

The IMTeTM Reports

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Aspects of an Emerging World **B. Times of conflict ...** **2nd Edition**

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Introduction

Aspects of an Emerging World deals with issues of global, regional, and country-specific interest, which relate to the socioeconomic, political, cultural, demographic and geopolitical/geostrategic backgrounds of a world on the threshold of massive change. *Aspects of an Emerging World A. Times of change ...* completed in April 2018 is followed by the present part *B. Times of conflict ...*

The way the entire report has been structured and written and the manner in which it conveys information and analysis is in short independent paragraphs or bullet format. We deliver information and comments that we consider important to highlight and, in the *Closing Remarks* section, we provide our core views on each specific chapter. We have not attempted to create a comprehensive analysis or an all-encompassing coverage of news or developments outside of our scope and capacity, but merely to furnish an intelligible mosaic of information accompanied by relevant comments: this should automatically build up a background that will enable our readers to become more aware of the wide-ranging changes taking place or imminent in our world and their significance for and impacts on both professional and social life. It is to be noted that the information provided may at times to some extent overlap, in the sense that topics addressed under one chapter might be dealt with in other chapters as well, from a different or complimentary angle, while a diversity of positions on one and the same subject may also appear throughout our report. In this second part of our series, primary attention has been given to the geopolitical and geostrategic aspects of developments around the world, since we believe it is those developments at this particular time in history that will define to the greatest extent how we will transition to a new era. We have also given increased weight to the emerging protagonists of change and their respective regions, i.e., Russia, China, Europe/the EU, the US and *Greece*, in the latter case not because Greece is our home country but because we believe that *Hellenism* is an expression, an ideology, and a civilizational ideal which, dating back to antiquity, will again play a significant role in our changing times. The US certainly does not escape our attention, but because of its well established more static position, there is far less to report on the still de facto leading world power. *Art* is a small but highly important section, since, through the deeper layers of human consciousness, it often foreshadows things to come and, particularly in our turbulent era, can reveal hidden aspects and underlying currents of a world in turmoil - but may also delineate visions for the future. At the end, the *Epilogue* contains our concluding remarks highlighting the main issues and the challenges with which our world is confronted. We have also added a last additional section, a *Supplement on Russia, The Power of Symbolism, and Greece*, with *symbolism* being the connecting link for all three small closing essays – also a few lines on *Miracles*!

Aspects of an Emerging World B. Times of conflict ... is now re-appearing as one single entity, with numerous important updates including the worldwide effects of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and a few additional graphs. As a new era unfolds over the present decade, with many ups and downs, with periods of peace and periods of turbulence and confrontations, we will continue following world events closely ...

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World Developments & Trends

- ❖ More innovation platforms are evolving today than at any other time in human history, out of which five leading platforms are revolutionizing our world: artificial intelligence/blockchain technology, robotics, DNA sequencing, energy storage, and deep learning. The resulting business opportunities are enormous, with multi-trillion USD value assigned per platform and with a multiplier exponential growth effect, as each of these platforms allows more innovation with no end in sight in this self-feeding process. Continuously declining learning curves are accompanied by declining costs due to increasing production volumes. The impact of these developments in our world across all economic sectors will be enormous.
- ❖ Today's capitalism suffers from a contradiction that is increasingly hard to ignore, namely, lack of competition in key markets due to the elimination of middle size companies. Without competition, the world ends up with huge monopolies that may be highly profitable for the owners but will probably not serve the greater cause of balanced economic growth and distribution of wealth. In addition, the resulting tight interrelationships between corporate and state sectors fuel non-transparency and corruption and contravene free market principles.
- ❖ Over the past 35 years, the average pretax income of the top 1% in the USA has more than tripled (that of the top 0.001% increased sevenfold), while that of the lowest income groups has remained virtually the same. Meanwhile, globally, the top 1% have increased their income by 27%, whereas the poorest, representing about 3 billion people, did so by 12%. Expressed in other terms, the top 10% of humanity have come to own 85% of the planet's wealth and the world's approximately 2,200 billionaires became 12% wealthier, while the bottom levels of humanity (about 7 billion people) grew 11% poorer. This situation is giving rise to much resentment and suspicion among the general public, billions realizing that the system is broken and has to change. It is sad that much of what appears to be reform in our time is in fact the defense of stagnation.
- ❖ American companies such as Amazon, Facebook, and Alphabet have been key drivers in the establishment of an economy based on technology, transaction, and innovation platforms. In a *platform economy*, companies see themselves as marketplaces where supply and demand are brought together. The importance of a digital trading platform exponentially increases with the number of participants participating in a *networking effect* where, with each additional user, the value of the social network for all users increases, creating fast growth and high profitability. These mechanisms explain, to a certain extent, why participating corporations have achieved such enormous power in terms of revenue, profits, stock market value, market position, and diversification in many industries to an extent never witnessed before. The future of *the platform economy* lies with American and Chinese corporations, while Europeans seem to be heading for a secondary supporting role.
- ❖ Corporations are struggling with the challenge, managing the complexity of what they have become and the power they possess as well as how to exercise that power in a commercial, political, and societal way. Corporations may in the future be assigned the responsibility of assisting in protecting some of the key values in societies, in which case they could also be valued by the public accordingly.
- ❖ In today's world, wealth of information means *scarcity of qualified attention*. Exciting stories, often lacking in reputable reporting, catch people's attention, and in the way that information is disseminated and in the fight for *digital clicks*, there is often no room left for objective, democracy-friendly reporting. The need for the international media to satisfy 24-hour news and various entertainment coverage

inevitably generates a certain level of misinformation. This is because the global information dissemination system is susceptible to manipulation, consequently all too often turning out misinformation and disinformation. Social media, which have both a leading role, and could certainly also exert a positive role in the new digital world, often comprise an amalgam of mixed products of truth, half-truth, and fiction, their narratives at times conflated with objectivity and truth that are not easily recognizable, quality analysis greatly reduced, and expert voices not readily discernible.

- ❖ Technological innovation and the new digital world are creating a revolution that is shaking the very foundations of the Western liberal order. Blockchain algorithms will be replacing entire industries of middleman services, such as finance, insurance and healthcare, leaving serious doubt as to the future of employment and, ultimately, of financial rewards, predominantly benefitting *an aristocracy of technological knowledge*. Enlightened thinking on the positive side or social revolts on the negative side will inevitably lead to a reset in global order and a new contract between the state, economic power centers, and citizens worldwide.
- ❖ Game-changers in digital transformation are big data and artificial intelligence (AI), concepts helping businesses get deeper insights into market dynamics and consumer behavior, key parameters in strategic decision processes. Over the next decade, the digital revolution, including robotics and automation, may leave many low-skilled workers without jobs, creating political unrest and also, to some degree, denying developing countries the opportunity of using cheap manufacturing as a vehicle to economic prosperity.
- ❖ By the middle of this century, about 70% of the world's population, up from 50% today, will be living in cities. As the world is becoming more city-centric, smart cities, i.e., cities that will seek and strive to anticipate things before they happen, will be reliant on massive loads of data, collected by numerous cameras and spread throughout the urban matrix, on traffic, temperature, air quality, humidity, and multiple other parameters. Cities will become greener, with gardens and vegetation on rooftops and open spaces, creating microclimate environments and offering a higher quality of life.
- ❖ Almost every fifth child is presently growing up in a war or crisis area. More than 100,000 newborn babies die every year in the ten worst affected countries of the world as a result of military conflict, while adding children up to the age of five, the figure exceeds 850,000. The number of children living in crisis areas has doubled since the 1990s, with about 400 million growing up in military conflict areas. Approximately 24,000 children were abused and/or neglected in various ways in 2019 (based on reported numbers only), a 300% rise since 2010.
- ❖ Just over 4,000 Christians were killed simply because of their faith in 2018, 25% more than the year before. In Europe, anti-Christian hostility reached an all-time high in 2019, with Christian symbols and churches under frequent attack. Laicism, portrayed as secularism, relegates the faithful only to the private sphere, while every other form of religious expression or denomination is all too often stigmatized.
- ❖ For millennia, following the beginning of the Jewish diaspora, Europe was home to the majority of the world's Jews. Currently in Europe, anti-Jewish prejudices continue to spread throughout the continent (with some notable exceptions), which could eventually mean the virtual end of the Jewish presence in Europe, unless sociopolitical measures are taken against this worrisome trend.

- ❖ In 2018, global military spending reached a new post-Cold War high of USD 1.8 trillion, primarily due to higher US and Chinese military expenditures. Among the largest other contributors to this rise are Saudi Arabia, India, France, Russia, the UK, Germany, Japan, and South Korea.
- ❖ The phenomenon of *willful blindness* describes the state of mind of both individuals and groups who intentionally remain unaware of, or *blind to*, impending disasters - including personal or collective tragedies, corporate collapses, technical failures, and even crimes against humanity. During the materialistic age in which we live, all too many people, indeed, turn a blind eye to matters of ethical importance in order to avoid uncomfortable situations and continue to feel safe, to avoid conflict, to reduce anxiety, and to protect prestige. However, a greater understanding of any given situation encourages debate which can lead to solutions; it challenges human biases and discourages conformity while not allowing the tendency to retreat or recoil from difficult and/or distasteful situations and problems. It is very possible that on account of the Covid-19 global health crisis, humanity may well be coming one step closer to being far more mindful of what's going on, whether locally or collectively around the planet. This would enable us to be proactive in anticipating looming crises rather than being reactive once a crisis has erupted - at which point it is sometimes too late to avoid substantial damage - while searching for solutions.

Closing Remarks

The world is currently experiencing a tremendous cultural shift as an adaptation process to technological change is underway. With currently rapid non-linear technological innovation in progress, any attempt to predict the future based on observation of the present or the past is bound to prove pointless. Imagination emerges as a key asset in a world where no one can forecast what the future holds, except to say that, most probably, the winners will be those who exercise imaginative scientific planning to sketch out the future beforehand. China seems to be taking over the lead from the US in this domain, developing different perspectives, reference points, and alternative scenarios on a wide range of issues. Thanks to China's ancient Taoist teachings, Chinese science-fiction thinking defines success as a virtue which is based on collective rather than individual action, where imagination becomes a key strategic asset, impacting scientific, social, business, and military spheres of action. Medium-term planning becomes less valuable due to the speed of constant transformation in high technology tools. Looking forward to the year 2050, China has mapped out its own future, utilizing design fiction for the creation of desirable futures on its list of priorities, an approach with major geopolitical, socio-technological, and economic implications that is sure to shake the world.

The ongoing health and economic crisis due to the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus pandemic could become a catalyst for further global developments, speeding up shifts already in motion. After forty years of globalization, openness, and freedom, societies are showing signs of fatigue. The pendulum worldwide is moving towards border closures, conservatism, a longing for protection, even authoritarianism. The current health crisis has become the tipping point for accelerated change globally in sociopolitical, cultural, and economic trends, highly likely to be accompanied by serious geopolitical disturbances.

The modern state seems to depend ever more on human rationality and science/technology as the means to ensure a stable and secure future. Modern man has finally put aside the wisdom of the ancient world and a new technologically and scientifically controlled future has emerged with man proudly at the helm. That man, armed with his scientific intelligence and mighty

technological tools, is from now on the absolute controlling force of whatever happens on earth and, by extension, in the universe. This is, sadly, the mortal hubris of our times: the towering pomposity of our materialistic society that blindly imagines it has found the ultimate road to prosperity, stability, and security. According to this manner of thinking and the new religion of rationality, if something goes wrong, it is attributed to a functional error, to negligence, to erroneous counsel, etc. However, we have seen that modern humanity's expectations of science and of the power of the state collide again and again with a defiant reality and ultimate truth - and the ongoing coronavirus crisis is a dramatic example of the clash between scientific/materialistic beliefs and Divine creation. Centralized human control over a future crisis of an unprecedented magnitude, which could, in fact, not be controllable at all, may simply bring about the end of our era of science. Egyptians, once at the forefront of science, said of the plagues that so often visited them that they were the finger of God. The greatest scientists who ever lived acknowledged how much the pursuit of science - one of the many gifts of God to humanity - requires profound humility and to be constantly accompanied by the hope for salvation by the Creator. Through the present global health crisis, our Creator is teaching us priceless lessons and humanity must listen. The first humble step should be the awareness that without divine blessings very little indeed is controllable by us humans.

Policies

- ❖ The newly elected European Parliament is more fragmented and polarized than at any other time. France is gaining influence, while Germany is losing power within the EU. Poland, of major geopolitical significance for Europe, is a divided country with sensitive domestic issues, where a political and sociocultural struggle is underway. The political constellation has changed in Europe, with populist parties no longer wishing to leave either the EU or the Eurozone and no one desiring all-out open borders. Inbound and outbound forms of migration, the latter depriving mainly Eastern European countries of skilled young professionals, are important issues in the new European landscape. Green projects translating into environmentally driven fiscal policies are at the top of the European agenda and will translate into more public investment and larger budget deficits for at least the next decade. As the US, China, and Russia are involved in a new cold war over global power and over ideology and technology, Europe has to find its role in this constellation. Otherwise, it may end up without any significant influence in world affairs, which will have dangerous consequences for its future. The EU needs industrial, financial, and technological corporations of a significant size in order to keep up with the US and China, which means a huge change in planning for which Europe is only partially ready. Necessity may nevertheless dictate change and Europe may be ultimately propelled forward and forced to respond to these challenges.
- ❖ The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), a political and economic union of states located in central and northern Asia and Eastern Europe, namely Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Armenia, has an integrated market of about 180 million people (2015) and a gross domestic product of about USD 5 trillion (2018). The EAEU stands for the free movement of goods, capital, services, and people and provides for common policies in the macroeconomic sphere, transport, trade, investments, industry, energy, and agriculture. It covers an area of about 20,000,000 square kilometers, which is approximately 15% of the world's land surface. Russian President Vladimir Putin's plan is for the EAEU to grow into a powerful, supranational union of sovereign states like the EU, uniting economies, legal systems, customs services, and military capabilities, thus becoming the bridge between Europe and Asia. In other words, the Eurasian

Economic Union is set to become a major player in the world's raw material markets, the energy sector, the arms industry, and in agricultural production. An enlargement could include Moldova, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, as well as parts of Ukraine and Georgia, while a link to China's Belt and Road project is a likely future possibility.

- ❖ The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is the largest regional organization in the world in terms of population and geographical coverage, including almost half of the globe's population and spanning over three-fifths of the Eurasian continent. SCO member states are China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India, and Pakistan. Countries with *observer status* are Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, and Mongolia, while *dialogue partners* are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, and Turkey, despite the latter's full NATO membership. SCO objectives include the safeguarding of the security of the Central Asian region, focusing on the establishment of a fundamentally new model of geopolitical integration with reliability, integrity, and safety being cornerstones in its policies/foreign relationships.



Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)

- ❖ After almost twenty years of negotiations, the European Union and Mercosur, the South American economic bloc, agreed on a comprehensive trade agreement in late June 2019. This paves the way for the largest free trade zone in the world, sending, during a period of rising global trade tensions, a strong signal to the world for open rule-based trade. Nevertheless, the implementation of the trade

agreement brings critical national interests of Austria, France, and Brazil to the surface, with certain nations threatening to veto the agreement. Benefits of the agreement will be carefully weighed against national policy agendas and it will be several more years before the deal comes into force.

