U.S. Weapons across the High Seas to the Lost Continent of Eurasia

By Mary Beaudoin

Part I. The Lost Continent

Generations of students in the United States have been taught that there are seven major land masses in the world with Europe and Asia forming separate continents. In today's U.S. schools, Common Core education standards define continents in this way.1 But, if we look at a globe or a map of the world without this preconceived idea, there are only six, with Europe and Asia forming one continent.

The prevailing perception in the West has been that Europe is a separate continent, because Europe's countries are supposedly more closely identified with their once-upon- a-time colonies and their World War II Pax Americana benefactors in North America,2 though there is an ocean between them, than with their neighbors to the east. International finance continues to tie Europe to the U.S. in a Gordian knot. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), dominated by the U.S. and uniting western Europe and North America in a Cold War military alliance has since incorporated member and partnership countries of eastern Europe and beyond to encircle Russia. And in the east, the U.S. Asia Pivot—or "Rebalancing" (as it is renamed) —is encircling China.

While America has been working on incorporating more of Europe into its best laid plans, something else has been happening. The 21st century is being called "the Eurasian Century." The relationship between the major powers, Russia and China, has intensified.3

Today, Russia and China are involved in developing trade agreements: China has taken a leading role in the 21-member Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP),4 viewed as a rival to the 12-member Transpacific Partnership (TPP) that the U.S. administration is desperately trying to pass on a fast track. The ruble and yuan are being exchanged in some financial transactions between Russia and China, bypassing the dollar.5 Gas-rich Russia has concluded two major deals to send its gas to China, the world's leading consumer of energy.6 Then there is BRICS––an association of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, the five "emerging" countries––which has predicted the eventual "end of Western financial domination."7 And the ancient Silk Roads are being revived—this time not with caravans of camels and horses but, in the words of Asia Times correspondent Pepe Escobar, as "the most spectacular, ambitious and wide-ranging pluri-national infrastructure offensive ever attempted: high-speed rail, pipelines, ports, fiber optic cables, and state- of-the-art telecom. China is already building across the Central Asian stans which will link Russia, Iran, Turkey, and the Indian Ocean, branching out to Europe all the way to Venice, Rotterdam, Duisburg and Berlin."8.

Carte des Voyages Tres Extraordinaires de Saturnin Farandou, (Paris, 1879) spoof of Jules Verne's Voyages Extraordinaires by Albert Robida, considered the father of science-fiction illustration

That is what worries U.S. hegemonists, who want U.S. to act as the single dominant power in a New World Order, crossing nation-state boundaries freely in the service of transnational corporations to mine the world for profit.9 A multi-polar power-sharing dynamic throws a wrench in the U.S.'s own Silk Road plans that had long been in the works. The U.S. Congress adopted the Silk Road Strategy Act on March 19, 1999. Grabbing control of former Soviet space and NATO expansion were key to the economic and strategic schemes.10

After a coup d'etat in 2014, all of former Soviet Ukraine has not fallen in with the U.S./NATO camp and remains a flashpoint between east and west. Another thorn in the side of U.S. hegemonic plans is the Eurasian Economic Union, an agreement concluded in January of this year between Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Armenia; Kyrgyzstan is expected to become a member this May.11 Eric Draitser, founder of StopImperialism.com, commented: "The EEU should be understood as yet another blow to US hegemony in Asia and the former Soviet space."12

In addition, the idea that the western European countries of the European Union might be better off in trade agreements with its closer neighbor, Russia, than with the U.S. may begin to gain some traction. According to the EU Observer, Russia's ambassador to the European Union Vladimir Chizhov asked the EU, "Do you believe it is wise to spend so much political energy on a free trade zone with the USA while you have more natural partners at your side, closer to home?" He also commented, "We don't even chlorinate our chickens," a dig at the U.S. food industry.13 U.S. agribusiness and processing industries trouble Europeans as the U.S. is trying to conclude The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership agreement (TTIP), which it initiated allowing an open market in Europe for its exports.14

In the face of U.S. incursions into its region, Russia under President Vladmir Putin is holding firm on national sovereignty, unlike his more oligarch-friendly, commons-privatizing predecessor Boris Yeltsin.15 But this standing firm does not mean isolation. In his October speech in Sochi, Putin made it clear that Russia would be

part of the international world community, as he expected the U.S. would, referring to a multi-polar power sharing. He said he didn't want war, but he was would not back down if the West gets too close to Russia's borders.16 Like other statements he has made, this should be regarded as an opening that the U.S. could take to respect mutual sovereignty and work together with Russia to create an environment that would revive nuclear disarmament and demilitarize.

However, U.S. hegemonists are interested neither in power sharing nor in backing off threats to another nuclear-armed country. Instead they have been escalating attacks on Russia.

One tactic takes the form of propaganda—a formula used so often in the past: heaping scorn on the leader of a country demonizing him. Once we start to hear the word "regime" applied to it we can bet that country is a target for the next takeover.

