

## GEOSTRATEGIC AXES AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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### Abstract

Contemporary global geopolitical structure. Main geopolitical axes at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Theoretical approaches: historical approach, approach based on the balance of power of geopolitical players, approach based on the flow of strategic resources, energy resources, trade, finance and investments, politico-military interests and activities, geopolitical epicenters, clashes of civilizations, global social chaos, clash between sea power and land power, global communication within global geopolitical space and global geopolitical blocs.

**Keywords:** geopolitics, geopolitical activity, geopolitical epicenters, geopolitical axes, geopolitical player.

### Introduction

Unprecedented geopolitical movements within global geopolitical space started right after the end of the Cold War, the war between the West and the East. Victorious powers started geopolitical penetration into the territories, which had been “closed” and protected by Eastern bloc before. Dissolution of the USSR, Eastern bloc and the Warsaw Pact implied that the East (particularly the USSR) could not geopolitically “seize” and “protect” most of its former geopolitical territories, and interests as well. End of the Cold War emphasized new important and significant geopolitical factor. It was the geopolitical “awakening” and activity of *Asian geopolitical players*. On the one hand they act against other geopolitical players and on the other they protect geopolitical activities of their own; they started to penetrate neighbor geopolitical territories and states.

Period after the end of the Cold War is significant for its qualitative changes of contemporary global geopolitical structure. This situation is primarily caused by the following factors: dissolution of Eastern bloc, “withdrawal” of many of its territories, new intense geopolitical activity of the West (the USA and European Union), geopolitical activities of Asian geopolitical players, “erosion” of the support and aid for the Third World and new stage of global economic globalization. This new global geopolitical structure deeply influenced not only key geopolitical players and their position within the new global geopolitical map but also geopolitical epicenter, axes and centroid.

Geopolitical power, value and (hegemonic) position of the USA became even much stronger. Russia lost its former position. Germany, many states of Western Europe, China, India, Brasilia and several Muslim states (Saudi Arabia) strengthened their positions. European Union, considered a new geopolitical player, was established in the nineties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Muslim states are influencing global political activities and situation. New epicenters, lines, barriers, borders and geostrategic axes are emerging on contemporary global geopolitical map. Many geostrategic axes are still on the map (for example the USA – Europe – Japan) but geopolitical importance and values of theirs have changed rapidly (for example the USA – the USSR between the end of the Cold War period and the USA – Russia after the end of the Cold War period). One of the most crucial and stable axis, the axis between the USA and Europe, changed dramatically after the end of the Cold War. Both players have strengthened their geopolitical power and position within the global geopolitical system. Both players are re-defining their geopolitical interests and goals. When global economic crisis started it suddenly lead to certain “problems” between them, but their basic axes and interests remain the same.

Considering the previously mentioned we have to point out two important facts. First, creation of new global geopolitical structure with its political relations, epicenters, lines, axes, barriers and centroids goes through first premature stage. We suppose that mankind will face huge geopolitical turbulences and geopolitical changes until 2030. Stabilization of global geopolitical map will be a very long and slow process. We still do not know when and how it ends. This fact is one of the reasons why we have to deal with geopolitical issues.

Second, there is a difference between the change and creation of new geopolitical structure after “hot” world wars and after the “Cold War”. Historically, victorious allies usually made an agreement on “division” of the World and they created new global geopolitical map almost after all global conflicts. But the situation after the end of the Cold War was a bit different. This process is very long, more complex and more global. Previous world wars (WWI and WWII) were colonial wars; it was a fight over global domination. Victorious allies gained everything (for example colonies, natural resources or territories). As we mentioned before, situation after the end of the Cold War was much different. Colonies did not exist anymore. Most colonies were transformed and they became sovereign states of the Third World with their different status and position. There was a rivalry

between the East and the West and fight over the influence in sovereign states of the Third World started right after the end of WWII. This is the main reason why the defeat of Eastern bloc did not mean the right to seize its satellites and allies “automatically”. Geopolitical dominance and “seizure” of those states had (and still have) different character. Globalization as well as geopolitical activities and penetration to those territories and states are the main aspects of domination. But this effort to dominate on the one hand and resistance of those states on the other support the rise of crisis areas, geopolitical epicenters with ongoing conflicts and wars. Today we witness very intense and complex geopolitical activities of players and their penetration to global geopolitical territories, particularly abandoned ones. Geopolitical space is getting “smaller”. There is an increase in number of geopolitical players and their geopolitical movements. There will be also an increase in the number of geopolitical clashes and conflicts. If we take into consideration factors such are anarchy of international system, global economic crisis, fall of states, long-term absence of stable global structure and strong international law we predict even more conflicts and wars in the near future than it was in the Cold War period. New network of relations is being created. It is so complex and difficult that it can easily cover over the most important geopolitical activities of global superpowers. Those geopolitical bindings, in which all geopolitical activities and conflicts are being held, and which help us to predict future alliances, represent “geo-strategic axes”.

