

PROMISES MADE – PROMISES BROKEN

And the Consequences of Silence

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On February 6, 2014, Reuters reported that a senior Kremlin aide has accused the United States of interference in Ukrainian affairs which "*breached the 1994 treaty under which Washington and Moscow jointly guaranteed Ukraine's security and sovereignty after Kiev gave up its Soviet-era nuclear arsenal.*" The Kremlin's accusations are the height of unabashed hypocrisy and chutzpah. By going on the offensive, Russia is attempting to camouflage its own flagrant transgressions of the security assurances it gave to Ukraine in 1994.

After the fall of the Soviet Union and its declaration of independence on August 24, 1991, Ukraine became the third largest nuclear power in the world having more nuclear warheads than France and Great Britain combined! Twenty years ago, at the behest of the United States and Russia, Ukraine agreed to remove and to have destroyed all nuclear weapons on its territory. All that Ukraine asked in return was to be given security assurances by the United States, Russia and the United Kingdom upon its accession to the NON-PROLIFERATION TREATY as a non-nuclear weapon state. These security assurances were given on December 5, 1994 and are commonly known as the BUDAPEST MEMORANDUM. On the basis of these assurances, Ukraine surrendered approximately 1900 nuclear warheads.

The BUDAPEST MEMORANDUM states in part:

The United States of America, the Russian Federation, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, reaffirm their commitment to Ukraine, *in accordance with the principles of the CSCE Final Act, to refrain from economic coercion designed to subordinate to their own interest the exercise by Ukraine of the rights inherent in its sovereignty and thus to secure advantages of any kind.*

On December 19, 2008, in a joint statement by US President George W. Bush and Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, the importance of these security assurances was reaffirmed upon the signing of the UNITED STATES – UKRAINE CHARTER ON STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP. One year later, on December 4, 2009, the security assurances, [given to Ukraine in return for its surrender of its nuclear armaments], were reconfirmed by President Barack Obama and Russian President Dimitry Medvedev.

Sadly, the security assurances of the Budapest Memorandum that were so loudly touted by the United States as a model for nuclear disarmament were recently blatantly violated by Russia when it exerted its economic power to blackmail and coerce Ukraine to digress from its freely chosen path of economic integration with the European Union. Even the president of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich, admitted this was the motivating factor in his last minute refusal to go forward with the negotiated EU Association Agreement. Nor is there any reasonable quarrel that Russia's egregiously coercive actions towards Ukraine were in direct contravention of the 1994 Trilateral Agreement and the Budapest Memorandum.

One would have expected the United States, as party to the Budapest Memorandum, to vociferously react - at the highest political level - to Russia's breach of the security assurances it gave to Ukraine. After all, this was the *quid pro quo* for Ukraine surrendering its nuclear weapons of mass destruction - defensive as well as offensive. These security promises were reaffirmed by the presidents of the signatory countries. The Budapest Memorandum itself provides that the signatories "*...will consult in the event a situation arises which raises a question concerning these commitments*". Moreover, it is the United States' long term strategic goal to limit the proliferation of nuclear weapons to other countries - such as Iran - and to reduce the existing nuclear arsenals around the world. Regrettably, in face of the obvious breach of the security assurances promised by Russia in the Budapest Memorandum, all that has been heard from the United States on the subject is deafening silence.

There is an old adage - "*a man is only as good as his word*". This proverb applies equally to countries and the manner in which they comply with international agreements - most importantly, when it comes to nuclear disarmament and related security promises. It is self evident that Russia's blatantly coercive behavior towards Ukraine evidences that the Kremlin has absolutely no regard or respect for any international agreement to which it is a signatory and believes that it is entitled to arrogantly ignore such accords at will and with impunity. The Kremlin has now put the world on notice that any international promise that Russia makes - especially in nuclear nonproliferation and security assurance agreements - is subject to *caveat emptor -- buyer beware!*

However, the deafening silence from the United States also has had direct and significantly detrimental consequences. Realizing that its crass and brazen coercion of Ukraine resulted in no penalty [or even muted criticism of this overt transgression of the Budapest Memorandum], the defaulting party - Russia - is emboldened to potentially violate other international agreements to which it is now a signatory or will be in the future. Moreover, the Kremlin has now taken advantage of the United States' silence and has gone on the offensive and is making blatantly absurd accusations that the United States is violating the Budapest Memorandum. Russia is attempting to have America explain itself rather than vice versa. The Putin administration has clearly learned the old football strategy "*the best defense is a good offense*".

America's failure to take any responsive action also corrodes and undermines its credibility in the international arena. The United States has always prided itself on its veracity and credibility proclaiming that Americans always "*stand by their word*". In light of America's inaction vis-à-vis Russia's breach of the security assurances given to Ukraine, why should Iran, or the warring parties in Syria, or even Israel, have any faith in the security assurances that were or will be given in any disarmament negotiations or peace talks? If Russia is a party to such future agreements, why should any participant expect the United States to stand up to the Kremlin if Russia were to again breach its future security commitments as it did with Ukraine?

The United States needs to take a long, hard look and reevaluate its foreign-policy strategy towards Russia. If Russia is to be a necessary co-participant in international negotiations, then the United States government should nevertheless have the political and moral courage - at the highest political level - to criticize and take positive and definitive steps to thwart such behavior when the Kremlin audaciously transgresses its security commitments. If America continues to remain conspicuously silent in response to the Kremlin's trampling of its security assurances given to Ukraine in the Budapest Memorandum, then the United States role as a world leader will be greatly diminished and the future security of America will be threatened. Promises should not be made only to be broken without consequence - especially when the promises involve weapons of mass destruction.

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