

Hybrid Wars: Breaking the Balkans. The Russian-Chinese Strategic Partnership Goes To Europe

Part II

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(Please read [Part I](#) before this article.)

The first part spoke at length about the strategic situation in the Balkans and briefly identified the state of affairs in each country, thus infusing the reader with the valuable background knowledge. Continuing with what has already been learned, the research will now transition into an examination of the two multipolar transnational connective projects that are the reason the region is being targeted for Hybrid Wars.

The Russian-Chinese Strategic Partnership Goes To Europe

Structural Fundamentals:

In a conceptually similar framework as what's going on in Central Asia right now, Russia and China also have a shared strategic vision for the Balkans that involves complementary infrastructure projects paving the way for a regional geopolitical transformation. The primary difference between Central Asia and the Balkans, however, is that the former physically connects both Great Powers while the latter is beyond either of their direct peripheries. This makes the Balkans much more vulnerable to external subterfuge since neither Russia nor China is capable of directly protecting their interests there at this point, and must instead rely on skilled diplomatic maneuvers, visible economic promises, and effective strategic partnerships in order to ensure the viability of their respective projects. The US, and to an extent, certain personal and state actors in the EU, are afraid of Russia and China's plans because they fret losing influence over this geostrategic territory that could quite literally serve as a multipolar bridgehead into the center of the continent.

Geopolitical Goals:

Herein lies the geopolitical nature of what both Eurasian Great Powers are trying to accomplish, and it's that they envision their transnational connective projects becoming magnets for the multipolar cause. The idea is that they'll attract organic regional support among the populace through the positive benefits that they provide to each of the transit states. Parallel with this, the construction of physical infrastructure heading deeper into Europe will forge a common path for Russian and Chinese influence to follow and will wed each logistical extremity together in a shared community of economic interests. Through these means, the multipolar states can deepen their engagement with Europe, which ultimately would serve to challenge the overriding unipolar pressure that the US is presently exerting on them. Conceptually speaking, the more economic interaction that Russia and

China have with their European counterparts, the more likely it is that their developing bilateral partnerships could expand into other spheres and eventually take on a strategic-political nature. As this happens, the US will gradually lose its hold over Europe, which is geopolitically unacceptable for it since it depends on its absolute control of the Western Eurasian peninsula in order to manage the affairs of the supercontinent.

Structural American Counter-Responses:

From an American geostrategic perspective, Europe is equally as important to its grand strategy as the Mideast and East Asia are, and with Russia and China currently pushing back in the latter two, respectively, it's of the highest importance that Europe remains a bastion of uninterrupted unipolar hegemony. Consequently, the US isn't taking any chances in losing its European stronghold to the Russian-Chinese Strategic Partnership and is aggressively pushing forward with two structural counter-responses designed to preempt this, both of which are enveloped in the shroud of the New Cold War that Washington purposely provoked.

NATO

The first one is the expansion of NATO all throughout the continent under the false guise of 'countering Russian aggression', in promotion of which Secretary of State John Kerry delivered his [infamous statement](#) in February 2015 when he quipped that "Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia, and other countries - Georgia, Moldova, Transnistria, they are on the line of fire" between the US and Russia. That's not fully true because Russia doesn't have anyone in "the line of fire", although the US certainly does and it plainly listed out its geopolitical targets for Hybrid War the coming years. The expansion of NATO infrastructure closer to each of them in the subsequent months is the first step in structurally intimidating these states (not counting Kosovo, which is an occupied Province of Serbia) and strong-arming them away from potentially pragmatic cooperation with Russia. It's succeeded in some cases like Georgia but failed in others such as Serbia and Macedonia, despite the latter having to contend with the pressure from newly opened NATO command centers in Romania and Bulgaria, respectively.



TTIP

The second means in which the US seeks to preempt the Russian-Chinese Strategic Partnership from affecting multipolar change in the continent is through the TTIP agreement, a form of post-modern imperialism which would place the EU under American economic control and preclude the formation of any independently negotiated free trade agreement outside of Washington's approval. There's also the issue of "economic governance", whereby the largest transnational corporations would receive political and legal rights not expressly granted to human beings, the effect of which would allow the largest American companies to strategically influence most of the European vassal governments.

