

Geopolitical Tensions and the Multipolar System: The US versus Eurasia

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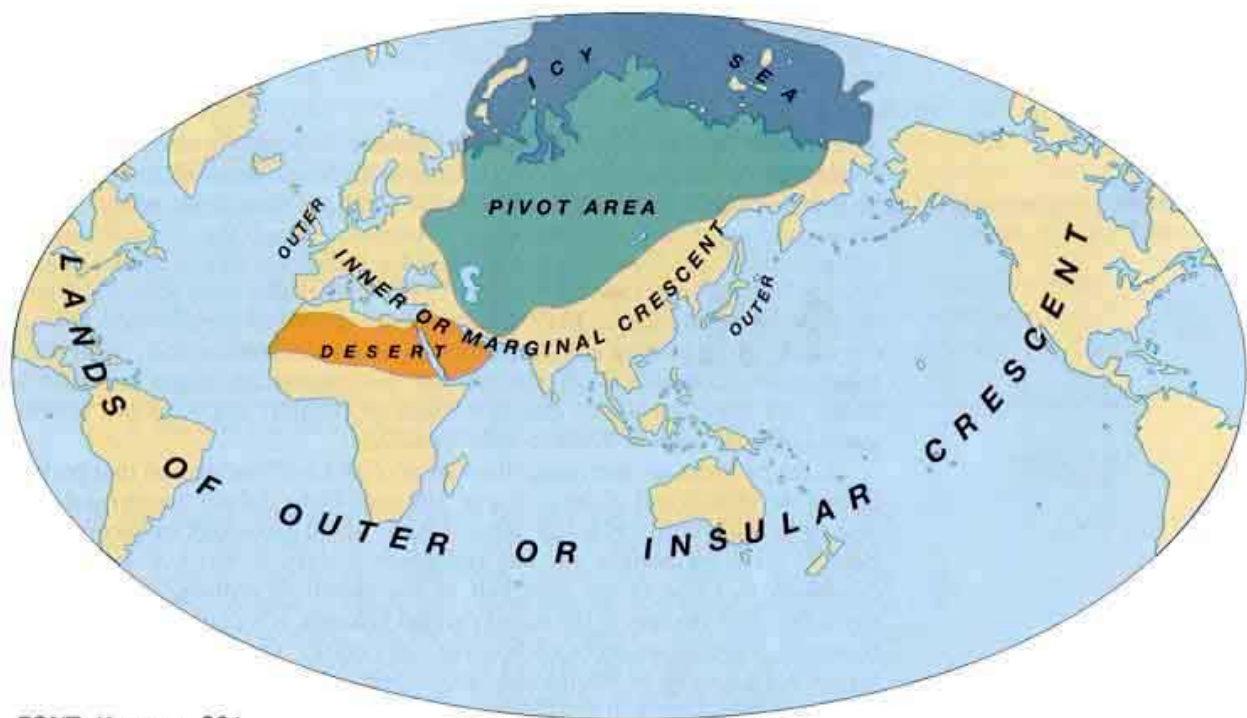
Global Research, May 13, 2011

13 May 2011

Region: [Europe](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#),
[Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

The transition from the unipolar system to a multipolar one is generating tensions in two particular areas of the Eurasian landmass: the Mediterranean and Central Asia. The process of consolidation of polycentrism seems to be undergoing an impasse caused by the "regionalist" behavior adopted by the Eurasian powers. The identification of a single great Mediterranean-Central Asian space, functioning as the hinge of the Euro-Afro-Asian landmass, could provide operational elements for Eurasian integration.



FONT: Knox, p. 391

In the process of transition between the unipolar moment and the new polycentric system geopolitical tensions are observed that are discharging principally in areas of high strategic value. Among these, the Mediterranean basin and Central Asia, real hinges in the Euro-Afro-Asian structure, have, since 1 March 2003, taken on a particular interest in the setting of geopolitical analysis regarding relations between the US, the main Eurasian nations and the countries of North Africa. Remember that on that date, the parliament of Turkey, that nation-bridge *par excellence* between the Central Asian republics and the Mediterranean, decided to deny the support requested by the US for the war in Iraq¹. This fact, far from

