



SMALL WARS JOURNAL

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The Atlantic Alliance and the Sino-Islamic Nexus: From the Hindu Kush to the Shores of Tripoli

by Tony Corn

Of all the theses and sub-theses put forward by Samuel Huntington in his seminal article on *The Clash of Civilizations* (1993), none turned out to be more controversial than his assertion concerning the emergence of a Sino-Islamic nexus based on an “arms-for-oil” *quid pro quo*, and composed of three core states: China, Pakistan and Iran. Yet, in less than two decades, the Sino-Islamic nexus has both broadened and deepened well beyond anything imagined by Huntington.

The “Chinafrica” phenomenon is but the most recent development. Following the adoption of a new Africa policy in 2006, China has managed in just a few years to overtake both the former colonial powers (Britain and France) and the United States to become Africa’s main trading partner.

In 2011, for the first time in history, a Chinese warship entered the Mediterranean - ostensibly to help evacuate 36,000 nationals from Libya. In the not-too-distant future, China may well seek to secure a naval base in Tripoli for the very same reasons that led France in 2009 to secure a naval base in Abu Dhabi. As of this writing, France and Britain are the only two European countries which appear to have realized a) that Beijing’s determination to protect its nationals and promote its interests will logically lead China to seek a permanent military presence “West of Suez,” and b) that Libya, the country with the largest oil reserves in Africa, happens to be run by a dictator who expressed support for a Sino-Islamic nexus as early as 1994.¹

With most of Europe asleep at the wheel, NATO’s performance in Libya has been so far rather uneven, prompting outgoing Defense Secretary Robert Gates to warn that the Atlantic Alliance is facing a “dim, if not dismal” future. The danger is that this kind of untimely pronouncement could quickly become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

¹ As Samuel Huntington put it in 1996: “The most passionate call for such cooperation came from from Mu’ammur al-Qadhafy, who in March 1994 declared: “The new world order means that Jews and Christians control Muslims and that if they can, they will after that dominate Confucianism and other religions in India, China, and Japan...Now we hope to see a confrontation between China that heads the Confucianist camp and America that heads the Christian crusader camp... We are standing with Confucianism, and by allying ourselves with it and fighting alongside it in one international front, we will eliminate our mutual opponent. So we, as Muslims, will support China in its struggle against our mutual enemy.” *The Clash of Civilizations*, Simon & Schuster, 1996, pp. 239-240). That Qadhafy would offer China a naval base is all the more probable that, in November 2008, he did not hesitate to offer a naval base in Benghazi to Russia (who, for now, appears more interested in modernizing its Tartus base in Syria).

At this particular juncture, U.S. policy-makers ought to realize that what Britain and France need most from America is not military support so much as moral support. Just like President Bush, after the 1991 Gulf War, was able to say, “By God, we’ve kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all,” at the end of the Libyan affair, Britain and France must be in a position to say: “By God, we’ve kicked the Suez syndrome once and for all.”

Though it is too early to say how China will try to take advantage of the “Arab Spring” to extend its reach in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), it is not too early for Washington to launch a strategic communication campaign designed to heighten the situational awareness of the rest of Europe by providing a comprehensive “mapping” of the ever-expanding Sino-Islamic nexus, both functionally and geographically.

For contrary to what many Washington observers seem to believe, the main problem with Europeans these days is neither “military capability” nor “political will” as such but, *first and foremost*, “geostrategic illiteracy.”

Fearful that Asia might experience by 2014 the kind of cataclysm that Europe went through in 1914, the initial reaction of most European allies to America’s idea of a Global NATO (first put forward in 2006) was a resounding “no entangling alliance.” Yet, if the past five years have shown anything, it is that, irrespective of whether the Western Alliance decides to “move East” or not, an energy-hungry East is increasingly determined to “move West.”²

The idea, widespread in most European capitals, that Europe could somehow step outside History and just watch from the sidelines as the “Pacific Century” unfolds, is a dangerous illusion. Rather than indulge in half-baked criticisms of NATO’s performance in Afghanistan, the Pentagon ought to highlight instead this fundamental fact of life: Europe may not be *a priori* interested in a Global NATO, but Global China is increasingly interested in Europe’s own backyard.

The ‘Clash of Civilizations’ Revisited

Just like “location, location, location” is the mantra of real estate agents, “timing, timing, timing” is that of foreign policy analysts. While Samuel Huntington’s seminal “Clash of Civilizations” article (1993) generated more comments than any other *Foreign Affairs* article since George Kennan’s famous “Long Telegram” (1946), the timing of the publication was less than optimal for Western audiences to fully appreciate the argument put forward in the essay.

The most timely aspect of *The Clash* was no doubt its refutation of Francis Fukuyama’s *End of History* thesis (1989). By equating the triumph of Democracy over Communism with an Hegelianesque End of History, Fukuyama had reduced the Hegelian concept of “struggle for recognition” to the mere fulfillment of *individual* self-worth within democratic societies. Without ever mentioning Hegel once, Huntington was in fact more authentically Hegelian by reminding us that the “real stuff” of History is the struggle for recognition at the *collective*, not at the

² Geoffrey Kemp, *The East Moves West: India, China, and Asia’s Growing Presence in the Middle East*, Brookings: Washington DC, 2010; Jon B. Alterman, *The Vital Triangle: China, the United States, and the Middle East*, CSIS, 2008.

individual, level (i.e. *among* polities, not *within* polities). Far from being over, Huntington argued, History was on the move again.

Though Huntington clearly acknowledged that “nation states remain the principal actors in world affairs,” the truly controversial part of *The Clash* was his proposition that, in the twenty-first century, the most important “grouping of states” would no longer be the three blocs (i.e. the First, Second, and Third Worlds) of the Cold War era, but the three civilizations represented by China, Islam, and the West.

While other civilizations are today mere civilizations-*form* (“swing civilizations”), Huntington argued in essence, China, Islam, and the West are, for the foreseeable future, the only three civilizations-*force*. And since China and Islam are re-emerging on the world stage after a two-century long eclipse, while the West is experiencing relative decline, one can expect a deepening and broadening of the emerging “Confucian-Islamic Connection” based above all on a “oil-for-arms” *quid pro quo*:

The cooperation among the three countries [China, Pakistan, and Iran] has included regular exchanges among political, military, and bureaucratic officials and joint efforts in a variety of civil and military areas, including defense production, in addition to the weapons transfers from China to the other states...Are these three states likely to become the core of a broader grouping involving other Muslim and Asian countries?...China’s increasing needs for oil are likely to impel it to expand its relations with Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, as well as Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan.³

In retrospect, it is clear that the academic *levee en masse* that greeted Huntington’s “untimely meditations” (in the Nietzschean sense) had nothing to do with the reality of global politics, and everything to do with the state of U.S. academic politics. To make a long story short:

By the 1990s, the very concept of Civilization had become a “contested notion” in the field of Anthropology and, by extension, of all regional Area Studies. A fear of being accused of “orientalism,” combined with an infatuation with “thick description,” had led academic practitioners to eschew macro-level theory-building altogether in favor of “ethnographism” - a cross between creative writing and political activism. There was no longer any room in “post-modern” Anthropology for a concept like Civilization.