Geostrategic axes are prior, main and basic directions of geopolitical activities of players within global geopolitical space. They are considered a concentrated expression of the sum of main activities of players and their basic and strategic interests and goals. Therefore it is not easy to define geostrategic axes without the survey and understanding of total summary of geopolitical movements and various types of activities (political, economic, demographic etc.) of all global, continental and local players. Geostrategic axes are stable complex long-term strategic directions and routes of activities of geopolitical players.

Definition of contemporary geostrategic axes and anticipation of future ones mean to survey basic and main activities of geopolitical players. The survey has to take into consideration the following aspects:

1. historical development,
2. balance of power between geopolitical players,
3. flow of strategic and energetic resources, finance and investments,
4. military interests and activities,
5. geopolitical epicenters,
6. global social chaos,
7. conflict between the Sea and the Soil,
8. global communications within global geopolitical space,

1. Geopolitical structure (geopolitical map) of the world is under permanent change. Its change is closely connected with changes of main geopolitical players, change of their interests and goals as well as main geostrategic axes. Change of geostrategic axes is determined by change of players, change of their geopolitical power and position, change of their geopolitical interests and goals and change of geopolitical activity. This change is a very slow process. It goes through decades and even centuries. Survey of developmental changes of geostrategic axes requires a long-term survey of *history of evolution and movement of power* of geopolitical players within geopolitical space. To understand basic tendencies of contemporary moves and changes of geostrategic axes it is necessary to survey history of movement of geopolitical players and strategic interests and goals of theirs. Both historical analysis and historical comparison can show up changes of global geopolitical structure and main axes of movements of geopolitical players. If we want to understand global geostrategic axes we have to know direction of moves and basic interests and goals of global geopolitical players. There is a possibility to predict future geopolitical clashes or integrations.

Contemporary global geopolitical situation, particularly basic geopolitical movements and geostrategic interests of main geopolitical players, implies that bond between the USA and Japan (going through whole Eurasia) will be the *global geostrategic axe* until 2030. There are also several other main axes, according to Western states, particularly the USA. There are territories of possible future geopolitical epicenters such are the Panama Canal, North Africa, Near East and the so-called Black Hole, Indonesia, Taiwan, Siberia and Korean peninsula. We can also predict creation of new *global geopolitical trapezoid* represented by main geostrategic movements and axes of the West (NATO, the USA). From historical point of view it could be the first connection between sea power and land power, forces of the West and the East, and forces of the North and the South. Advance in technology and warfare of main geopolitical players (if they do not change their strategic interests and goals) means that geopolitical space will be getting “smaller”, even more accessible, narrower and players will battle over it. It will lead to new turbulent geopolitical movements, chaos, conflicts and wars. It will lead to need for change of global geopolitical structure, new balance of power, and new integration and disintegration activities of main and new geopolitical players.

2. During the period of 2015 – 2030 it is not possible to anticipate stabilization of processes of geopolitical movements and global geopolitical structure, which started right after the end of the Cold War. We predict new turbulent geopolitical movements and clashes, particularly in Asia, Africa (North Africa) and Latin America. Main geopolitical players will protect their positions and territories. New players will try to strengthen their

geopolitical positions. Players will try to change and balance out force ratio, and change the global geopolitical structure in order to enforce their own geopolitical interests. The *new wave of geopolitical balance of power* will start and create new structure and new axes of geopolitical activities (after 2030). There are many alternatives.<sup>1</sup>

3. Geostrategic axes are (and will be) determined by *strategic transfer of resources, energy and goods* within global geopolitical space. They will be transferred to developed states, “resource powers” and territories. Those routes and nodes are of strategic importance for existence and development of geopolitical players and they are often considered global geostrategic axes. An effort to dominate the routes is a root cause of many conflicts, clashes and wars. If we want to know that we have to understand places, routes and nodes with high probability of conflicts. There is also a necessity to understand efforts of players in order to have control over those roads and nodes. Contemporary most strategic geo-economic and resource nodes are as follows: the Panama Canal, Gibraltar, the Suez Canal, the Gulf of Aden, the Persian Gulf, Colombo, the Strait of Malacca, the Torres Strait, Melbourne, the Luzon Strait, Taiwan, Shanghai, the Korean Peninsula, the Tsushima Strait, the Tsugaru Strait, La Perouse Strait, the Bering Strait, the Davis Strait, New York, the English Channel, Skagerrak, the Gulf of Bothnia, the Gulf of Finland, the White Sea, Istanbul, Batumi, Baku, Ashgabat and Almaty. Of course, particularly the USA, Russia, European Union, Japan, China, India, Brasilia and wealth Arab states will have to fight over domination in these territories.

