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Implications of the Ukraine crisis for security, non-proliferation and deterrence in North East Asia*

The Ukraine crisis has been a “wake up” call for Europe but its implication in Asia should be also be considered. The Russian “coup de force” in Ukraine has created a psychological trauma in Western countries not only amongst political and military leaders but also in the general population by its reminiscence of Cold war thinking and by pointing to the risk of a military conflict in Europe. Moreover the Russian attempt to change the borders by force could create a dangerous precedent and produce an undesirable “butterfly effects” in the rest of the world. In North East Asia, the stability in a context of rising powers and proliferation risks, relies on a status quo based upon the partition of the Korean peninsula, a *de facto* autonomy of Taiwan and a Japanese administration over the Senkaku-Diaoyu islands. As the status quo is increasingly challenged by revisionist powers, the question is worth to be raised: what are the implications

of the Ukraine crisis for security, non-proliferation, and deterrence in North East Asia?

Lessons from the Ukrainian crisis **The precedent of a change of borders** **by force in Europe**

The entry of Russian military forces in Crimea after the uprising of the Ukrainian population and the departure of President Yanukovich, was immediately condemned as a violation of the December 1994 Budapest Memorandum.

Beyond the “fait accompli”, Russia’s “coup de force” in Ukraine after Olympic Games in Sochi, confirmed to the rest of the world that adventurism in international relations is no longer a mark of secondary powers. Russia’s military intrusion means the resurgence of an

* Note achevée le 10 mai 2014.

expansionism by old great powers, and the risk of conflict with a nuclear state.

There was already a dangerous precedent with the attempt by Saddam Hussein to invade Kuwait in 1991, which resulted in the first war in Iraq. The annexation of Crimea, confirming the previous “coup de force” in Georgia in August 2008 and the occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, revived the general perception that, beyond Crimea, Vladimir Putin could be tempted to extend further his territories in a bid to restore the old sphere of influence of the USSR. From this perspective, the coup de force could lead to further steps, and raised a first immediate question: after Crimea, what’s next?

The annexation of Crimea by Russia has shown that the use of force could work, addressing a dangerous message to the rest of the world, with potential implications for the following decades in the 21st century. If Russia achieves its territorial goals with the use of force, then what would prevent another revisionist power from doing the same? Beyond the dangerous precedent it has created, the Russian “show of force” will probably encourage further “fait accompli” and lead to a renewed violence, raising risks of crisis not only at the periphery of Russia but elsewhere in other regions where territorial disputes prevails as well.

To complete the panorama, Russia’s continuing defiance toward the West after the coup de force in spite of international condemnation, and despite sanctions aiming at isolating Moscow on the international scene – including the suspension of its membership to the G8 and visa restrictions for targeted oligarchs, underlined the difficulties - not to say the impotence - the West faced to manage such a conflict.

...leads to major implications for deterrence and non-proliferation

The violation of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum by which Ukraine agreed to the withdrawal of the nuclear weapons stationed on its territory in exchange for security guarantees from the United States, the United Kingdom and Russia, broke one of the pillars of the international security architecture of the post-cold war order. The violation of the Budapest Memorandum could not but affect the credibility of both, the “*Russian security guarantee*” and the “*security guarantee*” itself. Russia’s annexation of Crimea violating international rules showed that a nuclear

country would not hesitate to defy other great powers, no matter the risk of retaliation, and ignoring expected international sanctions. If the Russian president had enough self-confidence to defy the leading global power, the needs to examine the reasons why Russia could nurture such a sense of impunity?

The violation of the Budapest Memorandum will also affect international non-proliferation and disarmament efforts. From now on, Ukraine is well founded to have regrets and doubts about the credibility of the major world powers, which were signatories of the memorandum, to protect its interests. And beyond Ukraine, which other non-nuclear state will ever believe that *security guarantees* can be relied on? As Ukraine is considering the future of its security in more critical terms, some declarations should not be undervalued: one of Ukraine’s leading personality, Pavlo Ryzanenko, put it simply: “*Now, there’s a strong sentiment in Ukraine that we made a big mistake in giving up nuclear weapons*”. And *Oleh Soskin, Volodymyr Ohryzko and Oleh Tyahnybok*¹, called Ukraine to consider renewing its nuclear-weapons status.