How this ties in to the examined Balkan context is simple - if Russia and China's economic megaprojects there are successfully implemented, then the next logical step would be for their partner states to eventually enter into privileged trading relations with them after some time, a development which would be explicitly precluded if some of them are

beholden to the US' advance approval via their TTIP participation. Even if only some of their transit state partners are tied to the agreement, then this still obstructs the larger continental-wide vision that Russia and China have of deepening their full multipolar engagement with the entire continent, thus giving the US strategic space to breathe and perfect a project-breaking blow against them in the coming future.

The Multipolar Megaprojects

All of the expansive strategic and situational analyses have prepared the reader for fully comprehending the contours of Russia and China's multipolar megaprojects in the Balkans. They will be discussed in brief at this time and then comprehensively expanded upon afterwards.

Balkan Stream And The Balkan Silk Road:

Keeping in line with the complementary nature of the Russian-Chinese Strategic Partnership, Russia's plan is to spearhead the [Balkan Stream](#) gas pipeline (the author's geographically inclusive name for the full scope of the planned Turkish Stream project) while China's is to build the [Balkan Silk Road](#) high-speed rail corridor through the region. Both projects run along the north-south axis connecting the Central Balkans with Greece, thus explaining the earlier analytical importance given to this specific sub-region. The Balkan Stream is envisioned to travel underneath the Black Sea and make land in Turkey's Eastern Thrace region, before continuing through Greece, the Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, and Hungary. The Balkan Silk Road is planned to proceed along mostly the same coordinates, connecting the Greek port of Piraeus (one of the [largest and most important](#) in Europe) with Budapest by way of Skopje and Belgrade. Taken together, Russia's expected role is to provide an independent source of energy while China's is to do the same with trade, and they're both supposed to greatly supplement the independent decision-making capabilities of their transit partners and guide them towards multipolarity.

Blocking Balkan Stream

Two Tries, Two Strikes:

As positive as all of this sounds, it's far from certain that either project will become a reality, since the US, as was previously explained in [Part I](#), will do everything in its power to prevent them from being built. In the spirit of the New Cold War and following on its success in snuffing out South Stream, the US has prioritized its efforts in obstructing Russia's Balkan Stream pipeline, and for the most part, they've regrettably succeeded for the time being. The first challenge came from the May 2015 Color Revolution attempt in Macedonia, which thankfully was [repulsed](#) by the country's patriotic citizenry. Next up on the destabilization agenda was the political turmoil that threatened to take hold of Greece in the run-up and aftermath of the austerity referendum, the [idea](#) being that if Tsipras were deposed, then Balkan Stream would be replaced with the US-friendly Eastring project. Once more, the Balkans proved resilient and the American plot was defeated, but it was the third and most directly antagonist maneuver that snipped the project in the bud and placed it on indefinite standby.

'Lucky' Number Three:

The climactic action happened on 24 November when Turkey shot down a Russian anti-terrorist bomber operating over the Syrian skies, and the nascent project [became a victim](#) of

the predictable chain reaction of political deterioration between both sides. Given how obvious it was that energy cooperation would be one of the casualties of simmering Russian-Turkish tensions, it stands to reason that the US [purposely egged Turkey on](#) in order to provoke this domino reaction and scuttle Balkan Stream. Be that as it may (and it surely looks convincing enough to be the case), it doesn't mean that the project is truly canceled, as it's more strategically accurate to describe it as temporarily shelved. Russia understandably doesn't want to enhance the position of a state that's proven itself to be so blatantly aggressive against it, but this feeling extends only towards the present government and in the current context. It's certainly conceivable that a fundamental shift in Turkey's position (however unlikely that may appear in the short-term) could lead to a détente of sorts that resurrects the Balkan Stream, but a more probable scenario would be if the disaffected masses and/or distraught military representatives overthrew the government.