being merely a negotiating point between Washington and Ankara, as it might have seemed at first (and certainly it was also this, because of two opposing elements: Turkish loyalty to its North American ally and the worry in Ankara for the effect of the hypothetical creation of a Kurdistan, which at the then-expected plan to divide Iraq into three parts, would have led to an unresolved “Kurdish question”), nonetheless established the beginning of an reversal of the 50-year trend in Turkish foreign policy². Since then, with continuous growth until today, Turkey, particularly through its closeness to Russia (aided by the lack of propensity in the European Union to admit Ankara) and the new good neighbor policies, has tried to practice a sort of “escape” from US protection, effectively making it an unreliable base for North American penetration into the Eurasian landmass. Besides the obstacles represented by Iran and Syria, Washington and Pentagon strategists now have to keep the new and little-malleable Turkey in mind.

The change in Turkey’s conduct came in the context of a more general and complex transformation of the Eurasian scenario, characterized by notable elements such as the reaffirmation of Russia on the continental and global scale, the strong geo-economic and financial emergence of China and India, and the deterioration of US military power in Afghanistan and Iraq.

From the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet downfall there seemed to be an unstoppable advance of the “Necessary Nation” toward the center of the Eurasian continent, following the two following predetermined lines of march:

- first, proceeding from continental Europe, aimed, through coups of “colorful revolution”, at the inclusion in its own sphere of influence of the neighboring ex-Soviet states, quickly dubbed the “New Europe” by Rumsfeld’s definition, and strategically destined, in time, to press against a Russia reaching the end of its strength;
- second, made up of a long road from the Mediterranean extending toward the new Central Asian republics, aimed at cutting in two the Euro-Afro-Asian landmass and creating a permanent geopolitical vulnus in the heart of Eurasia;

This was all stopped in just a few years of the Afghan morass.

The last few attempts at “colorful revolution” have failed and the agitation controlled by Washington in the Caucasus and in the Central Asian republics, respectively because of Moscow’s determination and by the joint Eurasian policies of China and Russia, put into action through, among others, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Eurasian Economic Community and the consolidation of friendly relations and military cooperation. At the end of the first decade of the new century the US had to reformulate its Eurasian strategies.

The usual Atlantic Hegemony Procedure

The assumption of the Western system geopolitical paradigm as led by the US, laid out in the dichotomy of the US versus Eurasia and in the concept of “strategic danger”³, leads the analysts practicing it to favor the critical aspects of the different Atlantic target areas. Such aspects are commonly made up of endogenous tensions due in particular to interethnic problems, social imbalances, lack of religious and cultural homogeneity⁴ and geopolitical friction. The ready solutions regard actions ranging from the role of the US and its allies in

the “reconstruction” of “failed states” in different ways (all in any case aimed at spreading the “Western values” of democracy and free enterprise, without taking into account at all the local cultural peculiarities and traditions), to direct military intervention. This is often justified, according to the situation, as a necessary response to defend US interests and the so-called international order, or in the specific case of states or governments that the West already and significantly considers, according to the rule of *soft power*, “rogue,” needing an extreme remedy to defend its people and safeguard human rights⁵.

Considering that the US’s geopolitical perspective is typically that of a sea power, interpreting its relationship with other nations or geopolitical entities from its situation as an “island”⁶, it identifies the Mediterranean basin and the Central Asian area as two zones characterized by strong instability. The two areas are located in the so-called arc of instability as defined by Zbigniew Brzezinski. The arc of instability or of crisis constitutes, as noted, an evolution and expansion of the geostrategic concept of rimland (maritime and coastal margin) developed by Nicholas J. Spykman⁷. Control of the rimland would have permitted, in the context of the bipolar system, control of the Eurasian landmass and so the containment of its main nation, the Soviet Union, for the exclusive benefit of the “North American island”.

