

Playing “Fool’s Mate” on the Grand Eurasian Chessboard

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For at least a generation or more, America’s international policies have increasingly been governed by our Ministry of Propaganda, and the bill may finally be starting to come due.

Last Wednesday the *Wall Street Journal* [reported](#) that Saudi Arabia was joining China’s Shanghai Cooperative Organization, a decision that came just a few weeks after [the announcement](#) that it had reestablished diplomatic relations with arch-enemy Iran following negotiations held in Beijing under Chinese auspices. For three generations, the oil rich kingdom had been America’s most important Arab ally, and the lead sentence of the *Journal* article emphasized that this dramatic development reflected our waning influence in the Middle East.

That same day, [Brazil declared](#) that it was abandoning the use of dollars in its transactions with China, its largest trading partner, following [an earlier statement](#) that its president planned to meet with China’s leader in support of that country’s efforts to end the Russia-Ukraine war, a diplomatic initiative strongly opposed by our own government. Geopolitical dominoes seem to rapidly falling, taking down American influence with them.

Given our country’s horrendous budget and trade deficits, America’s continued standard of living is heavily dependent upon the international use of the dollar, especially for oil sales, so these are extremely threatening developments. For decades, we have freely exchanged our government script for goods and commodities from around the world, and if that

becomes much more difficult, our global situation may grow dire. During [the 1956 Suez Crisis](#), the threatened collapse of the British pound marked the end of Britain's influence on the global stage, and America may be rapidly approaching [its own "Suez moment."](#)

Despite our enormous efforts and the shrill support of the global Western media, few countries other than our own subservient vassals have been willing to follow our lead and impose sanctions on Russia, further evidence of our greatly diminished international clout.



Since the 1980s I have regarded the tectonic shift of geopolitical power to China as an almost inevitable consequence of that country's development, and more than a decade ago I had described those powerful trends, already long visible.

- [China's Rise, America's Fall](#)

Ron Unz • *The American Conservative* • April 17, 2012 • 6,600 Words

But the facts have now become blatantly obvious. [Jacques Sapir](#) serves as director of studies at the EHESS, one of France's leading academic institutions, and a few months ago he published a short article setting forth the striking economic statistics, an analysis that has received less attention than it deserves.

- [Assessing the Russian and Chinese Economies Geostrategically](#)

Jacques Sapir • *American Affairs* • November 20, 2022 • 1,700 Words

He explained that according to nominal exchange rates Russia had a small economy, just half as large as that of France and roughly the same as Spain's, so it had seemed very vulnerable to the unprecedented wave of Western sanctions imposed after the outbreak of the Ukraine war. But Russia survived almost unscathed, and instead it was the West that suffered critical energy shortages, a severe bout of inflation, and other serious economic

stresses, suggesting that those comparisons were merely illusory.

By contrast, according to the far more realistic Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) metric, Russia’s economy was actually far larger, being comparable to that of Germany. But even that measure seriously underestimated the true balance of international power.

Among Western economies, services comprise a large, sometimes overwhelming fraction of total economic activity, and those statistics are far more subject to manipulation. Some economists have argued that drug-dealing, prostitution, and other criminal activity should be included in that total, which would therefore boost the supposed measure of our national prosperity.

By contrast, during periods of sharp international conflict, the productive sectors of GDP—industry, mining, agriculture, and construction—probably constitute a far better measure of relative economic power, and Russia is much stronger in that category. So although Russia’s nominal GDP is merely half that of France, its real productive economy is more than twice as large, representing nearly a five-fold shift in relative economic power. This helps explain why Russia so easily surmounted the Western sanctions that had been expected to cripple it.

When Sapir extends this same analysis to other countries, the results are even more remarkable. Although our disingenuous mainstream media invariably describes China as having the world’s second largest economy, it actually surpassed America in real terms several years ago as anyone can confirm by consulting [the CIA’s World Factbook](#). But while a substantial 44% of China’s fully modern economy consists of services, America’s service sector—advertising, retail sales, education, personal services, diversity consulting—amounts to nearly 80% of our total, reducing our productive output to merely a small residual fraction.

