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Geostrategy in a World in Turmoil **Early 2022 Flashpoints**

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All warfare is based on deception ...
Sun Tzu

The European Political Landscape after WWII

Following World War II, Germany achieved within the EU what it hadn't been able to accomplish since 1871: domination of Europe in an astonishingly peaceful way defying all expectations, without any doubt an admirable and major feat with probably no precedent in the history of the modern world. However, the period of peace after the two World Wars seems to be evaporating today at an accelerating tempo. Less powerful than before but with President Putin staging an impressive comeback, Russia is aggressively reclaiming lands lying within its historical spheres of influence and projecting its political and geostrategic power in order to influence the future of Europe and secure a leading unified Eurasian position. US representation in Europe and around the globe is largely on the defensive and without a cohesive and focused strategy. NATO, as long as the alliance still exists in its present form, is both politically and structurally weakened. Its modern-day purpose is questionable and marked by the widely differing views on policy issues entertained by the US and Europe. Its future is uncertain.

The ongoing Ukrainian crisis has radically changed the geostrategic situation on the European periphery bordering Russia and on the Eurasian landmasses around Russia. The truth may not actually be what the media and the US widely propagate. President Putin, a masterful geostrategic player – in the old, Russian, leading grandmaster chess playing tradition - has exposed the differing views and a potential split within NATO without even commencing any military operation in Ukraine. At the same time, he is seeking to massively reinstate the Russian sphere of influence over the past Soviet republics, while the entirety of the West's attention is focused on a potential war over Ukraine. The US is beating the drums of war louder and louder without really presenting even the minimum amount of ammunition to fight such a war: possibly, there has never been any intention to do so, or US foreign policy has other war plans.

Within Europe, Germany, the leading European nation, despite intentionally staying in the background, is nevertheless playing an essential role in the Ukraine affair. Germany is in reality not seriously backing Ukraine and, in our humble view, will in no way sever its relations with Russia. The future may confirm that the US-German alliance has in pragmatic terms lately been in existence only on a weak, non-consistent level. The German political and economic establishment are embarking on a new German visionary strategy expected to fully unfold over the next few years, which may bring the German nation and its allies in Europe on a peer status with China, Russia, and the US. This is a process already in motion, though not actually discernible at first sight. It relates to the vital, historical German identity question – which will over the coming years reshape Germany and the whole of Europe. That question has been around since the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest in 9 AD, a battle in which an alliance of Germanic peoples ambushed and destroyed the Roman legions, thereby foiling Rome's ambition to conquer Germania. The outcome of the battle eventually marked the Rhine as the border between the Roman Empire and the rest of Germania, thus being considered as one of the most crucial events in European history.

In order to understand today's geopolitical and geostrategic realities one has to often dig deep into the annals of history. Lessons and memories that historic events leave behind do not fade away because of *changing times* or due to *technological or other advances*: they remain deep in the psyche of a nation and mold its destiny stretching far into the future.

The German Enigma ... and the Future of Europe

Germany is pursuing a broad focus strategy with long-term goals. Within that context, it is likely willing to risk sacrificing Ukraine to uphold its deep-rooted economic and political relations with Russia (not necessarily visible in the context of everyday diplomacy), as well as draw up a new strategy for Europe. Europe still relies on an outdated NATO and, consequently, the US for protection. This landscape is however undergoing rapid transformation, and the Ukraine crisis may be a catalyst that will further accelerate this change. Germany needs Russia for energy, now and far more importantly for its future plans, and will avoid entering into any direct EU involvement in armed conflict with Russia to its east. Nord Stream 2, running from Ust-Luga, Russia, to Germany is a vital strategic project. The pipeline can pump about 55 billion m³ of gas per year and would roughly double Russian gas exports to Germany. Germany and Russia may have already dealt with their most urgent differences: both nations may have reached an important understanding over their respective political and economic spheres of influence in Europe. A German strategic plan for an alliance of core European States including Italy with the indirect support of the Catholic Church, something which metaphorically resembles the past Holy Roman Empire, may be in the making. Such an alliance, with strong political bonds, will probably not be joined by the Visegrad group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia), nor by Greece, nor by the Balkan Orthodox arc of states. These developments will lead to further change, fragmentation, or disintegration, of a European Union already weak in structure. Ultimately, a much-strengthened European core politically, economically, and militarily may emerge, to impress and impact the entire world. If Germany boosts its defense spending to up to 3% of its GDP, i.e., USD 120 billion per year, it would succeed in putting the combined EU's military spending ahead of China's and Russia's. If in addition Germany acquired the nuclear military means (technologically feasible speedily and at any time), it would open the way for a core part of Europe to become a peer military power next to the US, China, and Russia. Russia will in no way be unconnected to these processes of change and could play a key role in developments in Europe.

