

The “Grand Chessboard” of the 21st Century Geopolitical Strategies of the Multi-polar World

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“In the past 20 years, our partners have been trying to convince Russia of their good intentions, their readiness to jointly develop strategic cooperation. However, at the same time they kept expanding NATO, extending the area under their military and political control ever closer to our borders. And when we rightfully asked: “Don’t you find it possible and necessary to discuss this with us?” they said: “No, this is none of your business.” Those who continue insisting on their exclusivity strongly dislike Russia’s independent policy. The events in Ukraine prove this. They also prove that a model of relations full of double standards does not work with Russia.”

Detail from the speech of V. Putin - Conference of Russian ambassadors and permanent representatives. 1 July 2014¹

Abstract:

Following the March, 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, international political analysts began speaking of the rebirth of orthodox geopolitics. The event also signified the beginning of a multi-polar period. While US foreign policy is retreating and becoming more insular, large growing markets are returning through the use of military strength, i.e., by using “hard power”. Using its Eurasian geopolitical principle, Russia - which is clearly standing opposed to the USA - is increasingly becoming a land power. But given its natural geography it is doubtful it can become a sea power: only its Sevastopol harbour gives its flotilla access to warm-water seas. As such, Ukraine’s role as a buffer state will increase. The sharp opposition between West and East will make it impossible for Ukraine to become a bridging state in the future, i.e., to be a liaison state, a bridge state between West and East.

Keywords: orthodox geopolitics, geoeconomics, multi-polar world system, land power, sea power, Euro-Atlantic zone, Eurasian zone, buffer state, bridge state

¹ Official site of the President Russia. Conference of Russian ambassadors and permanent representatives. 1 July 2014, 15:45, Moscow. <http://eng.news.kremlin.ru/news/22586> (Accessed: July 1, 2014)

The year 2014 in world politics

It is very likely that geopolitical studies in 2020 or 2030 will look back upon the year 2014 as a turning point in geopolitics. This is largely because the Russian annexation of the Crimean peninsula in March shocked the western world, showing that territorial revision was still possible in the 21st century. Can the map of Europe be redrawn? Can a country's territorial integrity be compromised? Has one of the staples of international law, the principle of national sovereignty, lost its relevance in the 21st century? Is Russia - which is consciously positioning itself in opposition to the western world - foreshadowing a new cold war? We can no longer avoid asking the fundamental question of whether the era of a one-pole world has come to an end.

This last question can only be answered now by saying: likely yes. After the temporary period of a single-polar world ruled by the Atlantic field, we stand on the precipice of a multi-polar world. Yet this is just a temporary period: the international world economic and world political system is still Anglo-Saxon in character. On one hand there is the Bretton Woods world economy system, which from 1971 - when the world moved from a fixed exchange rate-system to a floating rate-system - was led and dominated by international monetary markets (especially through the USD). On the other hand the international system developed at the close of World War II - which tried to reflect and appease the power balance between winners and losers - held the UN as being the world's main political leadership organization. At the same time, terms used to analyze international relations for the decades leading up to the 1990s - which saw the end of decades-long Cold War antagonism - persist. As a result we generally deem Russia to be the main enemy of the Anglo-Saxon world, and believe that all foreign policy steps taken by Russia must be an effort to "resurrect" the Soviet Union. It is thus no surprise that after the annexation of the Crimea the prognoses of western analysts projected and pondered how Russia would militarily occupy Eastern Ukraine, or how new Russian military aggression should be expected in the Baltic region, Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

The world is still unable to break with Cold War associations. It is as if 2015 has meant the beginning of a new Cold War period. Where antagonism between the West (and the Euro-Atlantic field) and the East (Russia) has sharpened, where the West - which still clearly feels it is in the leading position of power - introduces more and more economic sanctions against Russia and is planning an increase in and reinforcement of NATO military presence in our region, which as such has again become a buffer zone in geopolitical terms. At the same time the West was surprised to have to acknowledge that Russia is capable of taking countermeasures and that Russian national self-consciousness and declarations on Russian state independence and self-sufficient geopolitical strategy are much stronger than they were just a few years ago.

But this transitional period - with its competition between great powers and shows of strength indicating a shift from a single- to a multi-polar world - is very dangerous in a national security sense. The political and economic institutions of the Anglo-Saxon world (especially those of the withdrawing, ever-more insular and 'unwilling to take military steps' USA and a United Nations that is losing its leading world political position) can no longer adequately maintain the world order and economic-political stability. But emerging markets (and among these especially the BRICS countries) are not strong and do not constitute an economic or political alliance that would be capable of establishing a new world order. Competition and continuous opposition between the West and the East brings to the surface again and sharpens those unsolved issues in international relations that the world has been incapable of resolving to this point. At best it has been able to ease tensions or use economic tools - e.g., developing relatively better welfare - to somewhat "cover up" issues and seemingly establish a sense of security.

Standing out among these acute security problems is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On September 23, 2011 at the UN General Assembly, Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian National Authority (Fatah) officially handed General Secretary Ban Ki Moon the letter requesting full UN membership for the independent Palestinian state. This meant that he was seeking the recognition of Palestine as a sovereign national state. But both Barack Obama and Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel, immediately announced their official opposition, and unequivocally stated that the establishment of an independent Palestinian state must be preceded by long peace negotiations. That is, if peace negotiations are at all possible. As of August 2014 Israel has considered its July military campaign in Gaza to have ended, but it also officially announced that it will not negotiate with Hamas, which essentially controls the Gaza Strip.

In security policy terms the situation since the events of the Arab Spring of 2011 is increasingly dangerous, given that the domestic situation in many Middle Eastern states is precarious. This is especially true of Egypt - which is of great geopolitical importance - where the demonstrations of Arab youth have morphed into a civil war. Syria has been in a state of civil war since 2012 (the resolution of which is hampered by the conflict between the USA and Russia, whereby Russia insists on keeping its naval base in Tartus, as stated in the 1971 agreement between the Soviet Union and Syria). US-led NATO forces permanently withdrew from Iraq in 2011, but the country has been in a state of domestic chaos ever since. Troop withdrawal from Afghanistan is expected at the end of 2016, but this is ever less likely given the present serious situations in Iraq, Syria and between Israel and Palestine. Another fundamental question is whether Iran will find new allies to join what the Americans termed the "devil axis" (encom-

passing Russia, China and Iran) in the future, and will it stand opposed to the USA, or the wider Euro-Atlantic field.²

But such great power competition can also lead to the weakening or disappearance of power control over given spheres of interest. This could lead to more serious and appalling acts of terrorism costing numerous lives that would shock global public opinion. On July 17, 2014 pro-Russian rebels in Donetsk, eastern Ukraine, shot down (probably accidentally) a Malaysian Airlines commercial plane flying from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, killing all 298 on board. The United Nations Security Council considered this an act of terrorism. Another sign of the loss of political control is seen in the disorder in both Iraq and Syria, where extremist Sunni organizations have declared the establishment of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which has been gaining in strength since June of 2014. It has occupied an increasingly large swath of Iraq and Syria, established an independent caliphate, and has come to call itself simply the Islamic State. There is no question that global security would be fundamentally threatened by the establishment of a new extremist Islamic state.