We are treated to relentless Putin bashing in the corporate media on a daily basis, and not just on Fox News. In his New York Times column last December, the Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman, attacking what he refers to as Putin's "swaggering strongman" persona, managed to reiterate a favorite fabrication of Washington that "Putin invaded Ukraine." (No mention of U.S. involvement.) He blamed Russia's financial troubles partly on what he sees as Putin's "crony capitalism,"17 but neglected to mention that former U.S. State Department official Natalie Jaresko was made a Ukrainian citizen by special decree in December and quickly installed as Ukraine's new finance minister,18 or that Hunter Biden, Vice President Joe Biden's son, sat on the board of a Ukrainian-based gas company when the VP went to Kiev, according to Al Jazeera America, to "discuss how the U.S. could provide technical expertise for expanding domestic production of natural gas."19

100 U.S. Stryker combat vehicles, the type used in Iraq and Afghanistan, paraded 300 yards from the Russian border in Estonia on February 24, in Operation Dragoon Ride, part of a Show of Force.
Photo: Washington Post

Then there is the well-publicized case of those poor put-upon-by-Putin girls, Pussy Riot—the freedom-of-expression darlings of everyone from NGOs and A-list celebrities to high-ranking U.S. State Department officials, who, we are supposed to believe, suddenly had become aficionados of Russian avant-garde performance art.20 Two of these young women, self-described as "anti-capitalist anarchists" were even showcased in a scene in the popular Netflix series "House of Cards," when it degenerated in its third season from a critique of Washington Machiavellian machinations into a Putin-bashing infomercial.

Propaganda creates the environment for the American public's acceptance of regime change, but destroying Russia's oil export business had a more tangible effect. Many Americans realize that the drop to $2.39 at the gas pump is the result of oil politics somewhere in the world, but may not realize that it could be the result of a meeting September 11, 2014, at the royal palace in Jeddah between Secretary of State John Kerry and Saudi Arabia King Abdullah; they are believed to have colluded to flood the world oil market in an effort to cripple Russia's oil export business, as well as weaken its ally Iran, and attack its ally Syria.21

The drop in oil prices isn't where the attacks end. The sanctions the U.S. and a compliant EU placed on Russia served as a double whammy to its economy. Standard & Poors downgraded the Russian credit rating to "junk" at the end of January. Moody's cut it to junk in February, citing "the crisis in Ukraine and a slide in oil prices and the ruble." The next ratings are out in mid-April, but prognosticators aren't optimistic.22

The sanctions presently are making things difficult for Russia, but Russian Ambassador Chizhov isn't the only one wondering how much longer Europe will want to tie itself so closely to the U.S. In December of last year, M. K. Bhadrakumar, a former Indian ambassador to Uzbekistan and Turkey, also wondered:

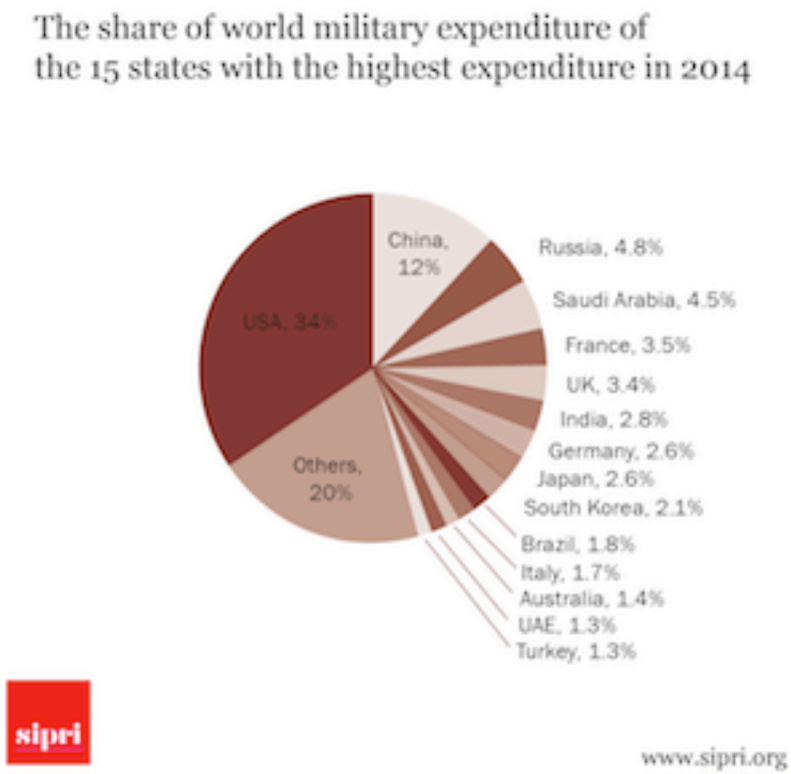
"Europe is hurting itself in the present estrangement with Russia...a normalization of relations with Moscow is in Europe's core interests of regional security and stability. The point is, unlike the US, which has no worthwhile trade or economic ties with Russia, the big Russian market is crucially important for Europe.23"

A sign that Europe is asserting its independence from the U.S. came in March when the UK, followed by Germany, France, and Italy, became a founding member of the new China-initiated Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), though the U.S. pressured many countries not to join. The bank now has more than 50 founding member countries and will fund large development projects, based on the same concept as the U.S.-dominated World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Russia became a founding member of AIIB on April 14. The U.S. and Japan have not joined.24

