

# Random Notes

*“Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all,” Helen Keller*



*February, 2015*

## *A Peace Plan*

I don't believe in peace at any price, but let's talk realities.

- Under current conditions, Ukraine can't win a war against Russia, and that is who we are fighting. The so-called separatists—who never before existed—are Kremlin pawns.
- Ukraine is not going to get back Crimea until hell freezes over or Putin dies, whichever comes first. And, truth be known, NATO doesn't want Ukraine as a member.

If you take these two statements as a given—and many don't—it opens the door to a creative peace settlement of the war.

The *only way* Ukraine can hold its own against a professional Russian military is for NATO to come to its aid, as it did Kosovo. In my view, that's not going to happen, ever.

If Ukraine is provided anti-tank and other heavy weaponry by the West, it just ups the ante. Russia will commit more resources, perhaps air power. The end game here leads over the cliff.



*Milan, October, 2014*

There may come a day when Ukraine is prepared to fight a war, but it is not going to happen at the same time the economy is collapsing and reform seems fantasy.

*There needs* to be a creative peace plan put forth. So, the view from the bleachers:

Regardless of US administration statements that Ukraine could receive NATO membership when it meets all the criteria, that's just so much talk. It won't happen under current dynamics.

NATO doesn't want to go to war over Ukraine and NATO membership would obligate it to protect the country's territory from aggression.

The oft-cited Budapest Memorandum—allowing each signer its own interpretation—is kindergarten compared to NATO commitment. NATO would feel an obligation to protect Ukraine if it were a member. That's NATO's worst nightmare.

Under this peace plan, Ukraine would give up any pretension to Crimea and NATO membership. I know. It's a big gulp.

*However*, It might go even further by providing water and energy to Crimea, but at a monetary cost to Russia (just like Russia charges Ukraine for gas), thereby negating that country's need to have a land bridge to the peninsula.

In this peace plan scenario, Russia gets Donbas lock, stock and barrel up to the line drawn by the Minsk Agreement. There would be no more support from Ukraine. The territory is damaged good anyway.

Now let's add some *cherries* on top of this peace plan.

- The plan would be enforced by a United Nation's peacekeeping contingent, and would be agreed between the United States, Russia and Europe. The "separatists" are really not relevant to this process. They are primarily a figment of Putin's imagination and his propaganda machine.
- Feeling magnanimous and having avoided a wider European war, The United States and Europe would come up with a \$50 billion Ukraine bailout (significantly less than the \$300 billion ungrateful Greece received). It would be tied to real and closely monitored reforms.

What would Ukraine have lost? A significantly damaged Donbas with antiquated industries, unable to contribute substantial to the growth of a vibrant Ukraine.

It would have lost Crimea, a second-rate vacation destination with bad service.

The best way to get even with Russia is to be a vibrant, independent, booming economy on its borders. Before long, Russians would be saying: "*We need a Maidan.*"

Ukraine needs some breathing room. It needs to fulfill its promise and its destiny. It can't do this with two hands tied behind its back.

Ukraine needs a *peace agreement*, and a stop put to the carnage.

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## On Religion and Terrorism



I agree with my long-time friend Jamie Dettmer, a respected reporter for the Daily Beast, who says there should be no “but” after the phrase, “I believe in freedom of speech.”

But....I have a “*but*” which I call extenuating circumstances.

There is a such thing as commonsense, sensitivity to all religions, and simply comity and good taste. This has to do with self-restraint and not any government or religious prior restraint.

Censorship has no place, even if the creative work is sophomoric as were—in my lowbrow view—many of the Mohammad cartoons contained in the Paris magazine *Charlie Hebdo*.

While I am personally offended by the “artist” Damien Hirst, the fellow who puts heads of cows in formaldehyde and calls it art, I wouldn’t suggest the

works be censored.

I’m not very religious. I believe there is about as much chance of there being a Muslim god as a Christian god as a sun god—and, if they materialize they are probably all the same deity.

I assume this makes me a heretic, someone that a crazed, screwed-up terrorist would like to separate noggin from neck. I have, though, always been uncomfortable with the word atheist.

If I had to put a label on me, I’d say I was a squishy agnostic, a dreamer who sometimes carries wishful thinking into the stratosphere. Hence, my autobiography on working in Ukraine was titled “*The Optimistic Alien*.”

I like religious people. I grew up singing “Amazing Grace”, and I still pluck the song on my guitar. My sister is a priest. My daughter works for a fundamentalist church school. Most all my US family are god-fearing (a few gun-toting) people.

They are part of me. I love them. For the most part, unless really engaged, I don’t challenge their beliefs; and, in fact, I am happy that they are happy believing in something. I envy them their certitude and solace.

My writing is sometimes caustic but always cautious.

I try to avoid blasphemy, especially on a personal level. On my death bed, I will probably shout out, “Hit me with the electrodes one more time”, but if it fails, the next phrase will be “I’m coming home Lord. Save a seat.”

*Fact is*, most of us don't end this journey without a casual reference to a supreme being as we partake the last drop of morphine. We cowards hedge our bets and hope for the best.

I have published two magazines, both of which used a measure of satire, particularly the old "Ukraine Observer". I created the cartoons that lampooned politicians I liked and those I didn't like with equal abandon.

Today I don't recall any article or cartoon ridiculing religion, though I have offered commentary on excessive proselytizing and hypocrisy, particularly on social issues.

*But*, I have ventured from my main point which is simply this:

If you think holding up someone's god to ridicule is cute, and you are not worried about the crazy terrorist with bombs, guns, knives and sarin poison, by all means, do your thing.

However, think for one moment about innocent victims, and the families of those victims. Then ask yourself: Is a bloodbath really worth a few mild snickers?

Believe me, your lame cartoon or joke will never be a *game-changer*. In most all cases, they represent poisonous darts thrown from the cheap seats.

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