As they are facing unprecedented challenges, Western powers will probably have to reassess their declaratory policy and maybe their deterrence posture to deter Russia from another fait accompli, but now they are confronted with the immediate challenge to de-escalate the crisis, and to find a way out of it. All this with a major limit: Russia will do its best to defend its interests by imposing the new status quo that prevails, by maintaining as much military presence as it can, and by imposing as far as it can, its preferred model of governance in Ukraine.

As Russia continues to mass troops along its borders, the United States has been asked to increase the number of troops and aircraft it has stationed in the neighboring countries, at a Black Sea air base in eastern Romania, while sending a destroyer in the Black Sea. In the meantime, NATO is increasing the air surveillance patrols in Eastern Europe. Poland’s Prime Minister Donald Tusk, said NATO will strengthen its presence in Poland within weeks, in a move that could help allay fears in eastern European states for their security after Russia’s seizure of Ukraine’s Crimea region.

1. *Oleh Soskin* is the director of a prominent Ukrainian think tank, *Volodymyr Ohryzko* was minister of foreign affairs from 2007 to 2009, and member of parliament and *Oleh Tyahnybok* is from the nationalist Svoboda party.

How to maintain the status quo in North East Asia?

The calm in “trompe l’oeil” style

By contrast with a Russia that was looking back to Cold War style actions, China delivered a quite positive image to the rest of the world. While Vladimir Putin was temporarily excluded from the G8, the Chinese president Xi Jinping was cementing ties with Europe – signing big deals in promising sectors such as aeronautics with France, and a financial agreement with Great Britain to step up the internationalization of the *yuan*. And, as Russia vetoed a Western-backed resolution condemning the Crimea referendum at a UN Security Council emergency vote on March the 15th, China abstained, isolating Moscow further on the Ukraine crisis.

This positive image glossed over a far more abrasive strategic landscape. Over the past few years, Chinese *leadership* - always uncompromising on territorial issues, and the regime in North Korea - more belligerent than ever, have been defying the status quo in North-East Asia in a way that has raised concerns about the risk that the situation could turn into a military conflict. After the escalation of provocations around the Senkaku–Diaoyu, from maritime harassment to jamming operations targeting Japanese vessels, China finally tried to impose its sovereignty over the disputed islands with the creation of an ADIZ² that none of its neighbors have so far respected. In parallel, over the same period, after the torpedoing of the Cheonan ship, and the bombing of Yeonpyong islands in 2010 that created a dangerous precedent, North Korea operated a third nuclear test on February 2013, followed up with several ballistic tests over the last weeks.

Meanwhile the rise of nationalism adds to the mistrust between the parties to those conflicts.

New security challenges

In this context, the crisis in Ukraine will directly or indirectly impact the regional stability and further weaken the Asian security framework.

China was not in need of the Ukrainian crisis to remain uncompromising on territorial issues, nor does North Korea to continue to be belligerent toward the south and, from this perspective, both countries follow their own path, and they don’t need to draw new arguments from the Crimea scenario: they

2. Air Defense Identification Zone.

don’t need to seek to duplicate it. However both China and North Korea will probably draw lessons from the Ukrainian crisis.

First, if Russia feels strong enough to impose a military “coup de force” and make the West yield to a new “*status quo*” given a perception that the risks of retaliations are limited enough, then what could China make of it? If acquiesced, the change of borders in Europe may embolden China to try to change the status quo over the disputed maritime territories with Japan and other neighbors. To further follow up, the crisis in Ukraine will probably feed the perception in North Korea that the margin of provocations, before it prompts a military confrontation with the United States and its allies, is still large.

Second, hesitations and lack of determination in the decision making in Europe and in the United States when it comes to impose sanctions is bound to send a counter-productive message: western countries are not ready to pay the relevant economic and strategic price for retaliation. And if economic dependence is an argument to restrain from imposing economic sanctions, then it is incentive. And if Europe hesitates to sanction Russia because of its economic ties, then what would Washington do against China if such a case occurs?

Recent events in North East Asia underscore the relevancy of those considerations: whereas the Senkaku-Daioyu have not been targeted by renewed provocations, they nonetheless remained under increasing pressure as the Ukrainian crisis alarmed Tokyo headquarters. Perhaps more significantly, another incident took place in the South China Sea on March 9, while international attention was focused either on the Russian incursion into Ukraine or on the search for the missing Malaysia Airlines passenger plane. Two Chinese Coast Guard cutters blocked two Philippine transport vessels carrying supplies to marines assigned to a corroding World War II-era vessel marooned on the Ayungin Shoal, known as the Renai Shoal to China. The incident reminded the critical importance of the challenges at stake over maritime disputes. Regarding China’s attempt to create an ADIZ that covered large portions of the East China Sea, including the Japanese-administered Senkaku Islands, in November 2013, and recent declarations by senior officials³, then China could move to impose an ADIZ over the South

3. Seniors reportedly said that establishing a second ADIZ over the South China Sea would be in the country’s interest.

China Sea. And China's current restraint over the Senkaku-Diaoyu, does not extend to a renunciation to its claims.