One of Sapir’s tables demonstrated that as far back as 2019, China’s real productive economy was already *three times larger than America’s*.

Table 4. Russian Productive Sector Comparison

	PPP GDP % of world economy, 2010–19 average	Share of the productive sector in GDP points in PPP	Share of the productive sector compared to Russia
France	2.50%	0.54%	44.31%
Germany	3.50%	1.09%	90.01%
Russia	3.30%	1.21%	100.00%

Table 5. Chinese Productive Sector Comparison

	PPP GDP % of world economy, 2010–19 average	Share of the productive sector in GDP points in PPP	Share of the productive sector compared to China
Germany	3.50%	1.09%	11.45%
United States	15.70%	3.25%	34.14%
China	18.60%	9.52%	100.00%

Indeed, by 2017 China’s real productive sector [exceeded](#) the combined total for America,

the European Union, and Japan.

American boosters often take comfort in our supposed advantages in technology and innovation, but although our past lead had been enormous, this seems less true today or in the future. Sapir provided a chart showing the tremendous growth in Chinese patent applications over the last forty years, which have increased from almost nothing to more than 60% of the world total by 2018, nearly five times America's share.

Table 6. Patent Applications by Country

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2018	Global share in 2018
China	-	5,832	25,346	293,066	1,393,815	60.70%
United States	62,098	90,643	164,795	241,977	285,095	12.40%
Japan	165,730	332,952	384,201	290,081	253,630	11.10%
South Korea	1,241	9,082	72,831	131,805	162,561	7.10%
Germany	28,683	30,724	28,722	24,926	46,617	2.00%
Russia	-	-	23,377	28,722	24,926	1.10%
India	1,207	1,147	2,206	8,853	16,289	0.70%
France	11,000	12,378	13,870	14,748	14,303	0.60%
United Kingdom	19,612	19,310	22,050	15,490	12,865	0.60%

There is some empirical evidence that these official statistics have real-world impact. American companies created and once entirely dominated the social media and smartphone ecosystem that is so important to global consumers, and for years their position seemed unassailable. But according to [a recent WSJ article](#), four of the five most popular smartphone apps in the U.S. are now Chinese, with Facebook ranked fifth. The main response of our bipartisan political class has been to threaten a ban on TikTok, wildly popular among our own youth, much like the *nomenklatura* of the decaying Soviet Union had once desperately tried to ban Western blue jeans and rock music.

This rapid rise of China in technology and economic competitiveness is hardly surprising. As physicist Steve Hsu [pointed out in 2008](#), according to international psychometric data, America's population probably contains some 10,000 individuals having an IQ of 160 or higher, while the total for China is around 300,000, a figure thirty times larger.

China's greatest strategic vulnerability had been its dependence upon imported energy and raw materials to feed its massive industrial base, and during an international confrontation America could potentially have used its control of the seas to interdict such vital supplies. But Russia possesses the world's greatest treasure-chest of such resources, and our unremitting hostility has now driven that country into a tight embrace of its Chinese neighbor, as recently emphasized by [the Moscow Summit](#) of their two national leaders.

Thus, our own actions have forged a strong China-Russia alliance that seems likely to displace America from its dominant global position. Such an outcome would be an event of historic proportions, comparable in magnitude to the collapse of the Soviet Union three decades ago.

Harvard's [Graham Allison](#) was the founding dean of the Kennedy School of Government,

assuming that post while I was still in high school, and his influential 2017 bestseller [Destined for War](#) coined the phrase “the Thucydides Trap” for what he feared might be an almost inevitable conflict between a rising China and a globally dominant America. But our irrational hostility toward Russia has now transformed the geopolitical landscape, and last week he took to the pages of *Foreign Policy* to argue that the China-Russia alliance now probably outweighed our own:

- [Xi and Putin Have the Most Consequential Undeclared Alliance in the World](#)
It's become more important than Washington's official alliances today
Graham Allison • *Foreign Policy* • March 23, 2023 • 1,300 Words

His closing paragraphs are worth quoting in full:

An elementary proposition in international relations 101 states: “The enemy of my enemy is my friend.” By confronting both China and Russia simultaneously, the United States has helped create what former U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski called an “alliance of the aggrieved.” This has allowed Xi to reverse Washington’s successful “trilateral diplomacy” of the 1970s that widened the gap between China and the United States’ primary enemy, the Soviet Union, in ways that contributed significantly to the U.S. victory in the Cold War. Today, China and Russia are, in [Xi's words](#), closer than allies.