- ❖ Powerful political signals are being sent by China and Russia through their directly aiding Italy in confronting the SARS-CoV-2 virus pandemic, especially in the country's most affected northern regions. The Chinese, taking the lead, sent a delegation of specialists with priceless experience in treating the virus in Wuhan, together with 700 ventilators and other medical gear, plus all the invaluable expert knowledge they had amassed. Moscow is sending an army medical unit composed of 120 doctors and nurses specialized in infectious diseases: 14 aircraft have landed in Italy so far, including two Il-76 huge transporters – in effect, an entire container hospital with 100 ventilators and 500,000 face masks plus other material. Smaller nations are helping too, with Cuba having sent 53 medical service personnel, about half of them specialists in infectious diseases and resuscitation and some possessing first-hand experience of Ebola in Africa. As concerns the EU, it too is manifesting gestures of solidarity – while it must also produce an effective action plan commensurate with the gravity and magnitude of the situation. The former is to be seen in, for instance, its recent announcement to create a strategic reserve of ventilators, protective clothing, and medications, as well as its approval of a large donation of aid to the Italian government. At the same time, China is using the pandemic as an opportunity to make further inroads into the Balkan region by assisting the Balkan countries in the present health crisis. There are thus astute political maneuvers taking place, some highly ethical, others less so, in this entire dramatic situation. Worldwide, all this needs to be accompanied by foresight as to the political implications that will play out in the aftermath of the pandemic period in a world which is rapidly changing – the changes propelled, in fact, by the present severe global health crisis itself as well as many other greater and lesser forthcoming *turns of the tide*.

Closing Remarks

Judged by the great historical determinants of civilizational power, namely, energy, education, demography, political stability, and military power, Europe is currently waning. Nevertheless, from a contrarian point of view, it could well be that through this seemingly diminishing process, Europe may right now be entering a new period of rebirth. The global ideal of universal peace never developed into a real vision, given that for centuries it merely served the materialistic and acquisitive purpose of the most powerful nations of first extending and then maintaining spheres of influence. Since the struggle has long been solely the projection of power and possession, this inevitably resulted in conflict, wars, and animosity. In this respect, the most ambitious peace project in the world's history is the European Union. It remains to be seen whether, in an era of profound global change and strong internal conflicting currents, the EU will not only survive, thereby reconfirming its ideal, but also resurrect itself in a period of renewed solidarity, enlargement, cohesion, and strength.

US influence over the Asian continent will probably wane over the next decade and beyond. The projected scope, depth, and endurance that is likely to characterize the cooperation between China and Russia, along with the future role of Europe in the new power dynamics of the entire Eurasian geographical domain, will have a direct impact on the policies and the influence of the United States over this vast region of the world, thus causing the US to face considerable challenges in maintaining a solid presence.

Social Positions, Conflicts, & Cycles

- ❖ The new hi-tech elites of our transitional times, by defining themselves through their progressiveness, distance themselves from the cultural roots of the preceding generations and respective family backgrounds. New cultural lines run horizontally between different cultures and the resources for the development of individual particularity and expressivity almost exclusively serve the aim of *self-fulfillment*, with core values being equality, justice and a critical attitude towards authorities. Modern elites do not wish to be seen as *elitist*, but portray themselves outwardly as youthful, casual, and sporty. They perceive themselves as champions of modernism, as reform forces leading humanity into a brighter future. Within this paradigm, traditional ideas and values are considered suspicious and potentially rejectable. Employment in upcoming dominant future industries is part of the habitus of these new elites, projecting such characteristics as originality, creativity, flexibility, internationality, curiosity, and openness. Attributes of a hedonistic consumer society are married with the requirements of a digitized and globalized economy into a new morality and societal status. Modern elites, unlike their more traditional predecessors, do not position themselves as keepers of the eternal but as *spearheads of an environment-friendly form of progress*. In a fast-changing world and under the relentless power of continuous transformation, this new paradigm is definitely not the only legitimate one but represents one of many possible life positions in the process of evolution. A revolution lacking in spiritual depth and based on an unprecedented level of materialistic principles contains the seeds of destructive fallacies, in an endless pursuance of unattainable life goals without a true spiritual dimension of divine origin and destination.
- ❖ Millennials (otherwise known as Generation Y) are changing social behavior and trends worldwide. They comprise people born between 1981 and 1996, totaling around 1.8 billion, who, by 2025, may constitute three quarters of the global labor pool. Together with Generation X - born in the years 1965 to 1980 – they are the *successor generations* which will, over the coming decades, inherit, in the US alone, financial assets totaling around USD 30 trillion, in commercial, real estate, and other assets. The Millennials are the first generation to grow up during the digital revolution, which is directly reflected in their consumption behavior. As a group, they exhibit an interest in sustainable investments, ethics, responsible corporate governance, social affairs, and environmental policies.
- ❖ A growing number of *digital nomads* are making their living online while traveling the world. Most of them are young people who work as freelancers, though occasionally as part-time employees, and are moderately affluent. The typical digital nomad is between 20 and 35 years old and will usually settle down as soon as he or she starts a family.
- ❖ During the past 70 years, Europeans have become less embedded in their own Christian identity and less willing to stand for Biblical history. Church attendance in core European countries stands between 10 and 20% (in the US, the figure is 40-50%), with Greece, a Christian Orthodox country, ranking first and Romania second in religious belief and church attendance. Greece ranks as the most religious country within the EU, with about 75% of Greeks saying that their nationality is defined by Orthodox Christianity. Russia has the largest number of Orthodox Christians in the world, at about 160 million. In the Holy Land, predominantly the land of Israel, Orthodox Christian archeological sites, churches, and monasteries effectively form a bridge between the Old and the New Testament, between Judaism and Christianity.

- ❖ Muslims now make up 5% of the UK population, with their respective communities having proved the hardest to assimilate within British society. Nevertheless, the UK is one of the world's most successful multiethnic, multifaith societies, though inequalities, which act as barriers to integration, leave substantial room for improvement in the ongoing efforts for greater assimilation.
- ❖ Civil liberties are in danger today as much from the extreme left as from the ultra-right, with the influence of the left on the sociopolitical agenda far more pervasive than the influence of the ultra-right. Today, criticism of different principles focuses predominantly, if not entirely, on the conservative social, political, and academic strata. The left-liberal Zeitgeist has long since replaced the power of convincing arguments in the German media, where the dangers of the right-wing and of ongoing climate change are dramatized beyond any levels of objective or scientific assessment.
- ❖ It is not yet clear how much migrants and refugees will change societies in Europe in terms of population structure, lifestyle and culture. For a long time, the concept of multiculturalism was high on the integration policy agenda. Too many immigrants/newcomers to Western societies live secluded, entertaining values and narratives that contradict the rules and mindsets of the majority population within European nations. Class tension and political incoherence have in fact become commonplace on the European Continent, and, in a different possibly less evident form, in the US. The West seems no longer to know how it has transformed, as it chooses to ignore how its civilization was shaped, what constituted it, what it was, and what it has become today. This leads to a dangerous apathy, which opens the gates to infiltration by alien civilizations, processes that are strikingly evident at the heart of Europe. There are, however, exceptions and they may multiply. Without more knowledge about each other, more honest and objective dialogue, more willingness to face each other's fears and to agree on what can and what cannot be accepted, the world will unavoidably head for a destructive clash of civilizations.
- ❖ The Hungarian government is probably the first European government to have a Special State Secretariat with only one duty, namely, to monitor the present status and the potential future destiny of the Christian communities, not only domestically but worldwide, and actively help wherever there is a need.
- ❖ At the very forefront of a global protest movement are often the younger generations. Many of these insightful and go-ahead young people grew up during the 2008 global financial crisis and have experience of how badly things can go wrong. They ask why globalization has not delivered the promised global prosperity, why the levels of deplorable corruption among political and economic elites, why huge financial debt levels that will eventually fall on their innocent shoulders, why the decades of reckless destruction done to our planet, why the rampant inequality, the exploitation faced by children and women ... they feel that they have been grossly deceived and let down.
- ❖ The world is in a process of disturbing mobilization, a social atmosphere to a large extent shaped and transformed by 24h news disseminated on an instant digital platform, with uncertainty increasingly becoming a permanent state. *Mass culture* as a pervasive ideology in the modern era, has given rise to the pursuit of banal, artificial, and materialistic pleasures, none of these obviously able to satisfy, let alone uplift, the human spirit. *Iconic reality* projected on electronic screens is penetrating every aspect of human life. People, having lost their connection with higher values, prefer an illusionary digital reality and are, within this process, losing their rationality and objectivity. The digital world offers myriad promises of *better days to come*, which, inevitably, never arrive - while the dates of unfulfilled

promises keep being pushed constantly further into the future. An iconic world eclipsing the real world is spreading over the entire globe, in the name of a new *technological idolatry*, the supposed answer to all and any human problems.

- ❖ The closing of borders due to the Covid-19 pandemic, leading to a *tendency toward introversion* for the nations of the world, may also represent a state's desire to reassure its inhabitants *that foreigners* (carrying viruses) are kept out. It carries the seeds for a new form of global interaction beyond business, economic, and trade issues, encompassing the moral, political, and cultural domains: it may well signify the birth of another novel type of globalization. This could form the background for a new global system based on universally accepted rules (safeguarded by transnational institutions with re-drafted governance rules), with an increased measure of popular participation in decision-making, transparency, free flow of information, and enhanced cooperation and sharing of scientific and technological resources to deal with global emergencies and crises.
- ❖ Tectonic technological, economic and social changes are creating existential fears and growing resentment against the financial, political, and intellectual power centers which drive globalization. In times of crisis, people regress to tribal thinking, a nostalgia for *an imaginary natural community* in which one may be safely embedded. In Europe, the danger lies in forgetting decades of peaceful coexistence as well as the hardships undergone to attain such peace. Western elites have to find ways to reinvigorate among populations the values of freedom in a clearly communicated way and to emphasize the merits and the beauty of the *adventure of freedom* as opposed to *the horror of totalitarianism*. Otherwise, it is possible that the established liberal order will be torn apart faster than we can imagine.

Closing Remarks

People worldwide need to modify their behavior in certain ways. Sudden global health threats cannot be viewed as personal but rather collective/community/social risk threats which can only be addressed through a cooperative attitude in thinking and in action. Resilience is a measure of how societies master critical situations, both technologically (including the health sciences), socially, and economically. The Covid-19 pandemic is currently a barometer showing how far ahead the crisis resilience of countries, especially in Europe and the US and other regions of the world, is functioning. International health organizations and academic/scientific institutions have in the past done various hypothetical studies with dramatic scenarios on the outbreak of pandemics, with large human cost and the destruction of a considerable amount of global economic output. European nations such as Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, certainly others too, have done drill exercises on pandemic cases in the past. The current global epidemic is putting the planning of the past few years to the test. Resilience concerns the past, present, and future of such a crisis. Past means levels of preparedness, present means efficiency and effectiveness of action, and future is measured in terms of social structures being better off after an emergency than before. It is, nevertheless, unfortunate how quickly societies forget such health crisis events, e.g., the other coronavirus epidemics such as SARS, as well as swine flu, mad cow disease, and bird flu. This tendency to forget unpleasant even shocking events all too quickly, because we simply want the good times to continue forever, to a certain extent deprives the world of the highly important learning process - one that must be assimilated by the public but, more importantly, adopted by governance, the health sciences and related private or academic research centers, to support optimal planning for the next pandemic and its detrimental effects, which will inevitably arrive again at some point in the future.

A clash between the old tangible versus the new iconic reality is inevitably pushing the socioeconomic, political, and cultural aspects of life to a gigantic reset. New potential global conflict lines will arise along the axes of ideological, religious, and sociopolitical systems. These processes carry the seeds for the creation of a synthesis of old and new - or else, and more likely, an entirely new digital world. The new world will have immensely positive characteristics, especially in the fostering of human creativity and intelligence in all aspects of productive human activity, notably in the life sciences fields. However, on the negative side, it could, parading as democracy, also hide the face of a global autocratic system where, in the name of achievement of global peace, security, and material happiness, human life could well come under total surveillance and control.

In the wake of a global crisis in economics and politics and in the midst of the breathtaking changes brought about by modern technologies, insecurity and a nebulous level of fear prevail worldwide. Historically, fear has always possessed formative power in the processes of thinking and acting, since it forces us to deeply question the present social and political order, which can lead to our positively remolding an outdated order into new forms and norms, with profound implications for political culture. Other levels of anger and fear stem from rising income inequality between rich and poor worldwide, as well as uncontrolled immigration movements. The wealthy elites, indifferent to the widespread feelings of insecurity among populations, have blithely dubbed the lower to middle classes xenophobic. Political order around the globe is in the midst of a transformation, with unusual personalities being the leading carriers of the currents of change: the result is the painful birthing of a new world. The belief that the old can be resurrected in an ever-accelerating timeframe is a fallacy proven by history. The world finds itself in the second half of the latter (fourth) phase of an 80-year megacycle. The present widespread manifestations of sociopolitical resentment and animosity that are currently shredding the fabric of the world will most likely be resolved through crises, upheavals, and military confrontations. It remains to be seen to what extent the global lockdown of entire continents, countries, and communities will affect civilian life in the post-coronavirus period given that, in the name of preservation of public health, a number of restrictions on personal freedom may remain in place worldwide. Seen from a positive longer-term angle, the above processes will ultimately open the way for a new era, with the numerous excesses having been worked out and institutions and social positions realigned, signaling the start of a new period of global prosperity. First, however, come the difficult years.

Geopolitics is a powerful principle shaping the historical aspirations of a nation in relation to its interaction with its overall surrounding geographical environment. Consequently, an individual's personality is partly a product of these external forces, free only in a limited sense. Eastern Orthodox Christian belief places the reference point for an individual at a far different and higher level, namely, that of Creation and Creator and their interaction. If the concept of the individual's natural striving for bonding with his Creator and of the fulfillment of his responsibilities towards Him is accepted, the individual can become truly free within the eternal and unlimited, unconstrained by time and space reference coordinates of divine Creation/Creator. Eastern Orthodox belief, when guiding an individual's thinking and acting, may be an emerging paradigm in these times of increased uncertainty and turmoil, eventually creating a platform for the dissemination of a global culture of peaceful coexistence on planet Earth and harmony between humankind and its Creator.

Economics

- ❖ Prolonged negative policy rates and overextended central bank balance sheets create significant risks to economic performance and financial stability. They distort financial markets, economic activity, and household economic and financial planning, and marginalize profits for the banking/insurance sectors. Close to zero or below zero yields make it impossible for savers and institutions to reach their financial goals with fixed-income assets. Negative rates cross the critical line where empirical historical observation does not exist and analytical models cease to function. They impose negative returns on savers and are harmful to banks and their role in allocating savings to productive uses, albeit reducing a government's debt service costs. The long-term implications of such policies are uncertain as the world finds itself historically in uncharted territory. Ultra-low rates inflate asset prices, generating a temporary wealth effect; however, in a pervasive atmosphere of fear about the unknown, such policies may longer-term not translate into productive investments but could instead generate dangerous new financial bubbles.
- ❖ The assumption of the irreversibility of a 35-year trend of falling interest rates due to globalization, technology, and demographics could prove to be a serious fallacy once the post baby-boomer generations inherit, over the next decade, tremendous wealth and, possibly, embark on a spending spree, flooding markets and creating product supply shortages, which could lead to a suddenly rising inflationary environment.
- ❖ Cryptocurrencies are a new form of money neither limited by national borders nor controlled by central banks, *carrying a strong inherent message of non-government interference*. Apart from their use by individuals, they can be a magnet for small states, entrepreneurs, and innovative companies, as well as an aid to economic and technological development.
- ❖ Facebook, with its new blockchain digital Libra currency, is addressing a record start-up number of 2 billion individuals who could use the latter currency and payment system. Libra, which is not created through *mining*, is fully backed by financial assets, a mixture of cash in different leading currencies, government bonds, and high-quality short-term debt, all going into a reserve account. Each Libra unit will represent a share of that reserve value. Libra may fluctuate against conventional currencies but not excessively. The *Libra Association*, founded in Geneva, Switzerland, to oversee the currency, has close to 30 members mostly in tech and telecom, financial services, venture capital, and academic and nonprofits organizations. For Libra, a number of hurdles have to be overcome related to the control and security of the reserve account, regulatory issues mainly related to the *know your customer* principle, crime, fraud, and tax evasion issues as well as the safeguarding of the public's sensitive information. Libra could become a massive marketing tool for blockchain technology, bringing people closer to dealing with a digital wallet and crypto assets. These could be the early stages of a new world currency and payment system in the making.
- ❖ Libra and Bitcoin challenge the currency monopoly of central banks. The Swiss National Bank (SNB) has become active in terms of digital money, exploring the launching of an e-franc based on blockchain technology. It further advocates that the way forward may lie in integration of existing electronic payment systems worldwide with the added introduction of certain central bank-backed digital versions of cash, which would be far better than leaving this space open for independent cryptocurrencies or digital platforms such as *Libra*, or in China *Alipay* and *Wechat*. The SNB clearly leads the way in discussions about the future of money. If a group of central banks collaborated, cross-border block-chain

transfers via digital money could become a reality. A core challenging issue remains the identification of the participants in transactions, probably to be overcome via biometric data, including iris, fingerprint, or voice identification.

