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Geopolitical Chessboard: U.S. Global Strategy: Defeating Potential Challengers In Eurasia

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Global Research, August 20, 2010
Stop NATO 20 August 2010

Region: Asia
Theme: US NATO War Agenda

"Eurasia is...the chessboard on which the struggle for global primacy continues to be played."

In its annual report to Congress on the Chinese military this week, the U.S. Department of Defense "voiced alarm over China's military buildup," with particular emphasis on what was described as the nation "investing heavily in ballistic and cruise missile capabilities that could one day pose a challenge to U.S. dominance in the western Pacific." [1]

The report, originally to have been presented on March 1, bears the title of Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2010 [2]

While commenting favorably on China's increased "contributions to international peacekeeping efforts, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and counter-piracy operations," it focuses extensively on what was noted above: That the nation's military capacity may keep pace with its economic growth and pose a challenge to the domination of the western Pacific Ocean region that the U.S. gained after World War II and, as with Europe and now Africa, to an almost uncontested degree after the end of the Cold War.

Washington's incremental and to most of the world imperceptible subordination of Europe through NATO expansion began in the early 1990s and has been completed over the last eleven years, since the war against Yugoslavia and the incorporation of the first former Warsaw Pact nations into the American-controlled military bloc in 1999.

Troops from 20 NATO new member and candidate states from Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia were deployed to Iraq after the U.S. invasion of 2003, then in the last days of 2008 transferred to Afghanistan where they serve under NATO command. To date 38 nations in Europe (inclusive of the South Caucasus) have provided forces for the Afghan war. Every European nation (excluding minuscule microstates) but Cyprus, in part because of its divided status and Turkish opposition, is either a full NATO member or involved in partnership programs with the bloc. Former Soviet and Yugoslav republics Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Macedonia, Moldova and Montenegro (the world's newest – universally recognized – nation) have advanced Individual Partnership Action Plans and Georgia and Ukraine specially crafted National Annual Programs for integration into the Alliance. The U.S. has subjugated Europe through NATO.

With the launching of U.S. Africa Command on October 1, 2008, the Pentagon has consolidated individual and multilateral partnerships with almost every country on the continent in an effort to, in large part, diminish Chinese and Russia influence.

The Middle East has followed the same pattern, with only Iran and Syria not drawn into the Pentagon's and NATO's (with the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative) military network. Iraq, Kuwait and Jordan host U.S. and NATO forces and Persian Gulf states Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are military partners of the U.S. and the North Atlantic military bloc. The United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Jordan and Egypt have supplied military personnel for the Afghan war.

Developments over the last twelve years have seriously called into question Washington's control of the southern half of the Western Hemisphere, and in 2008 the Pentagon reactivated its Fourth Fleet (which had been disbanded in 1950) for the Caribbean Sea and Central and South America as part of the U.S. response to an increase in independent foreign policy orientation by several nations in the region.

2010 has signalled Washington's return to Asia and, in particular, concerted and mounting actions to challenge its main economic rival in the world: China.

The Pentagon is currently conducting large-scale war games in South Korea, the second major joint exercises since late last month, and on August 18 Defense Department spokesman Bryan Whitman announced that the U.S. will hold anti-submarine warfare maneuvers with South Korea in the Yellow Sea, which borders Chinese territory to the north and the west.

Whitman mentioned that "The latest military exercise, planned for early September, followed a visit by Gates and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to Seoul last month." [3]

The past few weeks have seen a series of commentaries in the Chinese press on escalating U.S. military presence in Northeast Asia and the South China Sea. [4] The tone of many of them, often by major military officials and strategists, is one not heard since the Cold War, and the beginning of it at that.

Terms that have appeared in the articles include gunboat diplomacy, brinkmanship, hegemony, unilateralism, bullying tactics, muscle-flexing, Cold War mentality, super war machine and Asian NATO.

