

# World Configuration, US Strategy and Kosovo Crisis

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*There is a close correlation between war and change of the world configuration. Certain characteristics of war thus correspond to particular properties of the world configuration which is, in turn, seen as a political system determined by its economic bases. Many post-cold war conflicts concentrated around the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia—and all these wars could be attributed to the Adjustment of the European Political Structure. Following the changes in the world configuration, the US emerged as the only power with the global capacity, thus the US strategy appeared as the major weight in the adjustment of the world configuration. For the US strategists the four principal strategic areas are America, Europe, East Asia, and the Indian Ocean, but only the Western Europe has a potential to challenge the US global status. So far, the main US global strategy was to maintain the one-superpower plus major-powers configuration and a merge of any two major powers would outstrip the US super-power global status.*

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## 1. Introduction

The breakup of the USSR put an end to the bipolar world configuration. The new configuration is yet to take form. International actors, especially those of great powers, are endeavouring to secure a better position in the coming new configuration. As history teaches repeatedly us, war, the special kind of politics, has played an indispensable role in the formation of the new configuration. The Kosovo crisis proved to be the illustrative case. It proves that the US-West European competition is the major cause of the Kosovo crisis.

## 2. War and the Change of World Configuration

War and the change of the world configuration correlate closely. Thus the scale and style of war

correspond to the scale and needs of the change of the world configuration. The world configuration is in essence a political system, which in Marxist theory belongs to the realm of superstructure and is thus determined by the economic basis. War in Clausewitz' words is politics by other means. As the production relations change, so changes the political superstructure, and war is their midwife, which can be proved invariably by human history including the Kosovo crisis. For instance, prior to the two world wars, especially to the Second World War, the strength of the United States and USSR respectively had grown and outstripped, one by one, the old European powers while the latter still dominated the world order of the day. That is to say, international relations of production had changed without corresponding changes in their political relations. In other words, the main cause of both world wars was the stagnation of political changes in response to economic changes. World War I failed to solve the issue of US exceeding over the UK and France in power but lagging behind them in international status, a situ-

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ation that would not last long. "The world market under the hegemony of Britain went into crisis at the end of the period (1815-1914), owing to the accentuation of rivalry from Germany and the United States. The system was gradually restructured by retreats of the older imperial powers and their replacement by newer rivals in the crusade to carve up the world. But this process led to war."<sup>1</sup>

It was not until World War II that the US became the leader of the capitalist world. No one is able to challenge it without war and, more importantly, without economic strength. The USSR had won the war due, not to its political appeal and nor to its military art, but due to its industrial capacity to produce iron and steel and other raw materials. Who ever wins the war wins the status. There is no alternative.

In the post-Cold War era, many wars and military conflicts occurred in Eastern Europe and Central Asia or around the former Soviet "Empire". All those wars were unexceptionally attributed to the Adjustment of the European Political Structure. The declining of the Soviet economic strength started at least a decade earlier than, and actually brought about to its final collapse. The USSR was so weak economically that it could not even keep up its empire, the Eastern bloc as well as the Soviet Union itself. It is the Soviet Union rather than the Eastern bloc that initiated, and had the power to initiate, what later proved to be the "liberation" of the Eastern Europe. And it is Russia rather than other former Soviet republics that first seceded from the Soviet Union. Those two events led to the end of Cold War and the bipolar world configuration. But the new configuration of Europe is yet to be established. Wars are inevitable in the process of the configuration change of Europe. Of course, wars are confined to the areas that associate with the contraction of the core nation of the USSR, i.e. Russia, and of the core nation of the former Yugoslavia, i.e., Serbia.

