

Behind The Lines!



New Year's Day 2009

GLANCING BACK, PEERING FORWARD

RUSSIA AND THE NEAR ABROAD:

- Russia will continue to squeeze Ukraine both overtly and covertly with its ultimate objective to split the country and eventually bring it back into the Russian sphere of influence. Military force is always an option if political manipulation fails to get the job done. Sizeable ethnic Russian populations living in the near abroad provide the pretense for Russian military intervention at an opportune time. The Russian leadership will probe its periphery towards exploiting instability in Moldova/Transdnistria (Pridnestrovie) and Georgia. Despite superficial signs that Russia is at the negotiating table on the Georgian question, the Medvedev-Putin diarchy will continue to solidify its strategic positions in South Ossetia and Abkhazia which remain sovereign Georgian territory under international law. But one lesson emerges from this conflict: Russia's carefully timed intervention in Georgia preempted NATO membership for both Georgia and Ukraine.
- Growing political unrest will appear increasingly among the Russian populace as the economy continues to suffer from low crude oil prices, a struggling Russian ruble, and a feeble banking system. Open demonstrations quelled by the Russian authorities cannot be ruled out.
- Russian long-range bomber flights, naval deployments and port calls such as those conducted in the "American" Caribbean Sea as payback for U.S. warships plying the waters of the "Russian" Black Sea in support of Georgia will expand in scope and frequency.
- Now that the Russian constitution has been amended to extend the presidential term of office from four to six years, Putin will likely be the first beneficiary. A real or even fabricated political or economic "crisis" could swiftly remove Medvedev from the presidency ostensibly "for national security reasons" and replace him with Putin to fill out the unexpired term. Then the door is open for Vladimir Putin's eventual re-election as president for the next six or even twelve years.
- Bottom line - Russia will continue to meddle even as its economy struggles because of the worldwide recession/depression.

THE MIDDLE EAST AND SOUTH ASIA:

- Afghanistan will be the fulcrum of U.S. policy as the new U.S. administration implements a revised version of the surge in military forces appropriate for the political and geographical landscape of this region. As the political situation in neighboring Pakistan continues to deteriorate, the U.S. will expand its presence in Pakistani territory and airspace in support of military operations against Taliban and al-Qaeda elements on both sides of the Afghan-Pakistani.
- Despite vigorous U.S. diplomatic efforts to preclude hostilities, festering animosities between India and Pakistan could flare into open warfare at any moment. Kashmir will remain a source of conflict until there is a change in leadership.
- The Middle East remains a major flashpoint that could ignite a full-scale war throughout the region either by design or through miscalculation. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict which is exacerbated by Hamas and Hezbollah terrorist operations will not go away as long as two historical entities lay claim to the same sacred territory. Turkey will continue to emerge as a major actor and arbiter towards resolving rising conflict and instability in this part of the world following the drawdown of U.S. forces in Iraq.
- The U.S. and Iran will seek some kind of rapprochement on the Iranian nuclear question, but the timetable is not unlimited. If diplomacy fails, the military option remains whether military strike plans are executed by U.S. or Israeli forces, or both.

PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF CHINA (PRC) AND EAST ASIA:

- The PRC will continue to pursue its dream of restoring historic China in the Pacific Rim. President Ju Hintao will employ military exchanges and diplomatic visits as cover for his ultimate objective to subvert Taiwan and restore it as a legitimate province of the Chinese mainland. Military intervention could be an option should the Chinese leadership perceive a weakness and reluctance on the part of other world powers to respond during a crisis and quickly seizes the opportunity to negotiate a favorable *quid pro quo* arrangement.
- The Chinese military and political leadership will continue to upgrade its armed forces for future contingencies and project sea power at increasingly distant points around the globe such as the current naval deployment ostensibly aimed at piracy in the waters off the coast of Somalia.
- Food shortages and unemployment brought on by the worldwide economic downturn will challenge the central Chinese leadership in its ability to control increasing signs of unrest among segments of the population, especially in the western provinces.
- Despite blatant diatribes against South Korea, or even an occasional "incident" or provocation just short of open hostilities, North Korea will probe and test the mettle of the new U.S. administration, but eventually participate in some semblance of nuclear disarmament talks.