Eurasia As We (And the U.S.) Knew It is Dead

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Move over, Cold War 2.0. The real story, now and for the foreseeable future, in its myriad declinations, and of course, ruling out too many bumps in the road, is a new, integrated Eurasia forging ahead.

China's immensely ambitious New Silk Road project will keep intersecting with the Russia-led Eurasia Economic Union (EEC). And that will be the day when the EU wakes up and finds a booming trade/commerce axis stretching from St. Petersburg to Shanghai. It's always pertinent to remember that Vladimir Putin sold a similar, and even more encompassing, vision in Germany a few years ago – stretching from Lisbon to Vladivostok.

It will take time – and troubled times. But Eurasia's radical face lift is inexorable. This implies an exceptionalist dream – the U.S. as Eurasia hegemon, something that still looked feasible at the turn of the millennium – fast dissolving right before anyone's eyes.

Russia pivots East, China pivots West

A few sound minds in the U.S. remain essential as they fully deconstruct the negatives, pointing to the dangers of Cold War 2.0. The Carnegie Moscow Center's Dmitri Trenin, meanwhile, is more concerned with the positives, proposing a road map for Eurasian convergence.

The Russia-China strategic partnership – from energy trade to defense and infrastructure development – will only solidify, as Russia pivots East and China pivots West. Geopolitically, this does not mean a Moscow subordinated to Beijing, but a rising symbiotic relationship, painstakingly developed in multiple stages.

The BRICs – that dirty word in Washington – already have way more global appeal, and as much influence as the outdated G-7. The BRIC New Development Bank, ready to start before the end of 2015, is a key alternative to G7-controlled mechanisms and the IMF.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is bound to include India and Pakistan at their upcoming summer summit in Russia, and Iran's inclusion, post-sanctions as an official member, would be virtually a done deal by 2016. The SCO is finally blossoming as the key development, political/economic cooperation and security forum across Asia.

Putin's "greater Europe" from Lisbon to Vladivostok – which would mean the EU + EEC – may be on hold while China turbo-charges the its New Silk Road in both its overland and maritime routes. Meanwhile, the Kremlin will concentrate on a parallel strategy – to use East Asian capital and technology to develop Siberia and the Russian Far East. The yuan is bound to become a reserve currency across Eurasia in the very near future, as the ruble and the yuan are about to rule for good in bilateral trade.

The German factor

"Greater Europe" from Lisbon to Vladivostok inevitably depends on a solution to the German puzzle. German industrialists clearly see the marvels of Russia providing Germany – much more than the EU as a whole – with a privileged geopolitical and strategic channel to Asia-Pacific. However, the same does not apply as yet to German politicos. Chancellor Angela Merkel, whatever her rhetoric, keeps toeing the Washington line.

The Russian Pipelineistan strategy was already in place – via Nord Stream and South Stream – when interminable EU U-turns led Moscow to cancel South Stream and launch Turk Stream (which will, in the end, increase energy costs for the EU). The EU, in exchange, would have virtually free access to Russia's wealth of resources, and internal market. The Ukraine disaster means the end of all these elaborate plans.

Germany is already the defacto EU conductor for this economic express train. As an export powerhouse, its only way to go is not West or South, but East. Thus, the portentous spectacle of an orchestra of salivating industrialists when Xi Jinping went to Germany in the spring of 2104. Xi proposed no less than a high-speed rail line linking the New Silk Road from Shanghai to Duisburg and Berlin.

A key point which shouldn't be lost on Germans: a vital branch of the New Silk Road is the Trans-Siberian high-speed rail remix. So one of the yellow BRIC roads to Beijing and Shanghai boasts Moscow as a strategic pit stop.

That Empire of Chaos …

Beijing's Go West strategy overland is blissfully free of hyperpower meddling – from the Trans-Siberian remix to the rail/road routes across the Central Asian "stans" all the way to Iran and Turkey. Moreover, Russia sees it as a symbiosis, considering a win-win as Central Asian stans jump simultaneously aboard the EEU and what Beijing dubs the Silk Road Economic Belt.

On other fronts, meanwhile, Beijing is very careful to not antagonize the U.S., the reigning hyperpower. See for instance this quite frank but also quite diplomatic interview to the Financial Times by Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang.

One key aspect of the Russia-China strategic partnership is that both identify Washington's massively incoherent foreign policy as a prime breeder of chaos – exactly as I argue in my book Empire of Chaos.

In what applies specifically to China and Russia, it's essentially chaos as in divide and rule. Beijing sees Washington trying to destabilize China's periphery (Hong Kong, Tibet, Xinjiang), and actively interfering in the South China Sea disputes. Moscow sees Washington obsessed with the infinite expansion of NATO and taking no prisoners in preventing Russia's efforts at Eurasian integration.

Thus, the certified death of Russia's previous geopolitical strategy. No more trying to feel included in an elite Western club such as the G-8. No more strategic partnership with NATO.

Always expert at planning well in advance, Beijing also sees how Washington's relentless demonization of not only Putin, but Russia as a whole (as in submit or else), constitute a trial run on what might be applied against China in the near future.

Meet the imponderables

All bets are off on how the fateful U.S.-China-Russia triangle will evolve. Arguably, it may take the following pattern: The Americans talk loud and carry an array of sticks; the Russians are not shy to talk back while silently preparing strategically for a long, difficult haul; the Chinese follow a modified "Little Helmsman" Deng Xiaoping doctrine – talk very diplomatically while no longer keeping a low profile.

Beijing's already savvy to what Moscow has been whispering: Exceptionalist Washington – in decline or not – will never treat Beijing as an equal or respect Chinese national interests.

In the great Imponderables chapter, bets are still accepted on whether Moscow will use this serious, triple threat crisis – sanctions, oil price war, ruble devaluation – to radically apply structural game changers and launch a new strategy of economic development. Putin's recent Q&A, although crammed with intriguing answers, still isn't clear on this.

Other great imponderable is whether Xi, armed with soft power, charisma and lots of cash, will be able to steer, simultaneously, the tweaking of the economic model and a Go West avalanche that does not end up alienating China's multiple potential partners in building the New Silk roads.

A final, super-imponderable is whether (or when, if ever) Brussels will decide to undertake a mutually agreed symbiosis with Russia. This, vs. its current posture of total antagonism that extends beyond geopolitical issues. Germany, under Merkel, seems to have made the choice to remain submitted to NATO, and thus, a strategic midget.

So what we have here is the makings of a Greater Asia from Shanghai to St. Petersburg – including, crucially, Tehran – instead of a Total Eurasia that extends from Lisbon to Vladivostok. Total Eurasia may be broken, at least for now. But Greater Asia is a go. There will be a tsunami of efforts by the usual suspects, to also break it up.

All this will be fascinating to watch. How will Moscow and Beijing stare down the West – politically, commercially and ideologically – without risking a war? How will they cope with so much pressure? How will they sell their strategy to great swathes of the Global South, across multiple Asian latitudes?

One battle, though, is already won. Bye, bye Zbigniew Brzezinski. Your grand chessboard hegemonic dream is over.

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