- ❖ Apple and Goldman Sachs have jointly launched a credit card paired with iPhones, a move of strategic importance to both corporations. Goldman Sachs is enhancing its consumer banking brand and has indirectly become a competitor to US banks, whose lucrative credit card business has flourished for years. For Apple, the card, made of titanium is a strong marketing tool, keeping Apple customers tied to its brand, while the customer receives a well-presented analytical statement sortable by various criteria, annual statement credits, travel services, and other bonuses.
- ❖ Metals used in the production of computers, mobile phones, and electric cars, such as lithium, cobalt, and other rare earth elements, are catalysts for the transition to a new high-tech landscape. China has managed to control rare earths production in what has become almost a universal monopoly, while at the same time dominating the market for battery raw materials. The US has a limited production of rare earths and remains dependent on imports for the needs of its industries.
- ❖ Chinese entrepreneurs may become the tycoons who will electrify everything, from home appliances to household insurance, driven by AI and communication concepts. Huawei has probably successfully endured the war that the US has initiated against, it rightfully or not. By the end of 2020, the Chinese giant will likely have closed most of the major state deals for the development of 5G networks globally, including India, which has just opened its doors to Huawei for forthcoming 5G trials. It is an open question if, how, and by what means the West can compete with China in a technological race that is already well underway, with China having a clear head start.
- ❖ In the evolution of *Industry-4.0*, where the digital landscape and the physical technologies are growing in a connected and interactive way, the US is globally leading the way, with China following, its focus mainly being in Asia. Europe remains in third place.
- ❖ Global debt, which includes General Government, the Financial Sector, and the Private non-Financial Sector, reached USD 250 trillion in 2019. World debt exceeds USD 85,000 per capita, a multiple of the world average income per capita. The richer countries are the most indebted ones. In Europe, German households hold about 1.8 trillion Euros in cash and current accounts. Another 3 trillion Euros lies in various insurance and pensions schemes.
- ❖ If the French government stays on course in the implementation of serious supply-side reforms, i.e., reforms focusing on the labor force, capital, technology, and regulation, it will overtake Germany as the new economic leader of Europe and enjoy a true golden decade.
- ❖ Brexit could boost confidence and spending in the UK for 2020-2021 after more than three years of uncertainty and turmoil on the socio-political and economic fronts. GDP growth with the help of fiscal measures could reach 2.0% - 2.2% annually for the years 2020/2021, respectively. Another fact is that London remains, even after Brexit, the largest financial center in the world (ahead of New York without US businesses), marking about 80% of all financial transactions between Europe and the world. Of about 5,500 financial firms based in London, no more than 150 have already moved their location to Frankfurt, which is strongly indicative of the dominating position London will continue to exert over the European continent and in the financial world.

- ❖ The year 2023 may signal the end of the use of cash in Sweden. Conversion to a cashless society is more advanced in Sweden than in any other country in the world. In retail trade, six out of seven payments are made electronically. Within ten years, the value of notes and coins has halved, as well as the number of bank branches offering a cash service.
- ❖ Russia, China, and India are moving ahead to synchronize their financial systems, independent of the SWIFT network commonly used in international transactions. Russia and China already have their own domestic financial messaging systems in place (SPFS and CIPS), while India may use a combination of the Russian platform with a domestic service it is currently developing. Although it is a common perception that US global economic supremacy has started to wane, the fact is that the US dollar continues to be the global economic driver more than at any other time over the last 100 years. While the US accounts for approximately 20% of the world's economic output, more than 50% of all global trade transactions and currency reserves are in US Dollars.
- ❖ China is the second largest economy in the world in terms of *nominal GDP* after the US, but already first in terms of *purchasing power parity GDP* (2019 data). China's immense power emanates from its huge population of almost 1.5 billion. Out of the trade war between the US and China, a war for global dominance is emerging. Eventually, China's rise as the leading world economic power could be unstoppable and the US may ultimately choose to adopt a conciliatory position, share its leadership position, and elect to march side by side and in cooperation with China.
- ❖ The market value of the *Norwegian Oil Fund* has surpassed the magic mark of Kroner 10 trillion or just below USD 1.10 trillion. Since 1998, it has generated an annual return of about 6.1%. The fund has a stake in about 9,200 companies in 74 countries worldwide and holds on average 1.5% of all the world's listed companies. Its investments are diversified in terms of markets, countries, and currencies, with the majority of its holdings being equities, plus up to 30% in fixed income and up to 7% in unlisted real estate. Core directions in its investment strategy are the spread across most markets, currencies, and countries for optimal creation of value plus exposure to global growth, while maintaining adequate risk diversification. The Fund's single aim is to help finance the welfare state for future generations.
- ❖ Over-liquid investors are forced to buy assets on which they could get back less than they will have invested, the result of the creation of an abundance of capital through central bank policies. Central banks have failed to translate liquidity into meaningful investments, allowing extra liquidity to remain within the financial markets and creating huge distortions in the system. National budgets fuel ever growing deficits, which have to be funded by central banks with additional printed money. Obligations of healthcare and pension systems are mounting due to unfavorable demographics, creating new unsustainable debt charges.
- ❖ A bubble in bonds is a direct reflection of international debt at an even higher danger level than at the beginning of the global financial and economic crisis in 2007/2008. Global debt of states, corporations, and households reached almost USD 260 trillion at the end of 2019, about 325% of the world's GDP, forming a rather inelastic *debt plateau*, which makes its reduction relatively difficult and complicated. History teaches that private debts often become public debts in times of crisis, as a result of governments saving collapsing banks. These worrisome statistics are exaggerated by the fact that the US dollar, being a reserve currency, allows the US to still incur more and more debt for a long time

to come, even if that is not sustainable. Further economic growth is being paid for with ever lower interest rates and ever-increasing debt. The present Covid-19 pandemic will add enormous amounts of new debt on the global system. At some point, investors may decide no longer to believe that these huge debt sums can be repaid. At that point in time, rates may sharply rise with a dramatic impact on bond prices, the real estate and stock markets.

- ❖ The world may be gradually leaving behind a negative interest rate environment. Sweden's central bank has already decided to end its five-year experiment with below-zero rates, and the world's major central banks will be watching results closely. Donald Trump's policies may have been controversial but there is no evidence that they have inhibited growth or growth potential; to the contrary, primary objectives may have been achieved as the US trade deficit is shrinking.
- ❖ All epidemics - and the Covid-19 pandemic is no exception - have a highly emotional component, fully justified by the tragedy of illness and of loss of human life. However, in economic terms, the current outbreak is creating a situation which is, most probably, of measurable and manageable proportions. Does the current re-rating of equities make fundamental sense? In our view it does not. This is evident, as far as we can go with a present assessment, but, in fact, this is the only thing a prudent investor needs to understand. Despite the present panic, the American economy has been doing quite well. Europe has also been on a fairly positive track. With ultra-low interest rates in the US, Europe, and other areas worldwide, some of the best companies in the world will continue to be the only meaningful long-term investment avenues. We will assume that once the peak rate of infections has been reached in the US, Europe, and, throughout the Western world (something that cannot necessarily be viewed as an absolutely synchronized event), stock markets will recover quickly. Central banks are never out of ammunition, as long as the public agrees to hold the money that a central bank is printing. In that respect, it is a fallacy to assume that because of almost zero interest rates, e.g., in the US or in Europe, the FED or the ECB have no other emergency options with which to stem a crisis situation. In fact, in Europe, the ECB could increase its bond purchases, including government and corporate debt, virtually to an unlimited extent. It could in the future decide to buy equities directly, provide perpetual long-term loans, or even distribute free money to the public. In the current post-disease outbreak recovery stage, ample fiscal and monetary measures should ensure that production and services, supply chains, and, generally, economic activity around the globe will recover quite fast. Most of the current and maybe new upcoming costs will be transferred to government bills and ultimately land on central banks' balance sheets. Supported by extremely expansionary monetary and fiscal policies, governments would provide near-unprecedented help to companies, workers, and consumers to contain the risks of widespread bankruptcies, dismissals, and of a systemic wave of credit default. During the rebound period, bond yields will probably stay in very low territory for even longer than they would have done otherwise. This automatically re-rates quality companies, as corporate dividend yields look even more attractive. Low interest rates may make it easier for governments to bear the extra debt burden without having to increase taxes by much in the post-crisis period. Lower oil prices will support the real purchasing power of consumers. Ultimately debt can, either directly or indirectly, always be monetized. Even with the worst predictions on this pandemic, it looks rather unreasonable to expect a permanent re-rating of equities to such an extent as the current market panic suggests. From an economic perspective, the best value companies in the world will continue their successful course and, during the peak of this crisis, will, pricewise, remain on an extremely interesting investment plateau.

- ❖ The *Just in Time* (JIT) inventory system, a common inventory management technique and type of lean methodology designed to increase efficiency, cut costs, and decrease waste by receiving goods only on an as needed basis (originally adopted in Japan in car manufacturing in the 1970's), may have led to today's widespread shortage of medical stocks, which has proven disastrous in the current global Covid-19 epidemic, a period of extreme crisis and danger.
- ❖ Over the coming decade, governments may adopt unorthodox macroeconomic policies, e.g., the adoption of *negative taxation* to stimulate demand and extend the economic cycle, in the form of direct liquidity injections/tax credits for all. More and more investors will be seeking ways to link financial returns to societal and environmental benefits.
- ❖ A historic paradox has arisen in today's fluctuating and highly uncertain environment: namely, that aversion to short-term volatility (the consequence of investing in equities) may mean direct exposure to the risks of monetary debasement, financial repression, or indirect financial confiscation risk, all associated with liquid (cash) investments. Business innovation, the engine of sound business and wealth creation, will, nevertheless, continue unabated in almost any economic scenario one can imagine.
- ❖ In times of unprecedented change, investment strategies should strictly focus on the best and strongest companies in the world, on undisputable brand names, and on absolute quality and transparency in the investment process, while incorporating measures of protection beyond the usual i.e., hedging in a dynamically managed way.

Closing Remarks

The 2020 outbreak of the novel coronavirus, Covid-19, a highly infectious disease, will go down in history for its massive impact on the global economy and on public health, deeply affecting populations both physically and psychologically. Depressed shipping traffic and low pollution levels confirm a widespread slowdown in China's economic activity. The manufacturing and services sectors plunged to record lows in February and exports fell by almost 20%, while car sales sank a record 80%. China's economic engine is already restarting, but slowly as demand from other countries is low. Countries economically interlinked to China will be affected, particularly Australia, South Korea, and Japan, as well as the European continent. Closed borders add to the economic malaise. The US is facing a deflationary recession, and, possibly for a short period, even a depression. Following the coronavirus outbreak, countries round the world may be reluctant to rely on China and a new trend could emerge, away from dependence on the Middle Kingdom and toward greater economic self-sufficiency. Such a trend – not at all certain given China's remarkable ability for rebirth and recovery – if, however, validated may longer-term benefit Europe, the US, India, Russia, and other both developed and emerging regions of the world. Air travel, tourism, and travel-related industries worldwide may be affected for years to come, as social distancing becomes a new norm. Businesses related to restaurants, sporting and cultural events, and other services requiring extensive social contact will also face significant disruption. Industries less reliant on high social interaction, such as agriculture, will be affected to a smaller extent. On-line retail, on-line education, and anything related to the new digital economy, including the work from home concept and all services/products related to such an environment, will experience substantial growth for years to come. So will also Blockchain Technology/Fintechs/Digital Currency projects, as the world economy will be moving faster towards a digital money system. All of the above growth industries will build the new economy interlinked with Industry-4.0. To overcome this health crisis and its devastating economic impact, massive Marshall-type

monetary and fiscal stimulus plans are being set in motion for the US, Europe, and other major regions of the world. We will witness the spending of trillions of new money predominantly US Dollars, Euros, and Renminbi, but also Yen, Rupees, Rubles etc. to protect the income of populations and restart the world economies. That is going to mean significant amounts of additional government debt, much of which will have to be monetized in due time one way or the other. Inflation with, at the moment, demand at record lows worldwide should, in the short term, present no problem, although it will inevitably become an issue longer-term. Economic data throughout the globe for the months March, April, and May 2020 will exhibit a contraction not seen before in peacetime. For Europe, this will de facto mean the end of benchmark linked government budget deficits, with respective deficit levels for EU countries expected to reach as much as 5% and, in extreme cases, up to 10%, for example, in Italy and Spain.

A new school of US economists is advocating a revamped fiscal policy, «The Modern Monetary Theory (MMT)». MMT wants the state to finance its needs in infrastructure projects, health and pension care simply through deficits, while central banks will buy the resultant outstanding and growing debt and monetize it, over time reducing government budget and state deficits. MMT proponents use a highly disputable period, extending from the 2008 crisis to date, as evidence that MMT will not produce inflation. Empirical and theoretical frameworks for the MMT are at best highly questionable. Looking back into the past, evidence overthrows the entire MMT foundation with scary showings as, for example, in the cases of central bank-financed government spending which, approximately 100 years ago, destroyed the monetary system of the Weimar Republic and brought about the 1930's Great Depression, and, more recently, the Asian and Russian emerging market crises. The 2008 global financial crisis and the 2010 Euro crisis demonstrate that debt crises do not exclusively occur in emerging economies but can severely affect any economy in the world, large, small, emerging, or developed. In addition, evidence reveals that being a creditor or a debtor nation makes a huge difference as to the effects of government spending and increase in debt levels. Japan's debt is almost exclusively held in domestic hands, i.e., it is a creditor nation. Its debt, while ballooning, does not produce growth, while its currency appreciates. In a debtor nation where debt is held outside the country, once a confidence crisis breaks out, foreign investors flee capital markets, the local currency collapses, and inflation rises. The US is more of a debtor than a creditor nation, with about half of its debt held by foreign investors; however, it also has a «reserve currency status», a unique worldwide attribute which in effect qualitatively designates its debt as «sustainable in perpetuity», as long as the global community continues to trust the US Dollar in its reserve currency role. In contrast, the EU (collectively seen as a «nation») has creditor status, with most of its debt held within the EU borders. Application of MMT within the EU would probably result in sharply rising debt levels with zero or small effects on igniting growth. The MMT is a dangerous economic theory, with no serious scientific or empirical backing: its disastrous effects are sure to be felt during the next global financial crisis.