In the field of International Relations (IR), where, on the contrary, “theory-building for theory-building’s sake” had reigned supreme for the previous two decades, the tyranny of “Neorealism” had led insensibly to a reification of the concept of Polarity and to an anthropomorphization of the State. The idea that the concept of Civilization could be raised to the level of a “paradigm” (as Huntington the provocateur had presented it) was sheer anathema to the IR theory-builders, who subsequently went out of their way to neatly separate the study of “Regions” from that of “Religions,” lest they come face-to-face with something resembling – *horresco referens* - a “Civilization.”

³ Samuel Huntington, op. cit, pp.239-240.

Last but not least, in the field of History, where the concept of Civilization still enjoyed widespread currency, the 1990s happened to be a time when academic historians were trying to create a politically correct “Global History” in which inter-civilizational *cooperation* was systematically emphasized and inter-civilizational *confrontation* systematically downplayed. In this sanitized version of World History, there was by definition no room for “a *clash* of civilizations.”

But the facts are stubborn. For anyone with a modicum of knowledge of Middle East history (and not totally devoid of common sense), there was nothing a priori controversial in Huntington’s idea that a rising China would try to enlist Islam as a force multiplier. After all, it is a well-documented (if largely forgotten in the West) historical fact that just about every rising power in the 20th century has tried, with varying degrees of success, to enlist Islam as a weapon against peer competitors. In a nutshell:

Imperial Germany: Kaiser Wilhelm’s promise, during his famous visit to Constantinople in 1898, to be the protector of the “three hundred million Muhammedans that are scattered through the world” marked the beginning of a sustained propaganda offensive that saw Germany promote pan-Islam through a network of agents in Turkey, Iran, Russia and India, in order to undermine the Triple Entente and win Muslim “hearts and minds” to the cause of the Central Powers.⁴

Imperial Japan: In the wake of its military victory over Russia in 1905, Japan’s newly-found prestige in the Muslim world even led the Young Turks to dream of turning the Ottoman empire into the “Japan of the Middle East.” As one historian puts it: “During the years 1900–1945...the vision of a “Muslim Japan” was so compelling to many Muslims in Asia and beyond...that it justified cooperation with Japanese intelligence overseas ... In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the relationship transformed into a major Japanese military strategy as the Japanese government began to implement its Islamic policy by mobilizing Muslim forces against the United Kingdom, Holland, China and Russia in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East.”⁵

Fascist Italy: In order to realize his dream of re-creating the Roman empire, Benito Mussolini did not hesitate to follow the Kaiser’s template and proclaim himself the “protector of Islam,” especially in Libya, an Italian colony since 1911. On the soft power front, Mussolini’s propaganda offensive in North Africa and the Middle East was so successful that the Fascist ideology ended up permeating the ideologies of just about every political force in the Arab world, from the religious Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt to the secular Baath parties in Syria and Iraq.⁶ On the hard power front, during the invasion of Abyssinia in 1935, a significant proportion

⁴ See Jacob M. Landau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam: Ideology and Organization*, Oxford University Press, 1994; Donald M. McKale, *War by Revolution: Germany and Great Britain in the Middle East in the Era of World War I*, Kent State University Press, 1998; Tilman Ludke, *Jihad Made in Germany: Ottoman and German Propaganda and Intelligence Operations in the First World War*, Lit Verlag, 2006; Sean McMeekin, *The Berlin-Baghdad Express: The Ottoman Empire and Germany’s Bid for World Power*, Harvard University Press, 2010.

⁵ Selcuk Esenbel, “Japan’s Global claim to Asia and the World of Islam: Transnational Nationalism and World Power, 1900–1945,” *The American Historical Review*, 109, 4, October 2004, www.historycooperative.org/journals/ahr/109.4/esenbel.html. See also Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought*, Columbia University Press, 2007.

⁶ Manuela Williams, *Mussolini’s Propaganda Abroad: Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935–1940*, Routledge, 2006.

of the “Italian” forces actually consisted of Muslim volunteers from Libya, Eritrea, and Somaliland - all enlisted by the Duce to fight the “infidel” Christian Ethiopians.

Nazi Germany: Along with Mussolini, Hitler can be regarded as one of the founding fathers of “Islamofascism.” In recent years, there has been an abundant literature documenting how, under Hitler, Nazi Germany courted the Muslim world, and how the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem (the most popular political figure in the Arab world at the time, and the role model of one Yasser Arafat in particular) raised Muslim volunteers for the Waffen SS.⁷

Needless to say, throughout the Cold War, and especially after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the United States itself did not hesitate to enlist Islamism against Communism, with short-term results as positive as the long-term results were disastrous.

As Harvard historian Akira Iriye recently pointed out, the idea of a possible “clash of civilization” had already been anticipated by Admiral Mahan as early as 1897 – a full century before Huntington.⁸ What Mahan, who died in 1914, could not foresee, was that the advent of communism throughout much of the non-Western world would actually delay the re-emergence of Asia for two or three generations.

Be that as it may, since every rising power in the 20th century has tried to enlist Islam as a force multiplier, there is no reason to expect China to behave differently. Once a net exporter of oil, China became a net importer in 1993 (the year of the publication of Huntington’s article). Given the magnitude of its energy needs, a Sino-Islamic nexus is for China not one possible tactical option among many, but a strategic necessity. And so it is that China in recent years has not only developed “strategic partnerships” at the bilateral level, but also a multiplicity of Sino-Islamic fora at the multilateral level (Arab-Chinese Cooperation Forum, China-Gulf Cooperation Council Strategic Dialogue, etc.).

The State of the Sino-Islamic Nexus in 2011

As the National Intelligence Council’s *Global Trends 2025* report acknowledged in 2008: “The international system – as constructed following the Second World War – will be almost unrecognizable by 2025....In terms of size, speed, and directional flow, the transfer of global wealth and economic power now under way - roughly from West to East –is without precedent in modern history...”

While the reality of this epochal shift is no longer contested, what remains an open question is – to simplify – whether the Sino-Islamic nexus will be specifically directed *against* the West, or whether it is simply part of a broader scenario, known as “the Rest *without* the West,” in which the Rest simply chooses to organize its affairs by bypassing the West.⁹

⁷ Lukasz Hirsowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, Routledge, 1966; Robert Lewis Melka, *The Axis and the Arab Middle East: 1930-1945*, University of Minnesota Press, 1966; David Dahlin and John Rothman, *Icon of Evil: Hitler’s Mufti and the rise of Radical Islam*, Transaction, 2009; Matthias Kuntzel, *Jihad and Jew-Hatred: Islamism, Nazism, and the Roots of 9/11*, Telos Press, 2009; Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, Yale University Press, 2009.

⁸ Akira Iriye, “The Second Clash: Huntington, Mahan, and Civilizations,” *Harvard International Review*, May 6, 2006.

⁹ See Nazneen Barma, Ely Ratner, Steven Weber, “A World Without the West?,” *The National Interest*, 90, July-August 2007, findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2751/is_90/ai_n27325605/?tag=content:col1, and Nazneen Barma, Giacomo Chiozza, Ely Ratner and Steven Weber, “A World Without the West? Empirical Patterns and Theoretical Implications,” *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, vol 2, 2009, www.elyratner.com/Publications/A World Without the West%3F.pdf.