The formation of a multi-polar world in the 21st century: on the edge of a new age of “de-globalization”?

With the loss of the leading hegemonic role of the USA and the strengthening of emerging markets, we are today witnessing the development of a new world-level organization of space. In 2000, when the global market was unequivocally the highest spatial level, I wrote “Intensifying globalization also means that emphasis will move from independent national economies to a defining role of the global world market.”³ Now, in 2015, based on my research on the current world economy and world politics, I have concluded that the world economic crisis of 2008 was the beginning of a new period of so-called “de-globalization”, i.e., the role of the global market has been overtaken by regional markets and regional fields of power. Lying behind this is the fact that emerging markets are not building their economic/political spheres of interest at the global level, but at the regional level instead. An example of such is Russia. Although Russia considers itself a great power, Russian geopolitical efforts are not aimed at the world as a whole, but instead “only” at the Eurasian field. The emphasised region of China’s world economy expansion is East- and South Asia. Another example is that of Brazil, where the new Brazilian geopolitics aims to position the country as the leading state of the continent of South America.

² RUSSELL MEAD, Walter (2014) *The Return of Geopolitics. The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers. Foreign Affairs, May/June, 2014*

³ BERNEK Ágnes. (2000) *A globális világ "új gazdaságföldrajza". - Tér és társadalom, 4 szám, p.89.*

In this new 21st century period of “de-globalisation”, processes of world economics and world politics are such that we see the re-emerged prevalence of tendencies from the 1990s and the 1970s/1980s. In my judgment the most important elements of this transitional period are the following:

1. The role of national economies and national states at the beginning of the 21st century is more definitive than it was in the 1990s. National economic and national state efforts of emerging markets are much stronger than before. In fact, nationalist endeavours and protectionist economic policies have strengthened in emerging markets since the financial crisis of 2008. Another sign of the strengthening of national economies is that we can characterise the 21st century as one of competition between ‘giants’, i.e., between economic great powers, to use geopolitical terms. There is no question that currently economic scale, or economic strength, is what is most important. Today the sum GNI⁴ of the world’s 20 biggest economies is close to 80% of the sum world GNI. Further, the list of the 20 biggest national economies in the world now includes seven emerging markets. Also, the two most important locating factors for transnational corporations are related to the scale of the economy, namely the prospects for market expansion and the size of the economy; another emphasised aspect in judging markets is the sum value of GNI.

2. From a world economy and world politics perspective the role of continental and large-regional fields is growing. In the case of great powers and the large emerging markets, geo-strategic thought and the construction of large-region fields of power is more important than before. So-called “imperial thinking” is once again a central element of geopolitical efforts among the great powers. How will “Pax Americana” or the “American Empire” be organised in the 21st century? A cardinal question for Hungary will be what role “Pax Russica” or the “Russian Empire” - which is now forming on the spatial level of the Eurasian continent - assigns to the East-Central Europe region. Should the centre of gravity of the 21st century’s world economy shift to the Pacific field of power, then the given trans-continental great power fields and the relations between them will undergo reorganisation.

3. Today the role of natural resources is as definitive as it was in the decades of the 1970s and 1980s. The great power competition for natural resources - foremost oil and natural gas fields, as well as precious metals and ores - is considered the greatest geopolitical strategy of the 21st century. Once again, the value of those regions that have significant natural resources has increased. The

⁴ GNI = Gross National Income. The study was published by the World Bank, using data based on the currency rate method.

“heartland” of the 21st century is - among others - Central Asia, given its vast fields of energy supplies. The foundation for a Russian great power role and imperial ambitions is that Russia is the world’s leading producer and exporter of natural gas, and the second biggest producer and exporter of oil. Brazil’s current geopolitical strategy is backed by the discovery of massive so-called “pre-salt” oil fields off the coast of Rio de Janeiro, which will make it possible for Brazil to become one of the world’s top-5 exporters of oil within a few years. On the other side of geopolitical struggles of emerging markets we find China, which is now one of the world’s leading exporters of operating capital. Forty percent of Chinese foreign operating capital investments are in the energy sector, and more than 20% are related to Chinese acquisition of precious metal mines. After the financial crisis of 2008 the world market price of raw materials is again at a record high level: the cost of a barrel of Brent oil in the 1990s was about 20 USD, while now - in middle May of 2015 - it is 65 USD.

The power relations of the world’s oil- and gas-producing countries have fundamentally changed. A definitive factor in this is that it is now technologically possible to extract oil and gas with non-traditional methods, e.g., from oil sands and shale gas. In March of 2010, during his first term as President, Barack Obama announced the USA’s new energy strategy, which had a goal of increasing domestic oil and natural gas extraction. In 2009 the USA’s oil dependency was 51%.⁵ Obama authorised extraction from several US coastal areas: certain parts of the Atlantic coast, the eastern part of the Gulf of Mexico, and the northern coast of Alaska. As a result 2013 saw a turn in world natural gas production whereby it was the first year where Russia was not the world’s leading natural gas-producing state. It was instead the USA. Natural gas production in Canada and the USA grew so much that by 2013 almost one-quarter (24%) of world natural gas production was from North America. The significance of the USA in world oil production has also increased. Between 2012 and 2013 US oil production grew by 12%. As such, the USA became the world’s third-largest oil producer, behind Saudi Arabia and Russia.⁶

This is all of great geopolitical significance, as it is now possible for the EU to decrease its dependence on Russian oil and particularly on Russian natural gas. A dramatic change is expected in the liquid gas field, because while “normal” state gas can be transported through pipes a maximum of 3000-4500 km, liquid gas - through using appropriate ships and port terminals - can be sent most any distance. On March 26, 2014, during a visit to Brussels, Barack Obama mentioned many times that the USA could transport liquid gas to the EU (and Ukraine), but

⁵ *Though more than half of US oil imports were from North and South America - mainly Canada, Mexico and Venezuela. September 11, 2001 was the impetus for the launch of a US geopolitical strategy that aimed to lower dependence on Middle-Eastern oil.*

⁶ *Based on data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration - www.eia.gov*

that this would require work from both parties, most importantly the creation of a free trade zone between NAFTA and the EU. But beyond this, the spread of the transport of liquid gas could have a dramatic effect on the world market. With distance becoming a non-issue, the framework of current gas market areas and fields could change completely.

