

## **From the Origins of World War I to Global Conflict Today: World War I, World War II to World War III???**

**by Hall Gardner (Ph.D., Johns Hopkins SAIS)  
Chair, International and Comparative Politics Department,  
American University of Paris, France**

**ABSTRACT:** This essay provides a comparative historical analysis of geo-strategic and diplomatic causes behind international rivalries and alliance-formation during the Cold War (1946-90) and Post-Cold War (1990-now), by examining the rising contrasts between the same key Powers through significant analogies (regional rivalries, hegemony, encirclement, alliance-formations and cyclical threats of devastating world wars) to similar global clashes during the pre-World War I (1892-1914) and pre-World War II periods (1919-39). However, the actual differences between these four related periods outweigh the similarities of geo-political circumstances among the same Powers through time, given the significant geo-strategic, political-economic, military-technological and socio-cultural-ideological differences, not to overlook major differences in the quality of leadership and of diplomacy among states in differing historical eras. This work advocates that comparative historical analysis needs to thoroughly compare *and* contrast the differing socio-political structures and ideological factors in addition to international strategic relationships and alliances.

### **Section I.**

During the 1946-90 Cold War, frequent references were made to this pre-World War I analogy: that the Soviet Union (USSR) as a SuperPower appeared to replay the role of the encircled old Imperial Germany in 1892-1918. Yet despite these apparent similarities, the USSR collapsed in 1991 in a relatively peaceful whimper, rather than in a nuclear bang as the analogy to the pre-World War I era appeared to imply. It has subsequently become clear that not only the differences between the two periods outweighed the similarities, but that comparative historical analysis needs to thoroughly compare *and* contrast the differing socio-political structures and ideological factors in addition to international strategic relationships and alliances.

Given the significant geo-strategic, political-economic, military-technological and socio-cultural-ideological differences, not to overlook major differences in the quality of leadership and of diplomacy among states in differing historical eras, comparative historical analysis as a development of Diplomatic History and Realism Theories has a huge task before it. Nevertheless, despite the relatively peaceful Soviet collapse, it can still be argued that the disaggregation of the Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union has, over time, ushered in a new global constellation of major powers that *appears* to represent an explosive mix of the interwar and pre-World War I periods. At the same time, and without reference to systemic historical analogies, it can also be argued—based on empirical observation—that political-economic instability throughout Eurasia and abroad has already begun to raise the possibility of wider regional wars, if not major power conflict as well.

The question remains as to whether these widening conflicts can be managed in such a way so as to avert the apparently increasing possibility of direct conflict between major Powers—as both the pre-World War I and pre-World War II analogies imply. Another ques-

tion also remains as to whether diplomatic history possesses any clues as to how to prevent or ameliorate conflicts in new historical situations, with new weapons and involving differing states, irredentist socio-political movements and conflicting populations.<sup>1</sup>

On the one hand, the collapse of the Soviet Communist “empire” resembles the Post-World War I disaggregation of both the German and Tsarist Russian Empires, if not also the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. In effect, Soviet disaggregation has created a “shatterbelt” of actually and potentially conflicting states and irredentist socio-political movements throughout Eurasia and abroad that is, in many ways, more extensive than the “shatterbelt” region of previous eras.

On the other hand, the U.S.-NATO-EU strategic relationship in relationship to the new Russian Federation best parallels the Anglo-French entente of the pre-World War I period in relationship to Imperial Germany (II Reich), more so than the Anglo-French relationship in relationship to Weimar Germany, and then to Nazi Germany (III Reich) prior to World War II. This is true in that the pre-World War II Anglo-French alliance did not possess U.S. hegemonic backing and supports due to the American decision to withdraw into isolationism after World War I after the U.S. Senate refused to ratify the League of Nations in addition to opposing closer defense U.S. ties to Great Britain and France.

Moreover, the key difference between the U.S., as an extroverted insular-core Super-Power since the end of the Cold War, and a more introverted Great Britain, as an insular-core Great Power in relationship to Europe during the interwar period, is that the U.S. has, thus far, played a much stronger and expansive role as a "hegemonic" SuperPower in regard to Europe through the process of enlarging NATO membership in two waves of expansion in 1999 and 2004 deep into Central and Eastern European “shatterbelt” that was created after Soviet disaggregation.

Moreover, in relationship with the lesser powers in the ostensibly “developing” world, a more extroverted U.S. has not been playing the same geopolitical game as did a more introverted London before World War II when the British Empire was still recovering from the global conflict. Instead, U.S. interventions abroad best parallel the late-Nineteenth Century British interventions: the U.S.-led interventions in Afghanistan in 2001-02 and Iraq in 2003 parallel the earlier British interventions in Afghanistan in 1878 and Egypt in 1882 respectively. Both pre-World War I Great Britain and post-Cold War America appeared to be engaging

---

<sup>1</sup> This essay is a reworked and extended version of my presentation at the Joint Conference of the American University of Paris & Saint Leo University “World War I and World War II International Repercussions” (March 2016). I have developed a more elaborate comparative historical methodology on this topic in, Hall Gardner, *Crimea, Global Rivalry and the Vengeance of History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), Chapters 5-6.

in a quest to sustain their overseas global hegemonies in these eras, but largely playing down or ignoring hegemonic rivalries on the Eurasian continent at their own risk.<sup>2</sup>

By contrast with the U.S. today, Great Britain, at least in the more "multipolar" Nineteenth Century, tended to play a role as so-called "holder of the balance" between Republican France, Imperial Germany and Czarist Russia. Yet as the dynamics of interstate rivalry unfolded, London found it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to "hold the balance"—particularly after the creation of the Franco-Russian Dual Alliance in 1892-94. In many ways, French manipulations of the Franco-Russian alliance were able to pressure Great Britain into the formations of the Anglo-French-Russian *Entente* of 1904-07. The latter was then seen by Berlin as "encircling" Imperial Germany and subsequently as provoking the German leadership into a two-fronts war in 1914, in support of its pluri-national Austria-Hungarian ally, which appeared to be in the process of disaggregation, given its ongoing clash with the pan-Serb movement (backed by Tsarist Russia), among other significant domestic irredentist conflicts, which were also often supported by external Powers.<sup>3</sup>

Even though geo-historical circumstances are quite different today, the nature of hegemonic rivalries and alliance formation can be compared and contrasted with those of the pre-World War I and pre-World War II period. In this perspective, the post-Cold War multiple and parallel U.S./NATO-European/German-Russian and Indian-Sino-Japanese rivalries emerged out of the Cold War parallel U.S./NATO-Soviet/Warsaw Pact and Indian-Sino-Japanese rivalries. These contemporary rivalries can be also compared and contrasted with the earlier pre-World War II intertwined Anglo-Franco-Weimar/Nazi German-Italo-Soviet-Japanese-U.S. rivalries, as they in turn emerged from equally intertwined pre-World War I Anglo-Franco-Imperial German-Austro-Hungarian-Italo-Tsarist Russian-Japanese-U.S. rivalries.

---

<sup>2</sup> Here I am using the term "hegemony" as an intermediate position between "primacy" and "dominance"—in that all major Powers engage in a mix of tools that can often be characterized as either primacy, hegemony or dominance depending on the geo-strategic, political-economic and socio-cultural/ideological context, as also stressed in, Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p.214-215. Yet rather than focusing on the use of force alone as a means to define the above terms, as Hedley Bull does, one could argue that, through differing tools—or what I prefer to call differing forms of strategic leveraging—major powers seek to "balance" as much as possible, complex and interconnected geo-strategic, military-technological, political-economic and socio-cultural/ideological motives, interests, and other possible considerations, for sustaining their global, regional or local preponderance. In this perspective, actions of major powers that choose dominance tend to be heavy handed and not balanced; actions of major powers that choose primacy tend to rule with greater finesse *with consensus-building and differing degrees of power-sharing*, while those leaderships that choose hegemony act in-between intermittent heavy-handedness and finesse, as 'imperialism with relatively less brutal manners.' Moreover, positions of hegemony and primacy often evolve from initial positions of imperialism and dominance—much as the U.S.-West German position during the Cold War evolved from dominance, to hegemony to primacy. And finally, the definition of dominance as a lesser form of imperialism still needs further clarification in that the concept of dominance does not describe the *competitive process* between rival major and regional powers in building formal or informal empires involving regional, if not global, systems of infrastructure, markets, military bases and cultural outreach. While it is often stated that the United States did not create an overseas empire (after establishing a continental one), the U.S. has nevertheless superimposed its global hegemony over the former colonial empires of Britain and France, for example, while Moscow during the Cold War superimposed its counter-hegemony upon former Spanish or Portuguese territories, such as Cuba, Mozambique and Angola or even French colonies or protectorates, such as Vietnam and Syria. See: Hall Gardner, "Three Faces of U.S., NATO & Soviet/Russian Relations: Primacy, Hegemony & Dominance" (Draft: October 2015).

