



The Old World Revisited: Future of the International Order in Eurasia

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Contents

- 6 Figure or Ground?
- 7 Geopolitical Rifts
- 10 Cast of Characters
- 16 Eurasia's Geographical Connectivity and Political Compatibility

The crisis of the US hegemony has a geographical dimension. The military and political setbacks haunting the United States over the past few decades, non-Western countries joining the club of global economic players, and the crisis of the European Union as a source of Western standards and values are all evidence of an unprecedented peacetime shift in wealth and power distribution from the West to the East.

In all likelihood, the shift cannot be halted. By 2050, the United States, as estimated by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), will be the world's third largest economy, after China and India. Russia will retain its sixth position. The biggest West European economy, Germany, will rank ninth. Given China's rising technological level, its economic domination will be backed by a considerable military potential.

As the world's most densely populated countries, China and India will recover their historical status as the major economic centres, which they possessed before the West's surge to prominence at the start of the industrial age. The relative weakening of the United States will effectively push the centre of world hegemony back to the Old World, where it belonged historically, with the exception of several decades after the Second World War. Let us note that this is the way Beijing and Delhi see the course of the world history. For them, it is a return to the norm jeopardized two centuries ago.

The US global leadership was based on several main conditions. First, the US drew up and maintained the rules of world trade. At the start of its rise, it was ready to sacrifice its immediate economic interests to provide incentives for the rapid development of its key partners in containing communism. The US-created trade regime was an important factor in the post-war economic miracle in Germany and Japan (Robert Brenner). Second, the United States ensured the world market system's security by supporting allied countries and deploying military bases in key regions of the world. The US naval power is what largely provides for world maritime trade security up to now. Third, the United States as the leader possessed moral prestige, in the sense of Gramsci's idea of hegemony (Giovanni Arrighi) rather than Joseph Nye's of 'soft power': its values, ideals, and common sense were perceived as universal.

We are witnessing the collapse of two out of the three conditions we have mentioned. The United States is renouncing trade agreements, which the Obama administration promoted as a new institution of globalization and a tool of US influence on the world

economy. America is defiantly focused on its national interests, claiming that they in many cases correspond with those of its partners and allies. Although the policy of national egoism is criticized inside the United States, it is a hit with the electorate. Eroded by the US military campaigns in Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Libya, America's moral power is losing value for the United States itself. The US calls into question its own role as a global regulator, or ceases to conceal that the role will be used for its own benefit. The global sheriff is going corrupt and is pleased to tell the world about it.

As for the third condition of US power, it still has decisive importance for global security. The US is the only country that maintains an extensive network of military bases in all regions of the world. The US naval domination over most of the world ocean is incontestable, but its overall power has suffered losses in recent years. The United States has been unable to bring the Afghan war to an end on acceptable terms for years. It has destabilized the Middle East but failed to restore anything like stable government structures there. The US plans in Syria have been defeated by the Syrian leaders' resolve as well as by military and diplomatic efforts on the part of Russia and Iran. Having enjoyed a period of its greatest might for 25 years after the collapse of the USSR, the United States appeared unable to prevent the development of nuclear weapons by North Korea.

There is an unprecedented peacetime shift in wealth and power distribution from the West to the East

In the upcoming decades, Eurasia, the nucleus of the Old World, will face a challenge calling for a stable continental security regime. The same is prompted by the growing vacuum of leadership in the world and the continuing rise of the biggest regional powers. These powers can address security and development problems jointly, but for this they need to create a continental transport, energy, and communications infrastructure as well as the stable continental security regime.

There are obstacles to this plan, such as decades-old geopolitical rifts and expanding ungoverned spaces. The majority of Eurasian powers are engaged in maritime trade and still underestimate the potential of continental communications and infrastructure junctions, a factor that reduces the stimuli to settle regional differences and eliminate zones of anarchy. The continent's security depends on whether this regularity is maintained in the future.

Figure or Ground?

The Eurasian continent can be represented as a Gestaltian drawing in which figure and ground keep changing place: with a slight change of perception, the two white faces in the drawing fade into the background, revealing a black vase instead. Looking at a map of the world, one might describe Eurasia as a huge landmass linking clots of political power and economic activity at its western and eastern tips. But if you alter your perception, Eurasia disappears in any sense except the narrowly geographical: an observer will notice only two great oceans, the Atlantic and the Pacific, whose coasts are where human activity is most concentrated.

