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Hybrid Wars. The "Greater Heartland", Crossroads Of The Multipolar World

Part IV

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Global Research, March 27, 2016
Oriental Review 25 March 2016

Region: Asia, Middle East & North Africa, Russia and FSU

(Please reference the entire Law of Hybrid War series in order to get acquainted with the strategic themes of this article)

The Crossroads Of The Multipolar World

Redefining The Heartland:

The "Greater Heartland" acquires its premier strategic and economic importance due to being the supercontinental fulcrum of multipolar integration. As was mentioned at the end of Part III, there's a direct overlap between Russia's Eurasian Union and China's New Silk Road, and the countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan presently fall under both connective umbrellas. To those attuned with geopolitical theory, these three states noticeably correlate with the broad territory that early 20th-century British strategist Halford Mackinder termed the "Heartland", which he defined as the geopolitical pivot of Eurasia. More contemporary strategists narrowed the region down to the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia, but the author feels that this is presently insufficient to accommodate for the changing dynamics of the evolving world order, and thus proposes a modification of the concept to include Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan as well. This redefined version of Mackinder's original thesis moves the center of geopolitical gravity in a more southwards direction (by contrast, Mackinder's broad contours included all of Siberia and most of the Russian Far East) in order to reflect more relevant areas of geopolitical competition between the unipolar and multipolar worlds in the context of the New Cold War.

Connecting Eurasia:

Central Asia

Corresponding to the Greater Heartland, there are four generalized zones of connectivity, and each has them has their own geo-economic role in the large framework. The former Soviet Republics of Central Asia most directly connect to Russia and China, and they also provide a geopolitical bridge between them. Together these countries form the invaluable nucleus of the Russian-Chinese Strategic Partnership, and their stability is of foremost concern to both Great Power partners. Expanding the multipolar concept of integration even further, China announced an ambitious trans-Central Asian railroad in late November to link it to Iran, thus catapulting the region's significance to unprecedented heights.

Any disruption within this space carries with it the potential to quickly spread throughout the

whole region, especially if such events originate in the identity-fragile Fergana Valley, thereby necessitating a multilateral approach to the area's security. The Russian-led CSTO incorporates Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, while the SCO that's traditionally been a joint condominium between Russia and China includes these three plus Uzbekistan.

The weak link that's left out of both matrices is constitutionally neutral Turkmenistan, and while it's geographically insulated from the cross-border chaos that could contaminate the entire Fergana, it's very vulnerable to a conventional terrorist offensive from Afghanistan that could otherwise be mitigated by its multilateral involvement in one of the two regional security frameworks. This wouldn't matter so much if it weren't for Turkmenistan's absolutely pivotal role in multipolar transnational connective energy projects, chiefly in being China's most strategic energy partner and its largest gas supplier.

Iran

The Islamic Republic is uniquely positioned to act as the geopolitical conduit for Russian-Indian trade via the North-South Corridor between them. Pertaining to China, the trans-Central Asian railroad that was mentioned above is a potential game changer for Beijing's Mideast policy. In such a future configuration, this would enable China to directly access the Mideast market and therefore extend the reach of its New Silk Road while simultaneously avoiding potential maritime chokepoints that could be blocked during hostilities with the US. Taken together, Iran is an integral geo-economic partner for both Russia and China, although the two states don't have explicitly overlapping interests there to the same degree as they do in Central Asia. Nevertheless, any type of Hybrid War destabilization that adversely affects Iran's stability (whether occurring within the country itself or tangentially affecting it from abroad) would similarly impact on Russia and China's grand geo-economic interests as well.

North-South Transport Corridor (Mumbai – Helsinki) allows to significantly cut the distance of cargo transportation.

Afghanistan

This war-torn country is potentially one of the most geostrategic in all of Eurasia, as it theoretically allows for the projection of simultaneous influence to all of the Greater Heartland states except for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Under the control of the US, this means that that terroristic chaos could potentially spill over into their borders and help advance Brzezinski's "Eurasian Balkans" theorem, but in a liberated multipolar environment, it could reversely serve as a valuable midway territory in linking various connective projects. For example, in the absence of its present security challenges, it would be the most straightforward path in physically tying together cultural cousins Iran and Tajikistan (possibly by connecting to the Turkmen-Afghan-Tajik railway being built) while also avoiding the possibility that Uzbekistan might once more attempt to obstruct their bilateral trade. Granted, the opportunity cost in doing so is to directly avoid the potentially lucrative Uzbek market, but such a strategic sacrifice might be deemed as reluctantly necessary in order to secure the Iranian-Tajik trade route from falling victim to political transit games.

Afghanistan is poised to play a pivotal role in another, more certain project, and that's the TAPI pipeline that aims to bring Turkmen gas to the Indian marketplace. Conceived of

almost two decades ago, the first steps in its actualization were finally begun at the beginning of November when Turkmenistan authorized the construction of its segment of the pipeline. If the project is ever completed, then it would make Ashgabat a critical partner of New Delhi's and help Turkmenistan play a stabilizing role in India's economic ascendency. Understanding that this positive and potentially globally impactful scenario is conditional on TAPI's safe transit through Afghanistan, it becomes evident that Kabul could hold quite a lot of influence over the forthcoming state of affairs if it gets its security act together and plays its cards right, thus bequeathing it with an enviable geo-economic position in the future (and consequently making it an even more mouthwatering target for the US).

Pakistan

The South Asian state stands to become host of three intersecting multipolar connective projects, which thus grants it one of the greatest geo-economic potentials in the world. The TAPI pipeline has already been touched upon, but a similar project is envisioned to run from Iran to India, and potentially traversing Pakistan along the way (and if it does, conceivably branching off to China as well). There's the possibility that an expensive underwater route will be chosen instead in order to allay India's strategic concerns about Pakistan becoming a 'South Asian Ukraine' and using its energy position for political blackmail, but considering that TAPI will also be passing through Pakistan, it seems as though New Delhi already has enough faith in Islamabad's business savvy that it might opt to have the Iranian line go through it as well. If that happens, then Pakistan would distinguish itself as India's irreplaceable energy partner and the mutual benefit that both of them receive through this pragmatic cooperation could be used as a springboard for intensifying their economic relations through SAARC.

The third and prospectively most significant of the three infrastructure projects planned through Pakistan is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. This mammoth $46 billion endeavor will give China a vital lifeline to the Indian Ocean through the Port of Gwadar and allow it to mitigate the strategic loss that it's expected to suffer in Myanmar (which will described a bit later on in the research). In fact, it's entirely feasible that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor could even become the basis for aEurasian-wide 'zipper' that helps to bring the Eurasian Union, China, Iran, and SAARC all together. While it's still far too early to say whether or not this scenario will ever fully pan out, all the present odds seem to stand to its favor, and its successful implementation would give the *multipolar world its strongest leverage yet in reshaping the supercontinent's geo-economic flows.*

PREVIOUS CHAPTERS:

Hybrid Wars 1. The Law Of Hybrid Warfare

Hybrid Wars 2. Testing the Theory – Syria & Ukraine

Hybrid Wars 3. Predicting Next Hybrid Wars

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