<sup>3</sup> See my argument detailed in: Hall Gardner, *The Failure to Prevent World War I: the Unexpected Armageddon* (New York & London: Ashgate, 2015).

The interaction between the Great Powers and lesser ones and socio-political movements in their respective eras can likewise be compared and contrasted.<sup>4</sup>

## Section II.

In contemporary European strategic context, the uncoordinated “double enlargement” of NATO and European Union (E.U.) has begun to clash, particularly over Ukraine and Georgia, with the counter-claims of the Russian Federation and Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) over the Russian-defined “near abroad.” For Moscow, the “near-abroad” incorporates: the ex-Soviet states of Belarus’ (in which Minsk in turn opposes Russian efforts to assert its hegemony over the country), a torn Ukraine (in which Russia has annexed Crimea and is engaging in political-military interference in eastern Ukraine), a divided Moldova (in which the Transnistria is occupied/protected by Russian forces), Georgia (in which Russian forces are occupying/protecting South Ossetia and Abkhazia), plus Azerbaijan and Armenia which are in conflict with each other over Nagorno-Karabakh (a conflict impacting Turkey as well). In addition, there are the Central Asia countries, which fear Russian hegemony, particularly Uzbekistan. Of these post-Soviet countries, Belarus’, Armenia, Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, presently belong to the Russian-led CSTO.

In response to the uncoordinated NATO-E.U. double enlargements (in which NATO and E.U. both promised to bring Ukraine and Georgia into a closer relationship), Russia reacted by attempting to preclude any future NATO or E.U. expansion into the region in the midst of the Maidan Movement that overthrew the former “pro-Russian” kleptocratic leadership of President Viktor Yanukovich by surreptitious military intervention in Crimea, through the deployment of “little green men” without insignias, and then in eastern Ukraine in early-2014. This act of *preclusive imperialism* had followed the 2008 Georgia-Russia clash after which Moscow supported the independence demands of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in a tit-for-tat response to U.S. support for Kosovo’s independence from Serbia.

While Moscow has begun to assert its interests in the Ukrainian “near-abroad”, in an effort to counter perceived NATO-E.U. hegemonic aspirations, the U.S.-NATO-E.U. partnership coupled with the U.S.-Japanese alliance, has additionally been pressing both Russia and China into a closer political-economic and defense relationship, or a proto-alliance. For its part, China has continued to pressure Taiwan and to assert its hegemony over South and East China Seas in outlining its “Nine-Dash Line” map. Beijing has also remained extremely ambiguous as to whether it would fully back a nuclear North Korea in case of conflict with South Korea. Beijing has wanted to prevent the Pyongyang régime from collapsing; it has opposed the possibility that North Korea could eventually be unified with South Korea, backed by the U.S., as was the case for West German unification with ex-communist East Germany.<sup>5</sup>

Concurrently, the U.S. and European quasi-alliances with the Arab Gulf states have been seen as supporting and financing differing pan-Islamist movements beneath and within the soft Russian underbelly in the northern Caucasus, Central Asia, Afghanistan and northern Pakistan, not to overlook China’s Turkic and Muslim Xinjiang province (previously called Eastern Turkestan). These forces, plus those of feared secessionist movements within both Russia and China, represent additional factors that appear thus far to be pushing Moscow and Bei-

---

<sup>4</sup> To examine how geo-strategic rivalries evolved in somewhat similar ways in differing epochs would require a study of both the forces of globalization and how differing states with highly uneven power-capacities sought to manipulate their power-potential and geo-strategic positioning relative to other major and lesser states.

<sup>5</sup> Hall Gardner, *Averting Global War* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010); Hall Gardner, *NATO Expansion and U.S. Strategy in Asia* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013).

jing into closer collaboration in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and in the formation of a larger Eurasian Union.

The fact that Iran has been moving closer to both Russia and China in the post-Cold War era also raises questions as to whether the three countries could forge a new Eurasian Alliance. This appears plausible given the fact that Iran has been considered for membership in both the defence-oriented CSTO and also the more security cooperation-oriented Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), even though it has not yet joined either. But Teheran has closely aligned with Moscow and Damascus in the conflict raging in Syria and Iraq. Even more significantly, the fact that both India and Pakistan are expected to join the SCO in 2017 raises questions as to whether India will move out of relative neutrality despite closer defence ties with the US and Japan and closer toward a Eurasian alliance—despite its ongoing disputes with Pakistan and China.

### **Section III.**

Let us now look greater detail how today's global geo-strategic constellation of major Powers involving the U.S., key European states and Japan in relationship to Russia, China and a neutral (so far) India, represents a mix of the geo-strategic constellations that evolved in the periods before World War I and World War II.

In the contemporary situation, as previously stated, the disaggregation of the Soviet Union appears to parallel the collapse of four empires following World War I: Tsarist Russia (in Eastern Europe), Imperial Germany linked to the Austro-Hungarian Empire (in Central and Eastern Europe) and the Ottoman-Turkish Empire (throughout the “wider Middle East”).

In many ways, the global geo-strategic position of the Soviet Union as a Eurasian SuperPower has tended to parallel that of Imperial Germany, as a continental European Great Power, in that both were amphibious states with a global naval capacity and counter-hegemonic outreach that challenged the continental European and overseas political-economic interests of both Great Britain and the United States, in addition to confronting rival major Powers and lesser states of the respective eras.

But while Weimar Germany had largely lost its overseas outreach after World War I in part as a result of the Versailles treaty, the Russian Federation has sought to hold onto the remnants of the former overseas Soviet “empire”, now most importantly in Syria, while concurrently seeking closer ties to China, so as to stabilize Russian Federation hegemony throughout Eurasia, if possible. This close Sino-Russian relationship can be compared and contrasted with Weimar German and then Nazi German efforts to forge closer political-economic and secret military ties to Stalin’s Soviet Union despite their ostensible ideological differences.

From the Russian perspective, contemporary NATO-E.U. enlargements into the Central and Eastern European “shatterbelt” can accordingly be compared and contrasted with Polish efforts to forge a European confederation or “Intermarium” after the break-up of the Tsarist Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires, but before Soviets re-absorbed parts of Belarus’ and Ukraine. In the Russian view, NATO, backed by American hegemony, has been attempting to fulfill the InterWars period Polish President Józef Pilsudski’s project for a potential Eastern European federation or “Intermarium” based on the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Warsaw not only saw this project as a means to build an Eastern European confederation between Germany and the USSR in the InterWars period, but the goal was also to break-up the USSR under the complementary project, “Prometheism”. And given Eastern European state efforts to additionally forge close ties with states in the southern Caucasus (potentially backed by NATO), Moscow has more recently called this project a “Baltic-Black Sea alliance”.

In effect, since the second wave of NATO expansion in 2004 and particularly with respect to the promises of bringing Ukraine into NATO at some point in the future, NATO has appeared to be backing Pilsudski's old project in which Poland was to lead a European federation that was to include Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus', Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Ukraine and Yugoslavia.<sup>6</sup> Of the latter states, only Belarus', Ukraine and Finland have not joined NATO, although NATO has not yet taken the possibility of Ukrainian membership out of consideration and Finland has been debating the NATO option (along with Sweden). Both the Czech Republic and Slovakia joined NATO after their break-up. Yugoslavia then broke up in 1990, with Slovenia and Croatia eventually joining NATO, plus Albania. Ironically, if conflict erupts, the latter three states as NATO members, plus Montenegro, if accepted into NATO, could potentially «encircle» Serbia, which did not join NATO and which has had historic ties to Russia. In such a way, Serbia could once again become involved in a major inter-Powers war; but unlike the situation before World War I, the 'wider Middle East', and not the Balkans, would most likely be the central fulcrum where such a conflict could be sparked.