Given the above, there is no doubt that the key question of the 21st century will be: when will the world enter the “post-oil period”, or when will the “energy period transformation” begin? Many feel that the world is technologically ready to step into the “post-oil” age. But this would require further massive research and development investments of which only one country is currently capable, namely the USA. That is to say that the USA is exclusively capable of “leading” the world into an age of new technology. The Presidency of Barack Obama in this regard has been an utter disappointment for the world’s “green movements”. They had hoped that the President would stand at the forefront of the struggle to increase the proportion of renewable energy sources in world energy consumption. Currently this stands at around 10%, and prognoses predict that fossil fuels will dominate until 2040-2050. Some estimates claim that the USA spends as much on renewable energy sources research in one year as it does on one and a half days of military expenses. This despite the fact that only the creation of new technologies can secure a power advantage for the USA in the future. It is increasingly clear that Western sanctions will not lead Russia to give up its great power ambitions.

4. The 21st century will see not only a strengthening of geographic tendencies, but also a clear validation of global economic tendencies of the 1990s. This mostly means that the “grand strategies” of 21st century geopolitics will be pursued chiefly through economic means, thus increasing the significance of the economy. In world politics judgments on great power status will be based mainly on “economic strength”, which is the basis upon which a country can establish military power. This is indicated in the new geopolitical direction published in 1990 by Edward Luttwak called *geo-economics* - which is now considered a classic - which denotes that former violent conflicts between nations will be continued using new economic tools.⁷ My research shows that *geo-economics* is nothing more than an economic interpretation of the relation between politics and space, or in other words, *geostrategies* with economic means, emphasising

⁷ LUTTWAK, Edward (1990) *From Geopolitics to Geo-Economics: Logic of Conflict, Grammar of Commerce*. *The National Interest*, V. 17, Summer.

change through the global world market system of tools - through transnational corporations and international capital flow.⁸

What kind of geoeconomics strategies can exist? If we use military science as a starting point - the term 'strategy' itself was initially a military concept describing the science of the highest level of military leaders - along with the Luttwak perspective⁹ (the current field of war means merely the economic conflict between states), then I see two fundamental geoeconomic strategies: defensive and offensive. Luttwak's original statement on the basic concept of geoeconomics, "logic of conflict, grammar of commerce", could be modified for our times as "the logic of conflict and the system of tools of the global world market".

The grand "chessboard" of 21st century geopolitics - the re-emergence of orthodox geopolitics?

By the 21st century geoeconomics became a rather widely used term. At the same time the fact that the most cited geopolitics expert in our time is British geographer Halford J. Mackinder (1861-1947) indicates the unchanging nature of geopolitics, the lack of a new geopolitics, and the renaissance of the orthodox geopolitical approach. The two "basic terms" of geopolitics are derived from Mackinder's work, namely the "heartland" and the concept of Eurasia. The term "heartland" is regularly used these days in the sense of "whoever rules the heartland rules the world". In the 21st century the heartland is thought of as Central Asia, and is substantiated by the importance of the region to the United States, as evidenced in its current Afghan and recent Iraqi military presence. Also, the United States views Iran as a country that endangers the entire world system. In the 21st century the heartland can be defined as the "buffer pole" of geopolitical space.

Mackinder's best-known paper, *The Geographical Pivot of History*, was read at the Royal Geographic Society, on January 25, 1904.¹⁰ Analyzing the politics of Europe and Asia, Mackinder sought to answer how geographic and historical

⁸ BERNEK Ágnes. (2010) *Geopolitics and/or Geoeconomics. The Interrelations between the World Economy and World Politics in the 21st Century. – Geopolitics in the 21st century. 1. pp. 29-62.*

⁹ Edward Luttwak was born in 1942 in Arad. He studied in English and American universities. He served as both a military and strategic advisor for American land forces, air forces, marines, in various posts. He has written several successful books, among which those dealing with strategic questions of war and peace (especially *Coup D'État: A Practical Handbook and Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*). In 2009 he publicly criticized President Barack Obama on several occasions. (*The New York Times, Times Topics, 2010.*)

¹⁰ MACKINDER, Halford (1904) *The Geographical Pivot of History. Geographical Journal 23. pp. 421-437.*

processes and key events might be connected. He is the author of the term Eurasia, which not only denotes Europe and Asia as one continent in a geological sense, but emphasizes that the people and states of Europe and Asia constitute the centre of world power. Eurasia in current geopolitical thought is one of our most controversial concepts. The western and central states of Europe reject out of hand all geopolitical approaches that question Europe's independence. But at the same time, from the year 2000 it was a central concept at the beginning of the new Russian geopolitics. The new bi-polarism/multi-polarism - with eurasianism as opposed to atlanticism - is an important factor in Russia's new great power efforts.¹¹This is also indicated in the fact that Vladimir Putin regularly quotes Alexander von Humboldt's sentence of over two hundred years ago, according to which "Europe is not an independent continent, it is merely an inarticulate part of Asia, a meticulously articulated western peninsula."¹²

At the same time, for American geopolitics, holding political power over the Eurasian field has always been one of the key factors for its practice of power on a global scale. In his famous book "The Grand Chessboard" Zbigniew Brzezinski writes: "the issue of how a globally engaged America copes with the complex Eurasian power relationships— and particularly whether it prevents the emergence of a dominant and antagonistic Eurasian power—remains central to America's capacity to exercise global primacy."¹³

The "grand chessboard" of world politics in the second half of the 20th century was traditionally interpreted using North-South and West-East divisions. The former German Chancellor Willy Brandt led an effort in the 1980s to publish so-called Brand reports on world politics and the world economy through the perspective of a North-South division of the world. The so-called Brandt line runs at 30 degrees North and splits the world into a developed North and a developing South. But even by then the concepts of North and South somewhat diverged from the concrete geographic spaces and were better interpreted as social spaces. Despite the fact that the 30th parallel runs from the US-Mexican border through North Africa and the Middle East and through Iran, Pakistan, India and China, in the 1980s China and India were unquestionably considered developing countries, while Australia and New Zealand in the South were already unequivocally developed states. Thus, according to the Brandt line (and ignoring the use

¹¹ DUGIN, Alexander. (2004) *A geopolitika alapjai – Oroszország geopolitikai jövője*. In Ljubov, Siselina - Gazdag Ferenc. (eds.) *Oroszország és Európa. Orosz geopolitikai szöveggyűjtemény*. Zrínyi Kiadó, Budapest. pp. 333-376.