A recent feature in Global Times entitled "Dreams of empire a trap for modern powers" asserted the now monthly U.S. war games on either side of the Korean Peninsula – the Yellow Sea and the Sea of Japan – are "definitely aimed at China," and that Washington is attempting to reclaim its sphere of influence in East Asia after its seven-year involvement in Iraq (the same will soon be true for Latin America as well) and "sending a reminder" of its military power to the region. The piece, however, also said that "China and Russia are both unable to accept such claims. China's several military exercises and Russia's extremely large-scale military maneuvers are responses to the US's 'strategic reminder.'" [5]

The same publication wrote on August 18: "The Pentagon, facing budget pressures due to the economic downturn, naturally wants to keep China as a lasting military threat.

"The US continues to flex its military muscle by surrounding China with its military bases, engaging in a war in neighboring Afghanistan, and continuing to sell weapons to Taiwan." [6]

In the same vein, an editorial in People's Daily said that "By giving the aircraft carrier USS

George Washington's free access to the Yellow Sea and South China Sea, the United States seems to tell the world that the
'Asia-Pacific [region] and the [Pacific] ocean are still dominated by the United States.'" [7]

China Daily reported that analysts have recently commented that "The disturbed waters around China reflect how changes in the political landscape between China and the United States are laying the foundation for a future Asian power struggle." Shi Yinhong, senior scholar of American studies at the Beijing-based Renmin University, was quoted warning that "the US possesses long-term military advantages and sticks to its hegemonic ideals."

The same piece said concerning the threat of the U.S. soon deploying the USS George Washington supercarrier – which has "cruised along waters surrounding China, covering nearly 2,000 nautical miles in East Asia during the past two months" including in the South China Sea – near China's northeast coast that "Beijing is within striking distance of the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier in the Yellow Sea." [8]

People's Daily said of the pretext Washington employs for its increasing and presumably permanent military intrusion in the area, the sinking of a South Korean warship almost five months ago: "The United States made a lot out of the Cheonan incident by making use of joint exercises to re-control the situation in Northeast Asia. It also took advantage of the…attitudes of the ASEAN Regional Forum and some ASEAN countries and greatly played up the so-called [Chinese] 'threat' to speed its return to Southeast Asia….[I]n light of the country's recent display off the South China Sea, the escalating actions appear to be more a strategic show of strength rather than just a reaction to one particular incident." [9]

A Chinese analysis of August 18 presented the developments discussed above in a concise historical and geopolitical context:

"US intervention in the South China Sea disputes isn't incidental. It's the outcome of the Barack Obama administration's 'return to Asia' strategy. Some American analysts argue that China expanded its influence in Southeast Asia as the US was focused on the 'war on terror' after the 9/11 attacks. Their logic is simple: any potential challenger to Washington in Eurasia should be the target of US global strategy….By getting involved in the South China Sea disputes and fanning trouble between China and its neighbors, Washington aims to contain Beijing and re-establish its global hegemony." [10]

What is at stake in the seas off the coasts of the Koreas and in the South China Sea is more than the March 26 sinking of the Cheonan and more than just East Asia.

The observation that the U.S. will not tolerate any competitor or future rival in Eurasia, and that the control of that vast tract of land from the eastern Atlantic to the western Pacific is the key to global domination, is not typical of language often heard in China. It is rather that most associated with Zbigniew Brzezinski in recent years. The latter has been held in high esteem in China as he was National Security Advisor in the Carter administration, running U.S. foreign policy behind the back of Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, when Washington transferred diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to the People's Republic of China on January 1, 1979.

In his 1998 book The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy And Its Geostrategic Imperatives, Brzezinski triumphantly gloated that "The defeat and collapse of the Soviet Union was the final step in the rapid ascendance of a Western Hemisphere power, the

United States, as the sole and, indeed, the first truly global power." [11]

The leadership of China, first courted by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger in 1972, saw Brzezinski as the man most responsible for weakening Beijing's and Washington's main adversary at the time, the Soviet Union, with his support of anti-Soviet forces from Afghanistan to Poland and the undermining of Moscow's allies in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

With the USSR out of the way after 1991, though, it should have dawned on Chinese officials that the first sole and truly global power would sooner or later be knocking on their door as well. It has taken almost two decades, but just that is occurring.