Since Xi and Putin are not just the current presidents of their two nations but leaders whose tenures effectively have no expiration dates, the United States will have to understand that it is confronting the most consequential undeclared alliance in the world.

According to Allison, we are currently witnessing the end of the unchallenged American global dominance that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union more than three decades ago. Therefore, it was quite fitting that he quoted the views of [Zbigniew Brzezinski](#), the Polish-born political scientist who had been a major architect of our successful strategy during the victorious later stages of that Cold War conflict.

A longtime academic scholar of the “Realist” school at both Harvard and Columbia universities, Brzezinski had been the primary organizer of the Trilateral Commission in 1973 and in 1976 was named National Security Advisor in the Carter Administration, gradually gaining ascendancy for his harder-line views against his rival, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. He strongly supported Eastern European dissident activity, notably including the powerful Solidarity movement in his own native Poland, and he also orchestrated heavy military assistance to the Muslim rebels in Soviet-controlled Afghanistan. Both those efforts probably played a significant role in fatally weakening the USSR.

Indeed, although Brzezinski was himself a Democrat of strong social democratic leanings, his foreign policy positions were so greatly admired by Republican conservatives that there were even [later claims](#) that Ronald Reagan had asked him to stay on in that same role after Carter’s 1980 defeat.

By the mid-1980s, Brzezinski had become convinced that Soviet Communism was in terminal decline and in 1989 he published [The Grand Failure](#), bearing the prophetic subtitle “The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century.” The work appeared in print nearly a year before the Fall of the Berlin Wall marked the end of an epoch.

The collapse of the Iron Curtain reunited the severed halves of Europe two generations after their separation, and this was followed two years later by the shocking collapse and disintegration of the Soviet Union itself. Moscow soon lost control over territories it had ruled for centuries, with most of the boundaries of the Russian successor state rolled back to what they had been prior to the reign of Peter the Great in 1682.

The sudden disappearance of the USSR totally transformed the geopolitical landscape, leaving America as the world's sole superpower, having unchallenged dominance over the entire globe, a situation unique in world history.

Brzezinski considered the consequences of that global upheaval and in 1997 published [The Grand Chessboard](#), a short but influential book summarizing our unprecedented international position and outlining geostrategic policies to buttress our new dominance on the Eurasian world continent, the region that constituted the "grand chessboard" of his title.

Over the years, I've [frequently seen](#) accusations that Brzezinski was advocating a strategy for permanent American global hegemony, but I think such critics were confusing his ideas with the crude triumphalism espoused by the Neocons, who followed an entirely different ideological path. I finally read his book several years ago and encountered a very thoughtful and moderate analysis of the dangers and opportunities America faced on the Eurasian landmass, with the author repeatedly emphasizing that our worldwide dominance was merely a temporary condition, impossible to permanently maintain.

America was his country and he certainly proposed alliances and other measures to strengthen and extend our global position, but he sought to do so in a reasonable and restrained manner, avoiding provocative or precipitous actions and properly accommodating the legitimate geopolitical interests of other major powers such as China, Russia, Japan, and the larger European states.

His book had appeared near the absolute high-water mark of American prestige and influence and in the aftermath of the 9/11 Attacks a few years later, Brzezinski became a strong public critic of the Bush Administration's Neocon-influenced plans for an Iraq War, a disastrous mistake that wrecked the stability of the Middle East, squandered our national credibility, and cost us [many trillions](#) of dollars. Since the mid-1970s [his closest ally and collaborator](#) had been his former military aide Bill Odom, who as a three-star general later ran the NSA for Ronald Reagan during the mid-1980s, and the two of them later urged [an immediate strategic rapprochement with Iran](#) and withdrawal from Iraq.