Both perceptions of Eurasia have a clear political dimension, with one embraced by Russia and the other by the United States. US scepticism about Eurasian integration goes deeper than its assessments of the Russian-Chinese trade and investment exchanges. The US is used to seeing primarily oceanic expanses and coastlines. It looks from sea to coast, and this outlook reflects its central position on the planet. Russia, on the contrary, looks from land to sea and sees Eurasia as a land bridge between Europe and East Asia, the largest of its kind in the world.

Eurasia is moving from ground to figure thanks to distinctive and independent character of Russia's foreign policy. As an international political concept, Eurasia has various meanings depending on the context. For example, this term can denote the former USSR territory, regard themselves as belonging to different political and geographical spaces are trying to separate. This is the context for Eurasian integration proper and the polemics around NATO and EU expansion to the post-Soviet space. A different context involves the idea of connectivity between China's Belt One Road Initiative and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Here Eurasian integration derives a powerful economic and political boost from Russian-Chinese cooperation. The almost forgotten concept of Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok seeks to merge West European technologies and capital with Russian natural resources, pointing clearly to the limitations of US influence in the Old World.

The majority of big powers have their own unique vision of the Eurasian space. China's most developed regions, international trade and military activities face the Pacific. Its hinterland has only recently become a focus for the central authorities' resource-based design effort. India sees itself in a similar way. The Eurasian landmass is defined by the Kashmir problem and complex relations with China.

Eurasia is moving from ground to figure thanks to distinctive and independent character of Russia's foreign policy

There are physical and geographical constants. In its entirety, Eurasia is a system of watersheds between the Pacific, Atlantic, Arctic, and Indian oceans. The continent's hinterland boasts the world's largest mountain systems and remotest deserts. The political expression of this kind of geographical remoteness is found in the decades-old civil war in Afghanistan, compounded by the interference of neighbouring and distant powers. Bordering directly or indirectly on the three biggest continental powers – Russia, India, and China – Afghanistan remains a practically ungoverned territory without stable state institutions, which is unable to function as a solid structural element of continental cooperation.

Geopolitical Rifts

The United States is unable to formulate any comprehensive strategy, including towards Eurasia. The US is in the midst of the deepest foreign policy crisis in its history and the recovery will be protracted and painful. At present, it is moving away from global leadership to the status of a great power. This transition is complicated by an internal political struggle between the globalists and the mercantilist nationalists, and the logic of this struggle drives US political processes. This is why the US foreign policy will be impulsive, disjointed, contradictory, and, worst of all, irresponsible.

Debates are underway on the future of the liberal order and whether the US should practice self-restraint so as to strengthen this order. However, nobody seems to question the need to maintain and

strengthen America's superiority. Both the liberal globalists and the national mercantilists agree that the US must remain the strongest and most secure world power.

The US can only buttress its international standing through a Eurasian strategy. The main rivals of the US are located in this region. Eurasia's geopolitical consolidation without any contribution from the US can turn Eurasia into a centre of power that will be stronger than the US. Lastly, Eurasia is the source of the main threats to US security and economic interests.

Therefore, neither globalists, nor nationalists will turn away from Eurasia. The traditional goal of the US foreign policy is to control Eurasia's consolidation. This goal is much more important than the US liberal globalist tradition. It took shape even before the US started developing a liberal order, and there are no reasons to assume that the US will abandon it even if it retreats from spreading and preserving the principles of this order.

America's presence in Eurasia and its national security are closely connected to the system of US alliances. Nobody in Washington doubts that the US must continue to protect the security of its allies and prevent the rival centres of power from creating regional hegemonies. The US goal is to maintain the European and Asian countries' security focus on the US, which should keep Eurasia and America together. The US seeks to exploit the European and Asian countries' fear of Russia and China, as well as the Arab countries' fear of Iran, in order to strengthen their connection with the US and also as the basis for their long-term partnership. In this context, the US will use the numerous old conflicts and geopolitical rifts in Eurasia as its foreign policy tools on the continent.

