**Below the Radar: What are We Missing?**

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As the war in Ukraine enters its second month, already dreadful conditions only worsen. An immediate ceasefire or cessation of hostilities seems unlikely. The war dominates America’s attention as Ukrainians continue to display extraordinary courage and resolution under a vicious onslaught. And the risk of a dangerous escalation, intended or not, is present. But American transfixion on Ukraine does not mean other events are on hold and other forces are not at work globally.

Consider three below-the-radar issues that could easily trap the US. The first is the recurring political-ideological battle between democracy and autocracy that began in World War II. Second, a political revolution in Pakistan is in the offing. And third is how the war in Ukraine may affect nuclear proliferation.

Nazi Germany and Adolph Hitler represented the worst of autocratic evils followed by fascist Japan. After the war, an Iron Curtain soon divided East from West; making the Cold War an ideological conflict between freedom and liberty and monolithic, godless, autocratic communism. President John Kennedy’s 1961 inaugural address doubled down on this conflict promising to “pay any price and bear any burden … to assure the survival and success of liberty.”

President Joe Biden has re-raised the Kennedy banner; declaring the struggle of our age is between liberal democracy and autocracy. Given the decline in functioning worldwide democracies and the ascent of China and Russia as global powers, some see liberal democracies as extremis. This is false.

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The crisis is not with liberalism or democracy. The crisis is the failure of liberal democracies to govern, not the system itself. All governments, irrespective of the regime, can and do fail. The Soviet Union is exhibit a. Hence, below-the-radar is the performance of and not the form of government. And that is a massive problem for America and its failed and failing government.

As Pakistan faces turmoil in its political leadership, a small group led by former Pakistani Ambassador to America, Dr Husain Haqqani, has convened to examine possible US policy options. Prime Minister Imran Khan has exhausted domestic support. The question is not when Khan leaves office but who will form the new government. And what will be the position of that government towards the US and the US towards Pakistan?

Pakistan has maintained a love-hate relationship with the US since gaining independence in 1947. Before the Ukraine crisis, the current US policy towards Pakistan was aloof at best. Khan was largely opposed to America and America’s policies and Pakistan voted against the UN resolution condemning Russia over Ukraine. Many Pakistanis, especially the ultra-religious, regard the US negatively as do some of the less senior military.

The Pakistan military has been the default alternative for governing. In 1977, General Muhammed Zia ul-Haq seized power, having the courts consign his former boss and President and Prime Minister Zulfikar Bhutto to death. Zia was killed in a still-unexplained plane crash in 1988. In 1999, General Pervez Musharaf staged a coup d’etat, removing Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and assuming the presidency until he was forced to resign in 2008.

The current Pakistani Army chief is General Qamar Javed Bajwa. Whether Bajwa will attempt to control the government directly, find an appropriate surrogate or support a coalition government is unclear. But any government must deal with a hostile Taliban controlled Afghanistan; a hostile India; China; and a very troubled, debt-ridden economy. Meanwhile, the White House has run out of bandwidth over Ukraine to worry about and manage much else.

Last and possibly most important is the effect of Ukraine on non-proliferation. The demise of Saddam Hussein probably only reinforced Kim Jung Un’s pursuit of nuclear weapons. Yet, Russia’s 6000 nuclear weapons surely have restricted US and NATO options. Many states are taking notice. Japan, South Korea and Australia have the capacity to develop nuclear weapons. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States certainly will be evaluating their options. And Ukraine has significant nuclear experience.

That leaves Iran and its so far peaceful nuclear programs. The irony is that Russia is crucial to negotiations with Iran to foreclose a weapons option permanently. Iran’s theocratic and authoritarian leadership have uniformly declared that nuclear weapons violate Islam. And in the nearly decade long war with Iraq, Iran did not retaliate after Saddam used chemical weapons to kill its soldiers. However, will that anti-nuclear weapons policy persist?

Many years ago, the White House regarded a multi-crisis as two! In this day and age, two at a time may be the best to be expected.

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