Economic cycles are triggered by exaggerated investment activities, which in turn trigger monetary interventions. For about ten years, the world economy has been breaking ground in uncharted territory and against rational macroeconomic theories, with unknown consequences for this unpredictable journey. The world is going through a period of transformation unlike anything previously seen in human history. Monetary policy seems to have reached its limits. A new unfamiliar super-economic policy cycle is emerging, focusing on the dominance of fiscal policy with an increased indebtedness of states and the adoption of obscure theories such as the MMT advocating unlimited printing of money. MMT, formulated for our euphoric times, is a case study of the non-rational. Global debt

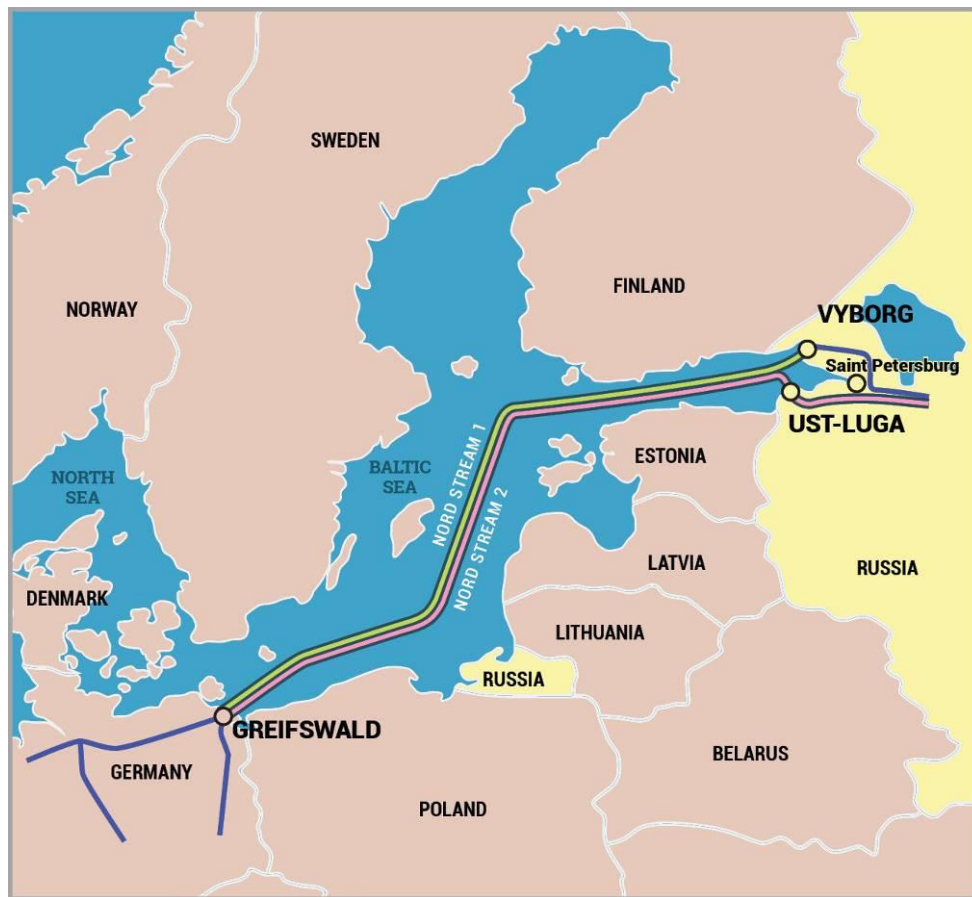
could easily reach USD 500 trillion in a few years, while businesses and investors act as if this were the everyday norm. Government borrowing reached a new record level in 2019, while companies in the next three years will have to repay or refinance corporate bonds worth USD 4 trillion, making the private sector highly vulnerable to a new recession. On top of all comes the Covid-19 global epidemic bringing with it a new wave of fiat money flooding by governments/central banks. A new liquidity crisis, postponed for a future date which inevitably will arrive, could create financial chaos in markets worldwide. Debt, regardless of how governments will deal with it, will become a drag on future growth. Quantitative easing on an unprecedented scale will simply mean monetization of debt with potentially severe inflationary repercussions. When considering such situations, history and rational economic thinking always point to an end that could be as disastrous as in the past – maybe even more so in current times because of the extreme monetary measures applied for so long. Warning indicators could be the sudden uptick of inflation reflected in the nominal yield of long-term bonds which central banks do not control. Looking ahead, social frictions could lead to huge waves of discontent expressed against governments and their policies, the leading players being a generation that feels betrayed by massive national debt that was incurred without any obvious economic return, an upcoming challenge for democracies around the world. Worldwide default going hand in hand with monetization of debt and the introduction of a new monetary base could be the platform of a great global economic and sociopolitical reset.

Major geopolitical and geostrategic events, such as large-scale wars, could induce sudden economic contraction and major recessions. These are the dominant risks the world is confronted with by the first half of the new decade. In a highly volatile and unstable world, markets can perform irrationally for longer periods, surpassing the average time an investor can remain solvent. Comprehending the inherent strength, stability, and ability of quality companies with strong brands to generate constant revenue streams for long periods of time, is a key factor of success in investment strategies, which should be simple, transparent, and dynamically protected. The understanding of key notions of geopolitics and geostrategy in a fluid world and their constant interaction during our times of transition, are factors of utmost importance for safe and successful investing, issues not at all sufficiently comprehended by most asset managers nor by financial services institutions.

Energy – Resources

- ❖ The Nord Stream 2 Energy project, delivering Russian gas from the fields of Siberia through the Baltic Sea, with an entry point in the Ust-Luga Leningrad region and exit point in the Greifswald area in Germany, covers 1,200 kilometers with a combined capacity of the two strings of Nord Stream 2 at 55 billion cubic meters of gas per year. This project will give a boost to Russia's long-term energy contracts with Europe, increase Europe's dependency on Russian gas, and weaken Ukraine's position, given that the latter will be compromised as a transit country for Russian gas. In October 2019, the Danish Energy Agency approved the construction of the gas pipeline through Danish territorial waters, allowing the last obstacle to the completion of the Russia-led project to fall.

NORD STREAM



- ❖ The United States has become one of the world's three largest exporters of liquefied natural gas (LNG) after Australia and Qatar. It has the potential to become the world's largest exporter of LNG within five years. Beyond 2030, energy geopolitics will start shifting again in as yet unclear directions as electric vehicles and significantly more efficient battery technologies start dominating the global scene.
- ❖ China is the world's biggest miner and supplier of rare earth materials, having, in addition, acquired substantial lithium and cobalt mines as well as energy utility companies abroad. It is also pushing for an ambitious program to integrate electricity markets throughout Asia, making it the leading provider of energy products, services, and related technologies to much of the world.
- ❖ Over the past few years, China has taken a leadership position in the manufacture of clean energy products, e.g., batteries and solar cells, accounting for about 50% of the global supply.
- ❖ The Danish island of Samsø, a 112-km² island with a population of about 4,000, has achieved a green energy transformation, with a pioneering spirit and great political skill. The green electricity generated by eleven offshore wind turbines compensates for the use of fossil fuel, which is still used in road traffic and ferry connections to the Danish mainland. Samsø, the bio-island, is considered a Mecca of agricultural organic products, a gourmet destination, and a pioneer of energy transition.

Closing Remarks

Unlimited energy with no dangerous nuclear waste is promised by fusion technology. In this hot - up to many million degrees - plasma gas, it should be feasible to fuse hydrogen nuclei into helium, while magnetic fields will keep the plasma stable at all times. Nuclear fusion would thus release energy that could solve the energy problems of the entire planet while being climate-friendly and with limited and manageable radioactive waste. It would replicate the thermonuclear reactions of the sun that have been burning for billions of years. Germany, France, and China have been working intensely on this technology for years, although its widespread application may still be at least two decades away. In 20 years from now, renewable energy sources could cover at least one-third of the world's energy needs.

Science & Technology

- ❖ The installation of smart language systems as a cybernetic control strategy aims at the evaluation of user data to achieve a certain predictability and control of human behaviour. The voice, as the medium of the individual's mood, is a highly sensitive biometric feature from which a vast amount of personal information can be extracted, such as emotions, personality traits, or existing or hidden mental illnesses. In the very near future, verbal communication to an intelligent machine will result in loss (partial or complete) of one's privacy and/or of one's intentional action sphere, establishing the process of *talking to robots* as the highest form of *asymmetric communication*. In this case, *asymmetry* is an imbalance in the relationship between speaker and hearer as a result of technological factors, i.e., the virtual assistant listens to the human speaker biometrically, instantly analyzing every aspect of the communication, including concealed emotional or physical states, while the human being receives a few naked words as an answer. As this technology-based framework becomes the tool to anticipate human desires and action, it acquires - once misused - the potential to exert a terrible impact on the individual as well as undermine social democracy.
- ❖ It may take a mere 4.0 seconds of audio to clone a voice, illustrating how fast the creation of artificial voice technology is advancing. As AI algorithms get more sophisticated, it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between what's real and what's artificial, the great danger being misuse of the technology through the fabrication of illusionary truths.
- ❖ Robots can today still be clearly differentiated from humans, but in the future such differences may no longer be distinguishable. Science is advancing in the building of computers out of organic material, replicating the nature of the human brain. Computer technology, especially machine learning, has developed to such a point that algorithms are close to developing an artificial life of their own.
- ❖ The world of innovation is no longer based on state-controlled research centers that drive progress, but instead relies on thousands of small startups with enormous entrepreneurial energy. Many software specialists from Chinese and other overseas universities are entering the field of AI, with China's venture centers in Shanghai, Beijing, and Shenzhen becoming Silicon Valley's serious competitors. China is excelling at machine learning algorithms through the utilization of massive amounts of data, ultimately the driver of AI. While the US may still be the leader when it comes to developing and designing new software concepts, holding on to its leadership is an open question.
- ❖ The greatest source of political power has always been information, and the internet is the greatest tool for transmitting information since the printing press

was invented. The effective distribution and use of information or disinformation through the web has thus become a powerful geotechnological weapon in the 21st century. Russia and China are leading the way in this race.

- ❖ Using six key long-term trends, namely, climate change, alternative energy, autonomous vehicles & smart cities, advanced materials & high-tech construction, policy directions and funding, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) unveiled plans for a sea-based *Floating City* as part of five future world concepts. The scientific engineering objective is to effectively anticipate how society can interface with technologically advanced cities, operational systems, and infrastructure under a challenge, for example, dramatically rising sea levels. In such an environmentally challenging context, water is being used productively and turned from a threat into an asset.
- ❖ 5G is one of the catalysts of the fourth industrial revolution and China is indisputably leading the way in this technology. China could spend up to USD 250 billion on the construction of 5G networks in the next six years. By the year 2035, 5G is expected to enable close to USD 12.5 trillion of global economic output.
- ❖ Over the past century, average life expectancy has doubled from forty to eighty years. Billions are being invested in the biotech sector today with the goal of slowing down or even stopping aging. However, the birth in November 2018 of genetically modified twins sets a dangerous precedent and opens a risky chapter where humans collide with divine creation.
- ❖ Energy-intensive cooling technologies are widely used as a means of preservation. Technologies of cryopreservation can be extended into practices of freezing life in an attempt to cheat death. The political, cultural, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of this and the implications it has, regarding the question of attempting to defer death by technoscientific means, could be staggering, provoking new questions about living and dying in the 21st century.
- ❖ The eighth perfect landing by the US Space Agency NASA on Mars became a reality in November 2018. The success rate landing in the harsh Martian atmosphere currently stands at about 40%. Exploration of Mars is an emerging area of competition between China, Europe, the United States, and Russia, a race where the United States to date remains a clear leader.

Closing Remarks

Digitalization, a world where cars drive themselves, factories produce by themselves, software and technology cure all diseases, and virtual realities fulfill all dreams instantly gives the appearance of being a human-made paradise that will vastly improve life and our world. A world where robotic servants understand humans' deepest desires better than humans do. God is being replaced by technology, which is the new religion, an AI religion where humanity is transcended by machines. Digitalism, in the form of super-intelligent machines, is seen as the means of substituting for our apparently «limited» mind, our often irrational emotions, and our aging bodies. However, such a «machine religion» is, in fact, driven by a deep-seated contempt for the human and is, in truth, a denial of the divinity of the human being, possibly leading to what we might call «the post-human era», with, albeit, a civilized façade. In this scenario, a subsequent technological step for humanity could be a merger between man and machine in a new super-species with an envisaged infinitely renewable life.

The point of singularity is reached when computers, globally networked, create a mind-boggling flood of inventions in ever faster self-potentiating sequences. The networking of existing AIs, as artificial brain regions, connected and spanning the

entire globe, rests on their continuous feeding on big data, i.e., massive information flows from social media, audiovisual and text, biometric readings, digital encyclopedias, health info, mobility data, business, art & culture, demographics, recordings, and the like. Data combined, instantly analyzed, and resynthesized could lead to accurate temporal and situational choices allowing software to work far faster than humans - however, without the unique consciousness possessed by humanity. This situation entails the potential of a future mega-confrontation for supremacy between man and machine, ultimately with horrifying consequences for the human race.

Humanity has recently entered the period of symbiosis of human and machine intelligence. However, while computers may already be close to leaving behind slow human thinking, they lack numerous divine qualities and capabilities that they can never acquire - such as possession and expression of wisdom, empathy and compassion, intuition, charity, a sense of morality, self-restraint, as well as the willingness to sacrifice for others, the striving towards truth, the desire for peace, and so much more - all this springing from human consciousness. Such characteristics and attributes can never arise in a machine merely from self-learning, i.e., through interactive algorithms with the provision of sufficiently large computing power and massive amounts of data. Such processes will never lead to the arising of consciousness in a computer - and it is highly unreasonable and dangerous to assume so. Such a future world would be one where superstition abounds, where the universe, even God, is equated to a computing machine, where reality has become a simulation, a world where an all-encompassing social network would connect humans directly to the brain of a single superhuman computer. Humanity is confronted with a dangerous fallacy, namely, that an unlimited digital increase of data processing capacity equates humans with God – a desecration of divine creation with looming catastrophic consequences.

The Environment

- ❖ Water scarcity is becoming a major issue in large parts of the globe such as Africa, Iran, and India, where severe droughts are becoming the norm. These phenomena could trigger both internal displacement and large-scale emigration, as well as social unrest, giving rise to outbreaks of war over vast regions of the world.
- ❖ While drinking water is becoming scarcer, seawater levels are rising worldwide. Though for 6,000 years sea levels had remained essentially constant, in the 20th century they rose by twenty centimeters and in the 21st they are expected to rise by one to two meters - even if globally agreed climate goals are met. In the polar regions, sea ice, ice sheets, and glaciers are gradually melting. In Antarctica, the unusually large-sized Thwaites or Doomsday Glacier is melting rapidly. Its collapse could submerge such megacities as New York and Sydney. Global warming is causing storm surges and heavy rains of unprecedented intensity while also contributing to rising sea levels, so that life on low-lying islands and on numerous sea-coasts round the world (e.g., the North Sea coast) is severely threatened. Coastal and island habitats of both humans and animals are thus in acute danger. Jakarta is the fastest-sinking metropolis in the world having subsided by four meters since the beginning of its explosive growth in the eighties, while by 2025 some parts of the city could sink by another two meters. If sea levels rise another two meters, the County of Kent in the UK could become an underwater Atlantis by 2040. Instead of cooperating with nature, man seems to have dangerously challenged her for space and resources, a battle in which

nature is ultimately bound to get the upper hand, unless man reverses both his way of thinking and course of action.

- ❖ Scientists believe that the current Covid-19 pandemic, which originated in Wuhan, China, was caused by a bat-born virus. Worldwide, communicable diseases, when originating from animals, are often from wild animals. As regards the present SARS-CoV-2 outbreak, most probably the virus jumped to humans because of its proximity to the bats' habitat. Thus, it could be said that most viral health threats that humanity is, or will be facing in the future, already exist, circulating among wildlife, like *viral dark matter*. A large pool of viruses in the hundreds of thousands exists out there, and we only recognize one when it jumps into humans and when we deal with the first outbreaks of the respective disease it causes. This very frequently is caused by human intrusion into once pristine areas. For example, we are witnessing in Africa the unprecedented establishment of multiple industrial, oil, and mining companies and the construction of traffic arteries that allow the movement of entire populations in and through previously virgin areas. Conversely, roads also allow wildlife to come dangerously close to human settlements. These dramatically changed circumstances, which never existed in the past, increase the chance of viral infections.
- ❖ There is yet another source of virus infections brought about by our current lifestyle. Namely, the billions of animals exploited and slaughtered each year because of the industrialization of animal agriculture. The vast majority of these pitiable animals live short and utterly wretched lives crammed into factory farms, which are a breeding ground for pathogens and virulent strains of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. The result is that the meat of diseased animals occasionally enters the food supply e.g., the outbreak of *mad cow disease* in the 1990s. Prevention is infinitely better than cure. Thus, we should focus on setting up diverse organic farms which create ecological resilience and sustainability. There must further be investment in plant-based agriculture, cultivating crops to feed people instead of *farming animals*: this would liberate vast tracts of land for nature and its precious and indispensable ecosystems and its biodiversity - for example, our precious rainforests, wetlands, forests, waterways, soils... - and their natural capacities for cleansing the Earth and warding off numerous environmental threats. All life on Earth is God-blessed: it is therefore obviously fully in our own interest that we should act deferentially towards all planetary life and with a God-given responsibility. Only then will we be able to minimize the risk of such epidemics and pandemics breaking out among human populations, while also vastly improving life for all who inhabit our planet

Closing Remarks

Although predictions about climate change for the coming decades have a sound scientific basis, what remains unclear is how much of the problem, which is today of global dimensions, is natural and how much is manmade. This raises a core question: namely, to what extent societal changes should be enacted without going to extremes, which in the latter case could raise another series of problems for the world. On the carbon emission front, energy, including electricity, represents about 25% of all emissions, the rest being attributed to transportation, manufacturing, agriculture, and building/construction. As a goal of zero emissions requires measures and actions closer to intensive social engineering, this could, in effect, undermine liberal democracy.

