

On a Silk Thread, the Chinese are coming

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FOREWORD

The world is rumbling and wars are in the air. At the end of 2021, I planned to stop writing books for a few years and I wanted to conclude a series of 10 books with a book on the changing geopolitical balance of forces, partly based on the Chinese master plan for the new Silk Road(s). My main rationale for this theme was that I was convinced then (and still am now) that the economic and military balance of power is going to change dramatically in the coming decades and that the mono-polar world, in which the US has held sway since the end of the 2^e World War, will be replaced by a multipolar world, in which Eurasia and especially China, Russia and India are central.

Besides, I was and am convinced that most people in the West do not fully realize the impact of this upheaval, and that the US will not accept such a development lightly and will do everything possible to frustrate this strategic master plan (Belt and Road initiative) initiated by China. It was the wise Athenian general Thucydides who already predicted some 2,400 years ago that a dominant power (in his time Athens and in our time the US) will not tolerate a rising power (in his time Sparta and later Syracuse and in our time China) without a fight and that this almost always leads to large-scale wars.

We live anno 2023 in a very turbulent and extremely dangerous world and in several places in the world there are (potential) casus belli that can be (in)directly related to these changing power relations. The proxy war in Ukraine is a good example. Having lived in Ukraine for years, I got to know this country well and in February 2014, when I stayed there, I already predicted the current proxy war during the US-directed coup d'etat known as the Maidan revolution. Taiwan is another such hot spot.

For over 100 years, the economic potential of Eurasia has been a real nightmare for power elites in Anglo-Saxon countries. Terror strikes them at the thought of countries like Germany, Russia and China forming an economic tandem. Several wars in the last century played out on this geopolitical chessboard. It was US-Polish hawk Zbigniew Brzezinski, who in his book *The Grand Chessboard* in 1997, laid the foundation for the US Neocons' strategic vision of Eurasia.

He was the influential US security adviser at the time. Paul Wolfowitz the US Deputy Secretary of Defense developed the strategic military doctrine developed after him between 1994 and 1999, which was essentially that the US should no longer tolerate an emerging military competitor under any circumstances. There was only 1 superpower and that was the US and it had to stay that way. US political scientist, sociologist and philosopher Francis Fukuyama even went so far as to speak of the end of history.

The US had won for good, but pride comes before a fall. At the time, Russia was in a deplorable position, the immense country was completely grounded socio-economically after the break-up of the Soviet Union and US oligarchs were plundering the country of its natural resources, total anarchy prevailed in which gangster gangs terrorized the country and the Russian army and government were on the verge of death.

China was in just beginning at that time with Deng Chao Ping's economic revolution and did not yet represent much economically and militarily. On Brzezinski's geopolitical chessboard, Russia was to be preferably cut into pieces and at the end of the 20^e century, few could have guessed that Russia would rise like a sphinx from the ashes under President Putin's leadership and that China would develop into a global economic power at breakneck speed.

The armies of Russia and China are now also world-class and can match those of the US, which spends \$1 trillion almost every year on its war machine and continues to present itself as the world's policeman, especially in those countries rich in valuable land and fuel or with important strategic locations. The metamorphoses of Russia and China have led to major geopolitical tensions since say 2014.

Although US foreign policy since President Nixon had always been to separate China and Russia, an aggressive US expansion policy since the beginning of this century achieved exactly the opposite, Russia and China now have a solid alliance and maintain fine (economic) relations and the same is increasingly true for India. US foreign policy on Europe can essentially be summarized as follows: keep Germany small, Russia outside and the US inside Europe.

Especially in the past decade, the EU and the European countries under it have increasingly acted as vassals of the US. Around the beginning of this century, I briefly had the expectation that the EU would set its own (foreign and economic) course and spread its wings on the world stage, but that turned out to be an illusion. I experienced the blowing up of the Nord-Stream pipelines by the US in September 2021 as an absolute low point, especially the self-destructive and docile attitude of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who disavowed German interests.

Already, the German economy is suffering enormous damage and the consequences of this terrorist act will reverberate for decades because this economic industrial giant simply cannot thrive without Russia's cheap fossil fuels. Never have I lived in a time when blind propaganda by the mainstream media was so rampant as it is now in the face of a proxy war in Ukraine.