Turkish Reversal?:

Both of these possibilities aren't that improbable when one takes note of the growing resentment to Erdogan's rule and the precarious position he's placed the armed forces in. It's well-known how dissatisfied a significantly growing mass of Turks have become (especially amidst an [ever-growing Kurdish Insurgency](#)), but what's less discussed is the strategically disadvantageous situation facing the military right now. As the author [wrote](#) about in October 2015, the Turkish forces are spread thin between their anti-Kurdish operations in the broad southeast, securing the heartland from ISIL and extreme left-wing terrorist attacks, occasional interventions in Northern Iraq, and remaining on alert along the Syrian border. This state of affairs is already almost too much for any military to handle, and one of the last things that its responsible leaders need right now is to balance against an imaginary and completely unnecessary Russian 'threat' cooked up by Erdogan. This pressure might prove to be too much for them, and in the interests of national security and properly fulfilling their constitutional role in safeguarding the territorial integrity of the state, they might band together in overthrowing him in spite of the [systemic changes](#) he's enacted in the past decade to defend against such an event.

The Path Forward:

There's a very real chance that Balkan Stream will be unfrozen and the project allowed to move forward one day, as it's too strategically important for Russia, and even Turkey, to be kept on the backburner indefinitely. It's entirely possible that an internal political change will take place in Turkey, be it in the mindset of the current leadership or more likely with the installment of a new revolutionary/coup government, meaning that it's much too premature for Russia or the US to give up on their respective policies towards Balkan Stream. Therefore, both Great Powers are proceeding forward with a sort of geopolitical insurance strategy, and in each case, it's centered on China's Balkan Silk Road. From the American perspective, the US needs to continue unabated with the destabilization of the Balkans, since even if the Russian project is successfully stopped, then it still needs to do the same thing to China's. So long as the Balkan Silk Road continues to be built, then Russia will retain a multipolar magnet through its premier strategic partner on which it can concentrate the influence that it's cultivated thus far. In the event that Balkan Stream is unfrozen, then Russia can immediately jump back into the mix as if it never left and rejoin strategic forces with its Chinese ally like it originally planned, and this nightmare scenario is why the US is resorting to Hybrid War in its desperate bid to destroy the Balkan Silk Road.

As has already been similarly mentioned, the Russian approach is to focus more on the economic, military, and political diversifications that were supposed to accompany the energy-based physical infrastructure it was planning to build. Instead of the gas pipeline forming the spine of a New Balkans, it looks as though the Balkan Silk Road high-speed rail will take this role instead, but either way, there's a multipolar megaproject that acts as a magnet for Russian influence. In the present configuration, Russia has relatively less influence in directly deciding the course of the infrastructure's construction, but at the same time, it becomes indispensable to China. Beijing has close to no preexisting ties with the Balkans outside of purely economic relations (and even those are relatively new), so Russia's privileged involvement in supporting the project and investing along the Balkan Silk Road route (which was supposed to run parallel with the Balkan Stream and bring in the said investment anyhow) helps to reinforce regional and local support for it by presenting a friendly and familiar face that decision makers are already accustomed to working with. It's not to suggest that China can't build the project on its own or that there isn't legitimate support in the Balkans for such an initiative, but that Russia's front-row participation in it reassures the local elite that a civilizationally similar and ultra-influential partner is there alongside them and is also placing visibly high stakes in the process out of a show of confidence in its hopeful success.



Beijing Is The Balkans' Last Hope

It's thus far been established that the Russian-Chinese Strategic Partnership intended to revolutionize the European continent with an infusion of multipolar influence along the Balkan Corridor, which was supposed to support Balkan Stream and the Balkan Silk Road. Regretfully, however, the US has temporarily succeeded in putting the brakes on Balkan Stream, thus meaning that the Balkan Silk Road is the only presently viable multipolar megaproject envisioned to run through the region. On that account, it's China, not Russia, which is carrying the torch of multipolarity through the Balkans, although Beijing is of course partially depending on Russia's established influence there to help secure their shared geostrategic objective and assist in making it a reality. At any rate, the Balkan Silk Road is arguably more important than the Balkan Stream for the time being, and as such, it's worthy to pay extra attention to its strategic details in order to better grasp why it represents the Balkans' last multipolar hope.