The areas of confrontation between the largest centres of power in Eurasia have developed over decades and remain largely the same. Their characteristic feature is the large-scale rivalry over the potential of influence in large regions. This rivalry can take the form of local conflicts, where a symbolic victory is sometimes more important than the direct military and political outcome of these conflicts.

Confrontation between India and China recently led to a new border conflict over the Doklam plateau, a territory disputed by China and Bhutan. The Indians said openly that the goal of their harsh actions was to show to the South Asian countries that India had a sufficient potential for containing China in the region and that India was ready to defend its interests. Ongoing tensions between India and Pakistan are rooted in differences between the two countries, but they also have an element of Indo-China confrontation.

The US will use the numerous old conflicts and geopolitical rifts in Eurasia as its foreign policy instruments on the continent

Japan faces the challenge of the North Korean nuclear missile programme and China's aggressive foreign policy. Japan will most likely be drawn into a potential US-Chinese military confrontation and possible conflicts on the Korean Peninsula or over Taiwan, as well as in a standoff with China over the Senkaku (Diaoyutai) Islands.

The key Middle Eastern countries maintain a complicated system of mutual deterrence. They make use of this system to develop allied or partner relations with the global centres of power. Confrontations between Iran and Saudi Arabia or between Iran and Israel, as well as the knot of contradictions between Turkey and its Middle Eastern neighbours, have turned the region into the main area for interference by world powers. However, the nature and results of this interference are different.

The ongoing conflict in Afghanistan is complicated by the fact that the largest centres of power overestimate its strategic significance. Afghanistan is often seen as a possible link between various parts of Eurasia. But this vision has little in common with reality, because Afghanistan cannot play this role for geographical or political reasons.

The situation in the border area between Russia and NATO should be carefully analysed because of its importance for Russia's foreign policy. The political leadership of some countries located in this wide border area present their countries as the frontline territory in order to maximize their security and economic advantages. They are trying to engage the leading Western actors, primarily the US, in the efforts to strengthen their security. They have been

implementing this strategy for a relatively long time, despite the fact that political leadership has changed in some of these countries. In light of political tensions between Russia and NATO, the strategy of the 'frontline' countries is aggravating the confrontation.

Ukraine, Georgia, the Baltic states, and even Moldova are pursuing this strategy. The only exception is Belarus, whose leadership is aware of the dangers of the Russia–West confrontation for the country. The Belarusian leaders have been trying to maintain allied relations with Russia and, at the same time, to develop partner and in the future friendly relations with the West. This policy is unique for this part of the post-Soviet space.

Cast of Characters

Strategic security of the Eurasian continent derives from strategies of many states. We will focus on the approaches of Russia, China, and India, since we believe that these countries will play a key role in creating the order on the continent which would rule out the destabilizing interference of external players. We will also outline the challenges faced by Iran, Turkey, and the European Union.

Russia is uniquely positioned in Eurasia, because it is present in a variety of Eurasian contexts to some extent. Russia's most important economic and political centres are located deep in the mainland. Historically, this factor has been the source of its military invulnerability and prompted it to assert control over vast tracts of land along its western and southern periphery. While enjoying political influence in many regions along the perimeter of the continent from the Norwegian Sea to the North Pacific, it is not a central player in economic exchanges between the coastal Eurasian spaces, acting as a supplier of raw materials and an importer of manufactured goods. Meanwhile, its military and political clout is growing. Russia's long-term foreign policy projects, such as the Eurasian Economic Union, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) are turned inland. Militarily, Russia certainly

dominates the entire territory of the former Soviet Union. Russia's revived military power has so far been its main asset in alliances; it remains unclear whether Russia will manage to obtain economic preferences in return for a politically effective power projection.

Russia is successfully addressing security challenges. It managed to prevent NATO's expansion to Ukraine and Georgia. It is more effective than many EU countries in countering the terrorist threat on its own territory. The military operation in Syria has made Russia one of the leaders in Middle East politics and strengthened its influence in other regions of the world.

Confrontation with the West over divergent interpretations of the Ukraine crisis and divergent approaches to the future of this country did not lead to Russia's defeat. The Ukraine issue did not paralyze Moscow in other regions of the world. Moreover, Russia's strong foreign policy amid Western sanctions proves them to be politically ineffective, and ultimately shows the West's weakness.