¹² NEMERKÉNYI Antal (2004) *Az európai kontinens természetföldrajzi adottságai*. In Bernek Ágnes – Kondorosi Ferenc – Nemerikényi Antal – Szabó Pál (eds.) *Az Európai Unió. Cartographia Kft., Budapest pp. 5-26. – cited on p.5.*

¹³ BRZEZINSKI, Zbigniew (1999) *A nagy sakktábla. Amerika világelsősege és geostratégiai feladatai*. Európa Könyvkiadó, Budapest.

of the 30th parallel) the developed North included North America, Europe and the Soviet Union. The 1980s were the “golden age” of developmental studies, and thus a respected portion of international and Hungarian research projects centered on the examination of the economic and social backwardness of the so-called “Third World”.

But in the Cold War period the developed Northern world was divided in two according to political system, with the capitalist West on one side and the antagonistic socialist (the Soviet Union and the European socialist states) East on the other. This West-East divide effects our thinking on international geopolitical space to this day, despite the fact that the regime transformations of the 1990s have led to a uni-polar world: international division based on Cold War logic is now meaningless. Further, thanks to the emerging markets of developing countries that were previously underdeveloped, the North-South division has also lost its relevance, so much so that in the 21st century we no longer use the term developing country in world politics or world economics (although international organisations have not moved away from this yet). I feel it is very important to emphasise that the foundation of traditional geopolitics using geographic points of the compass as a basis for interpretation lies in the view of Europe being the central region of the world. As such we always use world maps with Europe placed at the centre, and as such the North-South, but more so the West-East geopolitical point of view is based on a traditionally exclusively European view of examining geopolitical space.

The geopolitical “grand chessboard” of the 21st century is changing in fundamental ways, and the 2008 crisis affecting the European Union and European countries has resulted in a shift of the world’s central area to the Pacific Ocean field. José Manuel Barosso, the former President of the European Commission, gave a shocking speech to open the Fall session of the European Parliament on September 12, 2012. He claimed that the European Union is facing the deepest crisis in its history, and he feels that there is only one way out, and that is to establish a new model for European integration and to create a European political union based on a federation of member states. But the real problem is that international analysts treat this as highly unlikely. The crisis on the European continent has brought into question the strength of Atlantic relations and the role of the Atlantic field in the world economy and in world politics.

The grand strategies of the 21st century can be studied by focusing exclusively on the geopolitical efforts of three world powers, namely the USA, Russia and China. The world is turning, and all prognostications point to a 21st century that is not a European century. This will lead to a slow change in the Euro-centric world view, and the traditional interpretation of the international order in North-South and East-West terms will transform. To use cartographic terms, the zero-point will change, and the world will be interpreted not only through Brus-

sels and Washington, but through Beijing and Moscow as well. We must work out a new geopolitical view of space.

The “West” - the deepening questions over the American “smart power” foreign policy direction

In his first term as President, from 2009 to 2012, Barack Obama initiated a new foreign policy direction to replace the Bush doctrine of preemptive strike. The central element of the new direction was so-called “Smart Power”¹⁴, or a new geopolitical direction within whose framework the earlier hegemonic, military strength-based American world politics role is replaced by a new one using diplomatic means and aiming for cooperation with the other countries of the world. The President’s foreign policy direction was met with a great deal of criticism, which questioned whether the world’s leading power could give up using ever more military strength, and whether practicing power through diplomatic channels could work.

His two main ideologues were the two “old men” of geopolitics, Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski. The USA’s current grand geopolitical strategy’s two main elements are, in Brzezinski’s 2012 terms, a “bigger West” and a “new East”. A “bigger West” indicates that the USA has a goal of strengthening the West and as such seeks to bring Russia and Turkey into the USA’s circle of western allies. In this sense the Cold War division of East and West ceases, and the world is split not into geographic areas, but into a new 21st century geopolitical view of space. Brzezinski’s “new East” applies to China, East- and South-East Asia, which he judges to be an area in which the USA is in need of a new overarching set of relations. He does not see this as a zero-sum game, and in fact deems it a mistake to approach great power competition using “Cold War” logic.¹⁵ The fact that the geopolitical space of the 21st century and in turn the USA’s geopolitical direction’s centre of gravity has changed is clearly demonstrated in Hillary Clinton’s statements at several international forums where she has claimed that the 21st century will be America’s Pacific century. In the second 2012 issue of Foreign Affairs, Henry Kissinger analyzed current relations between

¹⁴ *In a geopolitical sense “Hard Power” or power based on military strength is replaced by “Soft Power” (based not on military strength but on executing power using economic tools). The goal of “Smart Power” is diplomatic aligning of interests and cooperation with the rest of the countries of the world.*

¹⁵ BRZEZINSKI, Zbigniew (2012) *Strategic Vision. America and the Crisis of Global Power*. Basic Books, New York.

the USA and China and called for the establishment of a new so-called trans-Pacific cooperation framework.¹⁶

In the spirit of the new American foreign policy direction of “Smart power”, US-led NATO troops permanently withdrew from Iraq in December of 2012, and in the same year the number of US troops serving in Afghanistan was decreased.¹⁷ But the diplomatic efforts to resolve the state of civil war in Syria led to serious criticism of the American President, claiming that he should have been more decisive, should have used military force, and should not have allowed a Russian proposal to emerge for the solution to the Syrian situation. Divergent views on the Syrian situation led to a deterioration of US-Russian relations, and the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014 brought a new low point.

An increasing number of international analysts claim that the USA, by avoiding military interventions and becoming ever more insular, is appearing ever weaker in the eyes of the world and is losing its international authority. Even Barack Obama’s domestic popularity was weakened by degree.¹⁸ But in 2015 the question of whether smart power can be used at all in the current international political situation has come to the fore. American practice of power through diplomatic channels and cooperation has brought unexpected results, with a weakening US role in world politics. In some areas of the world the strength of the US practice of power has decreased drastically. This all leads to a situation where the non-Anglo-Saxon world (and especially the large emerging markets) are “kept together” by one thing only, and that is a questioning and rejection of the USA’s leading role in world politics. In those countries where US influence has weakened we are now witnessing the construction of Russian and/or Chinese spheres of interests. The developing “power vacuums”, countries and regions that do not belong to any of the spheres of interest, are facing increasing security risks. An example of such is the disorder in Iraq after the withdrawal of American troops and the unresolved situation in Syria, which led to territorial takeover (in the border regions between the two countries) by the newly established extremist Islamic State.