During the 1917-21 Russian Revolution, the Soviet annexation of parts of Belarus' and Ukraine had been intended to check the further dismemberment of the former Tsarist Empire against Polish efforts to obtain hegemony over the region. Somewhat similarly, in 2014, Russian annexation of Crimea and political-military interference in Eastern Ukraine has represented an act of *preclusive imperialism* to check NATO and E.U. efforts to manipulate Kiev against Moscow and to prevent the further dismemberment of the Russian Federation, while preserving control over Russia's Black Sea Fleet at Sevastopol'.

In this perspective, as an act of preclusion, Russian President Vladimir Putin's annexation of Crimea and political-military intervention in Eastern Ukraine, appear to be more comparable Lenin's actions during the Russian revolution *in terms of geo-strategic intent* than the abused *cliché* to Hitler's aggressive seizure from Czechoslovakia of the ethnic German Sudentenland. (Kharkov, for example, which is an area in which Russophone "autonomists" have been clashing with Ukrainian "centralists", was the seat of Lenin's Congress of Soviets in Ukraine during the Russian Revolution).

In sum, German unification, followed by the uncoordinated double expansion of NATO and European Union into ex-Tsarist/Soviet/Russia declared buffer areas, has resulted in a significant Russian backlash under President Putin that initially originated at the time of the 1999 War "over" Kosovo. Such 1999 U.S.-NATO war against Serbia, fought without an open U.N. Security Council mandate, took place at the same time as the Russian war in Chechnya—in which Arab Gulf states, allied to the U.S., were seen by Moscow to be backing pan-Islamist forces, much as they did during Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 after the U.S. had purposely augmented the chances that Moscow would invade the country.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> See discussion of present day efforts to achieve an "Intermarium": T. Urbanskaya & K. Honcharov, "Intermarium Alliance—Will the Idea Become Reality?" in UNIAN (8 August 2015), see <http://www.unian.info/politics/1110820-intermarium-alliance-will-the-idea-become-reality.html>

For a Russian critique, see: Olivier Berlanda, "La bataille de l'Intermarium entre Russie et Occident: l'Europe des nationalistes de l'Est" in *La Voix de la Russie* (13 November 2015), in [http://fr.sputniknews.com/french.ruvr.ru/2013\\_11\\_15/La-bataille-de-lIntermarium-entre-Russie-et-Occident-Europe-des-nationalistes-de-lEst-9052/](http://fr.sputniknews.com/french.ruvr.ru/2013_11_15/La-bataille-de-lIntermarium-entre-Russie-et-Occident-Europe-des-nationalistes-de-lEst-9052/)

<sup>7</sup> On the 1999 NATO war «over» Kosovo and its impact on Russia and Putin, see: Hall Gardner, *Crimea, Global Rivalry and the Vengeance of History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). On U.S. *intervention in* Afghanistan, see: Hall Gardner, *American Global Strategy and the 'War on Terrorism'* (New York: Ashgate, 2005).

#### Section IV.

In looking to the countries flanking Russia to the east, the contemporary Russia-China relationship can be compared and contrasted with the 1888-1892 Russo-German Reinsurance treaty, but perhaps more pertinently with the 1922 Rapallo Pact that eventually led to the 1939 Molotov-von Ribbentrop Pact. Both the Russo-German Reinsurance Pact and Molotov-von Ribbentrop Pact broke apart after 2-3 years, but a break-up of a closer Russian Chinese relationship may not prove to be the case in the contemporary geostrategic constellation of major Power relationships—that is, if both Russia and China continue to see themselves as “encircled” by the NATO-E.U. enlargements to the East, plus the U.S. alliance with a “militarizing” Japan in the Far-East, and Arab Gulf state support for pan-Islamist movements to the South.

These pan-Islamist movements, it is feared by Moscow, could impact the northern Caucasus, Central Asia, Afghanistan and the soft Islamic underbelly of the Russian Federation, while Beijing has also opposed the rise of pan-Islamist movements in China’s Xinjiang province, in addition to other potentially secessionist provinces, including Tibet, inner-Mongolia, as well as Taiwan in its view. Much like the historical Russo-German pacts, closer Sino-Russian political economic and defense ties are intended to prevent either country from eventually aligning with the U.S. and its allies.

Japanese, Chinese and Russian rivalries in Asia appear to best parallel the period of China’s “Self-Strengthening” movement between 1861 and 1894 prior to the 1894-95 Sino-Japanese war, the 1904-05 Russia-Japanese war, and prior to the entrance of Japan into World War I against Imperial Germany, but in seeking to obtain Japanese hegemony over a China-in-revolution by claiming German concessions and by hoping to counter Russian territorial claims in southern Manchuria, Siberia and Korea. During the 1904 Russo-Japanese War, Japan had hoped to take most of Siberia as far as Lake Baikal while Tsarist Russia hoped it could still defeat Japan—if it had not been for U.S. mediation by US President Teddy Roosevelt. During the Russian Revolution, Japan again hoped it could seize Siberia, a factor that led to U.S., British and French military intervention in addition to the (failed) effort to repress the Bolshevik Communist Revolution.

From the Russian perspective, the historical fear of the potential break-off of the Russian Far-East, backed by either China or Japan or even the U.S., has represented a major rationale for Putin’s own version of the “pivot to Asia” in the effort to counter the American “pivot” or “rebalancing to Asia.”<sup>8</sup>

In addition to China’s irredentist claims and military pressures on Taiwan, and Russian claims to the Kuril Islands (or northern territories), tensions over the Korean peninsula (in which North Korea has intermittently threatened to set the peninsula on flame, or else raised fears that the country could collapse altogether) appear to parallel late Nineteenth Century Sino-Japanese-Russian disputes. These tensions could once again resurrect themselves, albeit in new forms of conflict over islands and resources. In today’s situation, it is largely China that has begun to play the role as the more assertive power in striving for hegemony over resources and islands in the Indo-Pacific.

In this respect, in addition to forging the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Beijing has begun to develop its “String of Pearls” and “Silk Road” strategies with their military aspects, in greater apparent collaboration with Moscow, at least so far. In response, Japan has looked to the formation of a “democratic security diamond” of the U.S. (Hawaii), Japan, Aus-

---

<sup>8</sup> Hall Gardner, *NATO Expansion and U.S. Strategy in Asia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

tralia and India in order to counter step-by-step Chinese pressures, to be joined by Great Britain and France.<sup>9</sup>

Here, the post-World War II U.S.-Japanese alliance appears to parallel the Anglo-Japanese alliance of 1902. Yet in the Chinese view, Japanese “militarism” has begun to break out of the American-supplied eggshell in that Washington has permitted Japan to augment military spending and expand its defense perimeter beyond its needs for territorial defense. Ostensibly, in revising the Article 9 “pacifist” clause of the Japanese constitution in 2014, Tokyo now claims that it would only engage its military in cooperation with the United Nations (U.N.) or with its Allies—and not unilaterally. But there is little trust for the Japanese on either the Chinese or Russian sides.

Soviet/Russian ties to India in South Asia and outreach to the Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean during and after the Cold War appear to parallel Imperial German ties to Italy with respect to the Adriatic and Mediterranean. In part as a diplomatic response to the September 11, 2001 attacks, the U.S., Europeans and Japanese have all been reaching out to a still neutral, yet nuclear, India as a means to counter pan-Islamist movements (backed in part by Pakistan). The U.S., Europeans and Japanese also hope to protect sea lines of communication from the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf and Pacific from piracy or attack. There is also the possibility that the U.S., Europeans and Japan may be able to wean India away from closer ties to Russia, while “counterbalancing” the rise of a more assertive China, as intended by Japan’s “democratic security diamond”. *Somewhat like Liberal Italy before World War I, India now plays the role of the key pivot state, which could potentially swing to either side if it does hold to her traditional policy of neutrality. How India’s expected membership in the Chinese-led Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and possible partnership in the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union will impact its relations with both Russia and China remains to be seen.*

## Section V.

In the pre-World War I era, the primary “shatterbelt” was the Balkans and North Africa; it was largely created as a result of Ottoman retraction and European imperialist interventions: France in Tunisia in 1881 and Britain in Egypt in 1882, for example, plus Austria-Hungary’s annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1878-1908, and the 1912-14 Balkan Wars which forced the Ottomans to retract and which raised the pan-Serb threat backed by Tsarist Russia. Italy’s 1911 intervention in Libya took place almost exactly 100 years before the U.S.-Franco-British intervention alongside NATO, against the Qaddafi régime in 2011. Yet deeper in Africa, Great Britain and France came close to precipitating a major Great Powers international war in 1898 over Fashoda along the Nile River in Sudan. Concurrently, the object of Anglo-German imperial rivalry was primarily the Horn of Africa as manifest in the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War, which sharpened the already deepening Anglo-German antagonism.