Humanity has the potential to understand, assess, and redirect its actions: history is simply the evidence of these mental processes put into effect. 2020-2021 will probably be years when accumulated understanding of the harmful effects of modern civilization on the ecosystem and the natural habitat of planet earth leads to simultaneous actions by numerous scientists, scientific bodies, public and

private organizations, governments, and intergovernmental institutions, who will, all together for the first time, be assessing, deciding, and redirecting human action. Everything will surely be on the table: technical innovation, new forms of doing business, required policies, and awareness of the critical state of planet earth. Although late it is still not too late for action and we remain confident that action will come, even if at the last moment. Losses will be recorded, some reversible some irreversible. Nevertheless, our environment and our planet will most likely be saved because there is no other alternative - it simply has to be saved!

Health

- ❖ The world is in a state of panic, this reflecting the public's feelings about an invisible and, to a certain extent, unknown health threat. This prompts *crowd behaviour*, with a focus mainly on temporary negative news and depressing actual events. Much of this has, unfortunately, been dramatized to the extreme by the mass media, which do not always present an objective picture based on rationality, science, past history, and actual facts, nor do they always focus on the positive technological capacities for response to such a crisis that our world possesses. Outbreaks of different coronaviruses have predated the current one, with scientists having identified a number of viruses which cause different respiratory illnesses in humans (and animals), e.g., SARS-CoV China 2002, MERS-CoV 2012. Pandemics usually spread fast but then subside thanks to strict and coordinated measures of containment, such measures being enacted at this very moment throughout the world. Consequently, the intensity of this virus outbreak and fast spread will eventually recede, while vaccines and antiviral drugs will gradually enter the market, all which will most likely help turn this disease, as was the case with many others in the past, into something the world can live with. Nature has its own self-corrective and defence mechanisms too and, longer-term, a wider level of physical resistance and immunity should be reached worldwide, while this virus pandemic will retreat.
- ❖ Wildlife transmittable viral diseases is a global health problem that has just recently begun to appear. Classically, modern society, notwithstanding all its resources and its technological tools, has not to date invested in scrupulously guarding against a potential threat until it reaches the point of needing to fight against it. Only when a mass continuous virus attack is taking place targeting populations globally does society learned to react – but this is a reactive and not proactive approach. Epidemics appear on average every three years. Investing in preparedness against such outbreaks should be a continuous approach, an integral part of regular annual budgets, instead of operating with emergency disbursements. Thus, deep respect must be paid by all for uninhabited wildlife areas, since human intrusion will inevitably elicit nature's counter-reaction, including viral outbreaks of pandemic and lethal proportions.
- ❖ Any state's resilience to a health crisis is only really put to the test when the state emergency personnel in hospitals or among the security forces begins to fail. With the present Covid-19 pandemic most if not all world nations may simply not reach such a situation because of the younger age of a large number of the personnel in such professional sectors and disciplines. Once the wave of infections has been slowed down, the resilience of societies is not in danger. Eventually, with this crisis as with so many others in the past, the number of affected cases will begin to decline. Viral epidemics usually last about 5-6 months, 3 months of the high-infection period and the virus's spread, then another 3 months of the retreat phase. By the end of April 2020, perhaps a bit sooner or slightly later in May, we will most probably have seen the total number of cases peak and begin to

decline, at least in the Western world. The world will come to realize that the present Covid-19 outbreak - although very contagious and, as a virus, living longer outside the body - is more or less like its predecessors. Thus, it could well be that by May this year the spread of the disease will have been dramatically slowed. Hopefully, within another month, the disease may no longer be an emergency. Life will return back to normal.

Closing Remarks

It's not what you don't know that gets you into trouble, but rather what you think you know with absolute certainty, which then turns out to be wrong!

Panic among the public arrives suddenly, reaches a peak of an extreme intensity, and then equally rapidly subsides with the first good news. The fact is that at present, throughout the world, unprecedented political, social, economic, and scientific mobilization is being targeted at stemming the current pandemic. However, fake news and disinformation abound, with figures falsely attributed to epidemiologists being disseminated by the media as to the potential of infection rates going up to 70% of the global population, or theories that this virus is likely to become globally endemic and be with us in perpetuity, creating catastrophe after catastrophe, or even worse. We naturally have enormous respect for and trust in the power of science, particularly today in our scientific/technological age. However, we need to distance ourselves from all non-scientific sources that cite such overly gloomy, extreme predictions, which, moreover, do not take into account the unprecedented defensive and counterattack measures already placed in the pipeline by societies worldwide. Also, to be taken into consideration is the spiritual power of many individuals, possibly whole communities, who are currently praying for divine help and for the restoration of good health to the entire world. Of course, the rising number of coronavirus fatalities around the globe is heartbreaking, but so are other daily, large-scale human tragedies related to wars, famines, genocides, etc. and which have always been with us but which, sadly, all too often leave people indifferent and unmoved (far less panicked), simply because they have not happened or, allegedly, do not happen on «our» territory.

Militarization & Security

- ❖ Over the last decade, the US has made a strategic shift towards not just defensive but also an offensive cyberwarfare capacity to counter increased competition with China and Russia. Israel is at an advanced stage in that direction, while the UK and France are following on the same path, upgrading their offensive cyberwarfare capabilities.
- ❖ Hybrid attacks can take different forms, not always with clear evidence of where and how the attack originated. Disinformation campaigns can cause confusion and cyberattacks can wreak havoc on civilian or military targets. Through *deep fake technology*, propagandists may soon be able to create authentic-looking videos in which real-life politicians disseminate fictional messages. Ironically, open societies are more vulnerable to such threats than autocracies, which restrict freedom of expression and the Internet. The close cooperation between the EU and NATO in this area is evidence that civilian and military threats are increasingly merging.
- ❖ Surveillance technologies are becoming a challenge for democracies worldwide. Targeted intervention in news dissemination and censorship on social networks influence the free expression of public opinion within and beyond a country's borders. AI in the hands of authoritarian governments offers the technology for advanced public surveillance at a previously unthinkable level. International

norms are not yet sufficiently in force for AI's safe use by the public and for the prevention of both private and government abuse of these technologies.

- ❖ Information and its dissemination may, in fact, have become digital weapons for the manipulation of public opinion, as well as for other political, financial, and military objectives.
- ❖ Corporations need to take a diversified, multifaceted approach to protect critical data, select the means and places for storage, and periodically reevaluate the safety, control mechanisms, and protection measures of storage facilities. Hostile parties aiming to steal critical corporate info may soon be in a position to target storage places where such information is located, regardless of geographical positioning.
- ❖ The current US land-based missile-interceptor system is, through the simultaneous use of multiple interceptors, almost 100% effective. According to the proposed 2020 defense budget, the US will significantly increase its deployed missile interceptors in Alaska, thereby thwarting the plans of any likely attacker using a limited number of missiles. The US is also successfully building new or upgrading existing missile defenses in Romania, Spain, and Poland and in the Arabian Peninsula. In addition, US antimissile defenses are being complimented by deployments in Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the Pacific. The US missile defense program has two layers: homeland and regional protection. The US is also closely cooperating with Israel, which has a long, proven, successful track record in the latter highly sophisticated military technologies.
- ❖ Hypersonic missiles gliding or flying at low atmospheric altitudes are capable of traveling at more than five times the speed of sound and largely penetrating current antimissile defenses. In the event of a coordinated attack by thousands of hypersonic ICBMs, any currently existing antimissile system would most probably not be able to engage and destroy all of them. The world is facing a radically new type of war in which *control* of incoming *low earth orbit missiles* would in a military confrontation be the determining winning factor. Another war dimension is increasingly becoming involved here, namely, space warfare and the simultaneous assault on reconnaissance/warfare coordinating satellites. In future wars, without these satellites, command-and-control over hypersonic and other missile technology flying weapons is severely inhibited. The US is keeping up with or even surpassing other major military world powers in the fields of material science, missile systems, and electronic and space warfare. Hypersonic missiles and space warfare are changing the nature, but not yet the military balance, of power despite significant advances made by China and Russia. The US plans to modernize its missile defense system, including space sensors and other related weapons, the objective being to be able to fight enemy missiles anywhere, at any quantity, and at any time. This constitutes the first major revision of US missile defense policy since 2010.
- ❖ The destructiveness of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons has today become *instantaneous*, in comparison to what was once too remote or too time-consuming to deliver. Timing and distance serve as criteria to justify pre-emptive military action. US nuclear force will always remain an imminent deterrent threat, while a new style of diplomacy, financial sanctions, and cyber power, together with traditional forms of warfare, all form a multifaceted front of political, kinetic, and cyber military action available to the US when confronting enemy states.
- ❖ NATO, which was successful in countering the Soviet threat for half a century, may still have a key role to play in a highly unstable world. The organization was formed in 1949 by the US, Canada, the UK, Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland,

Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, and Portugal. Today, the most important challenge to the organization's survival is the validation by its member states of the strength of the *Transatlantic Alliance*. Europe's defenses may, in the intermediate future, still be reliant on the US, as the EU is at present unable to wage a major war, even a defensive one, without American support. America's disengagement from Europe and the overpublicized and overemphasized rise of American isolationism does not in any way or form mean that the US is abandoning its strategic interests in critical regions of the world. US commitment to European defense would in fact be far stronger if European governments seriously shouldered their share of Europe's defenses in terms of monetary contribution as well as manpower and military hardware input.

- ❖ No continent is as heavily nuclear-armed as Asia. China, India, Pakistan, and North Korea have nuclear weapons, while the US and Russia are two major nuclear powers with vital interests in Asia. America's allies such as South Korea and Japan are under the United States nuclear umbrella. Asian countries' conventional forces comprise the largest standing armies in the world. China has almost 3 million men and India's armed forces include 2.75 million soldiers. Impoverished North Korea has an army of just under 1.4 million, with a total population of less than 26 million. The US Indo-Pacific Command, responsible for American armed forces in the region, has 375,000 troops of all types stationed in the region. Asia Pacific is the only region in the world where military spending has increased steadily since 1988, following the end of the Cold War. While China accounted for around 30% of the region's expenditure ten years ago, today its share is almost 50%. China's military budget is secret; it is however estimated to have been somewhere in the region of USD 200-250 billion in 2018.
- ❖ *US command of the seas* is the foundation of American national security and a core geostrategic American doctrine, preventing any enemy naval force from either invading its territory or denying the US access to the oceans. Russian and Chinese hypersonic military systems represent a challenge to *US command of the seas*. Consequently, command of the seas is being partially if not fully transferred to space-based systems, *controlling* weapon delivery. Command, Control, and Communication (C3) systems shifted first from the sea to the air and are now being transferred from the air into space. Thus, space control is gradually becoming the foundation that assures command of the seas. Space systems capable of detecting enemy missiles can destroy them and do so rapidly through longer-range hypersonics. In a military confrontation, the denying of space operations to the opposing force will become essential to protect merchant or military vessels from enemy attack, or, conversely, the undeniable command of space operation will provide broad support and coverage to an attacking force. Mastering of digital space as well as cyberwarfare capabilities are inextricably connected to and will increasingly play a decisive role in the new power equations emerging over the present decade. It will be a difficult, though not an impossible, task for the US to maintain a leading position in digital warfare capabilities for the years to come, directly challenged as it is by rapid advances by both China and Russia. Although digital warfare capacities and the command of space, through which command of the seas is secured, do not change geopolitical realities, they nevertheless radically transform the nature of war.
- ❖ The termination of the *INF Treaty* between the US and Russia on nuclear medium-range systems leaves only one arms control deal intact, namely, the *New START Treaty on Strategic Nuclear Weapons*, which expires in 2021. If Trump and Putin cannot agree on an extension, for the first time since 1972 no nuclear arms control agreement will be in force. At the same time, a worrying trend is that a significant level of nuclear rearmament is taking place, not only

between the US and Russia but also in the Asian triangle by China, India and Pakistan.

- ❖ Though the Cold War ended long ago, there remains a danger that a nuclear launch could at any time accidentally be initiated. This could occur as a result of human or artificial intelligence decision-making, or a combination of the two, whether by intent or in error. A proposed solution to the danger of a nuclear missile launch resulting from human error is the installation of AI systems in C3 systems designed to perform the above launches. This in turn introduces the risk of an automation bias since mathematical algorithms with which AI systems operate will only be able to rely on simulation data. The safety valve of an interface between AI and an expert human being for an effective launch raises issues of objectivity and proper judgment for these individual(s), making the safety question on this crucial, global military security issue quite complicated, nevertheless, not unsolvable. In 2018, the world's stocks of nuclear weapons totaled around 14,000 missiles, a number of them on instant launch status. The US and Russia have between 1,750 and 1,600 deployed missiles each, France around 300 and the UK anywhere between 120 and 280. Numbers of deployed missiles for other nuclear armed states are not readily available. The only real way to remove the threat of a nuclear weapons exchange and effective nuclear war is for the superpowers to come into new agreements to cleanse the world of nuclear weapons, something which, at least during the first half of this decade, seems unlikely to happen.
- ❖ US and Russian military leaders met for the first time in Bern, Switzerland, in late 2019 in high level discussions aiming at reducing the risk of an accidental military clash and avoiding dangerous misunderstandings between the armed forces of the two leading nuclear powers of the world.

Closing Remarks

A new nuclear arms race may not be limited to two superpowers seeking strategic balance, as in the past Cold War, but will probably include multiple nations clustered around hot spot geographical conflict areas. In future, confrontations will be characterized by escalating intensity, while the use of tactical nuclear weapons cannot entirely be excluded, these aiming at precision and concentration rather than widescale destructive effectiveness. Major global military powers may potentially allow the use of nuclear weapons in highly exceptional circumstances, involving large-scale cyberattacks on C3 systems or on infrastructure, such as power and public utility grids or other critical control systems. The world is moving away from international agreements which, in any case, have mostly been ignored. Although the number of nuclear weapons in the world has declined since the Cold War, from a peak of just over 70,000 in 1986 to about 14,000 today, though the pace of reduction has drastically slowed. The world is entering a period of much greater risk in the nuclear arena than during the Cold War.

Space warfare, which will define military supremacy in the immediate years to come, will technologically be far more radical and systemically independent than air warfare. The US is today largely treating space as an extension to existing war systems, i.e., fighting machinery, ships, aircraft, and aircraft carriers, and, although the value of space is understood, the inevitable decline in the importance of existing systems because of the rise of technologically far superior space-based systems has probably not yet sufficiently been recognized. New technology gives rise to new doctrines and new concepts of warfighting, where wars will be won by those nations that appreciate the innovative power of technology and the radically new ways to utilize it. The superior projection of power from space will be the decisive winning factor in coming confrontations. In

that respect, both the Chinese and the Russians are successfully competing for leadership with the US on the basis of highly advanced scientific thinking rather than sheer power projection of existing military hardware resources. This does not, however, mean that the US, with immense innovative potential and abundant resources in its military/scientific/academic centers, will not ultimately prove able to defend its leading global military position in this sector too.