¹⁶ KISSINGER, Henry. (2012) *The Future of U.S. – Chinese Relations. Conflict Is a Choice, Not a Necessity - Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91. No. 2. pp. 44-55.

¹⁷ One of the “success stories” presented in Obama’s second presidential campaign was the liquidation of Osama bin Laden in May of 2011.

¹⁸ This is foremost because a high number of American voters are not willing to accept the health-care reforms that were reached with great difficulty. However, Obama’s foreign policy is also criticized by an increasing number of voters. Average American judgments hold that Putin’s annexation of the Crimean Peninsula took place because the Russian President was aware of what steps he could take, given that he did not have to fear an American military response.

As smart power has led to a decline in US world power, a geopolitical direction based on “hard power” as practiced by the emerging markets Russia and China has emerged. It is thus beyond doubt that there is a renaissance of orthodox geopolitical strategies. This is reinforced by the fact that of the world’s military expenditures in 2013, the US stood for only 37% (at the beginning of the 2000s this proportion exceeded 50%). Significant armament by China and Russia is reflected in the fact that China is now second in the world in military expenditure (standing for 11% of world expenditure), while Russia now stands at number three (with 5% of global expenditure). From 2009 to 2013 USA armament expenditures dropped from 701 billion USD to 619 billion USD, while in the same period Chinese expenditures rose from 129 billion USD to 174 billion USD. The situation in Russia is similar, where expenditures of 65 billion USD in 2009 rose to 85 billion USD by 2013.¹⁹

For EU- and NATO member Hungary the most important question is: where does Europe stand and especially, where does East-Central Europe stand in current American geopolitical strategies? In his first term as President from 2009 to 2012 Barack Obama’s main foreign policy direction was always met by criticism from European countries, claiming the USA does not pay nearly enough attention to Europe. There is no doubt that Barack Obama undertook several Asian tours in this period. At the 2011 APEC meeting in Honolulu he emphasized that APEC economic integration should be further developed in the interest of making the Pacific Ocean field the central area of the world economy of the 21st century. In the minds of leading European politicians this means that Atlantic relations have decreased in significance for the US, and that Europe has moved to the back burner within American geopolitical strategies. This is supported by the need to newly interpret and reorder relations between the EU and the USA, given that they soured after the spying scandal of 2013.²⁰ Further, earlier free trade negotiations between the two entities were suspended. Another factor in the rethinking of US-EU relations is that Barack Obama makes his first official visit to the EU by visiting Brussels on March 26, 2014, meaning that this took place six years into his mandate as President. This visit was necessitated by Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. The visit, however, was an effort to strengthen the Euro-Atlantic alliance. Both parties confirmed that negotiations on the establishment of a free trade zone between them would recommence.

When reinterpreting the Euro-Atlantic field for the 21st century, a key question is the future of the EU. For the EU to move beyond the state described by Henry Kissinger, whereby it is a “world economics giant, but world politics dwarf”, there is only one theoretical path, which is the establishment of a strong

¹⁹ Based on data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. www.sipri.org

²⁰ Regarding the uncovering of National Security Agency spying, by Edward Snowden.

federal Europe, or a strong political union. But is this a realistic option? The official stance of EU institutions is: yes. EU institutions are stronger than EU-pessimists think, and the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, has a stated goal of renewing the EU and strengthening its institutions.

Unofficial opinions, however, hold that there is no realistic hope for the establishment of a federal European Union, and - much like the Hungarian government - other member states see the future of the EU as made up of strong nation states. This position is supported by the fact that this year's European Parliament elections saw an increase in support for extreme right-wing and Eurosceptic parties. An increasing number of analysts are predicting a future collapse of the EU and the emergence of a new Germany-Russia axis. In other words, the so-called Franco-German Europe will be followed by a Russo-German Europe. This position has geopolitical significance, as the East-Central European area is situated between Germany and Russia, and thus its present and future is fundamentally determined by how economic and political relations between Germany and Russia develop.

The countries of East-Central Europe have been even more disappointed in the foreign policy of the first Barack Obama presidential term. They feel that the fact that the President did not accept the German Chancellor's invitation to mark the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall means that "Barack Obama does not understand Eastern Europe", as was stated in newspapers at the time. In July of 2009 - shortly after Barack Obama visited Moscow - a number of formerly high-ranking East-Central European politicians wrote an open letter to the American President, asking him to keep in mind strategic interests of East-Central Europe when negotiating with Russia. According to the writers of this open letter, Russian influence is growing in the region once again, and will "in time lead to the de facto neutralisation of the region."

Ronald D. Asmus, the director of the German Marshall Fund's Transatlantic Centre, wrote a piece in the January/February 2008 issue of *Foreign Affairs* titled "Europe's Eastern Promise".²¹ The author was an outstanding expert on the topic, given that between 1997 and 2000 he worked as a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, and his field of expertise was NATO and trans-Atlantic relations. He had a role in Hungary's NATO accession in 1999.²²

In this paper the author analysed the two key geopolitical areas of the East-Central and South-Central European region: the north-south axis stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea on the one hand and the countries along the

²¹ Ronald, Asmus (2008) *Europe's Eastern Promise. Rethinking NATO and EU Enlargement. Foreign Affairs. January/February 2008.*

²² Ronald Asmus died in 2011 at the age of 53. His career is deemed by the Hungarian Foreign Ministry a lasting example of successful trans-Atlantic relations. One of the driving forces of this paper is to acknowledge his outstanding professional work.

meeting point of Europe and Asia, i.e., the Southeast-Southwest axis on the other. The countries of the north-south axis joined NATO in its first round of expansion (in 1999 - Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland) and in its second (from 2002 - Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia), and joined the European Union in 2004 and 2007, thus becoming unequivocal members on the transatlantic field both politically and economically.

What kind of expansion policy should NATO and the EU pursue regarding countries along the southeast-southwest axis, from the Balkans to the Black Sea? Ronald D. Asmus recommended a new approach, given that the transatlantic expansion policy of the early 2000s was in need of fundamental reform.

