

## **The New “Great Game”: What Awaits Us?**

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The game-changers in today’s world has coincided with the emergence of US President Donald Trump’s erratic administration, which is pursuing goals that are completely detached from those of Europe generally. Trump’s abandonment of the Iran nuclear deal, combined with Russian President Vladimir Putin’s increasing belligerence and Chinese President Xi Jinping’s growing ambitions, indicates that the world is entering an ever more confrontational and dangerous phase.

It is not possible to itemize the great currents of twenty-first-century geopolitics with the same confidence as those of the nineteenth, but there are a few obvious ones. There is the rise of China. There is increased political tribalism and a possible breakdown of liberal democracy on the horizon. In the nearer term, there is jihadist terrorism. And in the era of US President Donald Trump, it is hard not to wonder if the world is headed toward a future of declining co-operation and a return to naked, zero-sum great-power competition. But with the usual caveat that accompanies every prediction about the twenty-first century—namely, that it depends on humans still being around—none of these forces really matters, either.

It is also difficult to argue that what’s happening in the failed states of Syria, Iraq and Libya, the stormy waters of the East Mediterranean, the hardening sanctions and new axes against Iran, the Kurdish corridor, the intensified currency, trade, technology and energy wars and a decoupling of Europe from the US are unrelated to the designing of a new “Great Game”, now more visible and feasible than hitherto around our geography.

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This game or whatever we call it will inevitably affect each of us as the individuals, the nation, the region, the companies, the militaries, the civil societies and the world at large. Hence, we have to understand it better and try to influence its evolution to the best of our abilities.

New players have joined the game, who were previously on the side-lines of the Cold War’s bipolar order. Despite the global financial crisis, the “Middle Kingdom” has conquered a place on almost all of the world’s playing fields. Beijing has positioned itself to challenge the dollar as the global reserve currency, become a technology leader and extend its position of power via the Belt and Road Initiative throughout the world. This has led to the prediction of a new bipolarity—in former National Security Advisor late Zbigniew Brzezinski’s words, a “G-2 World.”<sup>1</sup>

The name of the game in today’s world is speed by which things are happening in our lives, industries and geopolitical space<sup>2</sup>. Long-lead time is long past; we now have to work into short deadlines and short-term gains. Connectivity has expanded; there are now more than 4 billion people around the world using the internet<sup>3</sup>. Things get outdated easily and there is a sense of permanent uncertainty and instability that prevails.

Predicting the future is not so difficult in light of what we already know. Two key megatrends are likely to shape our world out to 2030: demographic patterns, especially rapid aging in some OECD countries and increasing youth population in developing and emerging nations; and growing resource demands which, in the cases of food, energy and water, might lead to scarcities, despite current oversupply in energy, more obesity than food famine, and waste of water resources. These trends exist in today’s inter-connected world, but during the next 15-20 years they will gain much greater momentum.

When we reach the world of 2030, which will no doubt be radically transformed from our world today, no country—whether the US, China, or any other large country—is likely to remain a hegemonic power. A neo-polar world is in the offing. The empowerment of individuals and diffusion of power among states and from states to informal networks will have a dramatic impact, largely reversing the historic rise of the West since 1750 and restoring Asia’s weight in the global economy<sup>4</sup>.

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1 The new ‘Great Game’: What awaits us?, Mehmet Ögütçü, 28 May 2018, Hurriyet Daily News, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/the-new-great-game-what-awaits-us-132434>

2 Geopolitics, science and technology, speculation, financial markets, information streams, large business conglomerates, intelligentsia, mass communication, social media, the internet, popular culture, news networks, international institutions, sanctions, audiences, public opinion, nationalism, different governmental bodies and agencies, identity politics, proxy wars, diplomacy, countervailing international alliances, major business agreements, non-governmental organizations, human rights, prestige, military personnel, capital, and psychological tactics this way or another are part of today’s wide-ranging game-changers.

3 <https://wearesocial.com/blog/2018/01/global-digital-report-2018>

4 <https://publicintelligence.net/global-trends-2030/>

For centuries, the west<sup>5</sup> has been at the heart, and the principal shaper, of the game-changing developments around the globe. This is perhaps no longer so. The western nations still fire shots for certain decisions and choices in economy, energy and geopolitics that affect our lives at the end of the day, but increasingly some emerging nations, dubbed as BRICs, powerful in technology, trade, finance and military, want more directorship to be given for them on the management board of our planet.

Over the past few years, the European continent has experienced a period of turbulence - a change of elites, an outburst of populism, and a polarisation between the east, centre and west of Europe. The rise of euro-scepticism has led to concerns over the rule of law in Poland and Hungary. Alongside this, the Catalan separatist challenge is likely to divide Spain – and possibly the EU, while Switzerland’s relationship with the bloc is deteriorating<sup>6</sup>. Brexit, rise of far right in Germany, France, Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands, a marked decoupling from the US, and worsening threat of terrorism are disturbing.

The disparities between the EU and third countries are also growing. Irregular migration is still a problem – managing it requires legal pathways and a greater international co-operation. The EU needs to complete the EU monetary union, but what actually people from different parts of the EU want is not the same – and therefore there are completely different ideas of a monetary union and future vision of the EU.

On the eastern end of the world, there is a growing confidence that China is on the rise (again), while the west is in gradual decline<sup>7</sup>. The Chinese challenge to the west, increasingly assertive and effective, is taking place on three main fronts: ideological, economic and geopolitical. In the realm of ideas, the Communist party leadership is strident in repudiating western liberalism and developing what’s called the “Beijing Consensus” as opposed to the Washington Consensus that created the post-war order.