A Russian Grand Strategy

President Putin's recent list of security demands to the US, NATO and the Ukraine, in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, leaves no doubt that his true objective is to reassert Russian domination throughout the post-Soviet space, while longer term creating favorable conditions for Russia to exert substantial influence over European affairs. His plans for now and for the near future remain hidden: in that respect, we can only use intelligence, analysis and intuition and hypothesize. His grand strategy, however, is becoming far more evident.

Deployment of Russian forces to Belarus for the massive Russian military exercise Soyuznaya Reshimost 2022 taking place between February 10 and 20 is of a scale that cannot be classified as a routine military exercise, even a large one. It is most likely a concealed and precise military operation ensuring Russian control over Belarus, massively strengthening the Union State (of Russia and Belarus) and allowing either for a potential optimal Russian military strike on Ukraine (in our view, only if Russia is compelled to take such action) or, alternatively, for the firm establishment of such protracted conditions as will enable Moscow to impose its

foreign policy, political, and security demands on Ukraine. Noteworthy clauses of the renewed 2021 Union State Military Doctrine of November 4th, 2021, explicitly reject any attempts to alter or discredit the value orientations, cultures, development models, civilization, and religious values of the Union, or to falsify history, leading to the violation of the spiritual and ethical ties of kindred populations (an impressively vigorous and healthy response to the contemporary disastrous leveling trends of globalization nullifying the history, language, tradition, and culture of nations). Moreover, the development of any power potential of NATO on the external borders of the Union State, as well as the establishment of cores of military conflicts close to the latter, are to be treated as blatant threats.

Russian strategy has already achieved the complete encircling of Ukraine from the north (Russian Federation, Belarus), East (Luhansk & Donetsk regions of Ukraine, Sea of Azov) and south/southwest (Crimea/Moldova). Of the approximately 120,000 troops Putin has moved from the far eastern provinces of Russia to close to Ukraine's borders, about 30,000 are in Belarus, a large part of which could probably stay there indefinitely. The entire Russian mobilization around Ukraine includes military personnel, combat service support, massive firepower including standoff strike systems, field hospitals, blood supplies, air, ground, and maritime strike forces, electronic warfare systems, radar equipment, surface-to-air missile systems, artillery and multiple rocket launch systems, as well as extensive logistics capabilities, ultra-sophisticated communication command and control systems, etc.

A massive Russian show of force on the Ukrainian border has been a big distraction for the western world, while President Putin's actual goal may well be to bring former Soviet nations back under Russian control. In this respect, he has already impressively fulfilled his aim, having gained control over Belarus with the creation of the Union State and the stationing of substantial Russian forces on its soil. The recent violent unrest in Kazakhstan was the catalyst for President Putin to send in a sizeable number of elite Russian troops to swiftly restore order: these troops will probably remain there for the foreseeable future if not permanently, allowing substantial Russian control over this most important former Soviet Republic. Kazakhstan is the world's largest producer of uranium, providing 15% of the world's supply, necessary for nuclear weapons and nuclear power plants, while it also has extensive oil fields. Russian troops already occupy large parts of the former Soviet Republics of Georgia and Moldova as well as, to a lesser extent, of Tajikistan. Russia has also permanently deployed military forces in Azerbaijan on the Caspian Sea. For the first time since 2012, Russia has military contingents in all three of the South Caucasus countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia - either by invitation or occupation.