In parallel, on March the 17th, North Korea fired 25 short-range rockets into the sea off its east coasts; state media depicted Kim Jong Un overseeing an air force exercise, exhorting his fighter pilots to embrace "the spirit of becoming human bombs". As other regional powers were attempting to restore the six party talks with North Korea, with China as the leading state in the process, to avoid any possible contagion from the Ukrainian crisis, the provocation sent two signals: North Korea was again rising its bids before the negotiations, or, which could be even worse, was clearly saying it was not impressed, nor willing to negotiate. In both cases, Pyongyang's provocations showed that the new international context has emboldened the regime in an even more assertive stance, and made it feel stronger. And to add to the volatility of the situation, the attempt resulted in the exchange of artillery fire across the disputed sea border.

Another scenario could also affect the stability in this region of the world, but this time, in a detrimental way to Beijing: the referendum in Crimea could inspire some more radical Taiwanese, backed by the pro-independent party, the DPP, to press their claims by re-introducing the proposal of a referendum in the center stage of the political debate, defying China mainland and disturbing the process of "détente" in the cross strait relations. Recent occupation of the Parliament by protesters over the China trade deal⁴, defying efforts by police to evict them, has shown that on matters that directly pertain to cross-strait relations, Beijing can be completely powerless to influence developments in Taiwan, which reduce the prospect of a peaceful unification in the future. An even worse scenario for mainland China could shape in Xinjiang and Tibet, with the backing of residual activists in the diaspora that could revive the spectrum of a referendum over these autonomous regions form abroad.

New challenges for non-proliferation

Finally, the violation of the Budapest Memorandum is not only a stumbling block in the

4. The *Cross-Strait Services Trade Agreement* (CSSTA), was signed in June 2013 but has not yet been ratified by MPs. It would allow the two to invest more freely in each other's services market. The protesters, say the agreement with China would hurt Taiwan's economy and leave it vulnerable to pressure from Beijing.

seeking for a solution in the proliferation crisis because it has made North Korea feel more confident, but also because the credibility of the "guarantee of security" has been badly damaged. Assuming that the renewed process of negotiations had a chance to lead to results, what could be now the credibility of a "guarantee of security" which has proven to be so weak? It will be more difficult to convince North Korea to abandon its nuclear means. From now on, how to convince Pyongyang that disarmament worth it?

Second, the erosion of the credibility of the "negative security assurance" (offered by the United States), will add to existing risks of proliferation in North East Asia. After North Korea carried out a nuclear test on February the 12th, the debate over going nuclear came to the center stage of the political arena in South Korea; meanwhile, Japan is traditionally pictured as a "threshold" nuclear weapon state (a country that could stage a nuclear breakout virtually overnight should its leadership resolve to do so).

The Hague Summit – the third Nuclear Security Summit⁵, organized to counter nuclear terrorism, opened an opportunity to address these issues. Japan, the United States and South Korea set up a three-way summit meeting on the sidelines of the Nuclear Security Summit in the Netherlands, declared the Japan's Foreign Ministry. The trilateral summit to be hosted by U.S. President Barack Obama, was supposed to discuss mainly nuclear nonproliferation and North Korea's nuclear development. And, which is probably not a coincidence, the Summit opened on March the 24th with Japan pledging to return to the United States more than 315 kilograms of weapons-grade plutonium and a supply of highly enriched uranium.

New challenges for deterrence

After Syria, the crisis in Ukraine may spread the perception that the United States would be hesitant if a comparable case would happen in North East Asia. If Russia manages to change borders by force, then how to prevent China from a comparable take over? Then how to restore the belief amid China's *leadership*, that it would be exposed to such retaliation that the gain resulting from a military

5. The third in a series of meetings established after a landmark 2009 speech by President Barack Obama in which he said non-secure nuclear material presents "the most immediate and extreme threat to global security."

aggression would not be worth it?