In the new unipolar context, the US-defined geopolitical area of the Great Middle East runs in a wide band from Morocco through Central Asia, a band that, according to Washington, needed to be “pacified” because it represented an ample arc of crisis, with conflicts generated by the lack of homogeneity as mentioned above. Such a view spread by Samuel Huntington’s research and Zbigniew Brzezinski’s analysis, fully explains the practice followed by the US in order to open a passage in the Eurasian continental landmass and from there press on the Russian space to assume world domination. Nevertheless some “unexpected” factors such as the “recovery” of Russia, the Eurasian policies practiced by Putin in Central Asia, new agreements between Moscow and Peking, as well as the emergence of the new Turkey (factors that recalling the relative and contemporary “emancipations” of some South American countries delineate a multipolar or poly-centric system) have influenced the redefinition of the area as a New Middle East. Such evolution, emblematically, was made official in the course of the Israeli-Lebanese war of 2006. The then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said: « *I have no interest in diplomacy for the sake of returning Lebanon and Israel to the status quo ante. I think it would be a mistake. What we’re seeing here, in a sense, is the growing — the birth pangs of a new Middle East and whatever we do we have to be certain that we’re pushing forward to the new Middle East not going back to the old one.* »⁸. The new definition was, obviously, pragmatic; in fact it aimed at the reaffirmation of the strategic partnership with Tel Aviv and the crushing – weakening of the near and mid-east area that few days after Condoleezza Rice’s declaration was specified by Israeli Prime Minister Olmert to be the “New Order” in the “Middle East”. Similarly programmatic was Brzezinski coining of “Eurasian Balkans”, referring to the Central Asian area, seeing its use to the formulation of a geostrategic practice that, through the destabilization based on endogenous tensions of Central Asia, it had (and has) the aim of making the possible geopolitical union between China and Russia problematic.

In the years between 2006 up to the “Odyssey Dawn” operation against Lybia (2011), the US, notwithstanding the rhetoric initiated from 2009 with the new occupant of the White House, has in fact followed a strategy aimed at the militarization of the entire swath made up of the Mediterranean and Central Asia. In particular, in 2008 the US put military device in the field for Africa, Africom, currently (March 2011) involved in the Libyan “crisis”, intended

to root the American presence in Africa in terms of control and rapid intervention in the African continent, but also directed toward the “new” Middle East and Central Asia. Briefly, the US strategy consists of militarization of the Mediterranean-Central Asian arch. Its principle aims are:

- a) To create a wedge between southern Europe and northern Africa;
- b) To assure Washington’s military control over northern Africa and the Near East (including using the Camp Bondsteel base in Kosovo i Metohija), with particular attention in the area of Turkey, Syria and Iran;
- c) To “cut” in two the Eurasian landmass;
- d) To enlarge the so-called arc of crisis in Central Asia.

In the setting of the first and second objectives, Washington’s interests are turned mainly toward Italy and Turkey. The two Mediterranean countries, for different reasons (notably of energy and industrial policy for Italy and more strictly geopolitical for Ankara, wishing to take on a regional role of the first level, moreover in direct competition with Israel) have in recent years woven international relationships that, in perspective, since relations with Moscow are strong, could have (and can) be useful levers for a potential Turkish-Italian exit strategy from the North American sphere of influence. The objective attempt by Rome and Ankara to increase their own degrees of liberty in the international contest collided not only with the general geopolitical interests of Washington and London but also with the more “provincial” ones of Sarkozy’s *Union méditerranéenne*.

Multipolarism between Regionalist and Eurasian Perspectives

The practice applied by the Western system, led by the US and intended, as described above, to amplify the crises in Eurasia and in the Mediterranean is not aimed at their stabilization. On the contrary, such a procedure is devoted to maintain its own hegemony, through militarization of international relationships and involvement of local actors. Moreover, this kind of geopolitical “road map” is aimed at identifying other future probable targets (Iran, Syria, Turkey) useful for the United State of America’s foothold in Eurasia, laying out some reflections regarding the “health” of the US and the structuring of the multipolar system.

In a less superficial analysis, the aggression toward Libya by the US, Great Britain and France, is not at all a sporadic case but a symptom of Washington’s difficulty in working diplomatically and with the sense of responsibility that a global actor should have. This is shown by the rapacious nature typical of a declining power. The American political scientist and economist David. P. Calleo, critic of “unipolar folly” and scholar of the decline of the US, noted in long-ago 1987 that, generally, powers in the process of decline, rather than regulate and adapt themselves, seek to cement its staggering dominance by transforming it in rapacious hegemony¹⁰. Luca Lauriola in *Scacco matto all’America e a Israele. Fine dell’ultimo Impero*¹¹, (Checkmate for the US and Israel. The end of the last empire) believes, reasonably, that the Eurasian powers Russia, China and India handle the overseas power (i.e. USA), by now “lost and crazed”, in a way to not provoke reactions that could lead to planetary catastrophes.