President Putin, in our view, now has two main options:

- a) With Russia having already gained substantial control over major former Soviet Republics, we could imminently see the gradual start of a de-escalation of the Ukrainian crisis. The massive Russian mobilization of forces has additionally served as a national military drill of unprecedented scale in successful deployment and coordination sending strong messages in multiple directions. All elements will remain active for exertion of continuous pressure on the Ukrainian political leadership until Russian foreign policy goals are in large part achieved, security demands are met, and maybe longer term, a pro-Russian government is, in one way or the other, in power in Ukraine.
- b) A blitzkrieg-type invasion of Ukraine is initiated e.g., a direct attack to take Kyiv in north-central Ukraine and neutralize or replace its government, or a major ground and naval assault on Ukraine's Black Sea coast, or a combined assault from north and south. A well focused in its objectives but limited in scope and size invasion e.g., in the south or north can also not be excluded. In our view,

Moscow would launch such an invasion only if it is compelled to do so. Should Russia launch an invasion, Ukraine's power supply, telephone and mobile networks are likely to be the first targets of a Russian cyber and electromagnetic warfare attack, to shut down electricity and communication grids in the country. This entire complicated full-scale military operation is easier said than done and comes with increased risks for Russia. Many lives on both sides will be lost and, although we do not believe that either Europe/NATO or the US will be directly militarily involved, the US may lend significant support to the Ukrainian resistance. Russia's uncertainty as to the true intentions and likely actions of the US in this war is a clear deterrent, unless Russian intelligence has to a large degree penetrated the American decision-making process. If Moscow does not realize its military goals swiftly, it will be dragged into a war that may considerably weaken Russia in the long run and even jeopardize gains and goals attained so far. The occupation of a country can turn into a very difficult, time-consuming, and expensive process, even worse when there is resistance later on supported by foreign powers. President Putin, we have no doubt, understands all of these extremely perilous parameters very well.

We would place a 50:50 chance of either scenario (a) or scenario (b) playing out. President Putin has already achieved multiple strategic peripheral goals and would probably not need to add a huge new risk to his game plan i.e., a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. He is already in an optimal position to enforce his demands sooner or later upon the Ukrainian government. He has also already sent a strong message to the US, Europe, the EU, NATO and China. Apart from the logic of well analyzed arguments, President Putin is an exceedingly experienced war strategist, and nobody knows what his ultimate short-term action plans are. *Deception* may be a key concept in this context. In any case, either the scenario of de-escalation or that of war should play out imminently, and imminently means not in months or weeks but within days - we can say with a high degree of confidence within the month of February and definitely not later than March 2022. Russian troops cannot indefinitely build up around Ukraine, they cannot be sustained in idle mode, and most importantly they will have to return sooner rather than later to their bases, most of them in the eastern provinces of Russia close to the Chinese borders.

China

China is carefully analyzing Russian action and US and European reaction to the Ukraine events and will accordingly evaluate its geostrategic thinking regarding Taiwan. For the American Pacific alliance, a Chinese takeover of Taiwan would be a devastating blow. In no time, the US would lose its status as the pre-eminent power in Asia. If the US were unable or unwilling to defend Taiwan, its network of key allies in the Asia-Pacific, including Japan, South Korea, and Australia, would overnight be far more vulnerable to military and economic coercion from China. Both Ukraine and Taiwan are showing up America's weaknesses as regards the US networks and alliances that once supported American world order. The implications of these deficiencies are grave in a new era of global conflict and instability. China is at present in a seemingly strong economic and military alliance with Russia. A key energy project for both nations is the Power of Siberia 2 pipeline, starting from the Siberian Yamal gas fields in Russia, passing close to Lake Baikal, and crossing the border of Mongolia into the Xinjiang region of China. It would initially pump about 60 billion cubic meters of gas per year, more than doubling Russian gas exports to China, and will have a max capacity of 80 billion cubic meters. China is at the same time also competing economically with Russia over effective influence in Central Asia. It is an open question whether amicable, viable solutions can be found on any potential future disputes or whether, probably, longer-term, there will be a collision between Russia's Central Asian strategy centered around the Eurasian Union and China's own vision for the further build-up of the Eurasian

continent mainly via its One Belt One Road infrastructure development strategy. As far as China is concerned, for now, success means realizing its overriding geostrategic aims in the Western Pacific, holding sway over this region and, in effect, guaranteeing open unobstructed trade, energy and maritime lines. This would translate into a commanding position for the Middle Kingdom in South-East Asia, the effective undermining of the security of Japan and South Korea, and the country's gradual projection of maritime power primarily from the Western Pacific into the Indian Ocean, directly challenging US maritime supremacy.