Part II. Weapons Multiply Across the Sea

The U.S. is not trying to win friends by sharing in the pie. Instead, it is reverting to its usual terrible tactic—military force—which requires making enemies. At the end of last year former Ohio Congressman Dennis Kucinich warned that the U.S. is hurting itself with its anti-Russian stance and weaponizing:

"The House of Representatives unanimously passed a far-reaching Russia sanctions bill, a hydra-headed incubator of poisonous conflict. The second provocative anti-Russian legislation in a week, it further polarizes our relations with Russia, helping to cement a Russia-China alliance against Western hegemony, and undermines long-term America's financial and physical security by handing the national treasury over to war profiteers.25"



The share of world military expenditure of the 15 states with the highest expenditure in 2014. The large dark area indicates the United States.
Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute sipri.org

Nuclear weapons upgrade: As Kucinich has pointed out, this policy, moving in the direction of war, will only benefit those who profit from war. First and foremost will be the weapons industry: According to a report on nuclear weapons, funded by the prominent nuclear nonproliferation organization Ploughshares, there are plans for the U.S. to spend one trillion dollars ($35 Billion a year) to maintain the current arsenal, buy replacement systems, and upgrade existing nuclear bombs and warheads.26

The U.S. Missile Defense Shield: The Missile Defense Shield system that the U.S. continues to expand overseas is giving the U.S. first strike advantage over Russia and China—it is not defensive as is claimed, but is instead part of an offensive system designed to create “Escalation Dominance” or “nuclear primacy”— the U.S. ability to win a nuclear war.27 More installations are scheduled for Romania this year and Poland in 2018.28

Prompt Global Strike: The little shop of horrors called DARPA, which develops experimental weapons in the U.S., is creating hypersonic glide missiles that strike within less than an hour.29 China and Russia reportedly are developing them, too. The arms race is breaking records in speed.

Tactical Nuclear Weapons: Russia withdrew its tactical weapons from Europe more than 18 years ago and maintains more than 1,000 such weapons within its borders, as does the U.S. within its borders. But the U.S. maintains 160 to 200 tactical nuclear weapons (mini nukes) in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey that can be employed for "battlefield use." Michel Chossudovsky of Global Research, Canada, warns that the situation is so much more dangerous now because "none of the safeguards of the Cold War prevail," as was the case under the Cold War doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). "Nuclear weapons are heralded by the Pentagon as 'harmless to the surrounding civilian population because the explosion is underground.'" They are now "part of the nuclear toolbox to be used alongside of conventional weapons."30

Show of Force: In March, weaponized tanks bearing U.S. soldiers in "Operation Dragoon Ride" rolled boldly over a thousand miles from Estonia close to Russia's borders through five countries on their way to a U.S. Army base in Germany—an extremely provocative move. It must have looked like war was on.

New Ways of War, New Kinds of Weapons: With warhawks in control of the U.S., and the enormous profit to be made in weapons there is incentive to continuing to develop ever more threatening lethal weapons.

PART III Tallying Up

In 2015, the latest figures showed that in 2014, U.S. defense spending was 4.5 times larger than the next largest—China's—and that Russia's was only 54% of China's.31 It looks as though the current U.S. Congress will allow the Department of Defense around $600 billion for 2016, (and that does not include for nuclear weapons that fall under the Department of Energy),32 while cutting social programs. The U.S. war hawks put the blame on Russia and China, and say the U.S. needs to defend its arsenal against them because they are upgrading their weapons and nuclear arms. But however much other countries may not want to spend their talent and treasure on weapons, they must feel they have to keep up with the Joneses at the Pentagon—because the U.S. is continuing with plans for military dominance and taking it to their backyards.

Americans need to ask who is provoking who? Who is invading regions of the world far from home? Who is spurning efforts at multi-polar power sharing? Isn't threatening Russia and China near their borders fool-hardy? Why should American taxpayers be asked to finance plans for the destruction of other nations, as well as for their own doomsday?

To conclude: Russia may be experiencing some difficulties now, but there are many reasons to believe a country as vast and rich in resources, which has powerful friends with whom it is expanding trade and security agreements, will get past its current set-back and be even stronger together with the rest of the continent—unless the weapons all the powers—the U.S. included—are creating on the continent are used for World War III, in which case no one may survive.

This spring, leaders from around the world are gathering in New York City at the 2015 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review. If nuclear-armed states that actually signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (Russia, China, the U.S., UK, and France) are failing to implement it, what of those states like India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea who have nuclear weapons, but haven't signed it?

The U.S. could provide leadership in world nuclear disarmament. It could also stop acting as arms exporter par excellence; a recent Stockholm International Peace Research Institute report revealed that the U.S. has been leading the world in exports to other regions of the world.33

If the U.S. doesn't accept the fact that it is a multi-polar world, it will have become irrelevant, it will have lost relationship with the continent of Eurasia, and as a nation find itself isolated. Or worse—continue the descent into military madness.

Mary Beaudoin is the editor of the Women Against Military Madness newsletter. Polly Mann and Jay Kvale contributed to weapons information.

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