Pretty slogans such as fighting for democracy, a rule-based order are, if you look closely, in fact empty shells, quite apart from the fact that the rules mainly apply to others but not to ourselves in the West. We can change these rules at will and unilaterally, and the West continuously applies double standards. The hypocrisy in the foreign policy of that West shines through and nobody, not even the political elites of the West themselves know the rules of this rule-based order, which is constantly referred to.

The rules of international law, established after the 2^e World War, are systematically flouted by that same West. This did not go unnoticed by non-Western countries (80% of the world's population) that are now turning away from the West en masse and are keen to join the so-called BRICS countries, which will become a major economic alliance in the coming decades and will rival both the US and the EU.

What I had a hard time assessing after the Maidan revolt in Kiev in 2014 was what price Russia was willing to pay for a military intervention, whether one was militarily strong enough for such an operation or whether one needed to modernize the army first or whether Russia would opt for a diplomatic solution to spare its relationship with the West. At the time, when I informed family and friends that the situation in Ukraine might escalate, they must have thought me crazy.

First of all, most people in the Netherlands did not even know where Ukraine was located on the map, let alone that they knew anything about its history and allocated position within the master plan of the new Silk Road(s). Ukraine literally means borderland and for millennia-long that area had been the main corridor between East (Asia) and West (Europe). In my experience, it is therefore no coincidence that that is precisely where all the trouble broke out in 2014.

In this long history, several all-out invasions of Russia took place, both from Central Asia (Huns and Mongols) and from Europe (Poles, French and Germans) because the route to Russia has no natural barriers. Large parts of Ukraine were part of that larger Russia and only in 1991 did Ukraine become an independent country with a large Russian minority (1/3) mainly in the former Russian areas in the East and South of the country.

When my book was more or less ready for publication in mid-December, President Putin issued what I saw as a crystal-clear ultimatum to the West, drawing a line in the sand regarding Ukraine's entry into NATO. Already since 2007, he had stated in no uncertain terms countless times that the inclusion of Ukraine within NATO was a red line that Russia could not accept under any circumstances and that the unlimited expansion of NATO towards Russia was contrary to the commitments made by the West in 1991 and subsequent years.

The minutes of those talks recorded those commitments, but not formally in a treaty. In law, the adage made agreements (including verbal ones) reach parties as law, but in the case of Russia's legitimate security interests, this does not seem to apply in the eyes of the West, which in my view betrays a sense of superiority on the part of the West and borders on a form of racism. President Putin proposed a new security structure in late 2021 that would include Russia's strategic interests and keep Ukraine neutral.

Was this really so unreasonable now? Look at the map of 1991 and the map of today and see which countries surrounding Russia have joined NATO. As Ukraine had proved to be the ideal corridor in all Russia's invasions because of a lack of natural obstacles, NATO membership for that country was not a strategic option for Russia, quite apart from the fact that placing weapons of mass destruction just minutes away from Russia's major cities would be foreseeable.

His offer was bluntly and extremely arrogantly rejected, and we now know the consequences. Ukraine is lost for good, now deplores over 500,000 dead soldiers and is economically devastated, also because the main part of the national income was earned in the Russian-conquered areas in the east of that country.

I had foreseen a steady but gradual growth of Eurasia in the December 2021 version of my book, but in mid-December 2021 it became crystal clear to me that everything was accelerating at lightning speed and I decided to suspend this book until further notice and not publish it. 2 years I followed geopolitical developments closely and I had 2 options, namely: either I would never publish the book on the geopolitical impact of the Silk Road(s) again because of its lightning-fast pace and unpredictable twists and turns or I would still publish the updated script knowing that it could easily be overtaken by reality. I opted for the latter.

Fine books have been written about the new Silk Road(s) in recent years, and they are mainly about the substantive plans in geographical, infrastructural-technical and economic terms. That is essentially not what this book is about. The central theme of this book is what this geopolitical landslide might mean for us in the West and what might be the wisest strategy, other than blindly and emotionally engaging in armed struggle with emerging world powers and countries, claiming their rightful position after centuries of colonization and exploitation by that West. Do not underestimate the residual sentiments in those countries!

Unlike the US, I currently see no hard evidence that countries like China, India and Russia seek empire, want to impose their will on others and certainly not that they want to enforce it militarily. They simply want to trade and increase their wealth. Nor am I of the opinion that Russia wants to militarily conquer (parts of) Europe. I have been hearing this idea-fixe since my school days. Russia does not even have the military capacity and resources for that.