The dramatic geopolitical shifts we are now experiencing recently prompted me to reread Brzezinski's short 1997 book and doing so fully confirmed my recollections. Early on, he set forth the key reasons for America's global dominance, expecting that most of them would persist for at least a generation and possibly longer:

In brief, America stands supreme in the four decisive domains of global power: militarily, it has an unmatched global reach; economically, it remains the main locomotive of global growth, even if challenged in some respects by Japan and Germany (neither of which enjoys the other attributes of global might); technologically, it retains the overall lead in the cutting-edge areas of innovation; and culturally, despite some crassness, it enjoys an appeal that is unrivaled, especially among the world's youth—all of which gives the United States a political clout that no other state comes close to matching. It is the combination of all four that makes America the only comprehensive

global superpower.

Although the Polish-born author surely retained some deep personal hostility toward his homeland's traditional Russian adversary and his book was written close to the nadir of Russia's national decline, only traces of such animosity were visible, and he fully considered the possibility that a revived Russia would successfully integrate itself into an enlarged Europe, the "common European home" once espoused by Mikhail Gorbachev. He expressed some concern about instability in the Islamic world, but our disastrous post-9/11 Middle Eastern wars would have seemed acts of unimaginable recklessness and folly.

The penultimate and longest chapter of his Eurasia analysis was entitled "The Far Eastern Anchor" and he described that region as experiencing "an economic success without parallel in human development." He noted that during their takeoff stage of industrialization, Britain and America had each required roughly a half-century to double their output, while both China and South Korea had achieved that same result in merely a single decade. Brzezinski felt confident that barring unfortunate circumstances, China would surely grow into a leading global economic power, and believed that our own country should seek to incorporate it into the world system we had constructed, while properly recognizing that "China's history has been one of national greatness."

But although Brzezinski's appraisal of China's prospects was highly favorable, his 1997 analysis was actually quite cautious in its projections. He doubted that the country's remarkable economic growth rates would continue for another couple of decades, something that would require "an unusually felicitous combination of effective national leadership" and numerous other favorable conditions, arguing that such a "prolonged combination of all of these positive factors was problematic."

Instead, he leaned towards a more conventional prognosis that by about 2017, China might have a total GDP considerably larger than that of Japan, thereby establishing it as "a global power, roughly on a par with the United States and Europe." But the reality was that by that year [China's real GDP](#) was *more than four times larger than that of Japan*, and its real industrial production was greater than that of America and the European Union *combined*.

Thus, China's economic weight in today's world vastly exceeds Brzezinski's 1997 assumptions and that difference magnifies the importance of his strategic warnings, which our political leadership has utterly disregarded. Throughout his book, he repeatedly emphasized that the greatest danger America faced would be if we needlessly antagonized major Eurasian nations, which might then unite against us:

Finally, some possible contingencies involving future political alignments should also be briefly noted...the United States may have to determine how to cope with regional coalitions that seek to push America out of Eurasia, thereby threatening America's status as a global power...Potentially, the most dangerous scenario would be a grand coalition of China, Russia, and perhaps Iran, an "antihegemonic" coalition united not by ideology but by complementary grievances...Averting this contingency, however remote it may be, will require a display of U.S. geostrategic skill on the western, eastern, and southern perimeters of Eurasia simultaneously.

However, a coalition allying Russia with both China and Iran can develop only if the United States is shortsighted enough to antagonize China and Iran simultaneously.

Given recent events, his prophetic warnings were completely disregarded. Instead, our national political leadership chose to exactly invert his suggestions, and they did so despite China having grown much stronger than he had envisioned.

Brzezinski himself recognized some of these important developments, and the year before his death in 2017, he updated his analysis to proclaim that the era of American dominance was already drawing to a close and we should recognize that reality.

- [Toward a Global Realignment](#)

As its era of global dominance ends, the United States needs to take the lead in realigning the global power architecture.

Zbigniew Brzezinski • *The American Interest* • April 17, 2016 • 2,500 Words

Instead of heeding his concerns and adjusting their policies accordingly, our government has doubled-down on its crude strategy of attempting to maintain an impossible American global hegemony, a policy that seems likely to end in national disaster.

Our leaders have apparently decided to play a game of “Fool’s Mate” on the grand Eurasian chessboard.

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