

Battle of the Ages to Stop Eurasian Integration

Coming decade could see the US take on Russia, China and Iran over the New Silk Road connection

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Region: [Asia](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#),
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*The Raging Twenties started with a bang with the targeted assassination of Iran's **General Qasem Soleimani**.*

*Yet a bigger bang awaits us throughout the decade: the myriad declinations of the **New Great Game in Eurasia, which pits the US against Russia, China and Iran, the three major nodes of Eurasia integration**.*

Every game-changing act in geopolitics and geoeconomics in the coming decade will have to be analyzed in connection to this epic clash.

The Deep State and crucial sectors of the US ruling class are absolutely terrified that China is already outpacing the “indispensable nation” economically and that Russia has [outpaced it militarily](#). The Pentagon officially designates the three Eurasian nodes as “threats.”

Hybrid War techniques - carrying inbuilt 24/7 demonization - will proliferate with the aim of containing China's “threat,” Russian “aggression” and Iran's “sponsorship of terrorism.” The myth of the “free market” will continue to drown under the imposition of a barrage of illegal sanctions, euphemistically defined as new trade “rules.”

Yet that will be hardly enough to derail the Russia-China strategic partnership. To unlock the deeper meaning of this partnership, we need to understand that Beijing defines it as rolling towards a “new era.” That implies strategic long-term planning - with the key date being 2049, the centennial of New China.

The horizon for the multiple projects of the Belt and Road Initiative - as in the China-driven New Silk Roads - is indeed the 2040s, when Beijing expects to have fully woven a new, multipolar paradigm of sovereign nations/partners across Eurasia and beyond, all connected by an interlocking maze of belts and roads.

The Russian project - [Greater Eurasia](#) - somewhat mirrors Belt & Road and will be integrated with it. Belt & Road, the Eurasia Economic Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank are all converging towards the same vision.

Realpolitik

So this “new era”, as defined by the Chinese, relies heavily on close Russia-China coordination, in every sector. Made in China 2025 is encompassing a series of

techno/scientific breakthroughs. At the same time, Russia has established itself as an unparalleled technological resource for weapons and systems that the Chinese still cannot match.

At the latest BRICS summit in Brasilia, **President Xi Jinping** told **Vladimir Putin** that “the current international situation with rising instability and uncertainty urge China and Russia to establish closer strategic coordination.” Putin’s response: “Under the current situation, the two sides should continue to maintain close strategic communication.”

Russia is showing China how the West respects realpolitik power in any form, and Beijing is finally starting to use theirs. The result is that after five centuries of Western domination – which, incidentally, led to the decline of the Ancient Silk Roads – the Heartland is back, with a bang, asserting its preeminence.

On a personal note, my travels these past two years, from West Asia to Central Asia, and my conversations these past two months with analysts in Nur-Sultan, Moscow and Italy, have allowed me to get deeper into the intricacies of what sharp minds define as the Double Helix. We are all aware of the immense challenges ahead – while barely managing to track the stunning re-emergence of the Heartland in real-time.

In soft power terms, the sterling role of Russian diplomacy will become even more paramount – backed up by a Ministry of Defense led by Sergei Shoigu, a Tuvan from Siberia, and an intel arm that is capable of constructive dialogue with everybody: India/Pakistan, North/South Korea, Iran/Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan.

This apparatus does smooth (complex) geopolitical issues over in a manner that still eludes Beijing.

In parallel, virtually the whole Asia-Pacific – from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean – now takes into full consideration Russia-China as a counter-force to US naval and financial overreach.

Stakes in Southwest Asia

The targeted assassination of Soleimani, for all its long-term fallout, is just one move in the Southwest Asia chessboard. What’s ultimately at stake is a macro geoeconomic prize: a [land bridge](#) from the Persian Gulf to the Eastern Mediterranean.

Last summer, an Iran-Iraq-Syria trilateral established that “the goal of negotiations is to activate the Iranian-Iraqi-Syria load and transport corridor as part of a wider plan for reviving the Silk Road.”

There could not be a more strategic connectivity corridor, capable of simultaneously interlinking with the International North-South Transportation Corridor; the Iran-Central Asia-China connection all the way to the Pacific; and projecting Latakia towards the Mediterranean and the Atlantic.

What’s on the horizon is, in fact, a sub-sect of Belt & Road in Southwest Asia. Iran is a key node of Belt & Road; China will be heavily involved in the rebuilding of Syria; and Beijing-Baghdad signed multiple deals and set up an Iraqi-Chinese Reconstruction Fund (income from 300,000 barrels of oil a day in exchange for Chinese credit for Chinese companies

rebuilding Iraqi infrastructure).