In contrast, Russia is more likely to turn away from the West altogether because there are plenty of economic opportunities in the East. Russia does not need the West at all. The eagerness of numerous countries, including in Africa and Central and South America, to join the BRICS countries is so great that the West needs to think twice about whether their haughty, arrogant, self-righteous attitude towards 2/3 of the world's population is now so smart.

Continually, we in the West underestimate their technical and economic talents and overestimate ours. While the US and the EU focus mainly on utterly counterproductive economic sanctions against Russia and obscene arms deliveries to Ukraine, with no prospect of military success, the (aspiring) BRICS countries constructively forge one economic alliance after another and focus mainly on strengthening the infrastructure between them, exploiting economic opportunities and strengthening their diplomatic relations, based on equality. This positive mind-set and energy stand in stark contrast to our destructive attitude.

This fresh geopolitical wind apparently appeals so strongly to the wishes and sentiments of numerous countries that many countries in Africa and South and Central America have also shown serious interest in becoming part of this new multipolar world. People are completely fed up with centuries of domination and moral cowering of the West. Know thyself said the ancient wise Greeks.

We in the West, with the US at the forefront, are devoid of any self-reflection and empathy for dissenters and we even go so far as to characterize ourselves, through European Commissioner Borrell, as the garden of Eden versus a bunch of backward countries that are part of an imaginary jungle. Getting disconnected from reality is downright risky. A thorough environmental analysis is lacking.

Pride comes before a fall and, in fact, that negative image is completely false. It is the fate of every imperialist. One struggles, innovates and peaks, gains a lot of wealth, becomes lazy and (mentally) lazy, falls into decline without realizing it oneself and then loses out to emerging and more driven (innovative) powers that outstrip them in all respects. When I look at the history of, say, the past 5,000 years, I always see the same pattern.

The US too is over the hill, economically, financially, morally and militarily, but neither wants to see nor accept that, any more than the British did from World War 1^e onwards. In our country, we have an irrational fondness for the US not based on facts and we follow the US in almost everything. Most people are under the delusion that the US won World War 2^e but nothing could be further from the truth, it was the former Soviet Union that defeated Nazi Germany and with a human sacrifice of over 27 million Soviet citizens, compared to 430. 000 Americans, most of whom died in South-East Asia.

Marketing was invented in the US and people excel at sales pitches, spinning narratives and mainstream media here and there are not too interested in reality and facts, but in managing the public's perceived reality. There is certainly no more pluralistic investigative journalism in my country, but that is essential for a democracy to function properly. Although we pretend to educate independent, critical-thinking citizens, these media outlets feel they have to prescribe the narrative and repeat it endlessly.

Anyone who steps outside the box will be subject to (digital) group coercion, (self) censorship, expulsion and exclusion. Whether we can even begin to stem the tide of serious decline of the West is difficult for me to judge at this point, after the fiasco of the proxy war in Ukraine, because I see little evidence of any self-reflection or environmental awareness, especially among the political elites, who, by the way, have never been of such deplorable intellectual quality in my lifetime.

Still, I consider it worthwhile to at least explore, think through and consider a different course. If we do not do this, then for me a 3^e World War is not a question of whether it will happen, but when it will start. Given the lightning-fast geopolitical developments at the moment, I have some reservations about the shelf life of my analyses below. According to some, the 3^e World War has already started and, like the 1^e and the 2^e, began with a local conflict that expanded regionally and globally.

It is a given in historiography, that you cannot be sure about the accuracy of analyses until the dust settles and you are at least 10 years down the line. Having pinned my hopes on the common sense of the public and definitely not on the inimitable behavior of political elites, I have made this book as accessible as possible to a wide audience because I value common sense more than technocratic study-room wisdom.

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

We live in a time when anyone who really wants to can delve into numerous subjects and sciences. With logical common sense and a certain critical grounding, you can get very far. Very many people are totally uninterested in (world) history and geopolitics and never will be. Others rely purely on reports in the mainstream media and unfortunately those reports are riddled with propaganda, gaps and factual nonsense.