The question is taken as serious enough in Japan's headquarters to send a senior scholar, Kuni Miyake, someone close to the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe abroad to deliver the message. In a stop in France, he delivered the following message two weeks ago: "Crisis in Crimea means the end of Post-Cold War era and failure to contain Russia (...). It comes when the capability of the United States to meet the military need for security is challenged, and when the US pretends it can no longer globally wage two major wars at the same time".

As a result, it raises new challenges for the American extended deterrence: how to reassure Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, that from now on, Washington will not accept such a course of action? As first responses, to reassure allies in north East Asia, the United States moved on April the 7th. To reassure Tokyo over its mounting security concerns, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel announced the decision to send two Navy destroyers equipped with missile defense systems in Japan (to be deployed by 2017), to complete a previous decision in October, to position a second X-band missile defense radar in Japan. In parallel, in an explicit change of the American declaratory policy toward China, the Secretary of Defense also called China a "*great power*" (underlining its great responsibilities as a great power), and pointed to the example of Russia's annexation of Crimea as the kind of action that would not be tolerated. South Korea and the United States opened a high-level military meeting at the Pentagon to discuss North Korea and pending alliance issues on the agenda. The two-day Korea-U.S. Integrated Defense Dialogue (KIDD) comes just ahead of trilateral security talks, also involving Japan, to be held at the Pentagon later the same week. The U.S. Department of State already hosted a trilateral meeting with senior delegates from Japan and South Korea on March the 21st. The meeting, which was described as "productive, substantive," aimed to strengthen coordination on an array of issues concerning North Korea, including the shared objective of North Korean denuclearization. And the US and Taiwan finally saved F-16 upgrade deal after budget cut⁶. All these measures are aimed at reassuring allies.

6. On April the 6th, US officials have finally found a formula to upgrade Taiwan's aging F-16 fighter jets despite a Pentagon budget cut, helping the island to defend itself as its large neighbor, China, increases military spending.

Is it enough?

Beyond those first responses, other dilemmas still remain. First, as from now on, the need to reassess Europe security and the need for a renewed military presence in Europe to reassure allies, will probably feed the perception in East Asia that American rebalance toward Asia Pacific, already criticized for being inconsistent, may be undermined. Secondly, from now on, assumptions that Europe is in peace and that American wars were ending in the Middle East, concepts on which the rebalance toward Asia-Pacific relies are no longer convincing. In other words, as Washington extended deterrence was already facing critical challenges in East Asia, the strategic transformation underway in Europe will reinforce the need for choices.

The paradox of the American rebalancing toward Asia-Pacific" can be summed up shortly: while it has favored a growing sense in Europe that American pivot in Asia Pacific was detrimental to Europe, and had prompted an American withdrawal from the "old continent", it did not completely assured allies in North East Asia that it could meet the new challenges in the context of recurrent crisis over the peninsula and the Senkaku-Diaoyu. From this perspective, coming decisions in Washington over the allocation of resources and military investments will be decisive. As a first response, Chuck Hagel had to publically assert that the American Pivot would not be affected.

As the crisis in Ukraine will create new pressures in the decision making in Washington, between those who advocate the American pivot in Asia-Pacific and those who advocate a renewed presence in Europe, it will probably further accelerate the militarization in North East Asia. After the decision to transfer the OPCON of the stationed troops to South Korea in December 2015, and to allow South Korea to increase the range of its ballistic missiles, then what's could come next? In Japan, after the creation of a National Security Council, the publication of new guidelines for a defense posture that is more pro-active, and the relaxing interpretation of the constitution regarding the nation's right to self-defense, then what will be the further steps?

As need for deterrence is increasing in East Asia, Japan may be tempted to fulfill more and more its security needs by itself, considering that the American capability to deter China or North Korea will be limited in

the future. But as for Russia, it will meet the limits of China's acceptance. A few weeks ago, Tokyo relaxed a decades-old ban on military-related exports in a bid to expand joint arms development with allies and equipment sales to Southeast Asia and elsewhere. And to counter Beijing, Japan has moved closer to

Taiwan⁷. This could be a "point de non retour".[◇]

7. A report from *Kyodo News International* said that lawmakers from Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) are trying to create a Japanese version of the *Taiwan Relations Act*, the U.S. law that governs Washington's relations with Taipei. Japan does not have diplomatic relations with Taiwan, but the proposed law would seek to formalize the current unofficial ties.

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ISSN : 2273-4643

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