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QUOTE FOR THE DAY

**“Whatever Lola wants, Lola gets” song from
“Damn Yankees”**

AN UPDATE

Replace Lola with Putin. NATO is showing its teeth and, no, it’s not like Little Red Riding Hood, “Oh Grandma, what big teeth you have.” Au contraire, these are baby teeth. The U.S. is doing what? – sending 8,500 troops to Poland- for what possible reason? Paintball war games? OK, we’re sending some anti tank weapons as well, but with Biden saying there might be lesser penalties for Russia with a “small incursion” into Ukraine, our NATO allies are aghast. Germany is terrified to take too strong a stance against Russia – too many entangling relations plus they need that

natural gas from Nord Stream One to keep those German houses heated this winter. As a result, Germany is sending 5,000 helmets to Ukraine. Boy, that will turn the tide. And, Denmark- wow! They are sending 3 F85 fighter jets to Latvia, plus, 4,000 NATO troops are currently in Baltic states – must have Putin shaking in his boots.

BY THE NUMBERS

Ukraine is not a member of NATO, and NATO has made it clear it will not be militarily involved if Russia invades Ukraine. The sanctions NATO is promising are seemingly draconian, but have a checkered past in terms of success. Also, what havoc might Russia create in response to sanctions? Try no gas to heat 35% of Europe's homes and cyber attack capabilities that are seemingly superior to that of any country. Taken altogether, NATO looks like a paper tiger.

So, if an attack, which no one wants to see, were to occur, what does a Russian/Ukrainian conflict look like?

UKRAINE: 255,000 soldiers; 2,430 tanks; 285 aircraft; 25 warships, 0 nukes

RUSSIA: 1,000,000 soldiers (only 130,000 on border now); 13,000 tanks; 4144 aircraft; 603 warships; 6,400 nukes.

On top of this military mismatch, Russia has now positioned massive military on the Belarus border within easy access by paved road to Ukraine's capital, Kyiv/Kiev, while Ukraine has allocated most of its military to regions in the far south east.

Ukraine's leaders keep urging calm, "No attack imminent" while, just yesterday, one U.S. news source reported Russia was moving medical units and blood supplies to the border. Does anyone think that's just to teach the troops techniques in bandage rolling?

IS THIS REALLY JUST ABOUT UKRAINE?

Not at all, but Ukraine is a good lightning rod. Putin, in demanding that NATO defuse the situation by announcing that Ukraine will never be a member, already knows the

answer. The U.S., Germany and France all reject the idea of Ukraine gaining membership any time in the near future, but Putin wants a “forever guarantee” as well as a cease and desist from allowing other former Soviet Union countries joining NATO in the future. And, finally, Putin seeks a pull back of what NATO calls defensive missiles in eastern NATO countries. Putin sees those weapons as offensive.

BACK TO THE CUBA ANALOGY

As a newly minted second Lt. in the Air Force, I was witness on October 27, 1962 at Minot AFB, ND to our B52s taking off to attack Cuba and Russia, essentially, probably starting WWIII, if Russia didn't pull their Cuba bound missile carrying ships around. Thankfully, the Soviet Union backed down, but guess what? There was a huge quid pro quo about which few in the United States ever knew. Russia negotiated a deal, “We turn the missiles around. You (U.S.) get your offensive missiles aimed at Russia out of Turkey and Italy.” After screwing up the “Bay of Pigs” fiasco, Kennedy was hailed as a

hero for averting WWII with the Cuban missile crisis- not quite that way folks.

And, so you see there are ways to defuse the Russia/Ukraine crisis, but it calls for NATO and the U.S. to back off a bit. I would wager even some moderate concessions could dramatically reduce the risk of conflict.

But, “No” says Mr. Blinken and company, implying, “we’re not giving an inch” Back to you Mr Putin. Here is a man who is still not accepting of the break up of the old Soviet Union, he is a strong willed autocrat who can do almost anything he wants, there is little doubt that the Russian citizenry would not support him in “protecting their security” and, lastly, Putin is a very prideful man.

The columnist, Thomas Friedman, puts a bit of a different flavor to it saying, “Putin is the human embodiment of one of the oldest Russian fables: A Russian peasant pleads to God for aid after he sees that his better-off neighbor has just obtained a cow. When God asks the peasant how he can help, the peasant says, ‘Kill my neighbor’s cow’”.