For instance, wars have been fought along the belt between Russia and its surroundings, including the Baltic states, which suffered from war prior to the breakup of the USSR, the Trans-Caucassus suffered wars before and after the breakup of the USSR, Moldavia, Tajikistan and Chechnya and so on. The same is true of Serbia. The Kosovo crisis is the most recent case in point. Areas irrelevant to the adjustment of the political configuration are immune to war, such as the US and Western Europe. This is true even of areas relevant but not controversial to the adjustment of the political configuration, such as the most interior parts of Eastern Europe and Russia per se. Of course, the wars of the post-Cold War strategic adjustment are by no means larger than those of the two world wars, for the reason that the the adjustment needs of the former are much smaller than

those of the latter. Furthermore, since the power of the US, the preponderant power of the world before and after the end of Cold War, has not declined but rather risen, post-World War II international institutions are still intact and relevant in the post-Cold War era. Therefore, it is justified to say that the current change of the world configuration is in fact an alteration of it. In this sense, the old configuration resulting from World War II has not fundamentally changed in the post-Cold War era.

### 3. Adjustment of World Configuration, US Global Strategy, and Western Europe as the Potential Challenger to US Global Status

The US global strategy is the major weight in the adjustment of the world configuration. The US is the only power that has the capacity to act globally. The early 1990s are symbolic years, testifying that the distribution of power among the world's major nations has changed greatly in favour of the US leadership. The Soviet Union, one of the two superpowers, expired and left the scene as a much weaker Russian state. The US economy boomed and showed more dynamic than Japan and Western Europe with its "new economy". China, with its GDP quadrupled, rose most remarkably in its international status, in contrast to others, by the end of the Cold War. All in all, by the end of the Cold War, the four major power centres, Western Europe, Russia, China and Japan are more equalized in their strength and the US takes the indisputable lead, which is most significant to the new configuration of world politics.

Now we have a clearer picture of where the US can apply its global strategy. There are four major strategic areas in the world in the eyes of US strategists, namely, America, Europe, East Asia and the Indian Ocean. In America, the US, being a disproportionately bigger power, pays little attention to the region. In the Indian Ocean and the Middle East, sub-centres of power are in a real multi-polar structure, which weakens its challenge to the US leadership in the region. There are three strategic centres in Europe, which are NATO, Russia and Yugoslavia. There are also three strategic centres in East Asia, which are the US-Japan Security Treaty and ASEAN, China and Russia. No power of the above has direct ambition towards US territory, though some have strategic ambitions and capacity regarding their own regions, that is why Europe and East Asia are the two areas in which the US must become directly involved. The US of course has its strategic influence,

strategic presence and strategic interest in all four areas.

Western Europe is the only one among the four centres that has the potentiality, or at least one of closest to have the potentiality, to challenge the US global status. East Asia is no match for Western Europe in this respect. East Asia shares no world-wide accepted cultural power and does not even have a regional institution like EU, which is the most powerful regional integrating structure in the world. The sub-regional structures in Asia are either modest in economic and political strength or in membership with US itself. Western Europe is disadvantaged in challenging US global status. Firstly, Western Europe is geographically contiguous to a much larger area of poorly developed countries than the US.

Secondly, the world economy is more globalized and has a more vertical pattern of labour distribution where the US economy is on the top of this vertical structure, which is itself an asset to economic competitiveness.

More specifically, to be on the top is to have more value-added products in the global economy. The only way for Western Europe is to quicken the pace of European economic and political and military integration so as to get rid of this structural constraint. In order to maintain its position, the US must take advantage of its predominant status to contain this European integration within an acceptable confine.

The US is actually taking intensive steps (the Kosovo crisis is a case in point) to check this tendency, since Western Europe is very close to the critical point in the process of its economic integration, political integration and military integration. Western Europe and the US are entering into an inevitable and tacit zero-sum game.

