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REFLECTIONS ON THE STATE OF THE WORLD

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ABSTRACT

If the United States and Europe do not rediscover themselves anew, it will be very difficult for them to win the ideological war against Russia. The United States and Europe can and must prove that only open societies have the potential and the ability for revival.

At the same time, the Saudis are concerned about, and are rather afraid of, what will happen the day after the Americans sign a nuclear agreement with Iran. The United States is disengaging from the Middle East, thereby enabling Shi'ite Iran to support and strengthen all of the Shi'ite groups in a region dominated by Sunni Islam. The Saudis' fear is also based on Shi'ite Islam's hostility towards monarchies, which they seek to undermine and replace with regimes that act according to Shi'ite shari'a (the Iranian model).

* The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT).

Reflections on the State of the World

The opinion page of the March 28th edition of the International New York Times, is a focal point on defining current international relations between Russia, the United States and Europe – including a wakeup call and a warning sign to the West that the conflict with Russia is exposing its weakness, in the different approaches of the U.S. and Europe in terms of ideology, balance of power and steadfastness.

Immediately following Putin's annexation of Crimea, Jason Pack, a researcher of world history at Cambridge University, and Brendan Simms, a professor of the history of international relations at the same university, wrote an article titled, "A Weak E.U. Can't Stop Putin", in which they asserted that if a divided Europe follows a policy of reconciliation vis-à-vis Putin, it will enable the establishment of a new Russian empire with the power to manipulate energy prices, set back the achievements gained in the area of human rights, and destabilize the Middle East.

The writers plainly claim that European Union countries must exploit Putin's criminal takeover of Crimea in order to turn the weak union into a "Democratic Union of Europe" modeled on the United States of America. As historians, the writers provide historical examples in the founding of the United States in the late 1700's and the United Kingdom (England and Scotland) in the early 1700's. They explain that countries seek to create this type of federal union when faced with two conditions: a severe economic state and an external threat. These two conditions exist today in Europe and the only way to block the Russian threat is through the full federal unification of the European Union.

It should be noted that this article was written before the outbreak of violence in eastern Ukraine during the first week of April 2014, which is liable to deteriorate into a Russian invasion of eastern Ukraine.

The writers highlight a critical issue with far-reaching implications on future international relations. In 1994, the United States, Britain and Russia guaranteed Ukrainian integrity in exchange for the dissolution of its nuclear capability. A nuclear Ukraine would have probably deterred Putin from attacking and conquering Crimea.

It is easy to imagine what other nuclear states, or those heading towards nuclear capability, will deduce from this event and what its effect will be on the issue of proliferation of unconventional weapons.

My own commentary: In 1992 I met with the former head of the KGB, Yevgeni Primakov, in Moscow per his invitation. After a long day of discussions during which he communicated with me in Russian via a translator, we stood to say goodbye. We shook hands and then he switched to fluent English and said to me, “I would like you to take the following message to your political superiors: Russia was a superpower, Russia has the potential to be a superpower, and Russia will be a superpower once again”.

It is important to remember that these words were spoken when Russia was at the lowest political and economic level.

Primakov later served as the Prime Minister of Russia for a short period of time and to this day he continues to serve as one of Putin’s advisors.

This goes to show that the Russians never abandoned their vision, not even at the lowest moment in the history of the Russian Nation, of returning to the glory days of the Russian Empire.

Putin has proven to everyone that NATO is simply not prepared to cope with the complex problems of the global era. As mentioned by Pack and Simms “NATO lacks the political institutions and chain of command to forge a consensus, make tough decisions and to act swiftly on major problems. The organization was created to address the problems of a

bipolar world and to serve as a force multiplier for America” but it mainly served as a coordinator of the European member states, with the United States bearing most of the burden. According to the writers, as the United States takes a “back seat” (example, Libya!), NATO can fill the gap only if Europe is politically united.

As noted by International New York Times columnist, Roger Cohen, in the same edition, President Obama’s visit to Brussels in late March 2014 came too late and his speech was a collection of clichés regarding the mutual values shared by the United States and Europe despite the ideological differences that exist between them.

Putin exploited America’s image as a war-weary country; America’s red lines first changed color to pink and then to green; the European Union is divided, and NATO is a hollow organization that lives on past glories rather than on a vision for the 21st century. During Obama’s visit to Brussels, he tried to change the above image through a speech that proved to be nothing more than sham about America’s and Europe’s shared values, according to Roger Cohen.

If the United States and Europe do not rediscover themselves anew, it will be very difficult for them to win the ideological war against Russia. The United States and Europe can and must prove that only open societies have the potential and the ability for revival.

In the same opinion page from the March 28th edition appears an article titled, “America’s Role in Riyadh” by Caryle Murphy, who also wrote a book titled, “Saudi Arabia Through the Eyes of Its Twentysomethings”. The central theme of this article is Saudi Arabia’s disappointment with its strategic ally in Washington. Obama’s visit to Riyadh, which immediately followed his visit to Brussels, was intended to try and appease the Saudis – a nearly impossible task under current conditions. Egypt lost its standing as America’s number one ally in the Arab world. Saudi Arabia, whether by choice or necessity, finds itself the leader of the Arab world today and it is presenting Obama with an ultimatum – decide who you choose; us or Iran!

Relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States began to deteriorate when Obama supported the ousting of Hosni Mubarak and later opposed Morsi's ousting by the army. Further deterioration of the countries' relationship resulted from America's refusal to arm the rebels in Syria. The crisis reached its peak when the U.S. began its nuclear talks with Iran, which is considered to be Saudi Arabia's biggest enemy. The Saudis are presenting the Americans with a series of questions to which it is not easy to provide convincing answers. Has the U.S. forgotten the long and intimate cooperation between the two countries in the fight against terror? Has the U.S. forgotten that Iran was the one that destabilized the situation in Iraq after the removal of Saddam Hussein, is now undermining the internal stability of Bahrain and Lebanon, and is supporting Hezbollah? Has the U.S. forgotten that Iran occupied three islands in the Persian Gulf that belonged to the UAE?

The Saudis are concerned about, and are rather afraid of, what will happen the day after the Americans sign a nuclear agreement with Iran. The United States is disengaging from the Middle East, thereby enabling Shi'ite Iran to support and strengthen all of the Shi'ite groups in a region dominated by Sunni Islam. The Saudis' fear is also based on Shi'ite Islam's hostility towards monarchies, which they seek to undermine and replace with regimes that act according to Shi'ite shari'a (the Iranian model).

It can be assumed that the more the United States frees itself from dependence on Saudi oil, the greater the internal pressures will be to break the taboo of so many years and openly demand steps towards democracy from the Saudi royal family. If and when this happens, the century old chapter of the American-Saudi alliance will come to an end.

Then, Saudi Arabia's one and only alternative for strategic support will be China!

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