On this subject, the U.S. intelligence community itself – in its unclassified literature at least – appears to be undecided. As *Global Trends 2025*, which represents the collective wisdom of the U.S. intelligence community, puts it: “Some two-thirds of Mideast oil exports go to Asia, and some 70 percent of Asian imports are from the Middle East. This pattern is likely to intensify. Whether this nexus is primarily commercial – complementary investments and military sales – or acquires an increasingly political/strategic character could determine the character of the international system.”¹⁰

While this is not the place for a comprehensive (geographic and functional) “mapping” of the Sino-Islamic nexus, three aspects are nonetheless worth pointing out in the context of this essay:

- At the global level, the most significant evolution has been the emergence of an anti-Western bloc formed by China and the 57 members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). As Huntington pointed out, it all started in 1989, when China was able to mobilize OIC support to defeat Western-sponsored resolutions expressing condemning Beijing’s Tien An Men repression; that same year, Iran was able get China’s to reciprocate, following Ayatollah Khomeiny’s infamous fatwa against Salman Rushdie. Today, whatever the tensions *within* the Islamic bloc itself on other issues, it is clear that this Sino-Islamic nexus is intent on gradually rolling back *some* parts of the Western-inspired legal and financial order established under the aegis of the United Nations at the end of World War II.¹¹
- At the regional level, the most far-reaching initiative was the creation in 2001 of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a China-led organization including four energy-rich Central Asian Muslim republics as members, and Iran and Pakistan as observers. Ostensibly created to combat “terrorism, separatism, and extremism,” the SCO has been increasingly behaving like a rival of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) created in 1949. Though some Western observers still like to think of the SCO as an “axis of convenience,” the fact is that for its 10th anniversary summit in 2011, the SCO has chosen to strengthen its relations with the Russia-led CSTO and is reportedly giving serious consideration to extending membership to Pakistan and India.
- At the national level, the most noteworthy developments in the past three years have been the changing status of two “pivotal states” associated with the West since the beginning of the Cold War:

¹⁰ National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*, Washington DC, November 2008, p.83, www.dni.gov/nic/PDF_2025/2025_Global_Trends_Final_Report.pdf. See also the scenario outlined in the 2009 *Quadrennial Intelligence Community Review*, www.fas.org/irp/dni/qicr.pdf.

¹¹ In particular in putting an end to the status of the dollar as the world’s reserve currency established in 1944 by the UN Monetary and Financial Conference (aka “Bretton Woods”) which also created the IMF, the World Bank, and the GATT/WTO. See Tony Corn, “The Clash of the Caliphates: Understanding the Real War of Ideas,” *Small Wars Journal*, March 2011, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/715-corn.pdf>.

- Saudi Arabia overtook Iran as China's main supplier of oil in 2008. In 2011, the Saudis' growing distrust of America's handling of the ongoing Arab Spring has led Riyadh to try to re-build a China-Pakistan-Saudi Arabia axis. In the words of former CIA analyst Bruce Riedel, the Saudis are "looking east for help to old allies in Pakistan and China. Prince Bandar, former ambassador in Washington, reportedly visited Islamabad late last month to ask the Pakistanis for troops to help ensure internal stability in the kingdom and the Gulf States if needed. He invoked an understanding that dates back to the 1980s when then-Pakistani dictator Zia ul Huq provided over 10,000 Pakistani troops to protect the country after the Iranian revolution. Bandar also has been in Beijing to promote more trade and to ensure the Chinese communist dictators stand with their Saudi friends. Bandar was the deal-maker in the Saudi-Chinese intermediate range missile sale in the 1980s that provided Riyadh with its now aging missile force. He reportedly keeps a residence in China."¹²
- Turkey's re-orientation away from the West, which began in earnest in 2002 with the election of the Islamist AK Party, has continued unabated with the election of a Turkish national at the head of the OIC in 2005, and the election of the Turkish president himself at the head of the all-Muslim Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) five years later. A member of NATO since 1952 and one of the two pillars of the EU-Turkey Customs Union since 1995, Turkey's interest is nonetheless shifting toward the ECO, the OIC and the SCO. Ankara's attempts to create a China-Pakistan-Turkey axis culminated in 2010 in the establishment of a "strategic partnership" between Turkey and China.¹³

As for Afghanistan itself (which applied for observer status in the SCO in 2011), the most contradictory reports continue to circulate as to whether Karzai does intend to sign a post-2014 Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the U.S. or, on the contrary, is determined to bring Afghanistan in the orbit of China, Iran and Pakistan.¹⁴

"Global China" – Coming to a Theater near EU

Then, there is the "Chinafrica Connection," which the inward-looking European elites have yet to fully notice. Following the adoption of a new Africa policy in 2006, China has managed to overtake both the former colonial powers (Britain and France) and the United States to become Africa's main trading partner. Between 1995 and 2010, China's trade with Africa increased from \$6 billion to \$130 billion. While oil represents sixty percent of Chinese imports and is expected to grow in the coming years, the main Chinese export for now would appear to

¹² Bruce Riedel, "Saudi Arabia on the brink," *The National Interest*, April 6, 2011. <http://nationalinterest.org/print/commentary/saudi-arabia-the-brink-5120>.

¹³ See Tony Corn, "The Real Plan B in AfPak: Keeping China Out, Bringing India In, Calming Turkey down," *Small Wars Journal*, February 2011, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2011/02/the-real-plan-b-in-afpak/>

¹⁴ See for instance Max Boot, "How to handle an infuriating Hamid Karzai," *Wall Street Journal*, June 22, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304070104576397983229418542.html>,

and Kathy Gannon, "Karzai surrounding himself with narrow circle of advisers urging shift from US to Iran," *Washington Post*, June 23, 2011, www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia-pacific/karzai-surrounding-himself-with-narrow-circle-of-advisers-urging-a-shift-from-us-to-iran/2011/06/23/AGwqsphH_print.html.

be – people, with 800,000 Chinese nationals involved in aid, trade or investment on the African continent.

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As of this writing, Britain and France are the only two European countries which appear to have realized a) that Beijing's determination to protect its nationals and promote its interests will logically lead China to seek a permanent military presence "West of Suez," and b) that Libya, the country with the largest oil reserves in Africa, happens to be run by a dictator who expressed support for a Sino-Islamic nexus as early as 1994.

This is not to say that the current Libyan intervention is mostly about China and oil. For better and for worse, it isn't. For France and Britain, who have taken the lead, it is mostly about self-interested humanitarian assistance: Eastern Libya has been the main platform for illegal immigration from the African continent in the past two decades, and the last thing that Europe needs at this point is the kind of massive immigration that would inevitably follow a Qadhafi victory. For the U.S. Administration, who has wisely opted to be in a support position, Eastern Libya is first and foremost the one region of the Arab world that has sent the greatest number of jihadists to Iraq in the recent past, and where al-Qaeda would be tempted to relocate in the near future.