Bottom line: if NATO and the U.S. don't give Putin some concessions what is he to do? Is he going to say, "Well I guess I lost that stand off, time to bring the troops back from the border." Everything I have ever read/heard about Putin tells me, "no way" He will not go home with his tail between his legs – that's why the medical trucks and the blood supplies are at the border.

THE LAUGHABILITY OF SANCTIONS

Potash and the country of Belarus? C'mon man, what is that all about? Turns out that the U.S. doesn't like Mr. Lukashenko, president of Belarus, very much. He's an autocrat plus all the usual- denial of free speech, imprisoned opponents etc that we rightfully condemn.

Whatever- it's time to sanction Mr. Lukashenko for his awful ways. For those not up to speed on agriculture, potash is a vital crop nutrient in fertilizer, vital for global food security, and it so happens that Belarus and Russia account for 40% of the world's supply.

Belarus gets its potash to market by shipping it next door to Lithuania where it gets put on ships at the major port. The geniuses in foggy bottom decided that to punish Lukashenko they were going to deprive him of that export capability. With Lithuania being a member of NATO, the U.S. sanctioned the sale of potash by Belarus, and, Lithuania, wanting to be a team player, agreed to deny Belarus access to their port effective February 1, 2022 at a tremendous loss of port fees.

In anticipation of the markets being strangled, the price of potash has already doubled and Belarus and Lukashenko are wealthier than ever. But, “Aha” you say, “the party’s over come February first.” Not so fast. Russia, pretty good buddies with Lukashenko and Belarus, agrees to transport the Belarus potash by train to ports in Russia. In turn, Russia gains more influence/control over Belaruskali, the Belarus producer of potash. Net result, Russia has a big new source of income and Belarus still does very well in the sale of an increasingly expensive commodity that is of such value that it cannot be sanctioned. Score-

Russia and Belarus, ten. U.S. and Lithuania, zero.

POLITICS: SOMEONE PLEASE EXPLAIN

Dark days for the Biden administration: 69% of the country disapprove of Mr. Biden's handling of the economy and similar percentages of disapproval accompany his handling of immigration, crime and Covid. The president's overall approval rating stands at an anemic 41%.

Many political pundits see a glacial, potential long- term trend in political preferences. At the beginning of 2021 Democrats enjoyed a national political party preference of 9 points. In the fourth quarter of 2021 Republicans were ahead by 5 points – all supposedly a major indicator of what will occur next November and at the end of Biden's term in 2024.

**So, with the president doing so badly in all the polls, how do you account for this:
Politico/morning consult poll found in a poll**

on 1/26 the following results if a presidential election were held today:

Biden 45%	Biden 44%	Biden 44%
Trump 44%	DeSantis 39%	Pence 42%

No other major political figures fared any better against Mr. Biden except the ever mysterious “hypothetical GOP contender” - maybe it’s Zorro – who defeats Biden 46% to 37%. Where is this mystery man? GOP better find him pretty fast. Someone explain all of this to me – hurts my head.

YOU TOO MAY BUY PEDIGREE AND CACHE

by studying and learning from the hugely successful life of Prince Frederic von Anhalt (age 78)who you may remember as the 9th and last husband of Zsa Zsa Gabor. With all respect – must have been a great marriage as it lasted 30 years until her death in 2016.

It turns out that Prince Frederic – well- sort of a prince- was actually the son of a policeman in a working class German family who was adopted at the age of 35 by princess Marie

Auguste von Anhalt in exchange for his agreeing to care for her in her senior years. The German monarchy had been abolished in 1918, but the titles were allowed to continue to exist, albeit without the powers of nobility. Marie was the daughter of the last emperor of Germany. Having been adopted, Frederic became an instant prince and was off in a hurry to a garment maker to fashion the appropriate military garb cum medals and epaulets. This naturally led to a life of social inclusion and eventual marriage to Zsa Zsa.

Now a widower and childless, prince Frederic is himself looking to adopt a male heir to carry on the title and assist him in his later years. After five failed candidates Frederic has selected a fitness trainer, Kevin Feucht, (27) who looks great in his new uniform. Of great appeal to our readers, however, is the fact that for \$50,000 to \$100,000 prince Frederic will confer on you a knighthood – medals, extra. He’s already made more than \$10 million doing just that. Be the first in your neighborhood to advance your social standing.

Your faithful scribe,

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