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Estoril Political Forum

George Washington Memorial Luncheon

Admiral Nuno Vieira Matias and Executive Director Anne Taylor –muito obrigado to both of you! Thank you very much for the gracious invitation to speak at today's George Washington Memorial Luncheon.

It's befitting that today's luncheon is named after our first President, an American general who led my country's revolution. It is fitting because our revolution also marks the beginning of the historic alliance between the people of America and Portugal.

Pedro Francisco, a young man of 16 years old from the Azores, joined the fight for freedom in George Washington's army. Upon coming to America, he spoke no English, so being Americans, the first thing we did of course, was Americanize his name—changing it from Pedro to Peter. He was a fearless soldier, a hero of numerous battles, was wounded several times, and his feats of strength became legendary. His nickname was the Virginia Hercules.

Indeed, it was reported that after the battle of Camden, South Carolina, Francisco saw other Americans leaving behind one of their valuable cannons which was mired in the mud. According to the legend, he single-handedly freed the 1,000 pound cannon and carried it on his shoulder to keep it from falling into enemy hands.

This feat was commemorated on a stamp commissioned as part of the celebration of the bicentennial of the revolution. While that story was obviously apocryphal, his contributions as an American patriot were not and monuments were erected honoring his service in Virginia, New Jersey, and Massachusetts.

Next week, we celebrate the 238th anniversary of our revolution. And this year, we celebrated the 40th anniversary of Portugal's peaceful and bloodless revolution and its transition to a liberal and politically pluralistic democracy. Think about that phrase "peaceful and bloodless revolution." And think about just how extraordinary that is in the modern world when we look comparatively at Libya, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Ghana, Rwanda or Uganda. In Portugal a group of mid-level military officers—the Captains of April —led the movement to remove the shackles of authoritarianism and in turn galvanize the support of a people weighed down by thirteen years of colonial war which consumed 40% of the country's budget.

The country agreed that a change had to happen, but there was no immediate consensus on what form of government Portugal would adopt following the Estado Novo. Despite competing political ideologies the PS, PPD, and CDS all formed an alliance during this politically turbulent period. This alliance endured and they worked in concert during the two years subsequent years known as the "On going revolutionary Process." Moreover they realized the goal of a politically plural, liberal, and democratic Portugal was bigger and more important than they were individually.

Neither the political leadership nor people ever spiraled out of control. A new democratic government was formed which was responsive to the will of the people and was not simply a variant of the previous regime.

Since I came to Portugal, several Portuguese have said to me, "our revolution wasn't very exciting." That comment is mind boggling. It's almost a put down. In the Carnation Revolution, people put aside their own individual desires for power, eschewed violence as a means of achieving their goals, were inclusive of opposing interests, and worked cooperatively to achieve their common goal of freedom and democracy. That was an extraordinary achievement which provided those enduring lessons to the world. Show me a country where those lessons are ignored—where opposing viewpoints are excluded from the process, enemies are punished, and an environment is created which breeds violence and I will show you a country in crisis and a failed leader like President Morsi of Egypt or Prime Minister Maliki of Iraq. But the lessons of the Carnation Revolution have an even broader applicability than internal governance. They are a paradigm for international relations in today's world. When I was growing up, dividing lines were easy. The U.S. had friends and it had enemies. Democracy was good and communism was bad. There were two superpowers, the United States and Soviet Union, each representing one side of that ideological spectrum. And the biggest fear was the threat of nuclear war between those countries, which was held in check by the existence of

first strike and second strike capabilities—the notion that if they launched missiles, before they hit and destroyed us, we could launch our second strike and destroy them too. So as one political scientist branded it, peace was maintained based on the “delicate balance of terror.”

This was the age before color TV and the world is no longer black and white. Terror does not refer to a superpower with a nuclear weapon. In fact that is way down on the threat scale. Threats now take the form of a group of jihadists in a mountain camp in Afghanistan plotting to use a passenger airline as a missile; it is extremists trained as fighters in Syria returning as terrorists to countries in Western Europe. It is state actors, who believe that causing death and destruction are a divine calling.

President Clinton calls the world we live in “interdependent.” That means simply, we cannot avoid each other. Nor can we avoid exposure to these threats. Today’s world is complex and events happen at lightning speed, fueled by social media and a 24 hour news cycle. This year alone, we have had consuming crises in Syria, Iran, Ukraine and now Iraq. No country can respond to all of the challenges we face in the world alone. The United States used to be called “the world’s policeman” and some people still believe we can, and should, be. But that notion is completely divorced from reality. Countries have to be dependent on, and responsible to, each other—for their economic prosperity and national security. The challenge, according to President Clinton is to “create a climate of sufficient trust and sufficient coordination, so we can pay sufficient attention to what we have in common.” And that means we need not only to act together with our friends, but sometimes we need to act with countries that are allied in a particular cause even if they are not friends. And even acting together with our friends means compromising individual needs for the common good.