Regions & Countries

The EU (excluding Greece)

- ❖ French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel signed a new Franco-German friendship treaty on January 22nd, 2019, in Aachen Germany, 57 years after the signing of the Élysée Treaty by the then heads of state Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle. Both states committed to closer cooperation in a series of policy areas, these being: foreign and defense policy, internal security including the fight against terrorism and organized crime, deepening economic and monetary union, transposition of European into national law, industrial/technological development, climate change, culture, economic affairs, education, energy, environment, health and sustainable development, partnership between Europe and Africa, and cooperation with China and the Eurasian region. The admission of Germany as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council has become a priority of Franco-German diplomacy.
- ❖ Socio-culturally, France is a nation in deep transformation, a nation in the process of potentially losing its identity and its old ways of life, a nation that no longer identifies with its center of gravity. Segregation in urban compounds of rich versus poor reveals the ugly face of peripheral France and the depressing aspects of a working class which no longer finds its cultural references or possesses its formerly quality standards of living. Sadly, France is a nation which, since the French Revolution, has systematically been indifferent or even negative to Christian belief. Religious belief is in decline, with just over 5% of French people now regularly attending mass. The Muslim population represents about 13% of the population of France's large cities, more than double the national average. The French élites still refuse to understand and to acknowledge the disastrous effects that immigration and multiculturalism are having on their nation. President Macron has recently announced new measures aimed at countering foreign culture *separatism* and aiming at a *Republican reconquest*, including control over the so-called *no-go zone ghettos* in France. The changes would limit the role that foreign governments have in France in training, education, and financing alien religious centers. The above measures offer certain glimpses of hope for a longer-lasting potential turn in policy directions and a reversal of the worrisome trends – though this is still to be confirmed.
- ❖ President Macron appears to see in Russia a Eurasian power that must have its place in the security architecture of the European continent, which can be neither stable nor secure as long as its relationship with Moscow remains strained. Moscow has long regarded the European Union as a weak political entity, hardly capable of independent action, overdependent on and tied to American foreign policy. France considers itself in a position to contribute to the development of a new world order. A crucial question regarding President Macron's independent strategic vision for Europe and his openings to Russia is the role of Europe (and Russia) in a mounting confrontational position between China and the US.

- ❖ *The Intermarium* is the bridge connecting the Baltic with the Black Sea, creating Europe's link with the Eurasian landmass. With European politics in transition, Poland can certainly capitalize on its strengths to decisively influence if not direct policies in this geopolitically important zone of Europe. The Visegrad countries, consisting of the four central European states of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, with the addition of independent Romania, will continue to be strong voices within the EU: their insistence on more sovereignty rights for EU member states and the preservation of national and historical heritage can only positively influence the transformation process within the EU



- ❖ It seems that pro-EU establishment will continue pushing towards a European super state, despite the growing sentiment across a continent inclining towards decentralization and more autonomy for nation-states. In contrast, any expansion of the top-down powers of the European Commission would considerably increase the role of Brussels in almost all aspects of sociopolitical and economic life in Europe at the expense of national sovereignty.
- ❖ Austria could be showing the way to a new policy-making agenda in Europe, possessing as it does a new politically innovative conservative/green governing coalition that has solid goals for adoption of bold sociopolitical, environmental, and economic as well as effective migration control policies
- ❖ When an entire continent is in the midst of a highly contagious virus epidemic, solidarity becomes a more complex issue. The European Union has, till now, failed to pass that crucial test of solidarity, with nations largely acting for their own protection and benefit, not implementing, e.g., an even distribution of facemasks and protective equipment. For a European Union that pledges solidarity as a founding principle, this is a major failure exactly when unity and cohesion are so desperately needed in this, the Covid-19 virus pandemic. On another front, while during the ongoing provocations Greece is facing from Turkey on its north-eastern borders the EU has verbally acknowledged the problem, in truth, it has left an already overwhelmed Greece to deal largely on its own with the migrant crisis – and all of this on Greece's borders with Turkey, which are, needless to say, EU borders with Turkey.
- ❖ *The Weimar Triangle*, a loose grouping of Poland, Germany, and France, is a political concept with an interesting geopolitical logic behind it. It unites the three most important core European countries into a common voice, which in the future could positively contribute towards the promotion of EU reform, political change, and the formation of a genuine EU security policy. It could also help integrate within common European policy directions the idiosyncrasies of Poland - a regional European power economically aligned with the EU, though militarily with the US.
- ❖ Poland's and Romania's economies are booming thanks to a consistent economic policy of structural reforms, a highly educated labor force, low production costs, and high foreign investments. Since 1989, per capita economic output has grown by 150% in Poland, which has notably caught up in its prosperity vis-à-vis the other EU countries. At some point in the future, both Poland and Romania may join the Eurozone.
- ❖ Romania is an important EU country and a reliable NATO partner in terms of security policy vis-à-vis the geostrategically significant Black Sea region, with considerable weight in such issues as EU migration policy. The importance of the EU periphery should not be underestimated by European policymakers. The vast majority of Romanians rely on the rule of law, democracy, and a future in the heart of the EU, aspirations which the highly successful re-elected Romanian President Klaus Iohannis supports and promotes.
- ❖ Eastern EU countries collectively show an average of about three percentage points higher economic growth than the Eurozone, reflecting the stability and economic resilience of the region.
- ❖ The Bundeswehr has, since 2016, been engaged in a strengthening of its military fighting force, with greater spending, more soldiers, and less bureaucracy. In view of the changed strategic situation in Europe, national and alliance defense

will receive higher priority, with an estimated increase in defense spending to Euros 60 billion by 2023.

- ❖ Although EU nation-state leaders do talk increasingly about the possibility of a collective European army, in practical terms, an integrated European army is a far more complicated issue than the underlying theoretical concepts. EU states have been unwilling and unable to engage directly in security/military issues that may affect the wider European region. They have until now been collectively unable to project meaningful force to protect populations and territory except as a domestic security issue. The European Union does not, at the present time, meet crucial requirements to achieve the goal of a European army, the most important being willingness to allocate the necessary budget and to fight rather than patrol/survey. Sudden external events, e.g., an acute military threat such as war in countries and regions neighboring Europe, including the Middle East, or the withdrawal of the US security umbrella, are all events which could sharply accelerate the militarization of the EU to the level of being an autonomous and effective actor in defense and security.
- ❖ A completely new security system, if agreed between Europe and Russia, including restrictions on conventional and nuclear weapons, and on missiles and missile defense systems, as well as a renewed commitment to the principle that security is indivisible and must apply to all, could be a breakthrough in Europe's relationship with Russia.
- ❖ The EU is looking for alternatives to China's Belt and Road strategy as well as for emerging cooperation opportunities. Its *connectivity strategy* aims to integrate Europe and Asia on the regional level by expanding transport routes, streamlining energy distribution and digital networks, and promoting a cross-educational agenda through the exchange of students and researchers. Europe is looking towards China in a positive, cooperative, and open way, seeking means of working with Chinese and other Asian institutions and countries on project development, new mobility concepts for Eurasia/Africa, and the regional digitization process.
- ❖ The European Court based in Strasbourg, with jurisdiction over 47 European countries, and rulings binding on all 27 member states of the EU, ruled that migrants have to first enter European territory in a legal way in order to benefit from certain human rights protection legislation, such as access to lawyers and the right to remain in Europe. The ruling is a major victory for sovereign nations and their right to decide who is and who is not allowed to enter their territory. This verdict, which transfers some crucial decision-making powers on immigration back to European states, effectively allows European governments to deport illegal migrants immediately at the border.

Closing Remarks

The European Union belongs to its member states, whereas Europeans are, foremost, citizens of their nation-states and then citizens of Europe. Any attempt to dissolve historically existing European nations by mixing them with migrants from other parts of the world alien to European culture will trigger negative and surely destructive consequences, which could well tear Europe socially and politically apart. European citizens demand political innovation and a renewed feeling of belonging to the European family and its historical values. The EU can only survive and prosper if the positive meaning of the nation-state is sufficiently recognized again, with a distinct and explicit understanding of which powers belong to Brussels and which not, creating a new political concept - unity within diversity. A «European Community of Independent Nations» must rely fully on its historical, spiritual, intellectual, and political values as well as on parliamentary

democracy, political and economic plurality, and respect for civil rights and freedoms. The next five years will be a period of political flux, out of which, hopefully, consensus and a new European status will emerge.

Germany, presently being the European epicenter of political stagnation, is regarding, with a mixture of fascination and rejection, some of its neighboring countries. France, Austria, and Greece, with their young and aggressive political leaders, along with the Visegrad countries, show in practice that change is something possible and attainable and that mainstream parties are not necessarily an obsolete model. Since 2018, France's GDP outpaced Germany's, a trend expected to continue over the coming years. France, despite its serious domestic problems, is probably the only country in the European Union with the strength, determination, and energy to shake Europe out of its lethargy. In that process, France will have to primarily harmonize its vision, policies, and action with Germany and the Visegrad countries, with their own strong, distinctive political and ethnic agendas, as well as the European south. A new leadership style may gradually be emerging in the European political scene, and, slowly but steadily, a new positive direction for the European Union and Europe as a whole.

While the EU is losing its binding power, growing outside pressure is causing states to move closer together. With the fall of the Wall and the erosion of state socialism, the power of integration unleashed an unprecedented broadening of horizons. The global migration crisis after 2015 caused the EU's binding and integrating power to rapidly decrease. Pluralist Europe continues to exist, but it is being put to the test by aggressive xenophobic tones and nationalist headwinds. The gradually vanishing European achievement of the social state must be rediscovered, under the conditions of an extended solidarity in a pluralistic society and not within a subsidized but free, open economy. In a difficult, shifting global environment, Europe must rediscover its guiding principles: historical legacy, religion, democracy, stability, peace, and human rights. Since 1945, the EU has experienced both catastrophes and opportunities, crises and challenges, however, without a doubt, continuously learning from its history. The current SARS-CoV-2 pandemic is a critical situation in which European solidarity is being put to the test, with far wider implications going forward for sociopolitical and economic developments on the European continent and in the EU, as well as for any future Union enlargement policies. We are convinced that, despite obstacles, which at first sight seem insuperable, this process will go on. Within the European dream, which has been a one-time uniquely and immensely important global peace project, democratization, the culture of productive dialogue, protection of human rights, and the Christian roots of the European civilization, will once again, to a larger or lesser extent, form the core of a European Confederation to come.

The UK

- ❖ For the UK, political difficulties are only now beginning after its formal departure from the EU on January 31st, 2020. Trade negotiations will involve business and farming lobbies which are deeply involved in the negotiation process and will force both sides into painful compromises, with any deal subject to approval by the European Parliament and the independent parliaments of EU states. Also on the table is London's relationship with the Scottish government, with another independence referendum being likely. But the times ahead could also signal opportunities and a new start for the UK. Following Brexit, the UK economy, supported by an expansive fiscal policy, may enjoy a healthy economic rebound, particularly considering its very low starting point.

- ❖ The UK and France, regardless of Brexit, have much in common in foreign policy and defense and no reason to drift apart. The nation with whom the UK is probably best aligned in military strategy issues may not be the US but France, as the undisputed leader of European defense. France could act geographically as the last barrier of any force seeking to threaten the British Isles from the east.
- ❖ The UK's giant new aircraft carrier, the HMS Prince of Wales, the largest warship ever to be built for the Royal Navy, will probably sail on its first deployment in 2021. With two aircraft carriers, London wants to once again signal its global military maritime presence, although in wartime, protecting those massive vessels can probably only be a task dependent on the cooperation of the UK with the US and its key allies.
- ❖ Boris Johnson's premiership in Britain means the strengthening of UK-US relations and, if President Trump is reelected in 2020, a new golden period of transatlantic relations between the two countries not seen since the Thatcher-Reagan era in the 1980s may emerge. The US will probably conclude a new trade deal with the post-Brexit UK and the UK will strive to close several independent trade deals globally.

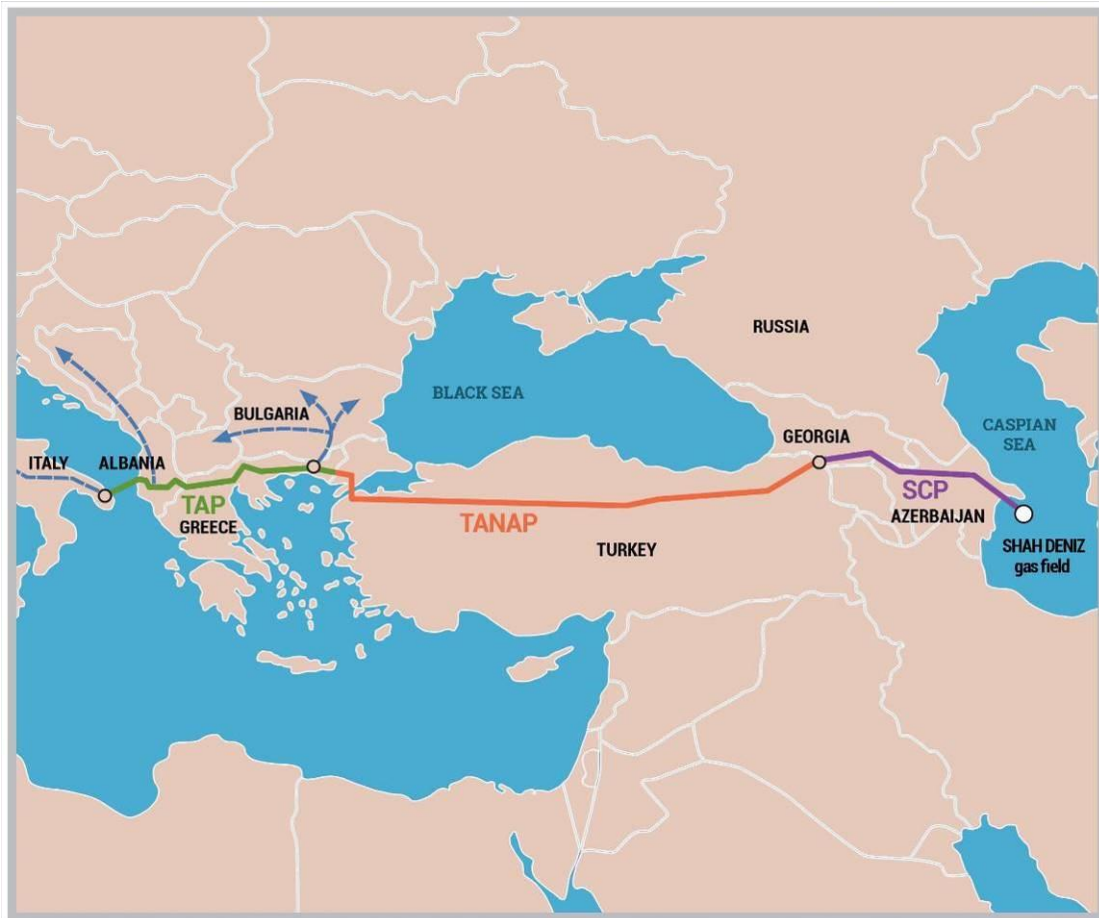
Closing Remarks

The British economy, driven by private enterprise, entrepreneurship, innovation, and risk-taking, profoundly differs from that of continental Europe, which is characterized by a far closer bonding with the state and a focus on social policies. Tension between Britain and the Continent never ended after World War II and Britain's close relationship to the US made this fact worse. The UK has always been regarded suspiciously as a disintegrating and disrupting factor for Europe's unity. France's De Gaulle always looked upon the Anglo-Saxon alliance as a complicated, multidimensional, long-term threat to European unity. Russia (the former Soviet Union) always remained a manageable relationship if not a potential future ally for Europe, a notion which directly challenges US global dominance. Geostrategic, economic, and social incompatibilities as well as differing long-term interests make the cultural gap unbridgeable between Britain and a United Europe. Britain, with its own distinct history and as a major sea power, never fitted into the united European vision, and the recent Brexit crisis is simply the reflection of this reality and a crucial turning point for both Europe and the UK.

