

Geopolitics and the Game among Great Powers

On March 13th 2015, a profound Global Conversation with Professor Walter Russel Mead took place in the Library of School of Economics of University of Tor Vergata. The conversation was a inspiration of the way of thinking to all the participants, also provided a perfect guidance of understanding the current international relations right after all tumultuous events in the year 2014.

Revisionism and the so-called revisionist powers have been an alarming phenomenon since geopolitical rivalries seemed to be becoming one of the biggest issues in world politics. The rivalry between the EU and Russia over Ukraine and the seizing of Crimea, the competition of coastal sovereignty between China and other countries in East Asia, and the sectarian conflicts in the Middle East seemed to be threatening the post-Cold War settlement and the existing construction of a liberal world order led by U.S. and its alliances. Although the United States will no doubt come down from the peak of hegemony, however, the fear is often greater than the danger.

From our perspective, Russia and China, the two great powers that most likely to overturn the settlement in Eurasia, neither have interests nor capacities to do so. Although Putin's unprofitable irredentism and uncompromising behaviours made the intention of this country more and more opaque, its current economic and diplomatic situations are quite deteriorative, and a series of sanctions from the United States would make them even more grim and force the country temporarily focus on the alleviation of their domestic predicament.

As for the threat of China, the most important reality is that the rise of China is happening, and it is relatively rising a little faster than the rest of the world, therefore inevitably invites dangerous competition with the United States and its allies and accordingly alters the post-Cold War settlement, rather than deliberately undermine the Eurasian geopolitical order or refuse to construct a win-win world and pursue the strategy of focusing on global governance. Comparing with the United States during its unipolar era, the current one has sufficient causes to be on the alert and consider China as a potential menace, even if this menace keeps equally vigilant.

The political scientist Francis Fukuyama has summarized in his book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, that liberal and democratic institution is the destination of development of ideology and the last form of governing of humankind, this perspective has an extensive foundation in western world and directly confirmed "Washington Consensus". This consensus is now concerned to be challenged by growing China. The standpoint of China is, however, the repudiation of the so-called "Beijing Consensus" and the narrow sense of

“Chinese Model”. China has always been trying to emphasize realism instead of ideology, that neither “Washington Consensus” nor “Beijing Consensus” is applicable to all countries, and each of them should find its own path. This is the generalized “Chinese Model”. In other words, China has never rejected the democratic system, only it was not adapted to the condition of this country.

China has always been a relatively conservative country, and its preference of orientation is inward prosperity and stability, and has no interests at all, at least temporarily, in any expansion of territories and culture. The habit of peaceful development is transparently embedded in their rich and fascinating history and ethnic characteristics. After the turbulence and upheaval in the previous a hundred years, its increasingly assertive stance in the region and aggressive territorial claims seem to be perfectly reasonable. The sovereignty of Tibet and Taiwan is still internationally controversial, when the basis and authority of jurisprudence of contemporary China was inherited from Qing dynasty and the continuation of sovereignty right is universally accepted interiorly. The geographic position of China does not make it advantageous to be defensive either, surrounded by a series of decidedly democratic neighbors which see it as a great potential danger, not to mention the age-long and unanimous hostility between China and Japan and the intensifying nationalism in both countries. Although these conflicts might lead to a zero-sum competition, they are still not able to be avoided in the near future.

In conclusion, we should never have expected old-fashioned geopolitics to go away. As China is seeking for a larger role and greater voice in the international stage, with its fastest-growing economies on earth, there is bound to be a competition between the existing settlement and rising great powers. Presumably, especially the U.S. and China will play the most important roles in the upcoming global challenges. They are not going to conflict with each other head on, but it’s rational to take precautions and keep watch. Fortunately, this competition is benign for now, and from my point of view, is beneficial to the global development of prosperity and freedom. As the famous Polish American political scientist, geostrategist, and statesman Zbigniew Brzezinski pointed out in his book, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, that the ultimate objective of American policy is to upbuild a truly cooperative global family in accordance with long-term trend and fundamental interests of humankind. This objective is inevitably going to be challenged and even adjusted as the world is changing, the progress, however, is unlikely to be overthrown or reversed.

Just as in one of the famous documentaries filmed by BBC, *The Chinese are Coming*, has noted: America has never been more paralyzed, more at war with itself at home, more stagnating in the areas of infrastructure and education, precisely the areas China vaulting ahead on. “We see in China, things we used to see in ourselves, can do, get it done, hard work, sacrifice, own the future. That used to be us, and now we see it in them. If we go weak,

your kids won't just grow up in a different America, they will grow up in a different world. But I know what world I would want my kids to grow up in, and it's a world where there is a strong America, counterbalancing a strong and thriving China, not one where you have a strong and rising China, and an America that is at war with itself, uncertain, weak and really unable to project power." Anyway, the game among great powers is so difficult to predict, and nobody would know what exactly these growing powers are bringing to the world. This world is full of doubt and hesitation, but above all, it's making progress and marching forward.

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