As was to be expected, the sinuous evolution of the NATO intervention in Libya has drawn criticism from armchair strategists who equate "thinking strategically" with reciting the Clausewitzian catechism of the war colleges. But as the current NATO SACEUR, U.S. Admiral Stavridis, is fond of saying, security in the 21st century is not an on/off switch between war and peace, it is a *rheostat*. More than ever, War and Peace are - as they say in academe - "social constructions."

In that respect, Pentagon lawyers, who apparently have yet to realize that the 1973 War Powers Resolution as currently worded is simply obsolete in the age of "persistent conflicts" and "small wars" ought to talk more often with Pentagon strategic thinkers about the "changing character of war." This is all the more urgent that the greatest challenges facing NATO in general and the U.S. in particular are neither a Clausewitzian war nor the kind of large-scale *counterinsurgency* illustrated by Afghanistan,¹⁵ but Cyber-warfare and the kind of *crisis management* currently conducted in Libya.

Though the June 27 arrest warrant against Qadhafi by the International Criminal Court has made it *de jure* possible to re-define the end-state from "humanitarian assistance" to "regime change," such a course correction might require *de facto* a gradual implementation, if only because the Libyan National Transitional Council appears to be, for now at least, a disparate coalition in which genuine democrats constitute a minority. In short, if the NATO campaign appears to "drag on," it is not simply due to the half-hearted participation of too many allies, or

¹⁵ As Secretary Gates himself put it in a speech to West Point cadets in February 2011: "In my opinion, any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should 'have his head examined,' as General MacArthur so delicately put it," (Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, West Point, February 25, 2011, www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1539).

to the extreme caution with regard to civilian casualties, but to the fact that NATO needs time to plan for “Phase IV” (post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction).

Washington pundits who mistakenly equate ‘protraction’ with ‘irresolution’ would do well to remember that, when America tried in Iraq to combine “regime change” with *blitzkrieg*, the result was “catastrophic success.” How about trying “successful chaos” in Libya for a change? For NATO in general, as for the Obama Administration in particular, the main problem so far is not the strategy as such, which is in fact rather sound, but a less than optimal performance in terms of strategic communication.¹⁶

“Fog and Friction” within the Western Camp

The deepening and broadening of the Sino-Islamic nexus in the past two decades has so far not led the Western Alliance to close ranks. If anything, “fog and friction” within the Western camp are on the increase - paradoxically because, on both sides of the Atlantic, the need to focus on “nation-building at home” has now taken precedence over doing nation-building abroad.

Oblivious of Churchill’s warnings that “there is only one thing worse than fighting with allies, and that is fighting without them,” American and European officials have yet to fully realize that, in the 21st century, *coalition warfare is going to be the norm rather than the exception*. Public criticism of Allies should therefore be kept to a strict minimum, and even deliberate “calculated gaffes” should take the form of *laser-guided* bombing rather than indiscriminate *carpet-bombing*.

Thus, in January 2008, Secretary Gates would have been perfectly justified to blast Europeans in general, and Germans in particular, for their abysmal performance when it comes to Afghan police training. Even German General Ammon at the time publicly admitted that, “at that rate, it would take 82 years to have a properly trained police force.”

Instead, the Secretary’s spinmeisters contributed to create a diplomatic row by emphasizing that European soldiers “do not know how to do counterinsurgency operations” – a factually correct, yet somewhat disingenuous, claim for anyone in the know. Europeans follow NATO doctrine, which follows U.S. doctrine and, as it happens, there was no U.S. doctrine on counterinsurgency (COIN) until December 2006. Given the fact that it takes on average two years for U.S. doctrine to be translated into NATO-wide training, there is nothing surprising if Europeans were not ready for COIN prime time by January 2008.¹⁷

In the Washington bubble, where last week’s events are already ancient history, it is too often forgotten that when European allies unanimously invoked Article 5 of the Alliance the day after 9/11, they were told unceremoniously “don’t call us, we’ll call you.” At the Prague NATO summit a year later, Europeans were then told in no uncertain terms to get ready for high-tech network-centric warfare (not counterinsurgency). When NATO was called upon to intervene in

¹⁶ Steven Metz, “Inside the Intervention,” *The New Republic*, April 1, 2011, www.tnr.com/article/world/86148/obama-libya-qaddafi-al-qaeda-nato.

¹⁷ That same month, the strategic consequences of President Karzai’s irrational decision to veto the appointment of the experienced Paddy Ashdown as the UN coordinator for the disparate international reconstruction effort were arguably of far greater import than the performance of NATO troops at the tactical level – yet, Washington chose to blast NATO allies rather than the Afghan president.

Afghanistan in August 2006, the mission was initially framed in terms of peace support operations (PSO), not counterinsurgency (COIN).

It is only after December 2006 (when Gates succeeded Rumsfeld) that the mission suddenly morphed from PSO to COIN – an activity for which, as mentioned earlier, NATO had never trained. Not to make too fine a point: In the grand scheme of things, whatever NATO’s shortcomings between 2006 and 2011, they pale in comparison to both Washington’s fateful decision to drop the Afghan ball between 2001 and 2006, and to the Afghan government’s colossal incompetence throughout the decade.

In another instance of megaphone diplomacy in Brussels June 2011, a visibly exhausted Robert Gates ended up mixing legitimate concerns (“today, just five of 28 allies – the U.S., U.K., France, Greece, along with Albania – exceed the agreed 2% of GDP spending on defense”) with more outlandish claims: “For most of the Cold War U.S. governments could justify defense investments and costly forward bases that made up roughly 50 percent of all NATO military spending. But some two decades after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the U.S. share of NATO defense spending has now risen to more than 75 percent.”¹⁸

A Cold War veteran with a genuine sentimental attachment to the Alliance, Gates no doubt intended to warn Europeans that the new generation of U.S. policy-makers would be more likely to adopt a lean, mean, bean-counting approach to the perennial question of “burden-sharing.”

Yet, what is too often overlooked is the fact that, by deliberately trading a *threat-based* approach for a *capabilities-based* approach to military planning and budgeting in the post-Cold War era, the “Indispensable Nation” has *chosen* of its own free will to spend on defense almost as much (43 percent) as the rest of the world combined. That does not mean that the whole U.S. defense budget is earmarked for NATO-related activities, nor does it mean that the EU has somehow a moral obligation to match a U.S. budget which is now more than six times the size of its peer-competitor China.¹⁹

As it now stands, non-US NATO Allies spend on defense roughly 300 billion dollars annually, i.e. - to use a militarily meaningful yardstick - nearly *twice as much as China and Russia combined*. If one chooses to argue that NATO nonetheless faces “the very real possibility of collective military irrelevance,” then it logically follows that Russia and China are even more “irrelevant.”

Not only does rhetorical overkill generate more heat than light, but it contributes to mask the real problem at the alliance-wide level: namely, that by trying to do both *collective defense*,

¹⁸ Robert Gates, “The Future of NATO,” Security and Defense Agenda, Brussels, June 10, 2011, www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1581. Needless to say, seasoned EU diplomats in Washington could not fail to notice that the Defense Secretary’s speech happened to coincide with the release of an embarrassing report showing that Pentagon officials cannot account for 6.6 billion dollars of U.S. taxpayers’ money sent to Iraq (the equivalent of the combined defense budgets of NATO members Romania, Hungary, Croatia, and Slovakia).