In the contemporary crisis, intermittent U.S., French, and Israeli military interventions by air-power in the Syrian Civil War in 2011-17 have been intended to stun and destroy differing pan-Islamist movements, but in the process of engaging in regime change in Syria. By contrast, Moscow began to engage in airstrikes in October 2015 in support of the Bashar Al-Assad government, which at that time appeared close to collapse given its battle with the Islamic State, Al-Nusra, the Syrian Free Army and the Army of Conquest, among other militias.

---

<sup>9</sup> Shinzo Abe, “Asia’s Democratic Security Diamond” in *Project Syndicate* (27 December 2012), in <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/a-strategic-alliance-for-japan-and-india-by-shinzo-abe>

Both Russian and Iranian military intervention is largely designed to safeguard the Syrian régime, which has protected the *Hizb'allah* militia and pro-Syrian Palestinian movements from the Iranian perspective, while Russian military intervention has been intended to prevent the further dismemberment of what remains of Soviet overseas hegemony. Moscow has hoped to hang onto its remaining overseas pressure points and bases that it had obtained during the Cold War. In this respect, the current Syrian Civil War plays a role very close to that of the Two Moroccan Crises of 1905 and 1911 that resulted in further isolating Imperial Germany.

Yet while Berlin in the pre-World War I epoch had hoped to assert its interests in Morocco, and possibly obtain a naval base in Agadir, for example, by supporting Ottoman-Turkish and pan-Sunni Islamist interests at the time, Moscow, by contrast, has been fighting to hold onto its Syrian sphere of interest and seeking to prevent its isolation throughout the region while sustaining its warm water naval base at Tartus in the eastern Mediterranean. Moscow has in effect forged an alliance with Iran, Syria, *Hizb'allah* and other pan-Shi'a, Christian and Kurdish, interests as a means to counter the predominant, yet divided, pan-Sunni Arab movements.

While a disintegrating Ottoman Empire played a major indirect role in the causes of World War I, in today's situation, Turkey now finds itself caught between a Russian military build-up in Crimea after the latter's annexation in 2014, and the ongoing conflicts in Syria and Iraq. Unlike other NATO countries, Turkey did not engage in economic sanctions on Moscow in the aftermath of the Crimean annexation. At the same time, as a NATO member, and due to its geographic position, Turkey cannot ignore Moscow's threatened conventional and nuclear military build-up in Crimea, plus Russian efforts to dominate the northern regions of the Black Sea.

Turkey's primary concern has not been Russia or the Islamic State, but to prevent the eventual rise of a unified Kurdish state, or step-by-step Kurdish control over areas in Syria, that could support Kurdish independence movements inside Turkey. The fact that the Islamic State has been able to engage in significant cross border trafficking in oil, raw materials, ancient relics and other lucrative activities, while purportedly engaging in acts of terrorism, has raised U.S. and European concerns with Turkish management of the crisis along its borders, even if that border is not easy to patrol, as Ankara claims, while causing a socio-political backlash of xenophobic and anti-immigrant movements in most countries in Europe as many of these refugees have hoped to transit through Turkey and the Balkans northward. The difficulties confronted by Ankara in handling the massive refugee crisis, stemming in large part from wars in Syria and Iraq, have raised fears of Turkey's socio-political destabilisation, particularly after terrorist attacks attributed to either the PKK or the Islamic State of Iraq & Levant (ISIL), not to overlook the alleged "Gülenist" coup attempt in October 2016 which resulted in mass arrests.

From this perspective, Turkish policy clashes with U.S. policy that has hoped to strengthen supports for Kurdish fighters against the Syrian regime. Concurrently, Turkish policy has also clashed with Russian policy which has opposed the so-called moderate forces, such as the Syrian Free Army (with a Moslem Brotherhood political leadership) and which has been allied with Turkey, at least from 2011 until 2016. Initially, with the rise of the Arab Spring movement, Ankara began to support pan-Islamist movements against the Assad regime despite its previously positive relations with the latter. Yet fears that the breakup of Syria would also lead to a Kurdish independent state that could support the PKK inside Turkey represented a major factor leading Turkey to suddenly shift toward Russia (while likewise strengthening ties with Iran). The Kurdish independence question, in addition to Putin's promise of Russian natural gas cooperation in Turkish Stream (bypassing Ukraine), tourism

and trade help explain why Turkey flipped so suddenly back to a close entente with Moscow in June 2016 when Turkish president Erdogan had so unexpectedly apologised to Russian President Putin for the fact that Turkey shot down a Russian fighter jet when it was leaving Turkish airspace, after completing its mission in Syria near the Turkish border in November 2015.

Another one of the reasons for Moscow's intervention in Syria has been its opposition to purported Arab Gulf state support for Islamist movements within the Russian "inner abroad" in the northern Caucasus. Moscow fears that a number of pan-Islamist movements will be able to take advantage of the collapse of the Assad régime in the effort to provide greater support for Islamist movements in Chechnya and elsewhere in the northern Caucasus and Central Asia—in effect undermining Russian hegemony over these regions. There is consequently a real danger that competing hegemonies could draw regional and major powers into war as the U.S., France, the Arab Gulf countries and Israel have all been engaging in air strikes or else in support for surrogate forces against the Syrian regime essentially backed by Russia and Iran, plus *Hizb'allah*. Moscow's decision to strike Syrian targets by cruise missile strikes in October 2015 from the Caspian Sea across Iranian and Iraqi territory is in part intended to send Washington a very strong warning given the latter's use of "cruise missile diplomacy" in a number of post-Cold War military interventions since Bosnia in 1995.<sup>10</sup>

The pre-World War I specter of Anarchist and Socialist movements, combined with the pan-Serb "Black Hand" terrorists that assassinated Austria-Hungary's heir to the throne, Archduke Franz-Ferdinand of Habsburg, had haunted both the Austro-Hungarian and Imperial Germany élites. These fears of terrorism and revolutionary change (whether peaceful or not) have now been replaced by the pan-Islamist threat posed by the differing groups. At the same time, much like monarchist elites of the pre-World War I era, Moscow sees these "terrorist" threats as being combined with the threat of "color revolutions"—which include the efforts to overthrow Russian allies such as Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia and Viktor Yanukovich in Ukraine by "democracy engineering." The latter represents a new form of popularly backed *coup d'état* or "pronunciamento".<sup>11</sup>

These "democratizing" threats now haunt both the Russian and Chinese leaderships, given the latter's decision to crush the nascent democracy movement in June 1989 at Tiananmen Square. Chinese hardliners have regarded U.S. support for multiparty party democracy as an act of war in undermining Communist Party leadership and legitimacy through its "hegemonic" democratic propaganda. For its part, Moscow had engaged in "reverse democracy engineering" in Ukraine in the effort to roll back the Orange Revolution in backing the ostensibly the pro-Russian leadership of Viktor Yanukovich from 2010-14, prior Yanukovich's expulsion from Ukraine by the Maidan Movement. In response to what Moscow condemned as the "Maidan coup", the Kremlin seized from Ukraine the Russian-majority Crimea peninsula, including the local Ukrainian navy, and hastily set up a popular "vote" in the effort to "democratically" legitimize Moscow's annexation—another form of reverse democracy engineering.

---

<sup>10</sup> Anne Barnard & Andrew Kramer, "Russian Cruise Missiles Help Syrians Go on the Offensive" in *New York Times* (7 October 2015), in [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/08/world/middleeast/russia-syria-conflict.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/08/world/middleeast/russia-syria-conflict.html?_r=0)

<sup>11</sup> See Hall Gardner, «General Introduction» in Hall Gardner & Oleg Kobtzeff, eds., *Ashgate Research Companion to War: Origins and Prevention* (New York: Ashgate, 2012). On techniques of revolutionary democratic change, see Gene Sharp's non-violent manifesto, *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, Albert Einstein Institute (2010) <http://www.aeinstein.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/FDTD.pdf>

## Section VI.

President Putin's fears of the further destabilization and disaggregation of the Russian Federation particularly in the Russian Far East (even before the impact of U.S. and European sanctions after the Russian annexation of Crimea) represent a major rationale why Moscow has begun to tighten its political economic and military ties with China—in addition to supporting joint Russian-Chinese efforts to counter the U.S. alliance with a militarily stronger Japan, which, in effect, parallels the 1902 Anglo-Japanese alliance. Here Russia has continued to oppose Japanese demands to reclaim all four of the northern or Kurile territories taken by the Soviet Union at the end of World War II.