Greece

- ❖ A crisis of political conservatism in Europe is being challenged by a different message which, loud and clear, is being disseminated by Greece and reverberates throughout Europe. The 2019 elections in Greece showed that conservatism, with its defining core values, is not only alive but also vibrant and in a position to win over large numbers of voters. Greece has manifested a high level of political maturity, having gone through populism in its worst form and having emerged with its core democratic values intact and in place.
- ❖ The construction of the Greek section of the Trans-Adriatic gas pipeline (TAP) has been completed and is now in the trial operating phase. This is one of the largest foreign investments in Greece and a project of significant geopolitical and economic importance, as it contributes to the emergence of Greece as a regional

TAP - TANAP



energy hub, adding new supply distribution lines to the European natural gas markets. The TAP connects with the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) at the Greek-Turkish border and will cross Northern Greece, Albania, and the Adriatic Sea before reaching Southern Italy to connect to the Italian natural gas network. The project will transport gas through the TANAP from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz Stage 2 field in the Caspian Sea to the EU countries and is part of the European Southern Gas Corridor.

- ❖ The Intergovernmental Agreement on the Eastern Mediterranean Pipeline (EastMed) between Greece, the Republic of Cyprus, and Israel was signed on 2.01.2020 in Athens. The EastMed is economically and politically the optimal option for the transportation of natural gas from the Eastern Mediterranean basin to Europe. The pipeline will initially connect to the Israeli and Cypriot offshore *Leviathan* and *Aphrodite* gas fields. The trilateral Israeli-Cypriot-Greek cooperation is the catalyst for the pipeline's promotion over the next few years, with additional political support from Italy and the US. Capacity projections point to 10 billion cubic meters of gas annually with a potential capacity expansion to 20 billion. Natural gas will flow along an approximately 1,900 km pipeline, of which about 1,350 km underwater (reaching depths of about 3,000 meters) and about 550 km onshore, via Cyprus and Crete to onshore terminals in Greece and Italy. Construction is expected to take 5-7 years at an approximate initially estimated cost of around USD 7 billion. The EastMed project could supply Europe with up to 10% of its natural gas requirements, further prompting interest of international corporate energy giants for additional research and development in

the region. Israel and Cyprus will gain access to an enormous new market in addition to important geostrategic benefits. Greece is playing a key role as a critical node in the EU's energy supply map, with significant income to be generated from gas transit rights.

EASTMED



Turkey is objecting to the above energy project on the basis of its bilateral agreement with the UN recognized Libyan government, unlawfully claiming exclusive rights over maritime waters, which the EastMed would have to cross. Turkey proposes that a connection to the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline already in place is the most economically viable and most secure route through Turkey, to

deliver hydrocarbon resources to European markets, though this latter option places a significant part of European gas supply under Turkey's direct control.

- ❖ Privatization of Greek ports, primarily Kavala and Alexandroupolis in Northern Greece, will be the primary focus of competition of interested parties, mainly the US, China, and Russia. Central to these processes is the changing energy landscape in the Mediterranean, the construction of LNG terminals, and the creation of new transit routes for natural gas from the Middle East and Asia towards central Europe. In addition, the harbor of Alexandroupolis has become a strategic node for US strategy and NATO, especially after the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014. Through this node, military forces can reach northerly countries, bypassing the Bosphorus straits, with directions to the Black Sea, Bulgaria, Romania, and North Macedonia. Other Greek ports such as Rafina and Volos as well as Ionian seaports may become international acquisition targets as Greece's geopolitical role in connecting the Middle East and Asia with Europe is greatly enhanced.
- ❖ Container traffic in Piraeus, Greece's largest port, has more than doubled in the last decade - an unprecedented Greek success story. China's Cosco awakened the stagnant port, with Euros 1.1 billion for further expansion of port facilities still to come. Piraeus as a port ranks in 5th place in Europe and 32nd in the world, making it a strategic hub for the new Chinese Maritime Silk Road. China has additionally confirmed its interest, participating in almost all significant energy and maritime projects to be fully or partly privatized in Greece.
- ❖ Greek shipowners have increased their beneficial world fleet ownership lead standing at around 18%, with Japan in second place at 11.5% and China at 10.5% market shares, respectively. Greek shipowners spent about USD 3.1 billion for around 215 new vessels from January 1st to the start of December 2019. The Greek fleet in total increased its deadweight tonnage in 2019 by just over 5%. The merchant fleet under Greek ownership in total surpasses fleets of entire continents, while individually owned Greek fleets exceed those of entire countries.
- ❖ Europe's largest urban investment on the southern Athenian coast at the old Hellenikon airport will stretch over approximately 6.2 million sq. m., of which about 2.7 million sq. m. will be used for the construction of residential communities, hotels, conference centers, shopping malls, casino resort complexes, offices, and other cultural and leisure areas, with a total investment of around Euros 7.5 billion, the entire project to be completed over 7 years.
- ❖ Greece more than ever is becoming the backbone of stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, the last strong barrier against Middle East conflict and Russian pressure in the Balkans, parameters that undoubtedly have to be taken into account by dynamically shifting US geostrategic policy lines. *The Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act of 2019 (EastMed Act)*, a US Congress approved legislation and spending package puts Greece at the center of the strategic security and energy interests of the US as it attempts to undertake a radical overhaul of its strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean, recognizing the new realities which have been formed in the area, where major US oil/gas exploration and distribution giants will participate. For Greece, this is an opportunity to revise its relationship strategically with the US in such ways as to ensure long-term stability and guarantees for the country's safety for many years to come. All of this in view of Turkey's ongoing aggression in the South-Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea, threatening Greek territorial rights plus vital energy projects of the participating nations of Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, and Israel. In this respect, the US will be in a delicate position, seeking to reconcile the potential and the nature of a continued strategic US-Turkey military relationship with the

importance of its longstanding alliance with Greece, all necessarily seen under the prism of the US-Russia new cold war framework as well as the instability and looming conflict possibilities in the Middle East.

- ❖ Turkey, with its expansionist policy and its ongoing claims in the East Mediterranean and Aegean Sea, presents a continuing challenge for Greece, claims that have both a territorial and an energy-related aspect. Turkey is no longer the familiar strong but predictable opponent. The aging of the Kemalist cohesive bond among its heterogeneous populations is pushing Turkish politics to a utopian nevertheless ambitious neo-Ottoman policy framework, which President Erdogan meticulously pursues, selling a unifying national goal to a Turkish population torn by multiple socioeconomic divisions. The *Blue Homeland* presents an artificial, non-existent geopolitical concept, viewing maritime space as a natural historical extension of continental geography. The conquest of maritime space has become for Turkey an important strategic goal with symbolic power and value. The Turkish people may be buying a utopian vision, therefore supporting their government which, despite its weaknesses, appears to be fighting for a just cause. Greece, using all the available tools of its foreign policy, namely, its alliances and military power, must neutralize these strategic threats to its indisputable territorial rights, threats posed by its neighbor in the South-East Mediterranean and in particular the Aegean Archipelago aiming at depriving Greece and the Greek Cypriots of large sections of their maritime territory and their oil and gas exploration rights.
- ❖ The legitimate declaration by Greece of its Exclusive Economic Zone encompassing its entire island region and the presentation of a complete map/charter of its continental shelf, air, and sea rights in the Aegean, the Libyan, and the Ionian Seas has become an immediate necessity. A systematic long-term effort, through cultural diplomacy, should bring to the surface for the entire world the history of antiquity representing *the maritime geography of Hellenism* and invalidate the illegitimate claims made by Turkey. At the same time, Greece's military capacity has to be further strengthened on the technological, digital, hardware, and logistical sides as well as through its potential cooperative and synergistic effects with Israel, Cyprus, and Egypt on energy and security issues in the wider East Mediterranean region. Greece will have to continue on an enlarged military budget, at or over 2.5% of its GDP, rapidly modernizing its already highly capable air force and navy, including its submarine fleet (with local production or coproduction capacities), highly effective for the patrolling and defense of the vast Aegean Greek island region. Greece's military contribution to NATO as a percentage of its GDP is the highest after the US's. Greece maintains one of the strongest armies within the NATO alliance and Europe.
- ❖ Professional, flexible, and culturally integrable, the Greeks may provide the harmonious link for and the answer to the demographic problems arising out of the cultural tensions between West and East. Greece's tradition in trade, its diaspora, and the world-leader status of its merchant fleet are dynamically present in global networking and lobbying. They create a powerful identity resting on national territory plus communities dispersed worldwide. Greece is in the process of reconfirming symbols and references resting on history, culture, and religion in order to renew its political and socio-cultural status not only locally but also globally. Athens, the renowned ancient capital that has survived from antiquity up till today, plays a vital, symbolic role in Greek identity. If Hellenism - resting on a historical civilizational platform with a far stronger adaptive power than that of other nations - succeeds in its geo-spiritual aspect, with its demographics constantly refreshed and its global influence strengthened, Hellenism could provide both the answer to pressing European questions and the much-needed spiritual awakening that Europe requires.

Closing Remarks

The relationship of the Greek nation with its history is largely experiential, a repetitive cycle of tragic and glorious periods. Throughout its millennia-long history, Greece has definitely learnt from its mistakes. The small nation, the birthplace of Western civilization, has a heavy legacy, namely, to safeguard existing precious links in its history but also to continue adding new links to an unbroken chain of values. In the years to come, Greece will face enormous challenges requiring strong decisive policies, determination, courage, and faith. Difficult decisions will have to be taken and applied consistently and with discipline. The EU in its present form will be of marginal help as it has not yet assumed its role as a strong player in the international sociopolitical and economic system, introverted, unable to make critical collective decisions and take the corresponding initiatives. The refugee and migration issue is a foremost pressing and critical survival issue for Europe, and even more so for frontline Greece. Mass movements of people into Europe from the Middle East as well as from further East and Africa will only increase with time, threatening social cohesion, peace, political order, and, most importantly, directly affecting European historical identity, tradition, Christian faith, and ways of life. For Greece, a country whose population is declining and aging at an increasing rate, where the younger generations have, during the crisis years, been leaving for a better future abroad, the problem could well take on the dimensions of a national crisis. Another issue of national importance is the relationship of Greece to its neighbor Turkey. Territorially, Greece is challenged by Turkey in a continuously escalating manner from its north-eastern borders all the way through the eastern Aegean Sea down to the Dodecanese islands, Crete, and further to Cyprus. These challenges call for continuous political and military alertness for the safeguarding of Greece's sovereign rights. Greece will have to rely primarily on its own strengths and resources, in particular, the strengthening of its military deterrent capacities, and also on political and diplomatic skills vis-à-vis its position in the EU and its strategic relationship with NATO, the US, and other Mediterranean nations, notably Israel. Greece is indispensable for the European Union as its ultimate Eastern frontier, as its most valuable energy-distribution hub in the south-eastern Mediterranean as well as a vital trade entry point, via its harbors of Piraeus, Thessaloniki/Kavala/Alexandroupolis in Northern Greece, and other ports on the Ionian Sea.

The influence of geopolitics, which has undoubtedly been decisive in the modern history of the Greek nation, should in no way be understood in terms of «xenocracy» or «dependence». The latest debt crisis in Greece should be viewed as the deepest symptom of a serious imbalance in Europe. The huge imbalances within the EU between creditor and debtor nations, between the north and the south, will in future have to be tackled by broader institutional reforms and greater integration of economic policies, including banking, immigration, and foreign policies, while at the same time the EU should allow for greater independence and autonomy for its member states in domestic issues, issues of national identity, awareness, tradition, and history. Greece will certainly contribute positively in such a dialogue and is the EU's best ambassador with respect to issues concerning the integration within the European family of the unstable, harsh Balkan region. Greece has always aroused strong international interest and will continue to do so, one commensurate with the resources - tangible and intangible - and the strategic geopolitical importance of the country. The recognition, even admiration, of Greece as the cradle of an ancient civilization by the emerging giants of the East such as China and India will further contribute to the country's positive role in a newly emerging era. Greece will be participating in these processes with all of its resources, its immense symbolic power, its

cosmopolitan character, its globally leading position as a maritime nation, as well as its powerful diaspora.

Modern Greece was born as a state in conditions of economic bankruptcy and international supervision. The country would spend about half of its years of independence since the Greek revolution of 1821 against the Ottoman Empire in a state of bankruptcy/debt restructuring. This presents us with a great contradiction, namely, a country that succeeds amid disasters. Paradoxically, each cycle of creation and destruction brought Greece ever closer to its ultimate goal, which was in fact its transformation into a modern, prosperous democracy. As state and society evolved and matured, failures served as the triggers for the necessary adjustments. Military defeats, financial catastrophes, humiliating foreign interventions were experienced, and the net result after losses and profits are accounted for has always been positive. Greece always maintained its profits while minimizing its losses, a peculiar case of a pioneering country in the sense that it was an early carrier of «late modernization». The development of Greece over the last thirty years should be considered an incredible story of success, as Greece has managed to ascend to the club of the forty most democratic, wealthiest, developed countries in the world. The periods of great development have always been accompanied by events of national necessity, crises, and the emergence of strong political figures to overcome the difficulties. The transnational ideological/business/scientific/cultural networks of Greece – composed to a large extent by its educated diaspora – played a most important supporting role in the evolution of the country. The Greek miracle can be explained by focusing on four crucial parameters: the successful end of the civil war in 1949 and the escape from communism; the implementation of a series of economic policies of crucial importance which propelled the country forward, the ability of Greek society to respond with remarkable speed and flexibility to corrective policies and emerging opportunities, and, importantly, the Greek Orthodox Church which always identifies with the spirit of the nation and will continue to do so in the future, thereby providing a deeper connective sense of national identity with a spiritual and highly symbolic nature. During the current decade and as «symbolism» makes a comeback, the symbolic power that Greece brings to the world will be a highly positive contributing factor in developments to come. In the aftermath of the great economic crisis, Greece is ready to take off in a new golden decade.

Hellenism is ecumenical in its form and substance and has been so since ancient times. Due to its global nature, it penetrates all continents, economies, cultures, and civilizations. In a chaotic but still miraculously organized way, it is guided by and based on intangible hereditary elements, its people with millennia of experience in sharing and communicating with other civilizations. Greece contributed decisively to the ideological system which legitimized and still legitimizes Western modernity, this notably during the 19th century when the new Western institutions were decisively strengthened by the founding of the modern Greek state after Greece's successful revolution against the Ottoman empire. Today, Greece will have to redefine its relationships with the West, in particular with the EU and the US, as well as with the further-off Eurasian nations, notably Russia and China. Only through a positive relationship with its own history nation can any nation meet the challenges of the future as well as address its future needs. Due to its long history and strong spiritual legacy, Hellenism does possess those intangible characteristics which could help Europe redefine its lost identity as well as its future directions. The regeneration of Hellenism as an expression of global soft power has the inherent capabilities to trigger inspiration, creativity, and pride among its people about the Hellenic Ethnos, externalize the timeless values of freedom and democracy, and become the positive driving force for Greece in a new world epoch, incubated but not yet

born, a challenging new era full of dangers and setbacks, but also of huge positive endeavors and achievements, a period during which Hellenism will leave its own distinctive and indelible mark.

