

INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN T. RYAN*, HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Conducted by Pierre-Emmanuel Dupont for the CRIA

Question: *How would you describe the current security situation in Iraq, and what are the prospects for withdrawal of U.S. forces, following the Petraeus report?*

Ryan: It is still too unsettled to say that the security situation in Iraq is good or even better than before. By many measures (sectarian violence, murders, terrorists captured/killed) security is better today than a year ago. However, reports show that civilians are still dying at high rates and terrorist attacks continue. The ultimate factor in whether the security situation will actually be better is the ability of the Iraq forces to sustain the achievements of coalition forces. Regardless of the security situation, U.S. troops are beginning the drawdown. General Petraeus announced that the 5 surge brigades would return to the U.S. after their 15-month tours ended 2008 and will not be replaced. The reason they will not be replaced is because the U.S. does not have the will to mobilize additional forces to replace them. The prospect for even more withdrawals beginning in summer 2008 is good. In his speech following Petraeus' report to Congress, President Bush said that he had approved Petraeus' recommendation to begin shifting more effort to training of Iraqi forces and handing off security responsibility to Iraq security forces. This change in mission will allow further reductions in Iraq and, by December 2008, it is possible that the U.S. could have as few as 10 brigades in Iraq.

Question: *Do you think that the recent clashes between the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and Turkey present a serious risk for the security in Iraq?*

Ryan: Every conflict in Iraq is serious and could develop into a fatal crisis for the country. However, compared to the Sunni-Shia divide, or even the threat from Al-Qaeda affiliates, the clashes between Turkish and PKK forces do not pose a critical risk. The PKK is almost universally abhorred by the Turks and the neighboring Kurdish groups. An extremist group, the PKK has a history of terrorist attacks throughout Turkey. If Turkey can limit its operations to clearly PKK targets in Iraq, the incursions will likely not become a reason for wider battles with Iraq or other Kurdish groups.

Question: *Talks about Iraq were held in the summer of 2007 between Iran and the U.S. in Baghdad. Do you think such talks could resume in a near future, given the current tension between the two countries?*

Ryan: At the end of the last round of talks, the U.S. Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, said

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that it was clear to him that Iran had no intention of conducting serious discussions on the problems in Iraq. Additionally U.S. ground commanders have been very open about evidence of the growth of Iranian support to insurgents inside Iraq. Given these developments, it seems unlikely new talks will be opened.

***Question:** Do you think Russia and the U.S. might find common ground about the missile defense deployment project in Eastern Europe?*

Ryan: Having worked U.S.-Russian relations for almost three decades, I have become an optimist that positive change is sometimes possible, but always difficult. There are clearly compromises available which could enable the U.S. to deliver a missile defense system to Europe against Iranian missiles while guaranteeing Russia against attack by that same system. However, Russia is in no hurry to reach these compromises because it feels that the U.S. deployment can be delayed indefinitely by domestic and foreign opposition to the plan. By the same token, American leaders believe they have the support at home and in Europe to deploy the system as planned without Russian cooperation or interference. The two nations will only find compromise when conditions prove one or the other wrong.

***Question:** You recently wrote that President Bush should accept Putin's challenge to make the INF Treaty become "universal in nature", as an alternative to a new missile race. Could you develop this point?*

Ryan: Long and medium range missiles present the risk of sudden and unexpected attack. When coupled with nuclear warheads these missiles can threaten the destruction of whole societies with only minutes warning. Without an effective missile defense system, the only way to protect against such attacks is to deter the enemy's use of those missiles by threatening a comparable attack. That caused both Russia and the U.S. to deploy medium range missiles during the Cold War. However, in 1987 Russia and the U.S. pioneered a better way of precluding such attacks - eliminating the missiles altogether. Achieving a global ban on intermediate-range missiles would remove the threat of sudden attack by neighboring states, and also make it unlikely that nations could build longer-range missiles either. If, however, states like Iran, Syria, or North Korea are not willing to eliminate medium range missiles then the U.S. and Russia will find themselves in the same situation they experienced in the 1980's - confronted by the deployment of intermediate-range missiles. In such a case, Russia and the U.S. would feel great pressure to return similar weapons to their arsenals.

***Question:** During the G8 Summit in Heiligendamm this summer, Putin made a proposal to Bush to use the Gabala radar station in Azerbaijan. What do you think about the negotiations going on about this proposal ?*

Ryan: Unfortunately, the Gabala radar is not the right type for guiding U.S. missile defense interceptors and cannot be modified to do so. The U.S. side has said that it is willing to add Gabala's radar data into the wider European defense network, but Putin has clarified his offer by saying that he does not intend Gabala as an "add-on" but a replacement for the Czech Republic radar. Gabala could eventually become part of a Europe-wide air and missile defense system, but cannot operate as a substitute for the radar planned for the Czech Republic.