Institutional Foundation:

The concept for the Balkan Silk Road was a couple of years in the making, and it owes its genesis to China's One Belt One Road ("New Silk Road") policy of constructing worldwide connective infrastructure. This endeavor was thought up in order to solve the dual problems of creating opportunities for Chinese outbound investment and complementarily assisting geostrategic regions in their liberating quest to achieve multipolarity. Relating to the area under study, the Balkan Silk Road is the regional manifestation of this ideal, and it's actually part of China's broader engagement with the Central and Eastern European countries.

The format for their multilateral interaction was formalized in 2012 under the first-ever China and Central and Eastern European Countries (China-CEEC) Summit in Warsaw, and the event two years later in Belgrade produced the idea for a Budapest-Belgrade-Skopje-Athens high-speed rail project (the author's colloquial description of which is the Balkan Silk Road) aimed at deepening both sides' economic interconnection. The 2015 Summit in

Suzhou produced a [medium-term agenda](#) for 2015-2020, which among other things, proposes the creation of a [joint financing firm](#) to supply credit and investment funds for this and other projects. It also officially described the Balkan Silk Road as being the “China-Eurasia Land-Sea Express Line” and suggested that it be integrated into the New Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor sometime in the future, implying that Beijing would like to see the countries cooperative more pragmatically with Russia (first and foremost in this case, Poland). Importantly, Xinhua [reported](#) that the participants agreed to complete the Budapest-Belgrade stage of the project by 2017.

Strategic Context:

What all of this means is that China has accelerated its diplomatic, economic, and institutional relations with Central and Eastern Europe in the space of only a couple of years, astoundingly becoming a premier player in a region located almost half the world away from it and partially a formal component of the unipolar bloc. This can be explained solely by China’s attractive economic appeal to the CEEC that transcends all sorts of political boundaries, as well as to the complementary ambition that the East Asian supergiant has in deepening its presence worldwide. Together, these two factors combine into a formidable component of China’s grand strategy, which strives to use inescapable economic lures in leading its partners (especially those representing the unipolar world) along the path of tangible geopolitical change over a generational period. To refer back to the Balkan Silk Road, this represents Beijing’s primary vehicle in achieving its long-term strategy, and the geo-economic rationale for how this is anticipated to function will be explained in the below section. Before proceeding however, it’s relevant to recall what was referenced earlier about the US’ hegemonic imperatives, since this explains why the US is so fearful of China’s economic engagement with Europe that it plans to go as far as concocting destructive Hybrid Wars to stop it.

Geo-Economic Underpinnings:

The geo-economic justification for the Balkan Silk Road is evident, and it can be easily explained by examining the larger Central and Eastern European area that it’s envisioned to connect. The Southeastern European peninsula directly segues into each of these two regions, and the Hungarian hub of Budapest is geographically located in the center of this broad space. As it presently stands, there’s no reliable north-south corridor linking Hungary and the markets around it (namely Germany and Poland) to the Greek Mediterranean ports, thus meaning that Chinese maritime trade with these leading economies must physically circumnavigate the breadth of the entire European peninsula. The Balkan Silk Road changes all of that and cuts out days of unnecessary shipping time by bringing Central and Eastern European goods to the Greek port of Piraeus and within convenient reach of Suez-crossing Chinese vessels. This saves on time and money, thus making the route more profitable and efficient for all parties involved.