Regarding the structuring of the multipolar system, it must be noted that this advances slowly, not because of recent US actions in North Africa, but rather because of the “regionalist” attitude adopted by the Eurasian actors (Turkey, Russia and China) who, in evaluating the Mediterranean and Central Asia as a function of their own national interests,

fail to gather the geostrategic significance that these areas perform in the larger scenario of conflict between far-flung (US) and Eurasian geopolitical interests. The rediscovery of a sole great Mediterranean-Central Asian space, highlighting the role of “hinge” that this takes on in the Euro-Afro-Asian subdivision, could provide operating elements to overcome the “regionalist” impasse that the unipolar-multipolar transition process is undergoing.

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NOTES

1 Elena Mazzeo, “La Turchia tra Europa e Asia”, *Eurasia. Rivista di Studi Geopolitici*, a. VIII, n.1 2011.

2 Turkey signed the Nato Treaty on 18 February 1952.

3 “Geopolitically, America is an island off the shores of the large landmass of Eurasia, whose resources and population far exceed those of the United States. The domination by a single power of either Eurasia’s two principal spheres — Europe or Asia — remains a good definition of strategic danger for America, Cold War or no Cold War. For such a grouping would have the capacity to outstrip America economically and, in the end, militarily. That danger would have to be resisted even were the dominant power apparently benevolent, for if the intentions ever changed, America would find itself with a grossly diminished capacity for effective resistance and a growing inability to shape events.” Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994 p.813.

“Eurasia is the world’s axial supercontinent. A power that dominated Eurasia would exercise decisive influence over two of the world’s three most economically productive regions, Western Europe and East Asia. A glance at the map also suggests that a country dominant in Eurasia would almost automatically control the Middle East and Africa. With Eurasia now serving as the decisive geopolitical chessboard, it no longer suffices to fashion one policy for Europe and another for Asia. What happens with the distribution of power on the Eurasian landmass will be of decisive importance to America’s global primacy and historical legacy.” Zbigniew Brzezinski, “A Geostategy for Eurasia,” *Foreign Affairs*, 76:5, September/October 1997.

4 Enrico Galoppini, *Islamofobia*, Edizioni all’insegna del Veltro, Parma 2008.

5 Jean Bricmont, *Impérialisme humanitaire. Droits de l’homme, droit d’ingérence, droit du plus fort?*, Éditions Aden, Bruxelles 2005; Danilo Zolo, *Chi dice umanità. Guerra, diritto e ordine globale*, Einaudi, Torino 2000; Danilo Zolo, *Terrorismo umanitario. Dalla guerra del Golfo alla strage di Gaza*, Diabasis, Reggio Emilia 2009.

6 “America as an “island” has become a common geopolitical descriptor, quite similar to the geopolitics of England and Japan. Such an expression underlies its maritime traditions of

trade and of military intervention overseas, and, of course, of its security-in- isolation and in distance.”. Phil Kelly, “Geopolitica degli Stati Uniti d’America”, Eurasia. Rivista di Studi Geopolitici, a. VII, n.3 2010.

7 Nicholas Spykman, *America’s Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power*, Harcourt Brace, New York 1942.

8 “But I have no interest in diplomacy for the sake of returning Lebanon and Israel to the status quo ante. I think it would be a mistake. What we’re seeing here, in a sense, is the growing — the birth pangs of a new Middle East and whatever we do we have to be certain that we’re pushing forward to the new Middle East not going back to the old one,” Special Briefing on Travel to the Middle East and Europe, US, Department of State, 21 July 2006

9 Tiberio Graziani, “U.S. strategy in Eurasia and drug production in Afghanistan”, Moscow, 9-10 June 2010
(<http://www.eurasia-rivista.org/4670/u-s-strategy-in-eurasia-and-drug-production-in-afghanistan>)

10 David P. Calleo, *Beyond American Hegemony: The future of the Western Alliance*, New York 1987, p. 142.

11 Luca Lauriola, *Scacco matto all’America e a Israele. Fine dell’ultimo Impero*, Palomar, Bari 2007.

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