Russia enjoys considerable leeway in regional foreign policy configurations in which it is involved. It does not have excessive or conflicting obligations, and its foreign policy, including military activities, does not require significant resources.

The Eurasian Economic Union, with Russia at its core, demonstrates stability. It withstood the economic crisis and is gradually fleshing out its institutional structures with certain economic cooperation projects. The EAEU is important not only in terms of access to markets for companies residing in its constituent countries. Along with the CSTO, it also serves as a long-term guarantee for security and stability of the key post-Soviet countries. Moreover, the EAEU is the foundation for higher-level integration projects. Its expansion beyond the territory of the former Soviet Union cannot be ruled out.

China is rapidly bolstering its armed forces striving to become an indispensable link in production chains, to secure guaranteed access to strategic raw material sources, and to protect its transport arteries. China's operating assumption is that it is growing faster than any of its potential opponents.

Therefore, it will benefit from delaying the moment of crisis: the later a conflict with any of the world powers comes, the more likely China is to win.

China has come close to creating its own alliance system. There are two large countries – Russia and Pakistan – which are essentially Chinese allies. China has no treaties that include clear military commitments with either one, but all the other elements of allied relations are already in place. A lot of joint military exercises have been conducted, and close ties in all areas have been established between key military and civilian institutions. Very high levels of operational interoperability of forces have been achieved. A working military alliance is just a few signatures away. On the part of China, the willingness to sign such a treaty will be determined by the degree of pressure exerted by the United States. So far, China does not consider it necessary.

China's main efforts to establish its sphere of influence are concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region. Both Koreas are under tough Chinese economic sanctions. In the case of North Korea, the sanctions of the UN Security Council are used to encourage the North Korean leadership to recognize its subordinate position in relation to China and to accept China's supremacy in international affairs. After that, China will cease to comply with the UN sanctions. With regard to South Korea, the goal is to force Seoul to remove the US THAAD complex from its territory. If China manages to achieve this, it will be able to tell South Korea which forms of cooperation with its American friends are acceptable and which are not.

Laos and Cambodia – the weakest members of ASEAN – have almost become Chinese satellites, and block ASEAN from developing a common position on China. Following the most recent military coup, Thailand is drifting in that direction, too, with an increased number of military contacts with China and a noticeable influx of Chinese investment. Malaysia is expanding ties with China as well. The Philippines ceased to be a 100-percent US ally and pursues a multi-pronged policy. Singapore has until recently remained a problem country for China, but the most recent visit by the Singaporean prime minister clearly outlined a positive shift in relations between the two countries.

India is extremely sensitive to China's foreign policy expansion in South Asia. Under the government of Narendra Modi, that country is pursuing a bold foreign policy and is making concerted efforts to turn India into one of the world's leading powers, and Modi and his government consider rapid economic growth to be the lynchpin of this process. One of Modi's key election promises was the 'Make in India' programme, which seeks to attract foreign capital and technology and create the proper environment for an economic breakthrough.

China has come close to creating its own alliance system

The Modi government considers the United States, Japan, and South Korea, which have necessary financial and technological resources, its key partners. Cooperation between India and these countries is built both on an economic platform (a free trade area with South Korea and growing trade with the United States), and on the common desire to protect themselves against the growing power of China. The Modi government is increasingly using this factor to its advantage, as it simultaneously tries to address domestic challenges (consolidating society around the image of an external enemy) and demonstrate that the country is prepared to act as a counterweight to China, in which the United States, Japan, and South Korea have a stake. In the long run, China is seen as a political adversary and an economic rival, whose Belt and Road project cannot be accepted by India from an economic or political standpoint, but which is still an important economic partner to India.

India sees Pakistan as a rogue nation in the grips of a debilitating domestic political crisis. Undoubtedly, there are prospects for easing tensions between India and Pakistan. In the past, India–Pakistan relations had seen periods of aggravation and de-escalation: a good example is Narendra Modi's personal visit to Pakistan in 2015 when he attended a Sharif family celebration. Currently, India sets the tone in relations between the two countries and is not interested in alleviating tensions, although it realizes that the collapse of the Pakistani state is fraught with great risks for India.