A quick look at the map reveals the “secret” of the US refusing to pack up and leave Iraq, as demanded by the Iraqi Parliament and Prime Minister: to prevent the emergence of this corridor by any means necessary. Especially when we see that all the roads that China is building across Central Asia – I navigated many of them in November and December – ultimately link China with Iran.

The final objective: to unite Shanghai to the Eastern Mediterranean – overland, across the Heartland.

As much as Gwadar port in the Arabian Sea is an essential node of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and part of China’s multi-pronged “escape from Malacca” strategy, India also courted Iran to match Gwadar via the port of Chabahar in the Gulf of Oman.

So as much as Beijing wants to connect the Arabian Sea with Xinjiang, via the economic corridor, India wants to connect with Afghanistan and Central Asia via Iran.

Yet India’s investments in Chabahar may come to nothing, with New Delhi still mulling whether to become an active part of the US “Indo-Pacific” strategy, which would imply dropping Tehran.

The Russia-China-Iran joint naval exercise in late December, starting exactly from Chabahar, was a timely wake-up for New Delhi. India simply cannot afford to ignore Iran and end up losing its key connectivity node, Chabahar.

The immutable fact: everyone needs and wants Iran connectivity. For obvious reasons, since the Persian empire, this is the privileged hub for all Central Asian trade routes.

On top of it, Iran for China is a matter of national security. China is heavily invested in Iran’s energy industry. All bilateral trade will be settled in yuan or in a basket of currencies bypassing the US dollar.

US neocons, meanwhile, still dream of what the Cheney regime was aiming at in the past decade: regime change in Iran leading to the US dominating the Caspian Sea as a springboard to Central Asia, only one step away from Xinjiang and weaponization of anti-China sentiment. It could be seen as a New Silk Road in reverse to disrupt the Chinese vision.

Battle of the Ages

A new book, [*The Impact of China’s Belt and Road Initiative*](#), by Jeremy Garlick of the University of Economics in Prague, carries the merit of admitting that, “making sense” of Belt & Road “is extremely difficult.”

This is an extremely serious attempt to theorize Belt & Road’s immense complexity – especially considering China’s flexible, syncretic approach to policymaking, quite bewildering for Westerners. To reach his goal, Garlick gets into Tang Shiping’s social evolution paradigm, delves into neo-Gramscian hegemony, and dissects the concept of “offensive mercantilism” – all that as part of an effort in “complex eclecticism.”

The contrast with the pedestrian Belt & Road demonization narrative emanating from US

“analysts” is glaring. The book tackles in detail the multifaceted nature of Belt & Road’s trans-regionalism as an evolving, organic process.

Imperial policymakers won’t bother to understand how and why Belt & Road is setting a new global paradigm. The NATO summit in London last month offered a few pointers. NATO uncritically adopted three US priorities: even more aggressive policy towards Russia; containment of China (including military surveillance); and militarization of space – a spin-off from the 2002 Full Spectrum Dominance doctrine.

So NATO will be drawn into the “Indo-Pacific” strategy – which means containment of China. And as NATO is the EU’s weaponized arm, that implies the US interfering on how Europe does business with China – at every level.

Retired US Army Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson, Colin Powell’s chief of staff from 2001 to 2005, cuts to the chase: “America exists today to make war. How else do we interpret 19 straight years of war and no end in sight? It’s part of who we are. It’s part of what the American Empire is. We are going to lie, cheat and steal, as Pompeo is doing right now, as Trump is doing right now, as Esper is doing right now ... and a host of other members of my political party, the Republicans, are doing right now. We are going to lie, cheat and steal to do whatever it is we have to do to continue this war complex. That’s the truth of it. And that’s the agony of it.”

Moscow, Beijing and Tehran are fully aware of the stakes. Diplomats and analysts are working on the trend, for the trio, to evolve a concerted effort to protect one another from all forms of hybrid war – sanctions included – launched against each of them.

For the US, this is indeed an existential battle – against the whole Eurasia integration process, the New Silk Roads, the Russia-China strategic partnership, those Russian hypersonic weapons mixed with supple diplomacy, the profound disgust and revolt against US policies all across the Global South, the nearly inevitable collapse of the US dollar. What’s certain is that the Empire won’t go quietly into the night. We should all be ready for the battle of the ages.

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Featured image: Iranian seamen salute the Russian Navy frigate Yaroslav Mudry while moored at Chabahar on the Gulf of Oman during Iran-Russia-China joint naval drills. The photo was provided by the Iranian Army office on December 27, 2019. Photo: AFP / HO / Iranian Army office

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