There are more reasons why Western Europe is the global and regional centre of gravity to the US global strategy. In the wake of the Cold War, the three centres of East Asia are more balanced in their respective comprehensive national power than those in Europe. Though China is growing fast economically, it is far behind Japan in economic power. Japan is far ahead of China and Russia in economic terms, but weaker in security terms. By contrast, the balance of power in Europe is in favour of Western Europe. Furthermore, all powers put together in Europe are larger than those in Asia. Therefore, US global strategic centres of gravity in the world at large and in the region are both in Europe and not in Asia in the post-Cold War era. By contrast, in the Cold War era, the aggregate power in Europe was also stronger than that in Asia, and thus military confrontation was more intensive than that in Asia, but the strength between Western Europe and the Eastern bloc was more balanced than in Asia, where the

Marxist countries were much stronger than Japan and other quasi-capitalist Asian countries. So, in the Cold War era, the US global strategy was focused in Europe while its regional strategy was, on the other hand, in Asia. In the Cold War era, the US had launched two protracted regional wars in Asia, and none in Europe, so as to strike Asian strategic balance. While in the post-Cold War era, the US launched no direct regional wars in East Asia but intervened many times in Europe, and for the same reason: to strike a strategic balance in Europe, since Western Europe is now more powerful than the other two centres of power, Russia and Yugoslavia. The US military intervention in the Kosovo crisis has been the largest of the kind world-wide since the end of the Cold War. In addition, despite the fact that the two military organisations, NATO and the US-Japan Security Treaty, both pursue an expansionist strategy, the US, in Europe, intervenes in the European affairs directly, by such methods as incorporating the three Visegrad countries in NATO first but not in the EU, if at all: also the US took the lead in NATO's attack on Yugoslavia, while in Asia it lets Japan play a relatively larger role than the US in Japan's expansion of its defensive sphere, and invites Japan and Taiwan to participate in the US sponsored "TMD" plan (Theatre Missile Defence Plan). In other words, relatively speaking, through the expansion of the Atlantic security alliance, the US expands its own military strength, while the expansion of the Far East security alliance serves to strengthen US allies.

US global strategy is to maintain the one-superpower-plus-major-powers configuration. Any merger of two major powers would outstrip US power. By the same token, any decline of one major power would induce this power to look for convenient a marriage with, or/and protection of, any other major power. The strength resulting from this marriage would very likely outstrip US strength or at least make trouble for the US leadership. This marriage cannot be between any one major power and the US, for there is no major power geographically adjacent to US. Neither would it be between any US ally and the US, as they are already married couples. It must then be between Russia or China and any other major power, or between Russia and China. Russia would look for marriage with Western Europe or China. China would look for Japan or Russia. Any of the above scenarios would be a nightmare to the US. In sum, the maintenance of the status quo in the world configuration, i.e., the one-superpower-plus-major-powers configuration, is in the best interest of the US, and is therefore its highest global strategic objective. The US strategy is to prevent submergence of any major power. Regional wars are only to serve this purpose.

#### 4. Adjustment of European Configuration and Kosovo Crisis

In the Cold War era, there were three independent strategic centres in Europe: NATO, WTO (Warsaw Treaty Organisation) and Yugoslavia. Other European countries were neutral plus the so-called fourth strategic centre of Albania. The strategies of the three centres were logically interwoven. To illustrate the NATO strategy, let us cite Josef Joffe: "Structurally-NATO's functions have always followed the immortal words of Lord Ismay, its first secretary-general: 'To keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.'"<sup>2</sup> The Soviet strategy can be logically illustrated by reversing NATO strategy, i.e., Americans out of Eastern Europe, Germany divided and Russians in Eastern Europe.

Yugoslavia's strategy in the Cold War was rather particular. During the World War II, Yugoslavia's strategic role was not important. The most important warring states, the Soviet Union, Germany, the US and Britain, did not project too much military force into Yugoslavia. In the later stage of the World War II, when the US, Britain and the Soviet Union were carving up Europe into post-war spheres of influence, Stalin's interest in Poland was much larger than in Yugoslavia. Ironically, the Soviet Union supported the old regime of Yugoslavia while Britain supported Communist resistance forces.

This means that no one, West and East alike, coveted Yugoslavia. They saw it as a liability more than an asset. That is why Yugoslavia was the only country in the region that was "liberated" mostly by itself. Shortly after World War II, Yugoslavia's staying in the Eastern bloc proved to be no longer cost-effective in security terms and thus dispensed by the Soviet Union. The US lost no time in recognising Yugoslavia as independent and with quite a considerable amount of economic aid in return. But the Soviet Union would not have stayed idle if Yugoslavia had lost its independence to the West. Hence Yugoslavia's independence was no choice.