¹⁹ As he himself subsequently admitted in a revealing interview, Gates belongs to a generation of Americans who believes that the iron law of imperial overstretch somehow does not apply to “informal” empires: “I’ve spent my entire adult life with the United States as a superpower, and one that had no compunction about spending what it took to sustain that position. . . It didn’t have to look over its shoulder because our economy was so strong. This is a different time. . . To tell you the truth, that’s one of the many reasons it’s time for me to retire, because frankly I can’t imagine being part of a nation, part of a government . . . that’s being forced to dramatically scale back our engagement with the rest of the world.” John Barry and Tara McKelvey, “The Defense Rest,” *Newsweek*, June 19, 2011, www.newsweek.com/2011/06/19/the-defense-rests.html#.

*crisis management, and cooperative security,*²⁰ post-Cold War NATO has developed a schizophrenic personality.

One minute, NATO is expected to increase its defense budget in view of putative threats emanating from Russia and China; the next minute, NATO is tasked with developing cooperative partnerships with the same Russia and China. The old burden-sharing issue took the form of the classic “free-riding” problem familiar to economists. The new burden-sharing issue is due to the fact that we live in “interesting times” when, for instance, the same four Central Asian republics that are official NATO Partners are *also* full-fledged members of the rival SCO. Simply put: *how do you do burden-sharing in the age of “asymmetric threats” and “hedging strategies”?*

In an indirect reply to Gates, Council on Foreign Relations chairman Richard Haas, the voice of the U.S. foreign policy establishment, pointed out that “no amount of harping on what European governments are failing to do will push them toward what some in Washington want them to do,” and that the problem is in fact systemic:

Alliances, whether NATO during the Cold War or the U.S.-South Korean partnership now, do best in settings that are highly inflexible and predictable, where foes and friends are easily identified, potential battlefields are obvious, and contingencies can be anticipated. Almost none of this is true in our current historical moment. Threats are many and diffuse. Relationships seem situational, increasingly dependent on evolving and unpredictable circumstances. Countries can be friends, foes or both, depending on the day of the week — just look at the United States and Pakistan.²¹

Mindful of the ongoing shift of the center of gravity of world politics from the Atlantic to the Pacific, Richard Haas rightly stressed the need to take the long view. Yet, his long-term vision suffers from a curious mix of unwarranted optimism and premature resignation. On the one hand, “other allies are likely to become more relevant partners in the regions that present the greatest potential challenges. In Asia, this might mean Australia, India, South Korea, Japan and Vietnam, especially if U.S.-China relations were to deteriorate; in the greater Middle East, it could again be India in addition to Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia and others.” On the other hand, “NATO as a whole will count for much less. Instead, the United States will need to maintain or build bilateral relations with those few countries in Europe willing and able to act in the world, including with military force.”

The troubles with this vision are many. For one thing, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, as mentioned earlier, are not exactly moving closer to America. In addition, convincing India (a nation with a 150 million strong Muslim street) to provide boots on the ground in the Greater Middle East may prove to be a more formidable challenge than getting Europeans to send troops in Afghanistan. Last but not least, since currently France spends more on defense than Japan, Italy more than either India, South Korea, or Australia, and the Czech Republic more than Vietnam, one could argue that America’s Pacific Allies, in whatever configuration, could face the “very real possibility of collective military irrelevance.” In these conditions, could it be that NATO, for all its flaws, is bound to remain the - *Indispensable Nation’s Indispensable Alliance?*

²⁰ See the new Strategic Concept adopted by NATO in 2010 at www.nato.int/lisbon2010/strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf.

²¹ Richard Haas, “Why Europe no longer matters,” Washington Post, June 18, 2001, www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-europe-no-longer-matters/2011/06/15/AG7eCCZH_print.html.

Contrary to what Haas suggests, it is at best premature to get reconciled with the idea that, from now on, “NATO” will be synonymous with just the US, the UK, and France.

Not that it would represent a dramatic sea change. As NATO *aficionados* know full well, NATO, since its creation in 1949, has always been a two-tiered alliance. On the one hand, a steering committee called the Standing Group, composed of the US, UK, and France (the three Western powers occupying Germany and, after 1960, the three nuclear powers within the Alliance). On the other hand, everybody else. Over time, the Standing Group came to include Germany in a new configuration known as “Key Allies.”²²

Today still, Britain and France account for 45 percent of the EU military budget (and more than two-thirds of EU military R&D budget) and, when it comes to power projection, the two countries have more in common with the US than with the rest of Europe. If one “laser-guided” criticism is nonetheless warranted, it should specifically target Germany, a key ally more interested lately in forging a “special relationship” with Russia over energy issues than in demonstrating solidarity with the US, the UK, and France over Libya (any reason why we still have 53,951 U.S. troops in Germany?).²³

Calls for abolishing NATO altogether are obviously ludicrous - unless one does not mind witnessing the emergence of a German-Russian condominium over Eurasia in the next decade (having recently decided to give up nuclear energy, Germany is going to be even more dependent on Russia’s oil and gas than ever). But it is at best premature, as Haas suggests, to downgrade Washington’s “level of ambition” regarding the scope and scale of European participation in NATO.

For the cost-benefit calculations of our allies significantly vary from one theater to the next. While Europeans have always viewed Afghanistan as, so to speak, “a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing,” Libya is closer to home, and Europeans have both fewer logistical problems to intervene, and greater political stakes in the outcome.

Since Brussels is so bad at public diplomacy, Washington policy-makers are unaware that the EU has conducted several military operations in Africa, the most recent being the 2009 EUFOR mission in Chad/CAR (next door to Libya) - an operation involving 3, 700 troops from ten European countries. Though unexpected, the Libyan mission could actually turn out to be a blessing in disguise for those determined to prove that Europe is more than “an economic giant, a political dwarf, a military pigmy.”

In the first ninety days, to be sure, the performance in Libya of NATO as a whole has been somewhat tentative, prompting the outgoing Gates to warn that the Atlantic Alliance is facing a “dim, if not dismal” future: “While every alliance member voted for the Libya mission, less than half have participated at all, and fewer than a third have been willing to participate in the strike mission... The mightiest military alliance in history is only 11 weeks into an operation

²² Due to the sensitivity of the subject, there is no detailed unclassified study of this informal quadripartite arrangement. For a brief overview, see David Yost, *NATO Transformed: The Alliance’s New Roles in International Security*, U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 1998, and Helga Haftendorn, “The Quad: Dynamics of Institutional Change,” in Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Imperfect Unions: Security Institutions over Time and Space*, Oxford University Press, 1999.

²³ On Germany’s estrangement from NATO, see Jorge Benitez, “Meet the New NATO,” Atlantic Council, April 26, 2011, http://www.acus.org/new_atlanticist/meet-new-nato.

against a poorly armed regime in a sparsely populated country – yet many allies are beginning to run short of munitions, requiring the U.S., once more, to make up the difference.”