In the future, the Central and Eastern European economies could ship their goods through Russia en route to China via the Eurasian Land Bridge, but while that might be beneficial from the perspective of producer-to-consumer relations, it’s hardly advantageous for resellers who plan on re-exporting the said goods elsewhere in the world. To take advantage of the dynamic economic developments currently underway in East Africa and South Asia (be it in selling to those markets or in physically building up a presence there), it’s best for either party’s entrepreneurial actors to connect with one another at a maritime node that enables them to efficiently and quickly load or offload their predetermined transshipped

goods. Geo-economically speaking, there's no better place for this than Piraeus, as it's the closest European mainland port to the Suez Canal which needs to be traversed in order to access the aforementioned destinations, with or without any transshipping involved (i.e. if EU entrepreneurs decide to directly export their goods there and not use a Chinese middleman).

In order to connect to Piraeus, the high-speed rail corridor known as the Balkan Silk Road is an infrastructural prerequisite, and its successful completion would lead to a significant sum of European trade being profitably redirected towards China and other booming non-Western locations like India and Ethiopia. The US fears losing its position as the EU's [top trading partner](#), knowing that the slippery strategic slope that could soon follow might lead to the rapid unraveling of its hegemonic control. Viewed from the reverse perspective, the Balkan Silk Road is the EU's last hope for ever having a multipolar future independent of total American control, which is why it's so geopolitically necessary for Russia and China to see the project completed. The inevitable New Cold War clash that this represents and the extraordinarily high stakes that are involved mean that the Balkans will remain one of the main flashpoints in this dangerous proxy struggle, despite the hierarchical switch of its multipolar protagonists.

New Cold War Battleground: Remixed

Out With The Old...:

The traditional actors competing over the Balkans have always been the German-led states (Austria-Hungary, Imperial Germany, Nazi Germany, and the contemporary EU), Russia (the Russian Empire, Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation), and Turkey (the Ottoman Empire, The Turkish Republic, and [Erdogan's Islamist "Democracy"](#)), and this dynamic has consistently been in play for the past two centuries in some iteration or another. Other participants were occasionally involved (e.g. the UK and France in Greece), but they were always more the exception than the rule, and the give-and-take rivalry between these three core powers has been the mainstay of the Balkans' international relations. Fast-forwarding to the post-Cold War era, this took the form of EU expansionism, the restoration of Russia's civilizational influence, and Turkey's promotion of Islamism. To an extent, this was just the modern manifestation of age-old rivalries being expressed in an updated form, and there was a large measure of stability and predictableness in their trilateral interactions.

...And In With The New:

Regretfully, however, the entire regional paradigm was irreversibly transformed by the game-changing involvement of the US, which sought to disrupt the centuries-old pattern by expanding NATO and bombing the Serbs. Prior to this, it helped engineer the structural preconditions for destabilizing Yugoslavia and provoking its dismemberment, and in historical hindsight, American involvement can objectively be said to constitute the most rapidly destabilizing force that the Balkans has ever seen. Never before in such a short period of time has the region gone through such widespread destruction and geopolitical reorganization than it did after 1991, and this is entirely attributable to the US' grand strategy of strategic state fragmentation (later defined as Brzezinski's "Eurasian Balkans" concept). The US' coordinated conventional and asymmetrical invasions of the Balkans (the latter via Color Revolution-conspiring NGOs) set a new standard for the application of unipolar force and were the tactical precedent for what would later follow in the Mideast.

The US' hyper aggression completely threw Russia off guard, since it was in no position at the time to counter it, and it decisively tilted the regional balance in favor of the EU and Turkey, by then joined together under the US' unipolar umbrella. The creeping advancement of NATO, the EU, and Islamic extremism played to Russia's disadvantage, and for over a decade, it looked like Moscow had finally surrendered the civilizational space that it had fought so ardently to free over the past two centuries. All of a sudden, however, the [2007 announcement of South Stream](#) dramatically signaled Russia's return to the region, indicating that it had actually spent the past decade devising a completely new strategy for Balkan re-engagement. Capitalizing off of its unconventional practice of "energy geopolitics", Russia aimed to surprise the unipolar world and asymmetrically turn the table on its prior successes. This bold, post-modern move could very well have succeeded had it not been for the US-manufactured New Cold War that purposely created the conditions for it and its Balkan Stream successor's [de-facto indefinite suspension](#).