4. Global geo-strategic axes are also determined (identified) by *military strategic territories, nodes and lines*. Defense geostrategic lines can be defined as follows:

- they represent defense barriers against supposed direction of enemy attack,
- they create barrier against supposed geopolitical pressure and penetration of hostile geopolitical players,
- they protect geostrategic territories, nodes, flows and axes,
- they represent a barrier against possible balance of power and “undesirable” change of geopolitical structure and network, against force ratio of geopolitical players,
- they defend against geopolitical integration in huge geopolitical areas and main geopolitical players,
- they protect against alliance between powers of the Sea and powers of the Soil of main geopolitical players,
- they control geostrategic routes of resources, energy and trade,
- they protect the system, no superpower or alliance can dominate the whole Eurasian territory.

5. Geo-strategic axes are results of strategic geopolitical interests and procedures of geopolitical players. Clash of moves and different interests is one of the usual results of geopolitical activities and penetration to geopolitical territories. Clashes cause conflicts and tensions; they can lead to possible wars. We can call them *geopolitical epicenters*. Geopolitical epicenters are territories of possible *conflicts and wars*. It is very important to survey them in order to predict geopolitical movements and changes as well as future geopolitical structures and axes. The most important geostrategic epicenters until 2030 are defined as follows: the Panama Canal and the Caribbean, the Mediterranean Sea, North Africa, the Gulf of Guinea, Near East, Central Asia, region of the Caspian Sea, the whole territory of the Black Sea including Mongolian and Chinese borders, territory between India and Pakistan, region of Indian ocean, Indonesia, Taiwan, the Korean Peninsula, Siberia and northern parts of Latin America, according to present analysis of global geopolitical space and strategic movements of players. Geopolitical activities of players are also being determined by geopolitical territories (where military activities occur very often) and geopolitical epicenters where *military conflicts* are of high probability. Wars and conflicts are the result of collision of movement of geopolitical players within a certain territory, according to previously mentioned. Every individual fighting part wants to push ahead with its own influence, interests and goals within certain region, using a variety of forms and tools. The inevitable result of uncompromising antagonistic movement of players is a clash of players in the form of war. The sharpest clash of players is a military one. Territories with very high probability of escalation of future conflicts and wars are as follows: the Black Hole (Near East and the Middle East, region of the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, Syria, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan), northern and central parts of Africa, the Caucasus (east of the Caspian Sea), Indonesia and Korea. Territories with lower probability of escalation of future conflicts and wars are as follows: Latin America, the Balkan Peninsula, popularly referred to as the Balkans (its European part) and territories between India and Taiwan.

<sup>1</sup> Š. Volner: Geopolitika. Klasická. Nová. EÚ – geopolitický aktér 21. storočia, IRIS, Bratislava, pp. 404 – 406



Fig. 1 Asia – future geopolitical epicenters



Fig. 2 Europe – geopolitical lines and geopolitical epicenter

6. New geostrategic barriers (particularly defense geopolitical barriers) are being defined and influenced by possible (and supposed) *global social chaos*. Global social chaos is a result of growing disparities between wealth of the “North” (the USA and European Union) and poverty of the “South” (Africa, Asia and Latin America). Increase in the number of less developed states with very low economic development, global economic crisis, huge amount of poor people and unemployed, wars and riots will violate political order in states of the “South” and support mass migration to developed states. This mass migration will violate order as well as social and political stability of developed states. Developed states of the “North” will protect their interests, social and political stability. It is a normal reaction. There are many ways how to fight mass migration. First measure is creation of various types of administrative barriers (visas and authorizations to enter the national territory). Second measure is building of protected borders and border checkpoints, creation of long completely guarded lines closely connected with strict control of free movement of illegal immigrants. It will be a very

tough fight because of the fact that migration flows will be very massive, well-organized and interconnected with Diasporas. Illegal immigrants usually fight for their own lives and this is the main reason why they will undergo unprecedented asymmetric risks. There is a high probability of conflict between civilizations, cultures, states, nations and religions in the near future. The most intense and massive migration flows will come from Africa, Middle Asia and Latin America. Migration flows will be as follows: from Latin America to North America, from Africa to Europe (French, Albanian and Italian connection), from Central Asia (Romanian, Ukrainian and Mediterranean connection) to Europe and the USA, from Middle Asia and region of the Caspian Sea (through Russia and the Ukraine) to Europe, from India and Vietnam to Europe. States of the “West” will build barriers and lines running at the bottom of eastern and western part of both the USA and European Union, we can call it a “geopolitical defense U”.