Since the end of the Cold War, Moscow has been concerned with the eventual rise of Germany/Europe, as well as Japan, if not China as well, as powers that could eventually challenge Moscow in political-economic, if not military, terms. In effect, despite their own ongoing nuclear and conventional force rivalry during the Cold War, both the U.S. and Soviet Union had jointly restrained, or at least limited by means of “counter-balancing,” the potential political-economic and military capabilities of Germany/Europe, Japan and China, if not much of the “developing” world.<sup>12</sup> During the Cold War, Moscow saw itself as being in a position of “co-hegemony” particularly in keeping Germany (and indirectly, Europe) “down” in accord with the “Four-Powers” (U.S., Great Britain, France and USSR) controls.

In addition to Moscow's fears of the eventual rise of Germany/Europe and of Japan as political-economic powers, if not as relatively independent military powers backed by the U.S., Moscow has also been concerned with the political-economic and military rise of China as a potential hegemonic Power as well. But starting with Mikhail Gorbachëv, whose pro-Chinese policies were then boosted by Boris Yel'tsin and Vladimir Putin, Moscow has sought to *channel* Beijing's rise by entering into a close Sino-Russian political-economic relationship by resolving territorial disputes. Close Sino-Russian ties have increasingly looked like a proto-military alliance since at least 2005.

In effect, Gorbachëv's opening to China in 1986 represented an effort to break the U.S.-NATO-Japanese-Chinese (and Arab Gulf state) «encirclement» that Moscow had feared at the start of the Afghan war in 1979. Gorbachëv's opening to China, plus his unilateral retrenchment in central and Eastern Europe resulting in the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, represented one of the primary reasons that tensions did not continue to spiral, possibly resulting in Soviet explosion in a two-fronts war as expected by the pre-WW I analogy. A possible East-West nuclear World War III had appeared plausible, particularly in the early-1980s in the first term of the Ronald Reagan arch-conservative administration.

Moscow's efforts to achieve closer ties with China, which is also pressing its regional claims in the Indo-Pacific, has accordingly represented an effort to stabilize, if not restore, Russian hegemonic influence in Eurasia and abroad—even if it means that Moscow could eventually become a junior partner of a rising China and its Road and Belt Initiative. This Sino-Russian re-alignment has been symbolized by joint Russian-Chinese naval maneuvers in the eastern Mediterranean in May 2015—truly an unprecedented historical step for China.<sup>13</sup>

In the present constellation of forces, a proto-Sino-Russian alliance best parallels the InterWars period's 1922 Rapallo Pact between Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia that led to the 1939 Molotov-von Ribbentrop pact, as previously argued. But in pre-World War I

---

<sup>12</sup> See my arguments detailed in: Hall Gardner, *Surviving the Millennium* (Boulder, CO: Praeger, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Hall Gardner, *NATO Expansion and U.S. Strategy in Asia* (New York, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013); Franz-Stefan Gady, “China and Russia Conclude Naval Drill in Mediterranean” in *The Diplomat* (22 May 2015), in <http://thediplomat.com/2015/05/china-and-russia-conclude-naval-drill-in-mediterranean/>

terms, the efforts to establish a Eurasian Union and a new Silk Road in the Chinese Road and Belt Initiative that would reach across Eurasia to Egypt and the Suez Canal play a similar role to Berlin's efforts to forge Berlin-Baghdad-Basra railway to the Persian Gulf since 1904.

The Berlin-Baghdad railway, which was almost completed before World War I, was intended to represent a land bridge that would compete with the British-controlled Suez Canal. The Suez Canal had been controlled by the British since 1882 in their effort to achieve global overseas hegemony—an effort that alienated friends, such as France, and enemies alike, particularly among the rival pan-Arab and pan-Islamist movements of the late-Nineteenth Century.

### Section VII.

Great Britain's unilateral intervention in Egypt in 1882 (without French supports as Paris withdrew its fleet from the attack at the last minute) would draw England into a long term occupation of Egypt. The occupation and extension of British controls from Cairo to the Cape would result in a suppression of pan-Arab and pan-Islamist forces, not to overlook Constitutional Democratic forces which also sought to put an end to the British occupation, albeit by more peaceful means. These opposition forces included the pan-Islamist Mahdi uprising (1881-99) against Anglo-Egyptian rule. Ironically, the rise of a number of anti-British socio-political movements had assisted in the aftermath of the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869 that then permitted greater communications within the Arab-Islamic world.

Much as Britain had made the leap to a formal empire in Egypt in 1882 and was forced to engage militarily in Sudan against pan-Islamist movements, for example, the U.S. has been drawn deeper into the quagmire of Iraq since its Two Gulf Wars in 1990-91 and 2003, than it previously expected.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, the Iraqi regime has been infiltrated by Iran since the 2003 U.S.-led intervention. On the other hand, the new Iraqi government has been confronted with the rise of a number of revanchist Sunni militias whose most powerful representative is now the Islamic State of Iraq & Levant (ISIL), which is commanded by many ex-leaders of Saddam Hussein's military. Largely in rivalry with a now less powerful al-Qaeda and its affiliated al-Nusra militia, among other ones, it is ISIL that has been seeking to implement a pan-Sunni state by force in linking Sunni-claimed territories in both Iraq and Syria—if not beyond.

### Section VIII.

In the long term, British actions in Egypt began to alter Great Britain's global strategy in such a way that London would become more and more concerned with its overseas empire and less and less concerned with the burgeoning naval and arms race on the European continent between France, Italy, Russia and Germany in the aftermath of the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian War. The major powers at the time—France, Italy, Germany and Russia—had all opposed Great Britain's quest for hegemony in controlling world trade and dominating Africa from the Cape to Cairo. Von Bismarck's Germany had played the *bâton égyptienne* as a

---

<sup>14</sup> Much as Great Britain had promised to leave Egypt 66 times between 1882 and 1922—when finally Great Britain declared, at least initially, Egypt "independent" (but without formal negotiations), the U.S. has acted in a similar fashion, by pulling troops out of Iraq in December 2011 (but maintaining a strong naval and military presence in the Gulf), but then engaging its air-power against the ISIL. See A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery in Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.90. I first warned that any U.S. presence will prove to be long-term, ironically enough on September 11, 1990. See *Scripta Politica* (American University of Paris) Vol. VII, n.IV (March 1991). Historian Niall Ferguson, by the way, made the **exact** same **analogy** in 2003, **but** 13 years later. See Niall Ferguson, "Lessons from the British Empire: True Lies" in *The New Republic* (27 May 2003); Niall Ferguson, *Colossus* (Penguin, 2004), p.220.

means to counter British hegemony by attempting to play French and Russian political economic and financial interests against those of Great Britain when Egypt was under “rule of the bankers.”

Here is the key point as the British occupation of the Suez and Egypt impacted British strategy in the Eurasian continent: It was largely in response to the Franco-Russian alliance—and in particular Russian naval pressures on the Ottoman Straits—that Great Britain began to gradually withdraw its naval supports for the relatively weaker German allies, Austria-Hungary and Italy, which had initially been intended to counter-balance Russia by means of the 1887 Mediterranean Accords. Great Britain’s tacit alliance with Germany through a defense relationship with German allies, Austria-Hungary and Italy, began to alienate Berlin once London then began to withdraw from the 1887 Mediterranean Accords in 1894-97—largely in the effort to secure the Suez Canal. Joint Franco-Russian pressures then led London to turn away from a possible entente or alliance with Imperial Germany and toward France and Russia once Anglo-German alliance talks had failed completely by 1902.

In other words, it was estimated that the British Navy would *not* hold up in a battle to protect the Ottoman Straits against Russian naval power, potentially backed by France and that London’s quasi-alliance with Italy and with Austria-Hungary (through the 1887-97 Mediterranean Accords) would prove too weak against a Franco-Russian naval combination as well. Something had to give: either London had to move more decisively toward Imperial Germany and its allies—or else toward France and Russia.