It was right around that time that China moved in to the Balkans and began flexing its Great Power weight around, in a development that few could ever have countenanced before it actually occurred. Historically having no ties whatsoever with the region except for some minor ones cultivated with Cold War-era Albania and Romania (the former didn't last the entire period and the latter began halfway through), China abruptly emerged as the Balkans', and one may even say, the EU's last hope for a multipolar future. The December 2014 announcement of the Balkan Silk Road and the recently declared 2017 timeline for its partial completion gave a new impetus to the global multipolar project and showed that the wind hadn't at all left its geopolitical sails.

The Russian-Chinese Strategic Partnership is at the core of this transformational initiative, but at the present moment, China is the driver and Russia is the back-up mechanic. No matter how influential its civilizational sway and all-around soft power may be in the Balkans, Moscow can only achieve so much without the assistance of a tangible infrastructural project like the gas pipeline it wanted to build, and what's needed to keep the multipolar momentum moving is the economic catalyst that only China can now provide. Symbiotically, China is dependent on the centuries-long goodwill and trust that Russia has nurtured in the Balkans, as this makes it the only reliable actor capable of working with the Central Balkans in helping them defeat the Hybrid Wars that the US is planning against them. Both Moscow and Beijing need the Balkan Silk Road to be built just as much as the US wants it to be obstructed at all costs, and this geopolitical zero-sum game sets the stage for the current confrontation.

The State Of The Game:

Simply speaking, the unipolar and multipolar worlds are clashing in the Balkans over the geopolitical fate of the EU. The US and Turkey represent the most solidly unipolar forces in this battle, while Russia and China are its multipolar counterparts. Despite being occupied by the US, it's very likely that the EU could be liberated if the Balkan Silk Road is ever completed, hence why one could accurately label the events taking place in the Balkans as "The Battle For Europe". The US is employing its military, terrorist, and NGO forces in this campaign, while its Turkish ally is spreading the infectious ideology of radical Islam in order to cull a seemingly innumerable amount of violent recruits for the unipolar struggle and pave the way for Neo-Ottomanism's pivot to the Balkans.

On the other side of matters, Russia is strategically advising its Serbian partners and [providing them with weapons](#) to counter-balance the US' Croatian lackeys, and it also

holds open the possibility to expand its strategic partnership with Macedonia beyond the field of democratic security (also known as counter-Color Revolution techniques) if the authorities there so choose. China's contribution to this fight is the overwhelming economic resources and professionally experienced management that it has to skillfully turn the Balkan Silk Road into a reality as soon as possible, and the dreams of prosperity and multipolar opportunity that are associated with its successful construction produce a strong and loyal attraction to the project among many people in the transit states.

The crux of the competition therefore essentially comes down to being between the ideologies of destructive force (the US and Turkey) and creative development (Russia and China). The unipolar camp and its regional Albanian and Croatian allies won't hesitate to burn the Balkans in a scorched-earth pyrrhic victory, while the onus of saving it falls on the patriotic citizens of the central sub-region between Republika Srpska, Serbia, Montenegro, and the Republic of Macedonia. It's a lot easier to pay off local goons and mislead wayward youth (be it religiously or in support of a pro-Western cause) than it is to cultivate sincere supporters of a patriotic ideal, but thus far, the playing field appears to be even, with a near-equal amount of unipolar fighters and multipolar defenders. The critical difference, however, is that the Central Balkan citizens who truly support their states won't ever turn their backs on their countrymen, and they'll resolutely defend their homeland from attack until their last breath. The same can't be said for aggressors (be they internal or external) that don't wholeheartedly believe in what they're fighting for.

The future of the Balkans, and consequently that of Europe, can go either way at this point, and there's no telling which side will ultimately come out on top, but the deciding factor will inevitably be whether the US and Turkey can mislead enough people into destroying their home region out of manipulated geopolitical hatred, or whether Russia and China can convince them to take a patriotic stand in defending it in order to see a better and more prosperous future for all.

To be continued...



Serbs protest against government's plans to deepen relations with NATO, February 2016

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