Russia has a secondary role in this strategy: the Modi government does not plan to give up the benefits that cooperation

In the long run, China is seen as a political adversary and an economic rival, whose Belt and Road project cannot be accepted by India

with Moscow can bring in the military-technical, energy, and political areas, but it is not going to risk its relations with the United States for the sake of being a friend to Russia.

India's foreign policy choice may improve stability in Eurasia by leading to a continental security arrangement involving Russia and China. Or, conversely, India may become a strong ally of the United States and the primary bridgehead for destructive actions targeting continental integration and security in Eurasia.

If US actions are, in fact, pushing Russia and China into a partnership, in the case of India, Washington does the opposite by means of creating conditions for New Delhi never to want to join this partnership. Since the government of Narendra Modi came to power, that country has been increasingly identifying as an Indo-Pacific power maintaining special relations with the United States and its allies from among the maritime powers, such as Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, and Australia, to name a few. India is very suspicious of China's motives and goals in South Asia and views China's support for Pakistan as an unfriendly policy. The recent face-off between the armed forces of India and China on Doklam plateau, as well as the crisis in the Maldives, illustrates these concerns.

By virtue of its geographical position and its proceeds from oil and gas exports, Iran can significantly expand its influence in Eurasia now when the sanctions on it have been lifted. Tehran is successfully expanding in the Middle East, but has not so far shown much capability outside the region. Iranians are aware of the limits of their power in Eurasia and are relying in their policy on cooperation with China and Russia, while excluding possible clashes with them. In an effort to diversify logistics routes for exporting its goods, Iran, in conjunction with Russia and Azerbaijan, is developing the North-South transport corridor.

Turkey is seeking to play an increasingly independent role in international affairs, positioning itself as a cross-regional power. Hence, the sporadic tensions in relations with major international players. High-profile foreign policy gestures, such as statements in support of Muslim Rohingya in Myanmar, are designed to cover up for a dearth of resources, which Turkey could use to improve its international standing. As a NATO member, Turkey acts spitefully, although it is unclear whether this is a long-term policy or just a tactical ploy to secure concessions from its partners. Obviously, Turkish

leaders were denied in their previous strategic goal of joining the European Union. The continuing uncertainty in domestic politics, the vague prospects of the Kurdish issue, exacerbated by the Syrian conflict and political processes in Iraq, make it difficult to make any meaningful forecasts of Turkey's potential for influence in Eurasia.

The European Union is focused primarily on sorting out its internal challenges. The main challenge to the EU's infrastructure development is overcoming the still stark disparity between Western and Eastern Europe. Plans are in place to build high-speed rail in the east of the European Union and convenient logistics hubs which will speed up business activities. Many will assess the overall success of the EU precisely by its ability to bridge the economic development gap and, ultimately, the gap between average wages in EU member countries.

Even though the subject of higher military spending has been gaining prominence in a number of EU countries over the past few years, most likely this policy will remain a fleeting concern that will not be supported by voters in the medium or long term. The European Union faces no direct military threats, and the transatlantic unity embodied in NATO is strong enough to withstand disagreements between the current US administration and the leading European capitals.

If in the 20th century, France and Germany determined the EU dynamics in tandem. In the 21st century, France found it more difficult to maintain its exclusive position. The political elite of the largest EU economy, Germany, is well aware that a significant portion of Germany's economic successes is due to its participation in the EU, and the opportunity to take advantage of a vast economic space. Migration risks, which have become relevant over the past few years, are unlikely to be a good enough argument to abandon the benefits provided by integration. Germany is well positioned to maintain its competitive advantages as one of the innovation centres in the next wave of the technological revolution and far into the future. However, even the leading EU country, as well as a number of others, are facing, at the national level, the same challenge as the EU in general, which is overcoming regional imbalances and preventing the 'ghettoization' and marginalization of areas, from individual districts to entire cities and regions.