It is not as though they were not notified, either.

The opening sentence of Brzezinski's introduction to The Grand Chessboard states: "Ever since the continents started interacting politically, some five hundred years ago, Eurasia has been the center of world power."

In the book's introduction and in its second section, "The Eurasian Chessboard," the self-styled geostrategist, customarily grouped among (and perhaps at the top of) what are called America's foreign policy realists, offers sweeping and grandiose claims symptomatic of acute individual as well as national megalomania.

His comments include:

"For America, the chief geopolitical prize is Eurasia. For half a millennium, world affairs were dominated by Eurasian powers and peoples who fought with one another for regional domination and reached out for global power. Now a non-Eurasian power is preeminent in Eurasia — and America's global primacy is directly dependent on how long and how effectively its preponderance on the Eurasian continent is sustained."

"How America 'manages' Eurasia is critical. A power that dominates Eurasia would control two of the world's three most advanced and economically productive regions. A mere glance at the map also suggests that control over Eurasia would almost automatically entail Africa's subordination, rendering the Western Hemisphere and Oceania geopolitically peripheral to the world's central continent. About 75 per cent of the world's people live in Eurasia, and most of the world's physical wealth is there as well, both in its enterprises and underneath its soil. Eurasia accounts for about three-fourths of the world's known energy resources."

More to the point in regards to the current situation, he brashly asserted that "America is now Eurasia's arbiter, with no major Eurasian issue soluble without America's participation or contrary to America's interests."

"All of the potential political and/or economic challengers to American primacy are Eurasian. Cumulatively, Eurasia's power vastly overshadows America's. Fortunately for America, Eurasia is too big to be politically one.

"Eurasia is thus the chessboard on which the struggle for global primacy continues to be played."

With the Russian government conceding point after point to Washington of late – including U.S. and NATO air, infantry, naval and interceptor missile deployments, exercises, bases and

installations on the Baltic and Black Seas, in the South Caucasus and Central Asia – and India all but formally recruited into an Asia-Pacific version of NATO, China is Washington's main "potential political and/or economic challenger" in Eurasia and hence in the world.

It is not so much a matter of China choosing to play that role as being cast in it nonetheless. For no other reasons except its economic power, its size and its location.

As Brzezinski stated over twelve years ago, "How America copes with the complex Eurasian power relationships — and particularly whether it prevents the emergence of a dominant and antagonistic Eurasian power — remains central to America's capacity to exercise global primacy."

The U.S. is reacting to China's rise by moving its unmatched military machine into the latter nation's neighborhood and consolidating an Asian NATO to surround it as the original North Atlantic military bloc, now global in its scope, does Russia.

To have expected anything else is to have been either inveterately naive or, as the self-proclaimed commander-in-chief of the world's sole military superpower Barack Obama recently branded his Chinese counterpart Hu Jintao, willfully blind. [12]

Notes

1) Wall Street Journal, August 18, 2010
2) The Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2010
http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/2010_CMPR_Final.pdf
3) Reuters, August 18, 2010
4) Part II: U.S.-China Crisis: Beyond Words To Confrontation
Stop NATO, August 17, 2010
http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/08/17/part-ii-u-s-china-crisis-beyond-words-toward-confrontation
5) Global Times, August 15, 2010
6) Global Times, August 18, 2010
7) People's Daily, August 17, 2010
8) China Daily, August 18, 2010
9) People's Daily, August 17, 2010
10) Xinhua News Agency/China Daily, August 18, 2010
11) The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy And Its Geostrategic Imperatives
http://sandiego.indymedia.org/media/2006/10/119973.pdf
12) Obama Doctrine: Eternal War For Imperfect Mankind
Stop NATO, December 10, 2009

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U.S. Risks Military Clash With China In Yellow Sea
Stop NATO, July 16, 2010

http://rickrozoff.wordpress.com/2010/07/16/u-s-risks-military-clash-with-china-in-yellow-sea

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