While in the post-Cold War era, NATO's strategy can still be illustrated by quoting Josef Joffe, "Strangely enough, these may be precisely the reasons that—suitably refurbished—still provide the triple *raison d'être* of the Atlantic Alliance...Russia is simply too 'big' for Europe...Germany is too big to be left alone, and not big enough to go it alone...Europe has flourished because the United States has essentially become a European power—and Europe did not flourish, as in the first half of this century, when American power was not part of the balance."<sup>3</sup> In addition, NATO feared Russia's size in the Cold War because of its strength, while in the post-Cold War NATO fears Russia's size because of its weakness or caprice. It is also the very reason of

Russia's independent strategic position and independent strategy in the European strategic arena in the post-Cold War era. Otherwise, NATO's strategic completeness is doubtful. As a Singaporean senior commentator put it concisely, "The US needs at present to strengthen NATO indeed, but with different purpose. Kosovo crisis led to the toughness of Russia. This is just what the US cherished."

Now, as arrayed above, two of the three old strategic centres have survived the end of the Cold War. Let us now look at Yugoslavia, the third centre, to see if it can also survive. And we want also to examine how the vacuum left over by Russia and Yugoslavia respectively will be filled. In the Cold War, they did not take for granted that Yugoslavia was within the US strategic sphere, but it was definitely not in Germany. It was Germany, however, following the end of Cold War and German unification, that first recognised, if not provided help, the independence of Croatia and Slovenia. "The US recognised their independence under the German pressure."<sup>4</sup> The US would not forget this. The US would not give up its influence over Yugoslavia.

Neither would Russia. In Russia's view, Yugoslavia was independent in the Cold War, so should it be in the post-Cold War. Russians insist that Russia must be consulted if any change is going to be made in the European configuration, especially if Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia are to be involved. The Russians are well aware that the West is not sincere in its suggestions to incorporate Russia in the Western system, and therefore the West should give Russia its corresponding status in Europe.

In addition, had Yugoslavia lost its independence to the West, the West would have moved its strategic frontline forward to Russia's. Would Russia allow this? Is the West prepared for this, or is this in the real interest of the West? To common reason, it is not cost-effective to incorporate Yugoslavia in the Western system, in the Cold War and the post-Cold War alike. In the Cold War, it was the pay-off that the US made for Yugoslavia's "independence". Now, in the post-Cold War era, who wants to pay for its "dependence"? This does not mean that the West wants to see a big Yugoslavia. A big Yugoslavia is no doubt a threat to the West. The US wants to see a divided Yugoslavia between a small Yugoslavia and a group of seceded Yugoslavian republics. "The US wants to leave some kindling in order to contain Europe"<sup>5</sup>

Yugoslavia is also very clear about its status in the post-Cold War Europe. Yugoslavia knows that it benefited from the Cold War and thus the benefits ended with the end of Cold War. Yugoslavia is not like Russia, which is independent and prestigious, nor is it like some East European nations, which are useful, though somewhat dependent. Yugoslavia is independent but not prestigious and useful.

Yugoslavia disintegrated in the wake of the Cold War. The process of its disintegration was wrought with military conflicts. The six former federal republics are complicated and differentiated in terms of ethnics, culture and territorial claims. In the Cold War, the Serbia Republic and the Serbs were the major state and ethnic entity of Yugoslavia and thus actually dominated the national defence institutions and defence resources of Yugoslavia. The "international community" had no objection to this, so long as it was helpful to the European balance of power. But since the end of the Cold War, the West stopped recognising Serbia's dominant position in Yugoslavia, for a big Yugoslavia was no longer an element of the balance of power against the Soviet Union. Not only Serbia but also Yugoslavia as a whole, lost support from the West that used to be the last factor that held the otherwise quite impossible ethnic groups together. Those ethnic groups except the Serbs, demanded more autonomy or even independence. Independence is easy but territorial demands and agreements are not. The major salient territorial disputes were and are between Serbia and other republics. The same is true of military conflicts.