Europe and the United States are together facing this very challenge in Ukraine. President Putin’s flagrant disregard of international law in violating the territorial integrity of Ukraine by annexing Crimea and attempting to de-stabilize Eastern Ukraine is a threat not only to Europe but to every democratic country in the world. In the rhetoric of responses some called on the United States to draw “red lines” and prepare a military response. Instead, the United States and the EU, have worked cooperatively—and in my view effectively—to address the crisis through the implementation of an agreed upon plan of escalating sanctions and political isolation such as suspending Russia from the G-8. That approach punishes Putin economically and diminishes his stature as a world leader, something he craves.

The fact that the U.S. and the EU have been able to act in concert are a prime example of the application of the lessons of the Carnation Revolution. The interests of the 28 countries of the EU and of the United States differed greatly.

Within the EU, for example, some countries currently depend on Russia for as much as 85 percent of their natural gas supplies. For others, such as Portugal, there is no dependence. Some countries share a border, or are within easy striking distance of Russia’s military and fear a domino effect if Russian actions go unchecked. Others, farther from Russia’s borders, see Putin’s action as unique to Ukraine. Economic interests go beyond energy since Europe is Russia’s #1 trading partner, while the U.S. is number 29. When it came to economic sanctions, there was a wide divergence in support for sanctions—some believing the measures needed to be more immediate and stronger, while others advocated that they were too strong. Many feared sanctions would result in Russian economic retaliation such as shutting off energy supplies which would plunge their own countries into a deep crisis. Others believed that sanctions alone, unaccompanied by military engagement, would not serve as an effective deterrent.

But, in the end, the countries involved were able to develop sufficient trust and sufficient coordination to implement their common goal. And despite some sharp criticism in the American media regarding what was viewed as a lack of leadership by the United States, President Obama understood that he needed to act in concert with its European allies and could not get too far out front of Europe on issues such as sanctions or he risked the coalition falling apart. The strength and the impact of the response to President Putin came from the very fact that the response was a collective decision. The EU and the United States acted in uniformity.

We also cannot overlook the consequences had we failed to act. And those consequences would have reverberated not just with respect to Russian actions but with the world at large. Those who do not share western values or seek greater global power, would have seen a weak and vulnerable west putting our economic and national security in jeopardy.

Testing western unity and resolve, not only plays out in international crises but also with commercial diplomacy and trade agreements – notably the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership – “T-TIP.”

T-TIP, which is currently in negotiations, is the trade agreement designed to open markets for goods between the U.S. and the EU. I should note that Portugal will be a main beneficiary of this agreement since it will advantage SME’s which comprise the vast majority of Portugal’s businesses. Here too, among the 28 countries and the U.S., there are a number of sticking points on issues that will need to be resolved or the agreement will be derailed. But it would be a mistake to think that the lack of an agreement will result only in the loss of economic opportunities between Europe and the U.S. Countries, such as those in the Far East, will view that result as a strategic failure and a weakening of the West’s economic power.

Finally, I started this talk about interdependence saying that the world is a complicated place. And it is. Our interdependence means that our relationships are complex and our enemies in one setting can become our allies in another. We see no better example of that than when, at the same time we exclude President Putin from the G-8, he is invited to participate with the Western Allies in Normandy because of Russia’s historical alliance in fighting Hitler and Nazism. So his isolation is not complete. Why? Because in my judgment there are places in the world where we need him and we need Russia. We currently have common interests with him even as we oppose him in Ukraine. He served an important role in avoiding military action in Syria by helping to forge an agreement with President Assad to turn over his chemical weapons. As a result, one Russian organization nominated him for the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize, although I suspect his actions in the Ukraine may dampen his prospects. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Russia wields enormous influence in Syria and President Putin is an important player if a solution to the Syrian crisis is to be found.

Russia is also a member of the so-called P5 + 1 talks, the 6 nations who are permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany, who are engaged in the attempt at striking a nuclear weapons deal with Iran. While it is too early to predict the outcome of the talks one month from the deadline, newspapers in both Tehran and the US report progress in the negotiations. And Russia is important to that continued progress.

And when we speak of Iran, the United States has in the past labeled that country as a state sponsor of terrorism and a destabilizing force in the Middle East. We know they have funded and trained extremist groups who have killed hundreds of American soldiers. Yet perhaps the P5 + 1 the nuclear weapons talks will open a possibility for engagement with Iran in the crisis in Iraq. Both countries share a common interest in preventing the ISIS extremists from gaining a foothold in the Middle East. ISIS is very much a threat to Iran. Currently there is no border between Iraq and Syria and, as an opened in the LA Times notes, there is no effective solution in Iraq without also preventing ISIS from using Syria as a sanctuary and recruiting base. To do this may mean talking to Iraq’s neighbors, and that includes Iran. As Secretary Kerry said in an interview, The US is willing to talk with Iran and would not rule out joint US Iranian military cooperation in order to thwart ISIS and restore stability in Iraq.

Our interdependent world is evolving and will continue to do so. Interests change, alliances shift and so do needs. Risks are greater and the consequences of our actions or of our failure to act can be grave. Portugal’s revolution reminds us that we can never stop our efforts to build trust, to put aside individual ambitions, identify common objectives and forge new alliances in our pursuit of a secure international co-existence.

Muito obrigado a todos. Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak today.