Chinese President Xi Jinping and his colleagues argue that one-party rule works well for China — and should extend long into the future. China is increasingly confident that its “model”, with “Chinese characteristics” can combine tight political control with continued rapid economic growth and technological innovation. Great power rivalry is the motor of history, now as always. The story of the age is the rise of China and its geopolitical consequences, and the future will depend on how Beijing and Washington manage their relationship.

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<sup>5</sup> The West refers to various nations depending on the context, most often including at least part of Europe and the Americas. Also known as the West, there are many accepted definitions, all closely inter-related. The Western world is also known as the Occident (from the Latin word *occidens*, “sunset, West”), in contrast to the Orient (from Latin word *oriens*, “rise, East”).

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.theweek.co.uk/in-depth/90746/europe-at-a-crossroads-will-the-eu-survive-2018>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ft.com/content/d3fb6be8-b7d1-11e7-8c12-5661783e5589>

The US has always had an outsize sense of its ability to determine China’s course<sup>8</sup>. Of course, China here could be replaced by present-day Egypt or Venezuela, or by South Vietnam before the fall of Saigon in 1975. Americans have often thought that they could alter another country to their liking and then felt frustrated when things turned out otherwise. Still, Campbell and Ratner’s self-reflection is admirable. And their counsel—that Washington should focus more on its own power and base its China policy on more realistic expectations—is worth taking seriously.

Some US watchers in China find the country we have studied for years increasingly unrecognizable and unpredictable. We should do our own self-reflection to examine what went wrong. Political polarization, power struggles, scandals, a lack of confidence in national establishments, tweets doubling as policy announcements, the frequent replacement of top officials in charge of foreign affairs, vacancies in important government positions—similar problems existed before, but their intensity and scope have been particularly stunning since the 2016 US presidential election.

The way the Trump administration is wielding US power and influence is bewildering to Chinese political analysts. In recent years, Americans have often asked China to follow the “rules-based liberal international order.” Yet, Washington now has abandoned or suspended some of the same rules that it used to advocate, such as those of the Paris agreement on climate change and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. It has become harder and harder for foreign-policy makers in China to discern what rules the Americans want themselves and others to abide by, what kind of world order they hope to maintain, and where Washington is on major international issues.

Beyond the new China phenomenon, some of the other significant game-changing developments in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century include Trumponomics, prices hikes for “black gold”, re-emergence of Asia in the cutting-edge technologies, and exporter of capital, Russia gaining new geopolitical spheres of influence, forex swings and cryptocurrency fever, Venezuela as a sinking ship, possible confrontation with Iran, demise of African dictators, a more dangerous world, trade wars, and green energy revolution<sup>9</sup>.

Science and technology are actually what matter most. When looking back today, the most important geopolitical feature of the nineteenth century is obvious: it was the era of the Industrial Revolution. Without it, there is no rising middle class and no real pressure for democracy. There is no capitalist revolution because agrarian states do not need one. There’s no colonization at scale because there is a hard limit to a non-industrial economy’s appetite for raw materials. There is no total war without cheap steel and precision

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<sup>8</sup> Kurt Campbell and Ely Ratner write in their article “The China Reckoning”, March/April 2018

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.globalresearch.ca/from-energy-war-to-currency-war-americas-attack-on-the-russian-ruble/5421554>

manufacturing. And with the world still stuck largely in a culture and an economy based on traditional subsistence agriculture, there is quite possibly no end to slavery and no beginning of feminism.

The key drivers of this era were the steam engine, germ theory, electricity, and railroads. Without the immense economic growth they made possible in the twentieth century, everything else would matter about as much as if it had happened in the Middle Ages. Just as the Industrial Revolution transformed everything a couple of centuries ago, so the digital revolution is doing it again. Right now, the world is at the dawn of a second Industrial Revolution, this time a digital revolution. Its impact will be, if anything, even greater than that of the first<sup>10</sup>.

Turkey's June 24 elections ushered in a new constitutional order with significant ramifications for the country's international role. Tayyip Erdogan became Turkey's first popularly elected executive president with almost 53 percent of the national vote. He will enjoy a range of executive prerogatives with full and exclusive responsibility for policymaking. He will be responsible for the conduct of foreign policy as well, unlike in the previous system, where the now vanished office of the prime minister had been entrusted with executive authority.

The systemic transformation that the post-24 June 2018 elections have brought about will have a huge impact on the conduct of foreign policy<sup>11</sup>. For many years, Turkey's highly regarded foreign service was composed exclusively of career diplomats who charted and guided the implementation Turkey's foreign policy. The Foreign Ministry was thus seen as one of the three key pillars of the Turkish state along with the military and the Finance Ministry — institutions distinguished by their allegiance to the nation rather than the ruling party.

Under a presidential system, the Turkish diplomatic corps is likely to be remodelled along the lines of the US system, with a combination of political appointments and career officers. The AK Party's new ally in parliament is its elections partner, the ultra-nationalist National Movement Party, who is widely expected to leverage its position as king-maker and seek influence over all policymaking, creating a new set of difficulties for President Erdogan in foreign and security policy.

All in all, Turkey cannot continue business as usual in this new Great Game till shaping up sand has the potential to be one of the game-makers (at least in the region around it) by any objective criteria given its relative power and significance in a vast geography from China to Germany and Russia to Saudi Arabia. The challenge remains whether Ankara will rise to the expectations in a democratic, economically sound and reliable fashion.

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<sup>10</sup> Tech World Welcome to the Digital Revolution, Kevin Drum, Foreign Affairs, July/August 2018.

<sup>11</sup> <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2018/07/02/turkey-s-foreign-policy-is-about-to-take-turn-to-right-pub-76723>