Though this clumsy wording once again generated unhelpful comments,²⁴ the same Gates, two weeks later, did not hesitate to come to the defense of European allies against the threats of funding cuts by the U.S. Congress: “These allies, particularly the British and the French, and the Italians for that matter, have really been a big help to us in Afghanistan. They consider Libya a vital interest for them. Our alliance with them is a vital interest for us. So as they have helped us in Afghanistan, it seems to me that we are in a position of helping them with respect to Libya. And to cut off funding for the U.S. forces in that context I think would be a mistake.”²⁵

In truth, there is more at stake than a U.S. payback for Afghanistan. For Britain and France, whose last joint venture on a large scale was the Suez expedition in 1956, the operation in Libya has a crucial psychological dimension that has escaped even the most supportive American policy-makers. The truth is, the memory of Suez continues to haunt British and French policy-makers, today more than at any time in the past fifty years. The good news is that Hillary Rodham Clinton is no John Foster Dulles. The bad news is best captured by veteran CIA analyst Charles Cogan:

It happened in the same backyard: along the North African coast, from the Suez Canal to Tripoli. The contrast is arresting. In 1956, Britain and France had the temerity to think that they could overthrow Gamal Abdal Nasser’s Egypt, which then totaled nearly 40 million people and which had recently emerged from the status of a British quasi-protectorate. In 2011, Britain and France have so far been unable to knock over a tinpot dictator, Muammar Qaddafi, who rules over a country of some six million people. What else can one think of, except the decline of the West?²⁶

In order to regain the self-confidence they lost fifty years ago, what Britain and France really need from America at this point is not so much military support as moral support. Just like, in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf war, President Bush was able to say “By God, we’ve kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all,” in the aftermath of the Libyan affair, President Sarkozy and Prime-Minister Cameron must to be in a position to say: “By God, we’ve kicked the Suez syndrome once and for all.” That feeling alone would be synonymous with “victory.”

As for the rest of Europe, contrary to what many Washington observers seem to believe, the main problem these days is neither “military capability” nor “political will” as such but, *first and foremost*, “geostrategic illiteracy.”

Though it is too early to say how China will try to take advantage of the “Arab Spring” to extend its reach in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), it is not too early for Washington to launch a strategic communication campaign designed to heighten the situational awareness of its European allies by providing a comprehensive “mapping” of the ever-expanding Sino-Islamic

²⁴ Based on this characterization of the situation, one would never guess that a) European and Canadian forces have flown three-quarters of the 12,000 NATO sorties, b) the total costs of the Libyan operation for the U.S. itself (expected to reach one billion dollars by the end of 2011) is still peanuts compared to the ten billion dollars a month Washington currently spends on Afghanistan, and c) that the U.S. is actually selling, not giving away, the extra ammunition needed by allies, etc.

²⁵ Robert Gates, interview with PBS Jim Lehrer, June 23, www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics/jan-june11/gates_06-23.html.

²⁶ Charles Cogan, “Egypt 1956, Libya 2011: The Decline of the West,” Belfer Center, Harvard Kennedy School, May 31, 2011, <http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/power/2011/05/31/egypt-1956-libya-2011-the-decline-of-the-west/>.

nexus, both functionally and geographically – for only then will our European allies be able to fully see the merits of a “Global NATO.”

“Global NATO”: A European Idea

Ever since the so-called “re-launch” of EU integration in 1985, the current generation of EU leaders has been absorbed in a variety of mundane tasks (from the standardization of electric plugs to the implementation of a common currency) leaving little time for the contemplation of global challenges. As a result of 35 years of “multi-level governance” (i.e. multilateral horse-trading on steroids) in the Brussels fish-bowl, their diplomatic virtuosity over the most esoteric *functional* issues is at an all-time high, but their *geostrategic* literacy is also at an all-time low.

It is therefore no surprise if the initial reaction of most Europeans to America’s idea of a Global NATO, first put forward at the 2006 Riga summit, was a knee-jerk “no entangling alliance.”²⁷ Given the ongoing arms race in the Pacific, Europeans are fearful that Asia by 2014 might experience the kind of cataclysm that Europe went through in 1914 and, having “been there, done that” twice in the 20th century, they understandably would rather sit out a hypothetical World War III.

It is up to Uncle Sam to patiently enlighten EU elites about the hard realities of geo-strategy. And for starters, to remind Europeans that the idea of a Global NATO was initially a *European* idea.

For it is none other than General De Gaulle who, in a famous memorandum addressed to U.S. President Eisenhower and British Prime-Minister MacMillan in 1958, first raised the idea of a Global NATO: “The Atlantic Alliance was conceived and organized for an area of responsibility which no longer corresponds to political and strategic realities. The world being as it is, it is no longer possible to consider as adapted to its object an organization such as NATO limited to the security of the North Atlantic - as if what happens in the Middle East or Africa was of no immediate and direct interest to Europe, and as if the indivisible responsibilities of France did not extend to Africa, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific.”²⁸

De Gaulle went on to suggest that the three members of the Standing Group discuss “without delay” the possibility of creating of a “global political and strategic organization” which would include four regional commands: Arctic, Atlantic (Europe, North Africa, Middle East, Latin America), Indian Ocean (India, Madagascar, Sub-Saharan Africa), and the Pacific.

De Gaulle’s proposal was not without merits: at the time, America, Britain, and France were the three Western permanent members of the UN Security Council created in 1945, the

27 For the original formulation, see Ivo Daalder and James Goldgeier, “Global NATO,” *Foreign Affairs*, 85, 5, September/October 2006, www.brookings.edu/views/articles/daalder/2006sept_oct.pdf. See also Tony Corn, “The Revolution in Transatlantic Affairs: Perils and Promises of a Global NATO,” *Policy Review*, web special, August 2007, www.hoover.org/publications/policy-review/article/6032. For a more recent formulation of the Global NATO concept, see NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, “NATO in the 21st Century: Toward Global Connectivity,” Munich Security Conference, February 7, 2010, www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_61395.htm.

28 « Lettre et Memorandum du General De Gaulle au General Eisenhower, September 17, 1958, » in Charles de Gaulle, *Lettres, Notes et Carnets (juin 1958- decembre 1960)*, Paris : Plon, 1985, pp.82-84, www.geopolintel.fr/article123.html.

three members of the NATO Standing Group created in 1949, and the only three Atlantic members of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) created in 1954.²⁹

Washington and London chose to ignore De Gaulle's 1958 proposal and, having waited for an answer from *les Anglo-Saxons* for eight years, De Gaulle finally decided in 1966 to withdraw from NATO's integrated command. Interestingly enough, until the French withdrawal, the Gaullist project nonetheless found a sympathetic ear in America in the person of the European-born Henry Kissinger.