The US

The US is closely following the unfolding events in the Eurasian geographical sphere and will do anything in its power to create a permanent division between Europe and Russia, but also to curb the influence of China on Europe. Anything could mean even going to war with Russia and causing the entire world to be headed in a very dangerous direction. In other words, as we have repeatedly commented in our past reports, a Eurasian continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific is a major threat to the US's status as a leading world power: it has always been so. Whether the US can ultimately fulfill its goals of undermining or thwarting such a historic geopolitical bonding and formation, could be an aim that runs counter to evolutionary geopolitical and geoeconomic currents sweeping our world, is doubtful.

The US foremostly and decidedly needs to stage a comeback to a healthy and strong domestic political landscape in all its aspects, from clear and peaceful bipartisan political relationships, to efficient social and economic policies, to meaningful and consistent global foreign strategies, including a confident rebuilding of its alliances worldwide, a focused and efficient military modernization program, and the projection globally of its willingness and the provision of the means to protect political and economic freedom worldwide. Sadly, none of those parameters are in place today. Without such endeavors, the US has no chance of obstructing Russia and/or China in their imperial ambitions, nor of preventing Europe from further distancing itself from the US and permanently connecting with Russia and China and the wider Eurasian continent. In such latter cases, this would mean the permanent end of US global hegemony and the start of a new multipolar world with different rules and norms – something which may already be happening.

War Flashpoints & Hotspots

Russia's military fleets have been on extensive exercises over the past few weeks across vast areas, including parts of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, the Baltic Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Black Sea. The Mediterranean in particular has been crowded with warships belonging to NATO, the US, and Russia, many of them carrying nuclear weapons. Russian military officials have recently warned that Russia is ready to open fire on foreign ships and submarines that illegally enter its territorial waters or ones that challenge Russian vessels. The Mediterranean has become a primary global hotspot with the potential of hosting a grave military accident, which could open the gates of Armageddon. The Black Sea could also become such a place of significant overloaded activity and danger, especially if foreign military fleets start approaching the Russian assault ships. Nothing of this sort or on such a scale looks possible on the Russo-Ukrainian border or in Belarus.

It should be pointed out that wider, dispersed military mobilization in respect to a potential Ukrainian war, especially at sea but also on land, or air, could in fact lead, via intended or accidental hostile action, to a chain reaction and to a war between Russia and the US. The US is accelerating the drumbeat of war in the loudest possible way, which, indeed, amplifies such a possibility - one that we sincerely hope is not intentional. A military incident, particularly at sea but also in the air or

on land, could easily lead to further escalation and to a thermonuclear exchange between the two major military world powers, which would be utterly calamitous for the entire world. Although the likelihood of such a scenario materializing is small, we do have to stay objective and at least mention such a possibility, in a world on the edge and with virtually no nuclear treaties in place. We are absolutely convinced that Russia, headed by a leader who is extremely knowledgeable and experienced in war matters, does not aim for such an outcome, nor, we hope, does the US. On the other hand, the persistent war rhetoric on the part of the US inevitably raises valid questions as to the American leadership's true intentions.

A World on the Edge

Pain, despair, and anguish are literally overflowing in most parts of Europe, the Middle East, and the USA. From Ukraine to Taiwan, to the Middle East and Iran's nuclear program, to the over-militarized Mediterranean waters and world oceans, the world is literally on the edge. The US needs to sincerely acknowledge that if it wishes to uphold the Monroe Doctrine - instituted 200 years ago to defend US spheres of influence in the Western hemisphere - it should logically and equitably also accept Russia's valid defense of its own spheres of influence, especially those on its very borders, which are additionally supported by strong historical bonds. It is certainly not doing so and could thereby be leading the European continent - if not the whole world - into a potentially cataclysmic war. The US's profound political weakness and its inconsistent foreign policy, Germany's revised perspectives that will most likely carve out a new fate for Europe, Russian-European relations, and the Russian-Chinese alliance are all elements pointing to a historic 21st century redistribution of power that is anticipated to gradually unfold within this present decade.

The year 2022 is a highly critical one for our world!

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