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## A Failing Empire: Russia and China's Military Strategy to Contain the US

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9/25/2017

*Looking at the global political landscape over the last month, two trends are becoming more apparent. The infamous military and economic power at America's disposal is declining, whereas in the multipolar field, an acceleration has occurred in the creation of a series of infrastructures, mechanisms and procedures to contain and limit the negative effects of America's declining unipolar moment. This series of three articles will focus firstly on the military aspect of these ongoing changes, then the economics at play, and finally, how and why smaller countries are transitioning from the unipolar camp to the multipolar field.*

One of the most tangible consequences of the decline of US military power can be observed in the Syrian conflict. Over the past few weeks, the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) and its allies have completed the historic and strategic liberation of Deir ez-Zor, a city besieged for more than five years by Islamists belonging to Al Qaeda and Daesh. The focus has now shifted to the oilfields south of the liberated city, with a frantic rush by both the US-supported Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the SAA to free territories still held by Daesh. The final goal is to claim Syria's resources and strengthen a weak US position (the US is not even part of the Astana peace talks) in future negotiations concerning the country's future. To understand how much the US dream of partitioning Syria is failing, one only need note repeated US failures as seen in the liberation

of Aleppo and then Deir Ez-Zor, and now the crossing of the Euphrates river. In spite of American intimidation, threats, and sometimes even direct aggression, the Syrian army continued to work against Daesh in the province of Deir Ez-Zor, advancing on oil rich sites. Thanks to the protection given by the Russian Federation Air Force during the conflict, Damascus has obtained a protective umbrella necessary to withstand attempts by the US of balkanize the country.

Further confirmation of Washington's failed strategy to divide the country a la Yugoslavia appears evident from the strategic realignment of the most loyal allies of Washington in the region and beyond. In the course of the last few weeks, several meetings have taken place in Astana and Moscow between the likes of Putin and Lavrov with their Turkish, Saudi, and Israeli counterparts. These meetings outlined the guidelines for Syria's future thanks to Moscow's red lines, especially regarding Israel's desire to pursue regime change in Syria and an aggressive attitude towards Iran. Even the most loyal allies of the United States are beginning to plan a future in Syria with Assad as president. US allies have started showing a pragmatic shift towards a reconciliation with the factions that are clearly winning the war and are going to call the shots in the future. The long-held dreams and desires of sheikhs (Saudi-Qatar) and sultans (Erdogan) to reshape Syria and the Middle East in their image are over, and they know it. Washington's allies have been let down, with the US incapable of keeping its promises of fulfilling a regime change in Damascus. The consequences for the US have just begun. Without a military posture capable of bending adversaries and friends to her will, the US will have to start dealing with a new reality that involves compromise and negotiation, something the US is not accustomed to.

An example of what can happen if Washington decides to go against a former friend can be seen with the Gulf Crisis involving Qatar. Since the beginning of the aggression against Syria, the small emirate has been at the center of plots and schemes aimed at arming and financing jihadists in the Middle East and Syria. Five years later, after billions of dollars spent and nothing to hold onto in Syria, the Gulf Cooperation Council, as expected, has plunged into a fratricidal struggle between Qatar and other countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE and Egypt. The latter accuse Doha of funding terrorism, an undeniable truth. But they omit to acknowledge their own ties to the jihadists (Egypt in this framework is excluded, fighting continually with terrorists inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood in the Sinai), showing a hypocrisy that only the mainstream media can rival.

The consequences of Riyadh's actions against Doha, backed up by a large part of the American establishment, seems, almost six months later, to have finally pushed Qatar and Iran together, reopening diplomatic ties. These are two countries that have for years been on opposite sides of many conflicts in the Middle East, reflecting contrasts and divisions dictated by the respective positions of Tehran and Riyadh. This seems to be no more, with Doha and Tehran coming closer and circumnavigating sanctions and blockades, overcoming common difficulties. This shift can only be described as a strategic failure by Riyadh.

Looking back six years, one of the reasons for the eruption of the conflict in Syria has everything to do with the famous pipeline that Iran intended to build connecting Iraq and Syria. Incredibly, the end of the conflict will see a new transport line emerging between countries that for years have had opposing and diverging strategic goals. Iran and Qatar are currently engaging in trade

agreements, and rumors have it that a joint effort to build a new pipeline that should cross Iraq and Syria, to end in the Mediterranean, is in the making. The idea is to jointly exploit the world's largest gas field, and in so doing become a new supplier for a Europe that is looking to diversify its energy imports. Riyadh and Washington will have to take full responsibility for this failure of epic proportions.