Ronald D. Asmus closed his 2008 paper with two scenarios. According to the first, the administration taking oath in January of 2009 would rebuild relations with the countries of the region, and both NATO and the EU would continue to increase their numbers of members. As such the countries of the north-south axis would become even stronger members of the Atlantic field, and the countries of Europe's southeast-southwest axis - given the numbers of them joining NATO and the EU - would attain significant political and economic stability. EU membership for Turkey, strengthening its middle-power role, would contribute to the construction of the eastern periphery of the Atlantic field. This positive prognosis predicted a new Atlantic field by 2012 which would force Russia to reconsider its great power role and reinterpret the geopolitical strategy it uses vis a vis the West. As a result by 2014 the USA and the EU - about ten years after NATO's second expansion round and the EU's largest eastern expansion - would redraw the geopolitical map of Europe and Eurasia.

The author's second scenario is that of stagnation, in which the leading countries of the Atlantic field (mostly the USA) are passive toward the countries of the region. According to the scenario the EU and the USA do not accept a confrontation with Russia, and thus given countries in the region are "left to their own devices" when trying to maintain "good" relations with Russia. Should only Croatia (and possibly Albania) join NATO by 2012, and should only Croatia become a member of the EU, a geopolitical stalemate will develop whereby future generations will be a high price for current passivity.²³

Now, in 2015, we can see that, unfortunately, Ronald D. Asmus' second scenario has come to fruition. From 2008 to 2012 all that happened was Croatia and Albania's NATO accession in April of 2009 and Croatia's EU accession in July of 2013. Asmus' "stalemate" situation has even worsened, given that the Euro-Atlantic field and Russia have entered a period of open antagonism. A key question for the future is which sphere of influence (Euro-Atlantic or Russian) the countries of East- and Southeast Europe and the Caucasus will join, or how they will levitate between the two great power spheres. In December of 2013 Russia

²³ See footnote number 2., p. 7.

officially confirmed that the Eurasian Economic Union will begin operations starting on January 1, 2015, encompassing members Russia, Belorussia and Kazakhstan in an economic union, with Armenia (now it is member), Kyrgyzstan and Tadzhikistan as likely members. Thus, the Eurasian Economic Union will become a competitor to the European Union, and it is no accident that after the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, the EU signed association agreements with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. This all indicates that the EU must reinterpret its expansion policy, and must further build a new foundation for its currently weak eastern partnership program.

In June of 2014 Barack Obama visited Warsaw (before the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the landing of American and British units in Normandy), where he essentially announced NATO's new Eastern Europe strategy. As such, NATO will increase its troop presence in Poland and increase the activities of its naval fleet in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. The Black Sea is of great significance, given that it is Russia's access channel to warm-water seas.²⁴ For the Baltic Sea, Estonia (given its control of the Gulf of Finland) is the most likely location for a NATO naval base, while for the Black Sea Romania is the likely choice. That is to say that the geopolitical importance of this region will increase in the near future, and through NATO's "active European military policy" the security policy role of East-Central Europe will increase. September of 2014 saw a NATO summit held in the United Kingdom, where the main question of NATO's further expansion had to be discussed by member states. However, international observers largely agree that further NATO expansion is unlikely, as is Ukraine's accession to the alliance.

On July 22, 2014, Vladimir Putin announced the Russian "response" to Barack Obama's new Eastern Europe military strategy at the meeting of the Russian National Security Council, whereby Russia will launch an armament program that will spend 640 billion USD by 2020. This means that Russia's armament expenditures will increase by more than 50% per year for the next five years. According to the President's announcement 30% of Russian military equipment will be high-tech by 2015, reaching 70% by 2020. This is clearly the largest armament program since the 1991 establishment of modern Russia.²⁵

The "East" - Russia as the West's enemy?

Russia, being the largest land mass country in the world, is in a geopolitical situation that lends itself to establishing itself as a so-called "land power". The geopo-

²⁴ *This topic will be dealt with in detail in the next section, on the analysis of Russia's orthodox geopolitics.*

²⁵ <http://en.ria.ru/russia/20140722/191111702/Russia-Must-Boost-Defense-as-NATO-Increases-Military-Presence.html> (Accessed: July 25, 2014)

litical area for this is the Eurasian field, given that Russia is characterized by being a country existing in both Europe and Asia. This was referred to by Vladimir Putin in an article published in *Izvestia* in November of 2011, in which he outlined a plan for a Eurasian Union that would spread from Lisbon to Vladivostok. Putin called this “Greater Europe”, a space in which Russia would have the determining role, it being a bridge between Europe and Asia.²⁶ This Russian Eurasian geopolitical space, or Russian social space, is so definitive that on May 7, 2012, Vladimir Putin referred to it in his inauguration speech: “...our main goal is territorial expansion from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean, through which we will become capable of becoming the leader and centre of gravity of all Eurasia.”²⁷

The main architect of the new Russian geopolitics and its leading figure is Aleksandr Dugin, who in 2002 organised his own political party, the “Eurasia” political movement. This indicates that Mackinder’s political term *Eurasia* has become an absolutely key term in current Russian geopolitics. Given that Eurasianism has a significant historical past in Russia, Dugin named the current Russian geopolitical direction *neo-Eurasianism*. This neo-Eurasianism stands in contrast to Atlanticism, with the main Russian geopolitical goal being the establishment of a multi-polar world order.²⁸ The Eurasia party has a definite geo-economics point of view, given that it was the party that established the Eurasian Economic Club, the “mission” of which is to establish a unified Eurasian economic field. Currently, Eurasianism has undergone institutional strengthening, from January 1, 2015 had started the Eurasian Economic Union with an anticipated four members (see above). Although the Atlantic view of the realistic chances of this initiative is rather sceptical, and though some see the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union as an attempt to reestablish the Soviet Union, it should be noted that the highest body of the Eurasian Economic Council has been meeting regularly since 2013, with a goal of preparing the operation of the Eurasian economic field.²⁹

Geopolitically, the key question in the establishment of the new Eurasian field is whether Russia will be able to find new allies in the future. Further, a sub-question is how Sino-Russian relations will develop in the near future. The most

²⁶ ПУТИН, Vladimir (2011) *Новый интеграционный проект для Евразии — будущее, которое рождается сегодня*. *Izvestia*, 2011. October 3.

<http://izvestia.ru/news/502761#ixzz241ccxKbK> (Accessed: November 2, 2012)

²⁷ Official site of the President of Russia. Vladimir Putin inaugurated as President of Russia. 7 May 2012, 12:20, Moscow. <http://www.kremlin.ru> (Accessed: May 8, 2012.)