The year of the Anglo-German estrangement, when London and Berlin really began to suspect each other’s motives, was 1894: Germany started to fear that Great Britain might seek a *rapprochement* with Tsarist Russia to possibly end the Anglo-Russian “Great Game” in Asia, which in turn might threaten a future “encirclement” of Germany by a Franco-Russian-British security realignment as had been forewarned by von Bismarck before he fell from power. At that time, London and Berlin also had significant disputes over how to deal with the Ottoman-Turkish Empire and how to divide the Congo between them.<sup>15</sup> The year of alienation—1894—consequently took place *before* Berlin began to build its fleet in 1897 *as a later political power factor* to press London into a closer and formal Anglo-German relationship against the Franco-Russian Alliance.

Then as Anglo-German tensions continued to mount over the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War, disputes in Asia, not to overlook American-German disputes, as well as the Dreadnought naval program for state-of-the-art battleships, London and Berlin found it impossible to come to terms. This led London to look toward France by the end of 1902. In 1903-04, Britain and France then conspired to keep Germany out of Morocco by exchanging French recognition of British controls over Egypt for British recognition of French controls over Morocco—the basis for the 1904 Anglo-French *Entente Cordiale*. The Anglo-French entente then represented the first step toward the “isolation” and “encirclement” of Imperial Germany before the formation of the Anglo-Franco-Russian *Entente* in 1907. By 1908, Berlin screamed “encirclement.”

Although the two democratic countries of France and Great Britain continued to prepare for war against each other as late as 1902, France would not go to war with Great Britain, as Georges Clemenceau had believed was possible in 1882, when Great Britain had

---

<sup>15</sup> Hall Gardner, *The Failure to Prevent World War I: the Unexpected Armageddon* (New York: Ashgate, 2015).

seized Egypt without French military support.<sup>16</sup> Instead London would unexpectedly align with France and Russia, and then go to war against Germany in 1914—primarily in the effort to safeguard the English Channel and North Sea after Germany attacked France through Belgium. And it would be Clemenceau himself who would be one of the major actors to lead the charge of *revanche* in the effort to regain Alsace-Lorraine against Germany....

In sum, *it was not initially the rise of Imperial Germany that would challenge global British hegemony, but the French-led alliance with Russia*. In fact, it was France and Russia who were actually the stronger naval and land powers, at least on paper, in the years just before Germany substantially built up its land and naval forces on the eve of the war. In effect, Germany had largely become Great Britain's enemy by default. And of all the major powers of that time, Great Britain was the least prepared or willing to be drawn into a major power war. The key point raised here is that Great Britain's efforts to achieve and sustain overseas global hegemony, as epitomized by its seizure and imperialist occupation of Egypt, would not prevent World War I.

### Section IX.

The long term forces leading to World War I were primarily generated when Prussia had seized Alsace-Lorraine in 1871 in an effort to assert its own hegemony over German states while likewise countering French efforts to sustain French hegemony over Prussia and over the German states as a whole. France would then engage in a long-term policy of *revanche* in seeking alliances with whatever state, most importantly Tsarist Russia, and then Great Britain, that would help it to counter German military pressures and burgeoning political-economic influence.

The French policy of *revanche* was intended to regain Alsace-Lorraine, by diplomatic means if possible, by means of exchange for a French colony for Alsace-Lorraine, for example. But France was also prepared to use of force if necessary. «Alsace, speak of it never, think of it always...» was the mantra of the French élites...

*But this parallel is the key danger today as the U.S. and Europeans confront a more militant Russia, which has begun to press its claims in the Black Sea region much like Lenin in the Russian Revolution, but perhaps even more like Tsarist Russia in asserting its hegemony over the Black Sea region since the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian war and then in alliance with France: will the pre-World War I French mantra be replaced in contemporary circumstances with the NATO-European Union mantra « Crimea, speak of it never, think of it always»?*

In the pre-World War I period, Great Britain had become over-engaged in Afghanistan and Egypt and elsewhere overseas and largely ignored the growing rivalries among the continental powers in Europe. In the present period, after having engaged militarily in Afghanistan and Iraq, and even though NATO has expanded to Russia borders, the U.S. has been unable to check, at least by diplomatic means, Russian intervention in Crimea and its

---

<sup>16</sup> The Deputy George Clemenceau led the opposition to French military intervention alongside Great Britain: "Have you taken safeguards? Have you made with your allies a plan for entering, for intervening, and then exiting? I want to know how you will go into Egypt, what you will do there, and under what conditions you will exercise your actions, and most importantly how you will exit! It is much easier to enter than to exit!... I demand that that you do not let yourselves follow behind England, which has only two special interests, its creditors and the Suez Canal. We cannot go into Egypt merely to serve the interests of the English. If you are going to let yourselves follow England in order to reestablish the *status quo*, it will result in an indefinite occupation, and for me, an inevitable war with England. I do not want to take such risks, I absolutely refuse, in such conditions, to authorize such an intervention in Egypt." Quote of George Clemenceau, Chamber of Deputies, 20 July 1882. Much the same position would be held by France and Germany in their opposition to the 2003 U.S.-led military intervention and then occupation of Iraq!

clandestine political-military intervention in Ukraine. Washington did not appear to take into account how Moscow would react to the prospects of eventual NATO membership for Ukraine, or to how Moscow would react to E.U. economic proposals that did not fully incorporate Russian interests given the close political-economic dependency between Kiev and Moscow. Here, Moscow interpreted the 2008-09 European Partnership that had been proposed by the E.U. and European Commission<sup>17</sup> as a means to isolate Russian economic interests. Once again, Moscow engaged in an act of *preclusive imperialism* in the effort to check Kiev from entering into political-economic accords with the E.U. that could impact Russian interests in eastern Ukraine—and to prevent Kiev from potentially evicting the Russian Black Sea fleet from Crimea and then inviting NATO forces to take its place.

The danger is that the dispute over the Crimea could soon become the predominant issue that drives NATO and European security and defense policy, that is, if a deal with Moscow cannot be arranged at some point in the near future. Here, of course, Ukraine is neither a member of NATO nor the European Union and hence the revanchist Ukrainian cause to regain the Crimea does not appear to be of “existential” significance as it appeared to be for France after the 1870-71 Franco-Prussian War. This makes a *Realpolitik* deal over eastern Ukraine and Crimea more plausible.

At the same time, however, the Russian military build-up and confrontation with NATO and the European Union make the “illegal” Russian annexation of Crimea symbolic of rising geo-strategic and political economic tensions. In effect, much as Imperial Germany feared that the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, combined with French pressures to regain Alsace-Lorraine, in alignment with Tsarist Russia, would destabilize Imperial Germany itself, Moscow now fears that NATO and the E.U. will potentially back Ukrainian claims to Crimea, while threatening to break up the Russian Federation by augmenting political-economic sanctions, in addition to backing a “militarized” Japan in Asia.

The Ukraine crisis is further combined with the more immediate Russian fears that Arab Gulf state support for pan-Islamist movements in the Caucasus and Central Asia will destabilize the soft underbelly of the Russian Federation, which has been further exposed after Soviet collapse. In part in the effort to deflect the U.S. and E.U. away from a focus on eastern Ukraine and Crimea, Moscow has engaged in a major military intervention in Syria. Moscow has argued that the U.S., NATO and Arab Gulf States have been in alliance at least since the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. Unless it can begin to co-opt some Sunni movements (such as the Afghan Taliban), Moscow now risks a new pan-Sunni jihad in militarily intervening in support of the Assad regime, in alliance with Shi’a Iran and *Hizb’allah*, much as was the case for its intervention in Afghanistan in 1979.

## Section X.

In the pre-World War I era, the Anglo-French-Russian-Japanese alliance encircled a military-strong (but socially instable) Imperial Germany and a collapsing Austria-Hungarian Empire. Berlin then staged a *coup d’etat* to press the collapsing Ottoman-Turkish Empire against British and French interests throughout the Islamic world. German support for the Ottoman-Turks would then be countered by Arab nationalism backed by the British in supporting King Saud, for example, which helped to further break up Ottoman rule.