The West supports national self-determination whenever the issue of national or ethnic disputes emerges. Self-determination is popular not only with the West in modern times. During the long history of mankind, it has always been true that unity is good for my family and self-determination for my neighbours. Since Serbia is the main party that objects to self-determination, it is therefore the main object of the West's isolation policy. Why not evolution policy or westward-enlargement policy, which have been applied to most other post-communist countries? The answer is: strategic interest and not ideological interest is the crucial criterion in applying different policies to different nations.

The term West is in Europe, semantically, different from the term West applied to the world at large. The former denotes US leadership, while the latter denotes US-European cooperation. The strategic discrepancy between the two is apparent in the European arena. The EU wants a war, if at all, that ends all wars. But the US thinks differently as is argued earlier with the "kindling theory". The EU may

or may not agree with US strategy over the former Yugoslavia. The EU supports US strategy if it is in agreement with it. But the EU has to go with the US even if EU does not agree with US strategy. The EU is an economic organisation. The EU is mostly not an organisation to discuss political issues and security issues. Political integration and security integration is the future, if not distant future, on EU agendas. How can an international organisation like this collectively and successfully resist US strategy even if it happens to have the intention? In summary, NATO's military action against Yugoslavia followed US strategy, which includes preventing the EU from being out of US control. Thus, NATO's strategy is in fact the US strategy. One of the NATO strategies that "keeps Germany down" survived the end of the Cold War, but with only an insignificant refurbishment, i.e., replacing Germany with EU. "NATO is the most ideal instrument that the US can play off Europe with"<sup>6</sup>

The adjustment of the European configuration mainly involves the area between Western Europe and Russia, which this article refers to as post-communist Europe, or PCE. As far as the prospect of the adjustment is concerned, five scenarios can be excluded: 1. PCE unity and independence, for it will be opposed by the East and the West alike. 2. the PCE as wholly dependent on Russia, for it will be opposed by the West. 3. the PCE a wholly dependent on the West; for it will be opposed by Russia and West. To Russia, it is a threat, and to the West, it is a burden. 4. The PCE as an anarchic or strategic vacuum, for it will be opposed by the West as it will be a larger threat than anything to the West. 5. Part of the PCE comes into the sphere of German influence, for it will be opposed by the US as it will be an expansion of German power to a critical point.

Actually, whatsoever the scenario, the PCE has broken down into four parts: 1. Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary have already joined NATO, and a limited number of other PCEs will follow.<sup>7</sup> 2. All PCE nations will not completely extricate themselves from Russia's influence.<sup>8</sup> 3. Serbia will maintain some sort of independence, not necessarily gloriously though. 4. The rest of PCE nations will either be in confrontation with Serbia or with Russia.

## NOTES

1. *A New Europe in the Changing Global System*, Ed. by Richard Falk and Tamas Szentes, United Nations University Press, 1997. p42.

2. "Where Germany Has Never Been Before", by Josef Joffe, *The National Interest*, Number 56, summer, 1999.

3. *Ibid.*

4. Lu Shi, "American Dual Strategy over Europe", *Guangming Daily*, June 3, 1999, Beijing.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Lu Shi, "American Dual Strategy over Europe", *Guangming Daily*, June 3, 1999, Beijing.

7. "NATO membership probably will not be available for most of the new Eastern Europe for many years". *Europe Undivided—The New Logic of Peace in U.S.-Russian Relations*, James E. Goodbye, United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington DC, Institute for International Studies, Stanford

University, Stanford, California. First published 1998. p. 164.

8. "Under any scenario, there will be a group of countries in the neighbourhood of Russia that will be left in an ambiguous status for a period of years. Russia always has seen and still sees this area as being within its sphere of interest". *Ibid.* p. 163.