²⁸ DUGIN, Alexander (2004) *A geopolitika alapjai – Oroszország geopolitikai jövője*. – Ljubov, Siselina - Gazdag Ferenc. (eds.) *Oroszország és Európa. Orosz geopolitikai szöveggyűjtemény*. Zrínyi Kiadó, Budapest. pp. 333-376.

²⁹ For more details, c.f. www.eurasiancommission.org

significant event recently was Vladimir Putin's May, 2014 visit to China, within which, after more than a decade of negotiations, Russia's Gazprom and China's CNPC (China National Petroleum Corporation) signed a gas agreement deemed the "deal of the decade". As part of the agreement Gazprom has guaranteed the delivery of 38 billion cubic meters of gas to China every year for thirty years.³⁰ Another sign of the strengthening of the Sino-Russian relationship is that the national banks of Russia and China recently announced that they have worked out a joint agreement to conduct their currency exchange business in their own currencies, thereby bypassing the US dollar. Currently 75% of Russian-Chinese commercial transactions are accounted in USD. Will American hegemony come to an end? This is the central question of the development of a new multi-polar world.

Currently, however - despite Russian openness to Asia - the emphasized target area of Russian geoeconomic and geopolitical efforts is the European continent. That is to say that the Russian point of view in geopolitical space continues to be one that is Europe-centred. The Russo-German Europe prognosis is related to this (see above), which refers to increasingly strong economic (as well as political) relations between the two countries. We might consider whether Russia's Europe-centric approach will remain in the future, or whether Russia will become capable of opening (mostly economically) toward China, Japan and South Asia.

East-Central Europe is one of the key regions in Russia's current "empire-building" geopolitics. Given their geographic location, the countries of Central and East-Central Europe are seen as "gates" toward Europe by Russian geostrategists. This is evidenced by the fact that since 2012 Russia's largest commercial bank, Sberbank, has become a player in Hungary's economy, since the Vienna-based Volksbank transferred all its Eastern European holdings (except for those in Romania) to Sberbank. According to Sberbank's official statement this East-Central European activity is a first step toward Sberbank beginning its expansion into Europe and becoming an international bank. Over the last few months Hungary and Slovakia have come under fire from the USA for practicing a "separate" Russia policy. Slovakia has been criticized for agreeing to the extension of the trans-Siberian railway through its territory to Vienna. Hungary is under scrutiny for an agreement signed on January 14, 2014 to expand the nuclear plant at Paks.

While Russia may become the leading land power in the Eurasian field, its status as a sea power is questionable both in terms of natural geography and geopolitics. Although the Russian sea coast is 37.653 km long (it's land borders stretch 22.407 km), most of the coastline is along cold waters, with the Arctic Ocean to the north and the Pacific Ocean to the East. The ports along the north-

³⁰ According to data on the Gazprom website: www.gazprom.com

ern and eastern coasts, with one exception (the port of Murmansk never freezes over thanks to the Gulf stream), are ice-bound for most of the year. In his piece titled “The foundations of geopolitics” Aleksandr Dugin characterizes this situation as Russia’s southern land borders being an “anaconda ring”, blocking Russia from reaching warm-water seas.

In accordance with its geographic characteristics, one-third of Russian naval strength is provided by the Northern Fleet, based in Severomorsk, beside Murmansk. The Russian Pacific fleet is based in the country’s largest and most southern Far East city, Vladivostok, although the port of Vladivostok and the port in neighbouring Nakhodka are ice-bound from October to March.³¹

Russia’s access to the Baltic Sea is secured by the Russian Baltic Fleet, which is based in the Baltiysk port, on the territory of Kaliningrad. The Baltic Sea is increasingly important to Russia in geostrategic terms, partly because of deepening Russo-German relations, the most important element of which is the initiation of Gazprom’s Nord Stream pipeline, which avoids Ukraine and deposits gas in Germany after underwater passage in the Baltic Sea.

The Russian Caspian fleet is relatively small, and based in the largest city of the Volga delta, Astrakhan. But given that the Caspian Sea is a sea in name only (it is the world’s largest lake, and provides no access to the sea), the presence of a Russian fleet here does not serve the purpose of creating Russian “sea power”, but instead is meant to secure a balance of Russian power in the area of the Caspian. An especially important area here in terms of Russian security risk is Chechnya.

The size of the Russian Black Sea fleet is somewhat less than that of the Baltic Sea fleet, however the base in Sevastopol on the Crimean Peninsula is a key element of Russian sea presence and Russian geopolitics. The deep-water, ice-free and defensible bay secures Russia’s access to warm oceans. In 2010 the parliament of Ukraine decided (among smoke bombs and fist-fights) to allow the Russian Navy to use the port until 2042. This base is in an important strategic geographic location for Russia, as Russia has no other way of accessing the Medi-

³¹ Vladivostok has gained significance in Russia’s Far East expansion plans over the past few years. One aspect is transportation. The world’s longest railway line, the trans-Siberian Express, has been fully renovated. It terminates at Vladivostok, and from here is connected to a railway line going to Beijing. The year 2012 saw the completion of the world’s longest auto highway (more than 10.000 km), and as a result St. Petersburg and Vladivostok are now connected by road. However, the most important investment in the Far East region is Russia’s new space port, in the city of Ulglegorsk, under the name Vostonchny, or Eastern cosmodrome. Construction is already underway north of the city of Blagoveshchensk, and according to plans it will begin operation in 2015. The base, which is on Russian territory, will operate in tandem with the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan.

terranian. The main reason Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula was clearly Russian fear that Ukrainian relations with the EU and NATO would lead to a loss of Russian control over the port of Sevastopol. Such Russian fears have a basis in history. One-hundred and sixty years ago in the Crimean War British, French and Turkish forces together defeated Czarist Russia and thus blocked the spread of Russian influence in the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, the two passages between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. All of Russia's current world politics "acts" on sea routes (e.g., shipments to Syria) originate at the Sevastopol port.³² Ukraine's potential membership in NATO would clearly lead to an advantage for NATO naval forces, given that Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey are already NATO members. It is no accident that one of Russia's emphasised goals is the construction of a Russo-Turkish relationship. The basis of this is the fact that Gazprom's Blue Stream pipeline goes through the Black Sea and transports gas through Ankara. Another key role for the Russian Black Sea Fleet is to provide security for Gazprom's Southern Stream pipeline, which is now under construction. Another question in the area is Georgia's possible accession to the Euro-atlantic zone, as the country also has coastline on the Black Sea. However, one of the results of the 2008 Russo-Georgian war is that Georgia lost control over Abkhazia and in turns its Black Sea coast.