---

<sup>17</sup> The E.U.’s Eastern Partners its European Neighborhood Policy are: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The goal was to establish a deep and comprehensive free trade area (DCFTA) with each of the Partner countries. See: *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council* (Brussels, 3.12.2008 COM, 2008), in [http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/docs/com08\\_823\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/docs/com08_823_en.pdf)

Unable to check or break-up the French-Russian Alliance, Berlin had tried, but failed to forge an alliance with London before 1902. While Great Britain had initially begun to build its fleet, primarily against Italy, France and Russia in 1893, Germany hoped to use its fleet as a tool of strategic leverage in the effort to press Great Britain into alliance. From 1897 on, Berlin believed that it could force Great Britain under the threat of an expensive naval race and war, to side with Germany. The German goal was, at least in part, based on the belief that American naval threats had forced Great Britain to «appease» the United States in permitting the latter to assert its hegemony over the Western hemisphere and Latin America through the Monroe Doctrine, followed by its Theodore Roosevelt Corollary. By 1902 mutual fears of what I call the «insecurity-security dialectic» then began to militarize and polarize the policy approach of all statesmen as socio-political and inter-state tensions augmented both *within* and *among* rival states and societies.<sup>18</sup>

As opposed to the hardline policy that Berlin used in an attempt to *impel* London into alliance, Paris used a much more subtle diplomatic strategy to *coax* London over to its side against Imperial Germany. In the period 1901-1907, London engaged in the formation of three ententes with former rivals that shocked the world: the U.S., France and Russia. This was also the time when London formally broke out of its “Splendid Isolation” by aligning with Japan in 1902. As tensions mounted before 1914, London’s *entente* with France and Russia gradually tightened into closer alliances.

London soon found itself in engaging in threats of encirclement against Imperial Germany and its collapsing Austro-Hungarian ally even though London had initially believed itself to be playing a clever game of «balance of power». And it was precisely French efforts, then backed by Great Britain, to prevent Germany from forging an alliance with Tsarist Russia that helped to tighten the vise of Anglo-French-Russian encirclement that led Berlin to explode into a two-fronts war.

## Section XI.

While the geo-historical configuration is significantly different today, and while the geostrategic constellations are not quite the same, there nevertheless appears to be a U.S.-led alliance in the process of formation that links the U.S./NATO, Europeans and Japan, plus a number of the Arab Gulf states against Russia, the CSTO and China. Such an alliance could possibly include India (given closer defence ties with the US and Japan) if New Delhi does shift farther away from Russia, China and the SCO. In addition to further isolating Moscow, there is a real danger that such an alliance could also be used to support Ukraine in an effort to pressure Russia out of the Crimea (and eastern Ukraine), much as France, aligned with first Russia, and then Great Britain, sought to pressure Germany out of Alsace-Lorraine.

In essence, the combination of NATO-EU enlargement in the west and the U.S. alliance with a stronger Japan (and Taiwan) in the east, coupled with Arab state support for Sunni pan-Islamist movements in the South, appears to be pushing Russia and China closer together toward greater political economic and defence cooperation. And much as Imperial Germany hoped to pressure Great Britain into alliance by naval threats, it appears that Putin, who appears to be acting more like Bernard von Bülow than Bismarck, has been playing

---

<sup>18</sup> Hall Gardner, «Alienation» in Hall Gardner & Oleg Kobtzeff, eds., *Ashgate Research Companion to War: Origins and Prevention* (New York: Ashgate, 2012).

much the same game, but now with the threat to use tactical nuclear weapons.<sup>19</sup> In addition, perhaps somewhat like Imperial Germany was able to influence Ottoman policies just at the beginning of World War I, since June 2016, Moscow has been able to flip Turkey closer to Russian interests despite their previous dispute over Syria in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab Spring movement. How renewed Russian ties with Ankara will impact US/NATO-Turkish relations remains to be seen.

Much as the crisis before World War I resulted in the failure to resolve the 1870-71 Franco-German clash over Alsace-Lorraine, as realized by British Prime Minister William Gladstone at the time, the contemporary global crisis is largely a consequence of the failure in the 1990s to establish a new system of Euro-Atlantic security from Vancouver to Vladivostok as proposed by Mikhail Gorbachëv and George Bush Sr. This proposed system of Euro-Atlantic security had been intended to incorporate the U.S., Western Europe, Eastern Europe and Russia, and bring both Russia and Eastern Europe into a reformed NATO or alternative system of security.

Yet by not finding a way to build a new system of security in Eastern Europe that would include Russian interests and that would separate German and Russian interests—much as British geo-politics theorist Halford MacKinder had argued was absolutely necessary in order to prevent conflict between Germany and Russia in the aftermath of World War I—NATO has, in effect, created a self-fulfilling prophecy: a Russian backlash which began at the time of NATO's "exceptional" intervention with the 1999 Kosovo War and which manifest itself with the annexation of Crimea and clandestine political-military interference in eastern Ukraine.<sup>20</sup>

Moscow has interpreted the largely uncoordinated double enlargement of NATO and the European Union (E.U.) into the ex-Tsarist Russia and ex-Soviet spheres of influence and security (that Moscow calls its "near-abroad") as a quest for NATO to achieve hegemony, if not imperial predominance, in the aftermath of the Cold War. The expansion of NATO, as an integrated military alliance, represents a "reversal of power relationships" between the U.S., Europe and Russia in the terms of traditional Realist Hans Morgenthau.<sup>21</sup> This reversal of power relationships is seen as an act of major power imperialism from the Russian perspective due to the fact that NATO and the Soviet Union had previously divided Europe between

---

<sup>19</sup> Zachary Keck, "Russia Threatens Nuclear Strikes over Crimea" in *The Diplomat* (11 July 2014), in <http://thediplomat.com/2014/07/russia-threatens-nuclear-strikes-over-crimea/> Ukrainian Defense Minister Valeriy Heletey pledged to retake Crimea: "Ukraine's New Defence Minister Promises Crimea Victory" in *Kiev Ukraine News Blog* (4 July 2014), in <http://news.kievukraine.info/2014/07/ukraines-new-defence-minister-promises.html>

<sup>20</sup> Hall Gardner, *Crimea, Global Rivalry and the Vengeance of History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> For the great Realist theorist, Professor Hans Morgenthau, imperialism is «a policy that aims at the overthrow of the *status quo*, at a reversal of power relations between two or nations. A policy seeking only adjustment, leaving the essence of these power relations intact, still operates within the general framework of a policy of the *status quo*», see Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: the Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Knopf, 1948, reprinted until 2006 by McGraw Hill), Chapter 5, p.37, in [http://www.sisekaitse.ee/public/Valissuhted/ERASMUS/Morgenthau\\_A\\_Realist\\_theory\\_of\\_international\\_politics.pdf](http://www.sisekaitse.ee/public/Valissuhted/ERASMUS/Morgenthau_A_Realist_theory_of_international_politics.pdf) For Morgenthau, the tools of imperialism include: military, economic and cultural. I have combined this definition with that of Doyle's: "Imperialism is simply the process or policy of establishing or maintaining an empire." Michael Doyle, *Empire* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1986). In this dynamic conception, imperialism can be seen as a reversal of power relations among two or more states and as an effort to sustain the new, yet altered, status quo after the reversal of power relations.

them under the post-World War II system of Four-Powers controls that gave Moscow a position of “co-hegemony” over Germany/Europe, plus a right to veto in the U.N. Security Council. Thus, for Moscow’s viewpoints, NATO expansion represents an act of “hegemony”, if not “imperialism”, even if Eastern European states had joined NATO and the E.U. “voluntarily” without any coercion under conditions of U.S.-NATO-E.U. primacy (given elements of power-sharing and consensus-building within NATO and E.U., despite U.S. preponderance).<sup>22</sup>

Much as Imperial Germany had been alienated by British efforts to reach out to Russia in 1894, the Russian Federation was initially alienated in the 1999 war “over” Kosovo by the U.S.-NATO intervention without a clear U.N. mandate against a Russian ally, Serbia, combined with the fact that three ex-Soviet Satellites Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland had also joined NATO at same time. The U.S.-led NATO war in Kosovo, plus NATO’s three post-Cold War Enlargements to the East, along with Russia’s ongoing war in Chechnya (itself seen as backed by U.S. allies among Arab Gulf states), were the primary external factors leading Russian President Boris Yel’tsin to step-down and Vladimir Putin to unexpectedly rise to power.

Concurrently, Russia (with its CSTO) and China (with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization), which could potentially align with other states, such as Iran and India, and socio-political movements overseas, appear to be in the process of forging an alliance against U.S., European, and Japanese “co-hegemony.” These states could potentially align with other states and socio-political movements overseas in the near future. Already since 2014, Moscow is forging a tighter alliance with Iran in Syria.