In 1961, Kissinger published an article based on De Gaulle's memorandum and promoting the idea of an "Atlantic Confederation." As his biographer puts it: "Kissinger wanted to take De Gaulle's Directorate proposal and expand it slightly in size and scope. He argued that an Executive Committee of the largest states – including West Germany (and perhaps Italy), as well as France, Great Britain and the United States – was a necessary federal structure for assuring the future dynamism of the transatlantic community."³⁰

In 1965 again, in what remains to date the finest study of the systemic problems confronting the Atlantic Alliance,³¹ Kissinger began rather gutsily by defending De Gaulle (whose popularity in the U.S. was at an all-time low) and proceeded to re-launch the idea of a Directorate with arguments that have not lost their relevance today:

Acquiescence in American strategic hegemony can have two meanings: It can either represent a sincere commitment to Atlantic partnership or disguise a neutralist wish to abdicate responsibility. Many who applaud our views may do so for reasons that will not prove very comforting in the long run... *Unless centralization of strategy is coupled with an effective sharing of political decisions – far beyond anything so far envisaged – the practical consequence could be a growing sense of irresponsibility among our Allies.* (p.22-23)

Irritation with De Gaulle's tactics does not change the fact that in his proposal of 1958 for a Directorate he pointed out what has remained the key problem of NATO: If the Atlantic Alliance is to retain any vitality, it requires a common foreign policy – or at least an agreed range of divergence... (p. 245.)

The time seems ripe to create a political body at the highest level for concerting the policies of the nations bordering the North Atlantic. Organizational devices should never be confused with substantive solutions. Nevertheless the following outline could serve as an illustration of a desirable direction if not a detailed blueprint for action. The political body could be constituted as an Executive Committee of the NATO Council. It could be composed of six members: five permanent members (the United States, Great Britain, France, the Federal Republic and Italy) and one rotating member representing the smaller nations.... The Allies would agree to accept a two-thirds vote as binding with escape clauses to be described... Within

²⁹ In addition to the US, the UK, and France, SEATO's members included Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan (including East Pakistan, now Bangladesh), the Philippines and Thailand, while South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were "partners" of sorts. SEATO was disbanded in 1977. See Leszek Buszynski, *SEATO: The Failure of an Alliance Strategy*, Singapore University Press, 1983.

³⁰ Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*, Harvard University Press, 2007, pp.171-172.

³¹ Henry Kissinger, *The Troubled Partnership: A Re-Appraisal of the Atlantic Alliance*, McGraw-Hill, 1965 (in particular chapter 8, "What Kind of Atlantic Partnership?")

this framework, the European countries could, if they wish, form a closer association.(pp.245-248)

In spite of Kissinger's eloquent plea, the idea of a NATO Directorate was never formally institutionalized, and France remained "outside" NATO until its 2008 re-integration. Or so the official version goes. In reality, beginning with the Nixon-Kissinger Administration, the U.S. and France gradually developed a "special relationship" as covert as the US-UK "special relationship" was overt, which was made public only in the final days of the Cold War. In a much-discussed article published in the summer of 1989, Princeton scholar Richard Ullman lifted the veil of one of the best kept secrets of the Cold War:

For a decade and a half the United States has provided substantial covert assistance to the nuclear forces of France. This assistance almost certainly has violated U.S. law. It also undermines myths that both governments have wished to propagate... With equal zeal they have kept from public view the far-reaching measures that France has taken in response to this American nuclear help... What makes the accomplishment extraordinary is that its full extent is unknown not only to the publics and to nearly all elected politicians of the various countries involved, but also to most senior - let alone junior - civilian political-military bureaucrats in their foreign and defense ministries... Washington has told London virtually nothing about its nuclear dealings with Paris... Today there is no longer any reason not to put the U.S. nuclear weapons relationship with France on exactly the same footing as the one with Britain...³²

This is not the place for a comprehensive review of the relations between the US, the UK, and France during the Cold War (much of which remains classified to this day anyway). Suffice it to say that the absence of a formal Directorate within NATO never meant that there was no informal Directorate, whether political or military.

Interestingly enough, the idea of an Atlantic Confederation – this time, including an economic dimension - was revived in 2007 by former Gaullist Prime-Minister Edouard Balladur, the long-time mentor of President Sarkozy.³³ And indeed, paraphrasing the Kissinger of 1965, one could argue that "the time seems ripe to create a political body at the highest level for concerting the policies of the nations bordering the North Atlantic."

In an era of "persistent conflicts," NATO is first of all, on an everyday basis, a collective security (not a collective defense) organization. Now is the time to consider the merits of an IMF-style Directorate (i.e. the more you pay, the more you get to play) for non-Article 5 missions. The prospect of membership in such a Directorate could arguably provide an incentive

³² Richard H. Ullman, "The Covert French Connection," *Foreign Policy*, 75, Summer 1989. On the political benefits for the Alliance as a whole of France's official posture of independence, see F. Roy Willis, *The French Paradox: Understanding Contemporary France*, Hoover Press, 1982. On the rapprochement between Washington, Paris, and London since France's reintegration in NATO in 2009, see Leo Michel, *Defense Transformation a la Francaise and U.S. Interests*, Strategic Forum 233, INSS, NDU, September 2009, www.atlanticcommunity.org/Michel%20SF%20233%20French%20Defense.pdf, and Ben Jones, *Franco-British Cooperation: A New Engine for European Defense?*, EU Institute for Security Studies, February 2011, www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/op88--Franco-British_military_cooperation--a_new_engine_for_European_defence.pdf.

³³ For a U.S. review of Edouard Balladur's *For A Union of the West*, Hoover Institution Press, 2009, see <http://streitcouncil.org/index.php?page=for-a-union-of-the-west>).

for countries like Italy, Poland, or Spain (often frustrated by their non-participation in the EU-3 Directorate) to significantly increase their defense budgets. The alternative? More of the same, i.e. a continuing abdication of responsibility that Kissinger foresaw in 1965.

“May You Live In Interesting Times”

One thing is sure: if the five years since the NATO Riga summit have shown anything, it is that, irrespective of whether the Western Alliance decides to “move East” or not, an energy-hungry East is increasingly determined to “move West.”³⁴ That does not mean that a “kinetic” clash is unavoidable - if only because, between the West and China, there is an asymmetry in terms of strategic culture.

In his book *On China* published earlier this year, Henry Kissinger reminded his Western readers that this asymmetry is best illustrated by the differences between Clausewitz’s direct approach vs. Sun-Tzu’s indirect approach, and/or the game of chess vs. the game of go (*wei qi*):

Where the Western tradition prized the decisive clash of forces emphasizing feats of heroism, the Chinese ideal stressed subtlety, indirection, and the patient accumulation of relative advantage... If chess is about decisive battle, *wei qi* is about the protracted campaign. The chess player aims for total victory. The *wei qi* player seeks relative advantage... In chess, the player always has the capability of the adversary in front of him; all the pieces are always fully deployed. The *wei qi* player needs to assess not only the pieces on the board but the reinforcements the adversary is in a position to deploy. Chess teaches the Clausewitzian concepts of “center of gravity” and the “decisive point” [and] produces single-mindedness; *wei qi* generates strategic flexibility...”