A clear sign of how fast things are changing in the region and beyond comes from Israel. Even the Jewish State has had to abandon any dream of territorial expansion into Syria, despite several attempts by Netanyahu to persuade Putin of the existential danger that Israel faces with Iran's presence in Syria. A smart and pragmatic Putin is able to let Israel know that any request to impose conditions on Russian or its allies in Syria will be firmly refused. But at the same time, Moscow and Tel Aviv will continue to pursue good relations with each other. Russian political figures are far too smart to play double games with their long-standing allies in Syria or to underestimate the capacity that Israel has to disrupt the region and plunge it into chaos. Furthermore, Assad has invited Russia into Syria as well as Iran and Hezbollah. Even if Putin were willing to help Netanyahu, which is doubtful, international law prohibits this. If anything is clear, it is that Moscow respects international law as few nations do. All other foreign nations operating in Syria, or flying over Syrian skies, have no right to be there in the first place, let alone to impose decisions over a sovereign territory.

If Tel Aviv's goal was to expand the illegal border in the Golan Heights and proceed with regime change, the situation has ended up totally different six years later. Iran has expanded its influence in Syria thanks to aid provided to Damascus in combating terrorism. Hezbollah has increased its battle experience and arsenal, as well as expanded its network of contacts and sympathizers throughout the Middle East. Hezbollah and Iran are seen as Middle Eastern peacemakers, playing positive roles in fighting the plague of jihadist terrorism as well as against Israel and Saudi Arabia, states that have tried in every way to assist terrorist organizations with weapons and money. Washington, Riyadh and Tel Aviv six years later find themselves in a totally different environment, with hostile neighbours, less collaborative friends, and in general, a Middle East increasingly orbiting around the Iranian and Russian spheres of influence.

Another indicator of American decline in military terms can be clearly seen on the Korean peninsula. The DPRK has obtained a full nuclear capability through a development program that has paid scant attention to American, South Korean and Japanese threats. The imperative for Pyongyang was to create a nuclear deterrent capable of dissuading the desire of many US policymakers enact regime change in North Korea. The strategic importance of a regime change in the DPRK follows the strategy of containment and encirclement of the People's Republic of China, a failed doctrine well known as the Asian pivot.

Beside its nuclear deterrent, the US is unable to attack the DPRK because of the conventional deterrent that Pyongyang has patiently put in place. Trump and his generals continue the rhetoric of fire and flames, dragging Seoul and Tokyo into a dangerous game of chicken between two nuclear powers. Not surprisingly, Trump's words worry everyone in the region, especially the Republic of South Korea, which would pay the heaviest price were war ever to break out. In light of this assessment, it is worth pointing out that the military option is simply unthinkable, with

Seoul and perhaps even Tokyo ready to break with its American ally in case of disastrous unilateral action against Pyongyang.

Kim Jong-un, as well as Assad and other world leaders facing pressure from Washington, have fully understood and taken advantage of America's declining military power. Trump and his close circle of generals are full of empty threats, unable to change the course of events in different regions around the world, from the Middle East to the Korean peninsula. Whether it is through direct action or through proxies, little changes and the results remain the same, showing a continuous failure of goals and intents.

The underlying rule guiding US policy makers is that if a country cannot be controlled, such as with a Saudi-style regime serving only American interests through something like the petrodollar, than that country is useless and ought to be destroyed in order to stop other peer competitors from expanding their ties with that country. The Libyan example is still fresh in everyone's minds. Luckily for the world, Russia has stepped in militarily, and on more than one occasion has, together with her allies, sabotaged or deterred the US military from taking reckless actions (Ukraine, Syria and DPRK).

In this sense, Hillary Clinton's defeat, more than Trump's victory, seems to have instilled some sense into this declining empire, if one ignores the persisting strong rhetoric. One can only shudder on imagining a Clinton presidency in the current environment, with her predictably careening at full speed towards a conflict with Russia in Ukraine and Syria or a nuclear standoff with the DPRK in Asia.

Trump and his generals are slowly adapting to a new reality where it is not only impossible to control countries, but where it is increasingly difficult to destroy them. The old doctrine of wreaking chaos on the world, with a view to emerging once the dust settles down as the world's hegemonic power, now seems like a distant memory. Just looking at the Middle East, even Syria, in spite of the unprecedented destruction, is on the road to reconstruction and pacification.

Russian military power and Chinese economic might have thus played an invaluable role in restricting the US war machine. The DPRK even took a further step by attaining a formidable nuclear and conventional deterrent, effectively blocking the United States from influencing domestic events by bringing about destruction and chaos.

While this reality is difficult for Washington to take, it must come to accept it. After almost seventy years of imperialistic chaos and destruction wrought all over the globe, America's friends and enemies are starting to react to this situation. Washington is left with a president full of sound and fury, but a credible military posture is now but a thing of the past.

The financial mechanisms that have allowed for this indiscriminate military spending are based on an intrinsic bond between dollar, oil, and the role of American money as the world reserve currency. The transition of the world order from a unipolar reality to a multipolar one is deeply tied to the economic and diplomatic strategies of Russia and China. The next article will explore the role of gold, investment, diplomacy and the petroyuan, which are all decisive factors that have accelerated the transformation and division of power on a global scale.