## Section XII.

While it may be comforting to think that U.S. hegemony is «here to stay»,<sup>23</sup> America’s relatively superior position in most military, economic and cultural domains will not necessarily prevent wider regional wars in areas that are largely outside U.S. spheres of influence and security, nor will American hegemonic preponderance necessarily prevent the U.S. from stumbling into a significant conflicts with revanchist regional states or even against a counter-alliance of major powers. It should be remembered that Athenian «hegemony» as first depicted by Thucydides did not prevent war with Sparta. Nor did British hegemony prevent the 1799-1815 French Revolution/Napoleonic Wars (after Great Britain had checked French efforts to achieve global hegemony in the Seven Years/French & Indians War), nor did British overseas hegemony prevent either World War I or World War II.

---

<sup>22</sup> The fact that the U.S. does not «dominate» NATO members and seeks consensus through primacy can be seen in the opposition by NATO members France and Germany, among others, to the Second Gulf War. And NATO was not imposed on its membership: the formation of NATO was initially proposed by Great Britain and Canada *but in conditions of American dominance and the need to jointly occupy Germany in a form of power sharing (along with the Soviet Union as well)*. At the same time, however, the reality of U.S. hegemony can be seen in the fact that the U.S. could largely circumvent the NATO military apparatus to intervene militarily in Iraq with only limited Allied supports, even if Germany and France opposed that intervention. The question remains as to whether all NATO members will necessarily perceive a future threat or action against a NATO member as necessarily an Article V contingency. For its part, Moscow continues to see NATO as seeking hegemony, if not dominance, as NATO expands into the Russian-defined «near-abroad». Moscow will still seek out the weak links in NATO’s chain and will try to find its Achilles heel—until, and if, NATO and Russia can eventually reach mutually agreed accords based on a relationship of parity and mutual trust.

<sup>23</sup> Salvatore Babones, “American Hegemony is Here to Stay” in *National Interest* (11 June 2015), see <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/american-hegemony-here-stay-13089?page=5>

What is needed in the effort to prevent an even wider and more intensive conflict is a major U.S., European and Japanese diplomatic offensive toward both Russia and China that seeks to establish new confidence building measures and systems of security in Europe in resolving the conflict over eastern Ukraine through the Minsk II accords while seeking a new joint understanding on Crimea, possibly as an «internationalized» free-trade zone, but still under Russian sovereignty. Another option to consider is a mutual U.S.-European-Russian recognition of a more decentralized and neutral Ukraine, while the European Union needs to consider joint E.U.-Ukrainian-Russian political economic accords.<sup>24</sup> In the Indo-Pacific, one possibility to quell tensions is to implement joint development projects and systems of joint sovereignty between China, Japan and other regional powers over islands and resources in dispute. In the wider Middle East, it appears absolutely crucial find a common approach through the formation of a Contact Group to the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Syria that seeks to put an end to proxy warfare and to bring Iran and a highly instable Saudi Arabia into closer political cooperation while likewise trying, as much as possible, to quell Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in which Palestinians appear to be entering into a third *intifada*.<sup>25</sup>

Without a serious and concerted diplomatic engagement on all three fronts, the chances of a wider regional conflicts, if not new forms of hybrid warfare between the regional and major Powers, will to continue to augment. This irenic approach is not intended to engage in a policy of appeasement in its Twentieth Century meaning of «capitulation», but in its Nineteenth Century sense of a policy of «mutual compromises». At the same time, both losses and gains can be expected due to the fact that major and regional powers, as well as local actors which could attempt to resist accords reached by rival hegemonies, will continue to engage in tough power-based bargaining and strategic leveraging—despite the risks and dangers of escalating warfare.

One of the ironies of the pre-World War I era, which is still relevant today, is that while Great Britain was not able to make peace with Imperial Germany, it was nevertheless able to forge an uneasy peace with Tsarist Russia over Tibet, Afghanistan, Baluchistan, as well as a condominium over Iran in the formation of the 1907 Anglo-Russian *entente*, which was assisted, in part, by the French at the time, who in turn had just resolved their own complex disputes with Great Britain in the period 1902-04. In the contemporary situation, perhaps the U.S. and Europeans could examine British *entente* policy toward Russia before World War I, even if the geo-strategic context and constellation of major and regional powers is not exactly the same as today given the fact that Moscow remains a potential geostrategic nuclear challenger to the U.S. and Europe and as the E.U.-NATO-Russian rivalry over Ukraine was not a key issue in the period before World War I or even during the interwar period at least after the Soviet Union had taken control of the region. The point is that the British proved that an accord with the Russian bear was possible...

At the same time, in reaching out for an accord with Moscow, the U.S., Europe and Japan must not concurrently alienate China. And it is still uncertain what role a rising India could play given Indo-Chinese-Pakistani rivalries over Kashmir and elsewhere in the region,

---

<sup>24</sup> Nicolai Petro, “Bringing Ukraine Back into Focus: How to End the New Cold War and Provide Effective Political Assistance to Ukraine” in *Carnegie Council* (19 August 2015), see [https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/articles\\_papers\\_reports/742](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/articles_papers_reports/742) See also Hall Gardner, “The Reset Was Never Reset” in *NATO Watch*, 49 (3 April 2014), in [http://www.natowatch.org/sites/default/files/briefing\\_-\\_paper\\_no\\_49\\_-\\_ukraine\\_russia\\_crimea.pdf](http://www.natowatch.org/sites/default/files/briefing_-_paper_no_49_-_ukraine_russia_crimea.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Hall Gardner, *Crimea, Global Rivalry and the Vengeance of History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Hall Gardner, *NATO Expansion and U.S. Strategy in Asia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

plus closer defence ties with the US and Japan, on the one hand, and the possibility of Indian membership in the Chinese-led Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and possible partnership in the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union, on the other. Conflict in the Indo-Pacific could thus be sparked over a number of issues, including disputes over Taiwan, islands in the South and East China seas, plus a disintegrating North Korea and divided Korean peninsula—unless Washington and Pyongyang can eventually come to terms over North Korea’s nuclear program, much as the U.S. has sought to engage Iran over its nuclear enrichment program.

The key dilemma from a comparative historical standpoint is that neither the pre-World War I era nor the pre-World War II era, provides any concrete advice as to how to manage the rise of new Powers, China and India. Neither does the pre-World War I era nor pre-World War II era, offer much advice as how to deal with the ongoing and horrific conflicts now taking place in the “wider Middle East”—which are perhaps most reminiscent of the Balkan conflicts before World War I.

In the few years before the so-called Great War, from 1912 to June 1914, the key Great Powers did attempt to develop a concerted policy toward the horrific conflicts in the Balkans, and it even appeared that Great Britain, France and Germany were on the verge of reaching some common accords over African colonies and the Berlin-to-Baghdad railway. Hawkish French President Raymond Poincaré had even dined in the German embassy in Paris in January 1914. And it looked like France and the Ottoman-Turkish Empire had begun to settle the Syrian question, for example. And as late as 27 June 1914, the British and German fleets paraded side-by-side at the Kiel Naval Review. That was the day before Archduke Franz-Ferdinand of Habsburg, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary was assassinated, precipitating the 1914 July Crisis when the European Great Powers could not reach any accord over the acrimonious regional clash between Austria-Hungary and Serbia.

The belated steps taken toward peace in the first six months of 1914 had failed to bring Great Britain, France and Germany into greater cooperation before the outbreak of the unexpected Armageddon in August. Not a promising omen for the post-Obama U.S. administration of maverick Republican President Donald Trump—particularly given Trump’s already highly criticised promises to forge a rapprochement with Vladimir Putin’s Russia.

## AUTHOR

**Hall Gardner, Ph.D.**, is Professor and Chair of the Department of International & Comparative Politics at the American University of Paris, France. He holds a Ph.D. (1987) in International Studies-Global Theory & History from Johns Hopkins University-SAIS in Washington D.C. This article is based primarily on his most recent books: *Crimea, Global Rivalry and the Vengeance of History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); *The Failure to Prevent World War I: the Unexpected Armageddon* (New York: Ashgate, 2015); *NATO Expansion and U.S. Strategy in Asia* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2013); *Ashgate Research Companion to War* (New York: Ashgate, 2012); and *Averting Global War* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010). He participated in Track II diplomacy with the East-West Institute after the 2008 Georgia-Russia War and with the Geneva Center for Security Policy in 2015 on Indo-Pacific disputes. He is an Advisory Board member of the: New Policy Forum (Mikhail Gorbachëv), Cicero Foundation (Paris/Maastricht); the French journal, *Géostratégiques* (Paris), the *Online Bibliography* of Oxford University Press, and World Association of International Studies.