As Kissinger rightly points out, Chinese strategic thinking gives as much importance to *thinking power* and *staying power* as to *fighting power*: “Where Western strategists reflect on the means to assemble superior power at the decision point, Sun Tzu addresses the means of building a dominant political and psychological [and, one might add, economic] position, such that the outcome of a conflict becomes a foregone conclusion. Western strategists test their maxims by victories in battles; Sun Tzu tests by victories where battles have become unnecessary...”³⁵

The *wei qi* approach to geostrategy is perhaps best illustrated by the proverbial “String of Pearls” strategy, China’s efforts to increase access to ports and airfields from the South China Sea to the Arabian Gulf – and beyond. The least known component of this strategy could well be the “special relationship” that has quietly developed between China and – Iceland. In 2007, China gave the Icelandic president the royal treatment during his visit to Beijing and, the next year, China actively supported Iceland’s campaign for a UNSC seat. Why, you ask, would a country of 1,3 billion people go out of its way to court a tiny island devoid of any natural resources and populated by only 300,000 people?

³⁴ Geoffrey Kemp, *The East Moves West: India, China, and Asia’s Growing Presence in the Middle East*, Brookings: Washington DC, 2010. See also Chris Zambelis and Brandon Gentry, “China through Arab eyes: American influence in the Middle East,” *Parameters*, Spring 2008, www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/parameters/Articles/08spring/zambelis.pdf

³⁵ Henry Kissinger, *On China*, The Penguin Press, New York, 2011, pp.22-32. See also Tony Corn, “Peaceful Rise through Unrestricted Warfare: Grand Strategy with Chinese Characteristics,” *Small Wars Journal*, June 2010, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/449-corn.pdf> .

The short answer: China is taking the long view, and positioning itself for the day when the Arctic Ocean will become consistently ice-free during summers (sometime between 2013 and... 2060). Nearly half of China's GDP is dependent on shipping, and the trip from Shanghai to Hamburg via the Northern Sea Route is 6400 kilometers shorter than the route via the Strait of Malacca and the Suez Canal.³⁶ And so it is that the Chinese have already built the largest embassy in Reykjavik, and the largest non-nuclear ice-breaker in the world.

Last but not least, quoting Sun Tzu, Kissinger reminded his Western readers that, for the Chinese, there is a clear hierarchy among possible strategies: "Ultimate excellence lies not in winning every battle but in defeating the enemy without ever fighting. The highest form of warfare is to attack the enemy's Strategy itself. The next, to attack its Alliances. The next, to attack its Armies. The lowest form of war is to attack Cities."

China today has of course no particular reason to attack America's strategy since, as then-candidate Barack Obama himself pointed out in 2008, it is essentially a self-defeating strategy consisting of "borrowing money from China to give to Saudi Arabia." And the Chinese have a priori no reason to attack American armies and cities, since it is more less costly, and more effective, to attack America's alliances.

Thus, in June 2011, two weeks after outgoing Defense Secretary Gates's speech in Brussels, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao embarked on a grand tour of continental Europe and the UK. The contrast could not have been more striking between the U.S. Defense Secretary, scolding Europeans for not spending enough on military hardware, and the Chinese Prime Minister, reminding Europeans that China earlier this year had come to the rescue of the embattled eurozone, and promising to buy more EU debt in the future.

As an eye-opening report of the European Council on Foreign Relations scheduled for release in July 2011 reveals, the Chinese "Scramble for Europe" is well underway. In an article published earlier this month, leading EU expert Timothy Garton Ash points out, in essence, that the *wei qi* logic is not limited to physical assets but extends to financial assets as well:

Forty percent of Chinese investment in the EU is in Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece and eastern Europe. Over the last year, Chinese political leaders have also visited Spain, Portugal and Greece [plus Hungary in June]...With the eurozone in intensive care, countries like Greece, Spain and Portugal would love China to buy some of their forlorn government bonds. While we don't know the exact figures for Chinese bond purchases, we do know that China's sovereign wealth managers have been quietly diversifying out of US treasury bonds... Investing heavily in these countries also has a political pay-off. The more dependent they become on Chinese investment and trade, the less likely they are to support common EU actions which China regards as inimical to its vital interests. It is not too cynical to see Beijing building up a kind of China lobby inside the decision-making structures of the EU, where the smallest state is at least notionally equal to the biggest.³⁷

³⁶ See Linda Jakobson's China Prepares for an Ice-Free Arctic, SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security, March 2010, p.5 <http://books.sipri.org/files/insight/SIPRIInsight1002.pdf>. For an overview of the String of Pearls Strategy in Asia, see Christopher Pehrson, String of Pearls: Meeting the Challenge of China's Rising Power Across the Asian Littoral, Strategic Studies Institute, 2006, www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/files/pub721.pdf

With two visits to Europe in less than six months, and the right communication strategy, the Chinese Premier has significantly bolstered a “Europeist” camp who thinks that the future belongs to a tripolar world (America, China, Europe) and that the time has come to lift the EU arms embargo against China in place since 1989.³⁸

Bottom line: Washington strategists should come to terms with the fact that, in this day and age, Sun Tzu ultimately trumps Clausewitz³⁹ (and that, at any rate, public diplomacy with allies is best left to State Department diplomats, who have the big picture). But the one message that the Pentagon’s strategic communication shop ought to deliver to the myopic Europeans is that, from the hills of Reykjavik to the shores of Tripoli, *the Chinese are coming to multiple theaters near EU, and in multiple ways - some distinctly less benign than others.*

As for Europeans, they would be well-advised to come to terms with the fact that, if Euro-bashing has resurfaced in America, it is not only because it invariably returns during U.S. presidential campaigns, or because demographically and educationally, the America is today less “European” than ever, or even because the U.S. political class has chosen for now to bash allies rather than come to terms with the fact that America is experiencing the same relative decline as Britain a century ago.

Euro-bashing has resurfaced mostly because the idea, widespread in some EU capitals, that Europe could somehow step outside History and just watch from the sidelines as the “Pacific Century” unfolds, is a dangerous illusion. In 1418, the Chinese armada of Admiral Zheng He - the largest armada the world had even seen – never went further than the Indian Ocean. By 2018, given the pace of China’s naval build-up, there is a good chance that Chinese submarines will be patrolling European coasts from the Arctic to the Mediterranean.

In the global age, as Samuel Huntington pointed out in 1989, there is simply no possible Exit from History: “To hope for the benign end of history is human. To expect it to happen is unrealistic. To plan on it happening is disastrous.”⁴⁰

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³⁷ Timothy Garton Ash, “Europe’s Crisis is China’s Opportunity,” *The Guardian*, June 22, 2011, www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/jun/22/europes-crisis-is-chinas-opportunity. Francois Godement and Jonas Parello-Plesner, *The Scramble for Europe*, European Council on Foreign Relations, Brussels, July 2001 (www.ecfr.eu).

³⁸ The “Europeist” view of a tripolar world is best presented by – paradoxically - the non-European Parag Kanna’s *The Second World: Empires and Influence in the New Global Order*, Random House, 2008.

³⁹ Tony Corn, “From Mars to Minerva: Clausewitz, Liddell Hart, and the two Western Ways of War,” *Small Wars Journal*, May 2011, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/767-corn.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Samuel Huntington, “No Exit: The Errors of Endism,” *The National Interest*, Fall 1989 (www.wesjones.com/eoh_noexit.htm).

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