Since the government of Narendra Modi came to power, that country has been increasingly identifying as an Indo-Pacific power

Germany is well positioned to maintain its competitive advantages

Eurasia's Geographical Connectivity and Political Compatibility

America's long-term strategy in Eurasia is to preclude its ouster from the continent and the emergence of any consolidated order that it does not lead. As such, Washington has maintained or intensified its involvement in the continent. Given the clear absence of a positive agenda, the US is particularly keen on conflicts in Eurasia, where one or several sides invite Washington as an ally or arbiter. The cleavages that sustain US involvement are likely to be India and Japan against China, as well as Saudi Arabia and Israel against Iran. The United States, for its part, does not want to extinguish conflicts but rather to let them smoulder, thus perpetuating US involvement. For a number of small border states in East Europe, the rivalry and involvement of major power centres – that is, the United States – is one of the few means of displaying their international political agency. Not infrequently, they feel compelled to take a confrontational approach in international affairs, even if this threatens their direct national interests.

Eurasian players are ensnared in long-term confrontations along geopolitical dividing lines, being unable to win a decisive victory over their rivals or redirect resources tied up in confrontation. This is the effect of the involvement of outside centres of power seeking to maintain a balance between the parties.

Yet, different rifts have their own significance for the overall situation in Eurasia. While the China–India confrontation is for leadership in South Asia, the Ukraine confrontation is over not so serious a matter. It is about Russia's security, the need for some basis to consolidate the Ukrainian state, and the prestige of the US and West Europe. Although the parties often see this dispute as existential, in reality it is marginal against the backdrop of more important political processes on the continent.

Under these circumstances, the major players may build up their influence through non-standard moves in new regions, where they were not involved previously. A case in point is the Russian operation in Syria that has created a new situation in the Middle East and facilitated a dramatic rise in Russian influence on world politics at a relatively low cost. Similar moves are likely to be pursued by other major power centres, such as China that may see a solution in increasing investment in the regions where it was weakly represented in the past.

Russia can choose the degree of its involvement in the existing Eurasian confrontations (possibly with the exception of a confrontation on its border with NATO). It can act in many Eurasian contexts simultaneously: to some extent, it is projecting influence in the Middle East, the APR, and Afghanistan. And there is potential for further growth of Russian influence.

Can we envision a long-term scenario in which the international order in Eurasia moves towards political and economic connectivity? Is a durable continental security regime possible? Under what conditions might one emerge?

US ‘withdrawal’ from Eurasia, either from conscious choice or long-term weakening, seems unlikely, although many power centres on the continent increasingly feel its presence as a burden. It cannot be ruled out that US foreign policy will become more consistent and constructive as the domestic political crisis in the US is sorted out. Russian-US relations could presumably stabilize within 10 to 15 years.

At the same time, several major and growing powers – Russia, China, and Iran – regard US involvement in Eurasia as impulsive and destructive. This alignment of approaches increases the emphasis on the continental space’s connectivity. Some aspects of this problem may be of importance for Turkey, to the extent to which it will be able to pursue a consistent foreign policy course.

The concept of ‘connectivity of the continental space’ consists of three key characteristics of interaction between Eurasian powers. First is their ability to securitize key regions of the continent on their own or through

US ‘withdrawal’ from Eurasia, either from conscious choice or long-term weakening, seems unlikely

regional agreements, minus active US involvement. A case in point is the Russia–Iran–Turkey partnership in the Syrian settlement process, provided it achieves durable peace in the country.

Second is the ability of major continental powers to form economic alliances. What this entails is a critical mass of local projects at the level of industries or even companies, which would make it possible for countries in the region to ensure their rapid industrial growth and technological advancement and would link Russia with its key partners in Eurasia. The EAEU is likely to provide an institutional framework for such alliances.

Third is the ability to promote the transport connectivity of the Eurasian continental space. In the geoeconomic sense, today's Eurasia is more of an archipelago than a continent, with the bulk of transportation between its regions proceeding by sea. And this is one of the reasons behind the US military and political presence in the continent. Developing transport corridors in the Eurasian hinterland will facilitate economic development, particularly in landlocked countries and regions. This network will be based on the North–South transport corridor, rail and roads around the Caspian Sea, and routes linking the post-Soviet Central Asian countries with China, Russia, and Iran. The continental waterways – both the landlocked Caspian Sea and the Russian system of inland waterways – are of particular importance in this regard. It should be stressed that the emerging Northern Sea Route can also be considered along these lines. It lies within the Russian Arctic border, and its security is guaranteed by a powerful Russian military force. In other words, it is an inland Russian waterway linking the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.