Between "West" and "East" - An analysis of Ukraine's orthodox geopolitics

The West often responds to the crisis in Ukraine by stating that "Ukraine's territorial integrity must be restored". On March 27, 2014 a majority at the UN General Assembly approved a resolution whereby the UN confirmed Ukraine's sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity within internationally recognized borders.

Although the international press emphasized the majority that voted yes, the results actually reflected the development of a multi-polar world order and a number of countries antagonistic to the Atlantic field. Of the 193 UN member states, only 168 participated in the vote (e.g., Iran and Serbia, as well as two potential members of the Eurasian Union - Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan - did not participate in this session of the General Assembly). One-hundred countries voted for, while eleven voted against (including Armenia, Belorussia, Bolivia, Sudan and Syria) and a total of 58 countries abstained (e.g., Russia and four other BRICS countries - China, India, Brazil and South Africa - as well as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan).³³

³² *Az orosz Fekete-tengeri Flotta a krími válság egyik kulcsa. Honvédelem.* www.honvedelem.hu/nyomtat/42827. (Accessed July 29, 2014)

³³ *Data available on the UN home page.* www.un.org

Statements from the UN and the West on Ukraine's political independence and territorial integrity are correct in terms of international law. But this does not hold true in a geographic, historic and geopolitical context, as Ukraine has never been in a state of territorial integrity. The current borders of Ukraine were established in 1945, with the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula taking place in 1954. Its independence as a state dates back to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Twenty-three years is a very short time to establish an independent, sovereign and economically strong state.

The country's name - *u-kraina* - means borderland. Throughout history Ukraine has been a buffer state, and it continues to be so, between the Euro-Atlantic field and Russia (and the Eurasian Economic Union it is organizing). Ukraine's importance is also based partly on strength derived from size, given that it is the European continent's second largest state in terms of territory, lagging only behind Russia. Its population of 45 million makes it one of Europe's largest states in these terms as well.

Ukraine is divided geographically into east and west, with a dividing line extending from Kharkov to Uman. This line is also a physical division, given that it is the border between the moderate forested land mass and the steppe zone. The majority of the population in the western and central, forested regions are Ukrainian ethnics who consider themselves Central-Europeans. Of the two geographic areas, the western has minimal mineral resources and has largely been left out of historic industrialization processes. West-central Ukraine is the country's main agricultural region, which in the Middle Ages was in the Kievan Rus sphere. North of Kyiv we find Chernobyl. The local nuclear plant exploded in 1986, which to this day is one of the world's most serious nuclear catastrophes. Eastern Ukraine, on the steppe, was one of the Soviet Union's industrial "citadels". Metallurgy and heavy industry here were based on black coal in the Donetsk valley and metal ore from Krivoy Rog. A large number of Russian ethnics worked here in the period of Soviet industrialization, and as such the population in the region's larger cities has a majority of Russian speakers who feel that Eastern Ukraine is clearly part of Russia. The three major industrial centres are: Harkov (Harkiv), Donyetsk (Donetsk) and Dnepropetrovsk (Dnipropetrovsk). South-Ukraine also has a definitive Russian majority. The region's centre is one of the largest ports on the Black Sea coast, Odessa. The Crimean Peninsula was annexed to the Russian empire at the end of the 18th century by Catherine the Great, and the Russians who settled here squeezed out the indigenous Tatars by degree. In 1954 Khrushchev made a gift of the region to Ukraine.

Halford Mackinder's most famous paper was 1904's "The Geographical Pivot of History". As such, Ukraine's geographical characteristics as described above serve as the foundation of its past, present and future. In the 9th century the Principality of Kiev was founded here, which was a great European power in the 10th and 11th centuries but disintegrated in the 12th. After the destruction left by the Mongolian Tatars so-called Russian Kiev became a part of the Grand Prin-

cipality of Lithuania, then a part of the Polish Lithuanian State Alliance. The country's independence was secured with varying levels of success by Cossacks organized to defend the borders. In the 18th century Ukraine became part of the Russian Empire. In 1917, after the collapse of Czarist Russia, Ukraine declared its independence, but in 1920 it came under the control of the Red Army. The Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic was established and became one of the founders of the Soviet Union in 1922. Its current borders were established in 1945 with the annexation of Polish, Czechoslovak (formerly Hungarian) and Romanian territories, and then that of the Crimean Peninsula. In 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine declared its independence.

Ukraine's factual political and economic independence never truly existed. Russia has always considered Ukraine a peripheral territory of Russia proper. The most important element of establishing Ukrainian sovereignty was always the attempt to decrease Russian influence. In the West only Henry Kissinger recognized this. "The West must understand that for Russia Ukraine is not a foreign state. Russian history began with Kievan Rus... Ukraine is an integral part of Russian history." On March 5th, 2014 Henry Kissinger stated that Ukraine does not have a choice between West and East. It cannot join either side. It must instead play a bridging role and fill the gap between the two spheres of power.³⁴

What are the chances of Ukraine becomes not a buffer state, but a "bridging" state? The country's current economic situation makes this impossible. Ukraine is one of Europe's least developed national economies. Its GNI per capita is 3.100 USD. The definitive branch of its economy - given its outstanding meteorological and soil characteristics - is agriculture. The country could be one of Europe's leading sources of food, but the establishment of a private agricultural sector is still under way. One of the fundamental problems with the economy is that 80-90% of energy sources are imported (with three-quarters of oil and gas, and all nuclear fuel imported). Given its geopolitical situation it is a transit country, with most of Russia's gas and oil pipelines to Europe running through Ukraine. This includes the Friendship oil pipeline, the Brotherhood gas pipeline and Gazprom's gas lines. The transit status of the country will soon decrease, given that Gazprom's Northern Stream was made operational in 2011, avoiding Ukrainian territory in the north and transporting gas to Germany under the Baltic Sea. It is expected that Gazprom's Southern Stream will be completed in 2015, which avoids Ukraine by running south, through the Black Sea and up to Austria. The basic question is: how will the West - through US, EU and IMF credit - be able to shore up the Ukrainian economy? The chances for success in this socially, politically and territorially divided country are low.

³⁴ KISSINGER, Henry: *How the Ukraine crisis ends*. *The Washington Post*, March 5, 2014. – www.washingtonpost.com (Accessed: March 25, 2014)

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