Only 1 side of an issue is highlighted, any nuance is missing and the reader is more or less forced to choose between the good guys (and that's us in the West) and the bad guys (that's all the countries that dare to take a different course and challenge the West). Of course, the world is not so black and white, but most citizens seem to find this simplicity comfortable and base their opinions on it, are unwilling to delve further into the matter or simply do not have the time.

According to the American writer Mark Twain, history does not repeat itself (exactly), but it does rhyme. Italian historian and philosopher Giambattista Vico recognized certain cycles in human history and I can make it much simpler. Empires come and go, know their time of flourishing, consolidation and decline until their empire is over. For me, it is obvious that the US is in decline in every conceivable area.

However, this is not without major tensions or (global) conflicts. Much of the news that is poured over citizens can be traced to these kinds of frictions whether it is about the proxy war in Ukraine, the feigned tensions between China and Taiwan or even riots in Kazakhstan, Georgia or Kosovo. They are all convulsions to the waning hegemony of the US. Empires of the world become arrogant, complacent and fall victim to their own success.

This has always been the case. Geopolitical (power) relations have been changing dramatically in recent years and have only accelerated after the US-provoked proxy war in Ukraine, also because it has become clear to many countries in the world what power games are being played by the West to their disadvantage. Self-awareness and the drive for more sovereignty and self-determination is also growing in Africa, South and Central America and Asia. France is being shown the door in Niger and Pacific islands are daring to partner with China instead of the US.

The enthusiasm for the BRICS countries is strong and its membership has recently increased substantially. Although people and cultures can be very different from each other, no one wants to be dominated by others. That is a universal fact. During that process of self-awareness, one also tends to look back at the past and especially the history of, say, the past 250 years.

After the industrial revolution, the British ruled the world and created an empire where the sun never set. Leading up to the 1^e World War, Western European countries in particular competed for resource-rich colonies in Africa and Asia. After the 2^e World War, the US took over from the British, albeit in a more sophisticated way where money, blackmail, coercion and eventually regime changes or military interventions became the main tools.

During that period, the US committed 72 (military) interventions and imposed economic sanctions on numerous countries. We are on the eve of a major turning point in history, with countries like China, Russia, India, Brazil and many other often resource-rich countries claiming their rightful position on the world stage. I am not going to romanticize this development and the situation in those countries because that is a pitfall that lurks in this kind of geopolitical landslide, but the West would do well to learn to listen better to these countries and say goodbye to their own hubris in order to play a meaningful role globally in the future.

Right now, the West is not listening to the arguments and motives of these countries at all. Right now, the omens are not exactly favorable. Arrogance, pedanticism and complacency are persistent ills. The idea that we in the West are better at everything is stupidly untrue. Cabinets full of books have been written about countries like China, Russia and India. I am not going to repeat or try to improve on that in this book. Fine books have also been written in recent years on the old and new Silk Road(s).

I would like to refer to that as well. The interested reader is expected to search for these sources himself via the Internet in 2023, form a balanced opinion and separate the wheat from the chaff (because there is also a lot of nonsense and factual inaccuracies). This book quickly tries to give the layman a broad outline of the changing geopolitical field of forces, which could also drastically change our lives in the West in the years to come.

You may not be interested in geopolitics, but geopolitics is interested in you. In fact, the Chinese master plan for Eurasia is an infrastructural megaproject aimed at doing business on this largest landmass in the world, where, as mentioned, 2/3 of the world's population lives. This mega plan differs from US hegemony by not wanting to enforce or impose norms, values and a monoculture on the participating countries, and that is precisely what apparently appeals to many.

There is also a strong drive among those countries to create a new monetary system and get out from under the yoke of the (Petro) dollar, on which a significant part of US power and prosperity has been based since the 1970s. People are fed up with Wall-Street and London City because the (Petro)dollar is regularly misused by the US for non-monetary political purposes, which of course is disastrous for confidence in a currency. Not only the dollar but also US-dominated institutions such as the World Bank and IMF are a thorn in the side of other countries.

Since the (Petro) dollar is 1 of the main pillars of US prosperity and supremacy and it allows it to maintain 750 military bases around the world, erosion of this position of the (Petro) dollar is seen by the US as an existential threat. The number of foreign military bases of Russia and China can be counted on the fingers of 1 hand, which should nevertheless be an indication for objective citizens in our country, in addition to the actual military behavior of the US in, say, the last 80 years, to judge who exactly is the real aggressor on the world stage.