The Need for Strategic Thinking in Ukraine and Beyond

By Ambassador Edward Djerejian, Baker Institute Director

Vladimir Putin’s brazen decision to invade Ukraine to effect regime change and have a compliant country in Russia’s orbit has major geopolitical implications for the post-World War II security structure in Europe and beyond.

In retrospect, Putin’s calculations should be no surprise. The springboards of Russia’s policy toward Ukraine were spelled out years ago in the so-called Gerasimov or Primakov Doctrine. Valery Gerasimov is the current chief of staff of Russia’s armed forces and Yevgeny Primakov was a former prime minister and chief of the intelligence services. The doctrine states that Russia should strive to create a multipolar world to counter the United States; Russia should have primacy in the post-Soviet space; and Russia should oppose NATO’s eastward expansion. Foreign policy experts in both Republican and Democratic administrations have been aware of this Russian policy direction. It and other Russian policy indicators...
should have been the basis of anticipating contingency crisis scenarios such as what we are witnessing now in Ukraine and of constructing U.S. policies to deal with them in a manner that addressed our and our allies’ national security interests. One important part of such contingency planning would have been to engage Russia in a frank and direct dialogue to make clear our redlines and resolve. Such dialogue with adversaries is critical to protect and advance our interests globally. This means understanding your interlocutors’ interests and situation thoroughly, determining if there is any common ground, and then planning policies to address various contingencies, including accommodation of interests or, if necessary, confrontation.

No one can predict the outcome of Putin’s “march of folly” but it may very well turn out to be a major miscalculation, given the heroic resistance of Ukraine’s leadership under President Volodymyr Zelensky and the unity of the Western alliance to counter Putin’s ambitions.

After the fog of war has passed, our policymakers must look ahead and focus on the regional “frozen conflicts” that have the real potential to blow up, like the current crisis, at any time not of one’s choosing. For example, in Russia’s near abroad there remains Georgia and the contentious issues of Ossetia and Abkhazia. In the South Caucasus there is the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh that led to war in 2020 and that involves Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkey and Iran in a complex destabilizing situation with final status issues unresolved. Domestic political dynamics in Central Asian countries are a focus of Russian interests and intervention. In the broader Middle East and North Africa, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains unresolved with no negotiations on the horizon; it is a classic example of where, in recent years, process for the sake of process in negotiations has led nowhere. The Western Sahara issue pits Morocco and Algeria against one another. Cyprus is a classic example of a frozen conflict since the 1970s. Kashmir is a dangerous conflict situation pitting two nuclear states — Pakistan and India — against one another. And further afield in Asia, the Taiwan issue looms large as a major regional issue with global implications.

The foreign policy establishment of both parties should be focusing on these issues on a sustained and active basis; where required, it should reassess our policy approaches to these conflicts and thereby enhance our government’s ability to anticipate crises and fulfill the critical responsibility to serve U.S. national security and foreign policy interests in a manner worthy of a world power.

In the post-World War II era, then-Secretary of State George Marshall underscored the importance of strategic thinking by our policymakers “far enough ahead to see the emerging form of things to come and outline what should be done to meet or anticipate them.” He understood that our policy planners should also do something else — “constantly reappraise what [is] being done.” Marshall was acutely aware that “policies acquire their own momentum and [go] on after the reasons that inspired them cease.” His wise insights are most relevant today.
Ukraine-Russia crisis: Energy concerns, consequences

Strategic response options if Russia cuts gas to Europe

In a newly published research paper, fellows Gabriel Collins, Ken Medlock, Steven Miles and Anna Mikulska analyze the potential energy security consequences of a significant disruption of gas supplies from Russia to Europe, and assess several strategic response options. Read their full report here, or click here for an executive summary.

The war in Ukraine: Where we are

Whatever the outcome of the war, it surely marks a watershed moment for Europe and the world, writes Bonner Means Baker fellow Joe Barnes. His new post in the Baker Institute Blog examines the short- and medium-term consequences of the invasion of Ukraine and what the rise of a revanchist Russia means for the United States. Read the post here.

“[The] Russian state is now viewed as a malign actor and, hence, dealing with Russian state-owned companies will be viewed in a negative light, could become scrutinized and will definitely bring public discontent.”

Anna Mikulska, nonresident fellow in energy studies, in Axios

Accolades
Hotez recognized for vaccine advocacy. Center for Health and Biosciences fellow Dr. Peter Hotez and his colleague Maria Elena Bottazzi were recently nominated by U.S. Rep Lizzie Fletcher for the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize, in recognition of their work developing a low-cost COVID-19 vaccine designed to be accessible around the world. Earlier this month, Hotez was also the recipient of the American Medical Association's Scientific Achievement Award, one of the organization's highest honors, for his work prior to and during the pandemic.

Neal Lane receives national award for leadership in science. On March 16, senior fellow in science and technology policy Neal F. Lane will receive The Herbert Pardes Family Award for National Leadership in Advocacy for Research for his distinguished leadership and sustained commitment to public engagement and advocacy for research. The award is one of five 2022 Research!America awards recognizing individuals who showed outstanding commitment to sustaining the nation's world-class leadership in medical and health research. Read more here.

The graying of America: How immigration can strengthen an aging workforce

With its population rapidly aging, the U.S. faces a demographic transition and critical challenges in the coming decades. A new report by Center for the United States and Mexico director Tony Payan and research analyst Pamela Cruz examines two key issues arising from the transition — the health needs of an older population and the strains on the labor market — and explores how immigration can help maintain America’s economic competitiveness. Read it here.
Upcoming events at Baker Hall

Visiting with the Ambassador: An RYP Open House at Baker Hall. Join current and future Roundtable Young Professionals for a membership recruitment, networking and open house event in Baker Hall’s Doré Commons. Baker Institute Director Ambassador Edward P. Djerejian will offer brief remarks. Learn about RYP membership here. March 8 | 6:00 p.m. CST

Assessing Mexico’s National Guard: The Impact on Public Safety in Mexico and the U.S.-Mexico Security Relationship. Nonresident scholar Richard J. Kilroy Jr. examines the U.S.-Mexico security relationship and the impact of Mexico’s militarized National Guard on public safety. March 9 | 11 a.m. CST

Energy Security, Energy Transitions and International Relations: A Conversation with His Excellency Philippe Etienne. Amid the Russia-Ukraine crisis, the Baker Institute Center for Energy Studies hosts His Excellency Philippe Etienne, the French ambassador to the United States, to discuss energy security, energy transitions and international relations. March 10 | 6 p.m. CST

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