Integration projects in Eurasia are also of importance for continental transport connectivity. It is the Eurasian Union and the Belt and Road Initiative that are creating cooperation formats that make it possible to coordinate international logistical solutions for major Eurasian transport corridors.

Relations with the most important West European countries are a major challenge for Russian foreign policy, a challenge undermining 'Eurasian connectivity' prospects. These relations are unlikely to improve

within the next few years. There is a structural problem underlying these relations, aside from superficial differences over Ukraine and value-based divides: Western Europe does not feel strong enough to pursue a partnership with Russia unmediated by US military might. The growing distrust between European capitals and the current US administration is a double-edge sword. On the one hand, it is weakening the potential of mutual understanding between Germany, France, and Russia, with Berlin and Paris increasingly nervous at being left 'one-to-one' with Moscow. On the other hand, a minor rift between the two sides of the Northern Atlantic impels the Europeans to bolster their own military capacity, which for Russia may mean new risks but also new prospects. If Western Europe finally resolves to compensate for its military and political weakness and its dependence on the United States, this may remove the abovementioned structural problem in its relations with Russia.

Apart from the record of geopolitical rifts in Eurasia, we should also take into consideration the experience of efforts to heal them, as this can offer a model for a new security system in the continent. The Russian–Chinese partnership is of particular importance in this regard. Integrating the EAEU and China's Silk Road Economic Belt project will be the main process on the Eurasian continent in the next few decades. This integration is a consequence of a long process that got under way in the mid-1990s and is beginning to yield results. In 1997, Russia and China signed the Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Establishment of a New International Order, which laid the basis for their relations that they described as 'a new type of long-term inter-state relations that are not directed against third countries'. Calling these relations unique, Russia and China suggested building an international order based on a network of identical bilateral relations, which later should become a multilateral system of equal states. Their cooperation will be based on equality, trust, and renunciation of the use of force as a foreign policy tool.

Russian–Chinese rapprochement is bringing the most tangible results in Central Asia. The same 1997 declaration provided for demilitarizing the Russian-Chinese border and offering joint security guarantees to minor Central

Integrating the EAEU and China's Silk Road Economic Belt project will be the main process on the Eurasian continent in the next few decades

Asian countries located between the two states, and to Mongolia. This ultimately prevented a security frontier from emerging between Russia and China, a frontier that in Europe, for example, includes the territory of several small East European countries. As a result, a unique region of cooperation is taking shape in Central Asia, one based on mutual understanding between Eurasia's two major poles, Russia and China.

It is in Russia's interests to extend the logic of these relations to other regions in Eurasia. The trajectory of Chinese–Indian relations is the most decisive in this respect, since the two economies will rank first and second in the world by mid-century. Russian diplomacy certainly accounts for the possibility of the negative consequences which India–China tensions may have for stability in Eurasia. It is also clear that normalization between the two should include China's partner, Pakistan. Afghanistan, a focus for Islamabad, will also have to be included in the settlement formula as crucial for the security of Russia and China. Thus, stabilizing Afghanistan – one of the most difficult tasks in the world – is emerging as the key to peace on the continent.

At Russia's initiative, Pakistan and India simultaneously joined the SCO in 2017. Over time, this is likely to lead to gradual normalization and create an atmosphere of trust between India and China. In this context, Moscow considers it important to avoid creating the impression in Beijing that it is acting as a broker. Russia should convince China that its aims are purely constructive and that it seeks peace and neighbourliness on the continent.

The choice to be made by India and China is momentous. Russian policy should be aimed at achieving a situation when relations between the three countries are better than each individual country's relations with the United States. The Russian–Chinese 'long-term inter-state relations of a new type not directed against third countries' should extend to India.

There are grounds for optimism in this regard. Russia and India have advanced their long-term partnership for decades. India is a key buyer of Russian arms. The two countries share a long history of benevolent and friendly relations. The important thing is to use these Russian assets to neutralize tensions and normalize relations in the China–India–Pakistan triangle. In the final analysis, this is what is capable of ensuring stability in Eurasia through 2050.

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