7. Historically, the longest geostrategic axes are being defined by antagonistic movements of *sea power* and *land power* (the Earth). This mutual penetration and an effort to dominate each other is one of the basic and main geopolitical tendencies. Heartland and Rimland are considered unique and key territories, according to many geopolitical strategists. Considering the position of both Heartland and Rimland there is one global threat for all global powers – one power seizes and control whole region of Eurasia. Neither Russia nor European Union, China, the USA or Muslim states support (or will support) such situation when one Eurasian superpower (or power) will dominate the region. This idea supports creation of geostrategic defense lines and barriers in order to avoid integration of main players controlling the region of Eurasia and their geopolitical activities towards East – West (Great Britain – Japan) and North – South (Russia – Indian ocean). Therefore the main defense lines of the West against Russian activities can be identified as follows: eastern border of Europe (so-called Iron Curtain during the Cold War period, nowadays territory of the Ukraine), eastern borders of Russian federation (Japan) and southern border of India (Colombo, Garcia Island). Today, the USA has hegemonic position and its penetration is the most significant one. Creation of contemporary geostrategic defense barriers is under direct control of the USA and it will try to keep them up for a longest period of time. Comparison of contemporary geostrategic defense lines of the West (the USA and NATO) and geostrategic defense lines of the Cold War period shows radical changes, particularly in Europe. Defense geostrategic line of the West does not lie on the border of Western Europe (“Iron Curtain”). Today it lies behind the borders of states of Eastern Europe (excluding Belarus and the Ukraine). There was no defense strategic line created between the USSR and China after the end of the Cold War period. During the American war campaign in Vietnam and Soviet intervention to Afghanistan the USSR tried to “eliminate” it towards the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean (but this initiative was not successful). Present situation concerning the main defense anti-integration and centrifugal strategic lines is as follows: from the Caspian Sea to Turkey, from the Caspian Sea to Iraq-Iran borders, from the Caspian Sea to Afghanistan and Pakistan, from the Black Sea region to China, from India to Taiwan and from Taiwan to the Bering Strait.

8. Global geostrategic structure and axes are also being identified by main global *geopolitical communications*. They connect individual states, regions and continents. They enable movement of people, goods, resources and energy. They support movements of individual players within global geopolitical space. They are of great strategic importance. Blockade of geopolitical communications could damage the existence and further development of engaged states and players. It could force them to search for alternative routes, which could bring on enormous complications and costs for individual players. Main global geopolitical route starts from the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean and goes through Asia to Japan and the Pacific Ocean. Another global geostrategic route goes from Norway to North Africa. This route is being divided to three continental ones: from Norway to Morocco, from Norway to Algeria and from Norway to Turkey. Regions of the Barents Sea, the Sea of Japan, the South China Sea, Sri Lanka and the Mediterranean Sea are also considered geostrategic communication nodes. The Panama Canal, the North Sea, the Celtic Sea, the Bay of Biscay, regions of the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea, region of Cape Town, the Tasman Sea, the Arafura Sea, the East Chinese Sea and the Okhotsk Sea are considered main continental communication nodes.

## Conclusion

It is necessary to emphasize that their geo-strategic importance will change through time because of the development of new technologies, materials, alternative resources and energy resources (for example sub-sea thoroughfares, new airplane technologies, development and use of amphibious vehicles, new alternative energy resources, new artificial resources etc.). Despite of the dynamic development of traffic and communication technologies we suppose growing density and interconnection of geo-strategic communication routes. New geo-strategic and transnational communications will be created until 2030. Communication route from Norway will go to Nigeria. There will be also another routes: from Norway to India, from Caspian Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, from the Barents Sea through the region of the Caspian Sea to India, from the Okhotsk Sea through Siberia to the Netherlands, from Siberia to Japan, China and India, from China through Central Asia to the Netherlands etc. In case of worsening of relations between NATO, European Union and Russia (and possible balance

between Russia and China, India, Iran and Japan) we could witness “blockade” of communication route from Russia (Siberia) and region of the Caspian Sea.

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