The Balkans

Geopolitics has made a comeback in the western Balkan region creating yet another challenge for the European Union. Russia is de facto marking off large areas of the Christian Orthodox Balkan area as belonging to its own direct or indirect sphere of influence. While the EU follows an indifferent, rather passive policy towards the region, Serbia, a key Balkan country, is moving closer to Russia, holding joint military exercises, getting ready to buy advanced Russian weaponry and entering into a free trade area with the Eurasian Economic Union. All this despite warnings from the EU, with which it continues its accession discussions started in 2014. The more indifferent the EU remains towards the Balkans, the more Russian influence will increase in the region. The future of the Balkans needs to be approached through a historical, cultural, and spiritual lens, and the process, tools, experience, and background for facilitating this endeavor reside in Greece, the cultural bridge between Europe and the Balkan nations. Greece is the only country which can educate and direct European politicians and US policy makers in the intricate complexities of this sensitive difficult region and how to deal with it before other foreign power infiltration leads to a complete destabilization and distancing of the Balkans from stable European policies. If Western policies fail, geopolitical instability may easily emerge in the Balkan area. The redefinition of European space, with a solid European identity, is indeed a pressing priority for the EU - an all-encompassing space that the Balkans certainly belong to.

Switzerland

- ❖ Swiss authorities could probably deal with *Libra* as an alternative world currency as long as all regulatory conditions are fulfilled. The Swiss National Bank may be in the process or may have already granted Fintech companies such as *Libra* access to its banking system under strict, specific, prespecified conditions, in line with the practice in place concerning other currencies than the Swiss franc, which may be used in Switzerland without a special permit.

Closing Remarks

Switzerland is set to remain an oasis of political and economic stability due to probably the best state infrastructure and the highest standards of living in the world. Switzerland will quietly but increasingly continue acting as a successful mediator in important international affairs, especially in the turbulent times that lie before us.

Russia

- ❖ The Eurasian Economic Union which came into force in 2015 envisaged as a free trade zone from Lisbon to Vladivostok has become the most important instrument of Russian foreign policy. The alliance has grown from the customs union between Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan to include Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, with its member states committed to creating a common market in which goods, services, capital, and people can freely circulate. Although this goal is far from being realized, nevertheless, the Union has become the most successful integration project so far on post-Soviet territory, with decisions taken by heads of state.

- ❖ Russia will continue expanding its ties with countries in the Balkans as well as in non-Western regions around the globe, in Central and South Asia predominantly with China, in the Middle East/Africa and South America. It is setting its priorities selectively in relationships with countries that offer economic and security benefits for Russia plus geostrategic value in the Kremlin's antagonistic policies vis-à-vis the US.
- ❖ Moscow and Beijing are far closer to each other than one would expect. Russia wants to be perceived as an equal partner of the Chinese. China may become the most important emerging partner for Russia as its clash with the West and in particular the US intensifies. Russia and China have steadily been solidifying their economic and energy ties since the early post-Soviet period. Trade between the two nations reached a new historical record of around USD 100 billion in 2019 and the plans are that by 2024 it will have reached USD 200 billion through projects in energy, agriculture, technology, and various industrial sectors. Chinese research institutions and corporations are laying the groundwork in cooperation with Russian universities for research into data processing, artificial intelligence, and cloud networks. The opening of the *Power of Siberia* natural gas pipeline - a natural gas pipeline in Eastern Siberia (1,865 miles or 3,000 kms long) – is part of the eastern gas route from Siberia to China. The USD 55-75 billion project is a huge step forward in Russia's cooperation with China. Its export capacity is about 38 billion cubic meters of gas per year and it is projected to deliver as much as 1.1 trillion cubic meters of Russian gas to China over the next 30 years, although specific numbers still have to be officially confirmed. All infrastructure pipes used in the construction are being produced in Russia. A technically most challenging project in harsh environmental conditions with the absolute lowest air temperatures along the *Power of Siberia* route ranging between -40 and -62 degrees Celsius.
- ❖ Inspired by its success in Syria, Russia is now expanding its influence over the African continent. The geopolitical competition is tough, but Russia is gradually making its presence felt in new locations. Over the past four years, Moscow has been strengthening its ties with several African states, focusing on interaction primarily in the military and energy sectors, i.e., direct arm sales, military assistance, consulting and training, security services, and nuclear technology. In Egypt, Russia has probably surpassed the US as the main arms supplier. Over the past five years, Russia has concluded economic and military cooperation agreements with more than twenty African states, the most important being Sudan, the Central African Republic, Madagascar, Zimbabwe, Libya, South Africa, Chad, and Zambia. In exchange, Africa is expected to provide Moscow long-term with a stronger voice in international committees such as the UN, thereby increasing Russia's global political weight and assisting in the promotion of its foreign policy aims. Although Russia remains a smaller player than the US or China on the African continent, its limited resources are being directed and used most efficiently and its competences utilized optimally in many parts of Africa.
- ❖ Russia's current engagement in Syria, its relations with Iran and Israel, and its overall strategy on the African continent represent a genuine master plan and a long-lasting grand strategy. In the Middle East, Russia has consistently striven to position itself as the preeminent external power. Using its military involvement in the Syrian conflict and its limited partnership with Iran, against US interests, Russia's relations have gathered new momentum in the region. In October 2019, Russian President Vladimir Putin concluded his first visit to Saudi Arabia since 2007. The two countries signed numerous agreements covering energy, the military, agriculture, industry, and cultural and humanitarian areas of cooperation. The Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF), Russia's sovereign wealth fund, has announced the opening of its first foreign office in Saudi Arabia. The fund is

already participating in about 25 projects worth USD 2.5 billion in the Kingdom, in infrastructure, industry, transport, the health sciences, and advanced technology. Russia is also positioning itself for a leading role in Iraq's future reconstruction. Its strategic interests in the Middle East are primarily directed towards maintaining stability in the region so that volatility does not spread to Central Asia and the Caucasus – areas of critical value for Russian security. Russia does not desire unnecessary involvement in expensive and unpopular military conflicts, putting at risk its relations with its partners, therefore opting for the highly important role of mediator and peacemaker. Moscow's longer-term objectives in the Middle East, through a masterful combination of predominantly soft power but also military might, as, when, and where needed, aim at solidifying its influence in the region for years to come.

- ❖ A new Russian soft power model is gradually emerging. In multiple instances, Russia is promoting its global image in politics, culture, sport, science and the economy, while the ambiguity of the US policy in the Middle East contributes towards the enhancement of Russia's position as a regional peace broker. Russia is preserving its culture domestically and exporting it as a powerful force to advance its global aims. The Russian language – as a strong cultural parameter – is spoken in almost all the former Soviet republics and in many parts of Eastern Europe. Apart from being a major international military power, Russia is additionally aiming to achieve the status of a modern *soft superpower*. In the Middle East and North Africa, young Arabs increasingly view Russia as an outside ally and friend, while the US is seen as erratic and unreliable.
- ❖ There is a long historical record of repeated military engagements between Russia and Turkey in the period between the 17th and 20th centuries. The two countries engaged in numerous disastrous acts, all this against the background of a stagnating Ottoman Empire and Russia's gradual ascendancy as a European power. The Bosphorus and the Dardanelles as well as the South Caucasus region have long been disputed geostrategic areas due to the opposing national strategies of Turkey and Russia. A temporary cooperation between Russia and Turkey should by no means be seen as a true strategic shift in their relationship nor a firmer and broader strategic realignment. Russia and Turkey disagree on almost all issues of regional and strategic significance, in such areas as the Ukraine, the energy-rich Eastern Mediterranean, the Caucasus and the Middle East. Greece should be alert and should carefully evaluate to what extent such an intricate and inherently unstable Russian-Turkish relationship may have spill-over effects on Greece's territorial space in the Aegean Archipelago.
- ❖ Over the past five years, Russia has adjusted successfully to US and European sanctions thanks to a solid insulation strategy. With its total foreign reserves at around USD 550 billion and inflation around 3%, its GDP rising again since 2016, and its external debt manageable, Russia's macroeconomic fundamentals have been improving steadily since 2015. In response to sanctions, Russia has reduced its holdings in U.S. Treasury bonds in favor of the yen, euro, and yuan, and redirected its focus through new economic ties with the Asian region and, in particular, China, creating a large enough economic buffer to manage future financial shocks. In addition, the Central Bank of Russia has set up the / its new national payment system, MIR, created after the introduction of US sanctions against Russia in 2014 and in force since 2017. MIR is in the process of cautiously entering the European market, with its first pilot country being the UK. Since its introduction, Russian banks have issued about 70 million MIR cards. Russia is focusing with its new payment system on such nations as China, Turkey, and Iran plus the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union. Russia's 2018 and 2019 GDP growth rates have been about 2.3% and 1.3%, respectively, while growth rates are expected to range anywhere between 1.6% and 2.0% for 2020 and 2021.

Russia's consolidated fiscal balance registered a budget surplus in 2018 of about 2.9% of its nominal GDP; the figure for 2019 should be lower at around 1.6%. Russia's National Welfare Fund liquid assets were close to 7% of GDP by the end of 2019, with indications of a strongly rising trend for 2020 and 2021 (actual numbers for 2020 and 2021 for the above statistics may probably be lower due to the unaccounted for Covid-19 pandemic and its detrimental impact on global growth).

- ❖ Russia's gold reserves have increased steadily to a total of about 2,250 tons in January 2020 from a low of about 1,700 tons in January 2017. Purchase of gold is an important strategic parameter of the Russian crisis policy, which includes gradual distancing from dependency on the US dollar. Russia is immunizing itself against further punitive measures by the US and creating a powerful safety net for any future severe economic, but also geostrategic, crisis situations. For Russia, high gold reserves translate into increased investor confidence in the ruble. Russia is largely buying gold from domestic producers, thereby assisting local infrastructure - from mining to processing - while circumventing the US Dollar. For the first time in the nation's history, gold and foreign exchange reserves cover all external debt, public and private. In addition, and as of 2016, the state has diverted part of its oil revenues into reserves to guard against any potential external shock, thus creating *a safety benchmark crisis oil price of USD 40 per barrel*. The external shock, the Covid-19 pandemic, is now with us and it remains to be seen at what level oil prices will stabilize in the post coronavirus pandemic period (at the moment below Russia's safety benchmark level) and how Russia's economic policy will react to such a new energy price level environment.
- ❖ Russia under Putin will continue concentrating its efforts on advanced warfare technologies for defense against aerial attacks. Russia has deployed into active duty its first hypersonic nuclear-capable missile, the *Avangard* hypersonic glide vehicle, which in flight can attain 27 times the speed of sound. Russia's latest nuclear-powered technology provides missiles with virtually unlimited range and with the ability to deliver conventional or nuclear warheads, flying towards any target in the world, while maneuvering on the way to avoid antimissile defenses and making it harder to intercept. Russia is also initiating nationwide reconstruction of its military airfields. Its Northern Fleet is thought to be completing its new integrated Radio-Electronic Warfare Center in different locations across the Arctic region, a process signifying an advanced technological capacity in electronic and space warfare, effective at ranges of up to 5,000 miles. Moscow will continue prioritizing its offensive/defensive strategic armaments to both boost its deterrence and match any missile and other advanced weapon military technologies developed by other nations. In addition, a return of Russia's military strategy to the concept of mass mobilization is consistent with its long historical tradition.
- ❖ The decision taken by the Moscow Patriarchate to sever relations with the Constantinople Ecumenical Patriarchate in response to the latter's recognition of an autocephalous Ukrainian Church signals an escalation in a conflict that is not destined to remain within ecclesiastical boundaries or within the local borders of Ukraine. The Ukrainian move toward ecumenical independence from Moscow may be part of a larger trend of separation from Russia. The Moscow Patriarchate is the only Soviet-wide institution that now remains after 1991, covering all Eastern Slavic populations. It is a model of *high ecclesiastical nationalism*, which in recent years has been codified in alignment with the ideology of the *new Russian world*, with an *imperial self-consciousness*, and has strong relevance to Moscow's projected political and ecumenical power, especially evident in Eastern Europe and the Balkan region. The consequences of the clash between Constantinople and Moscow are much wider, since they involve the whole Orthodox Church. What

could be the biggest Eastern Orthodox schism in a millennium, if not normalized, could have wide geopolitical repercussions, especially over European space, that would manifest themselves gradually.

- ❖ More than two-thirds of Russians approve of Vladimir Putin in his work as President, while 60% are dissatisfied with the work of the State Duma and 65% with the work of the former Prime Minister. As a response, President Putin has undertaken a major reshuffle of his government, including the appointment of a new Prime Minister, with the new cabinet agenda being to promote strong economic growth, create new jobs, and allow real incomes to rise. Close to 60% of Russians in a late 2019 poll still have a positive outlook in regard to their country, the highest such figure recorded in 2019.
- ❖ Over the past twenty years under Putin's rule, Russia rejoined the club of global decision makers. The country's economic situation has clearly improved, while the fight against terrorism inside this vast nation has been largely successful. Russia has been steadily expanding its influence on the African continent, maintaining a strong military presence in Syria. It annexed the Crimea; it also increased its influence in Eastern Ukraine and the Balkan region and is solidifying its presence in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, while establishing a presence as far off as South America through Venezuela, all signs of renewed strength. Putin beyond doubt defended Russian state interests against what have been at times unfavorable Eurasian conditions, in spite of Russia's extremely long national borders, an unstable economy, internal ethnic diversity, the rise of China, and the expansion of NATO closer to Russian territory.

Closing Remarks

In the years to come, demographic change may further distinguish Russia from the West culturally and politically, thereby emphasizing its unique Eurasian identity. Russia's shifting national strategy calls for closer economic and security ties with countries in the Asian-Pacific and the Middle East regions, a delicate strategic balancing act in overall East-West relations. Under Putin's leadership over two decades, a distinct Russian identity has emerged termed Eurasianism, containing components of both political ideology and foreign policy strategy. An important characteristic of Eurasianism is the pursuit of «collective stability», which is close to Russia's historical tradition. At the same time, Russia will in the coming years inevitably become more Asian and Muslim – though the Orthodox Slavic element will continue to control Russian politics. Russia will always be part of the Christian Orthodox arch extending from Russia through the Balkans to Greece and notionally further south to the Holy Land and Jerusalem. Over the coming years, the promotion of Russian nationalism - stressing the greatness and uniqueness of Russia itself - will only intensify. It is no coincidence that the Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the two primary Eurasian integration blocs, were created during the Putin era, their characteristics being strong political leadership, state-dominated economies, and an emphasis on collective stability over all-out democracy. China is a huge new growth avenue for Russia. The Middle Kingdom is the world's largest importer of crude oil and gas, most oil imports coming from Russia. Both nations are working together against a solely US-dominated world. If President Putin wants to be remembered as a legendary modernizer of historic norms for his nation, then he still has an open window for the next five years to change the country and allow for his peaceful succession. Non-conventional domestic policies, an innovative, highly flexible, and well-calculated foreign policy, including Russia's ability to successfully address external challenges from East and West, will be key parameters in the evolution of the country's new national identity. Such an identity has yet to fully emerge and may also be strongly influenced by looming international economic crises as well as political and military conflicts.

Russia is a vast country of just over 17 million square kilometers with over 100 different ethnic groups, numerous languages and religions, and about 4,200 kilometers of borders with China. Russia, in the words of Winston Churchill, «... is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma. » As Russia challenges US global dominance, the perception of its citizens is that the US, as part of its own national strategy, is intent on undermining Russia, both in terms of its role on the global stage and in terms of its domestic affairs and cohesiveness. Russia is a great nation that remains complicated and sophisticated and which is poorly understood by the West, one with a strong leadership on a clear ideologically and spiritually driven vision. Putin is aiming for an economic miracle, transforming the country in the next 5-6 years into one of the five largest economies in the world. The Russian President attaches particular importance to large infrastructure projects, technological superiority, and longer life expectancy for his citizens. The government plans to spend more than USD 200 billion on national projects in the next few years and secure another USD 100 billion from private investors. What the Russian economy has to overcome is overregulation and a questionable judiciary system, both of which tend to impede direct international investment. Moscow, the capital, has a majestic and radiant appeal and continues to grow, with new housing estates springing up on the outskirts, although in the vast rural areas things are more subdued. The country's macroeconomic stability can be attributed to a prudent central bank and strict budgetary discipline, making Russia independent from foreign funds. The Russian state budget is balanced, and the country is accumulating reserves to stave off any potential crisis. Russia is a vast nation with imperial aspirations, far more diverse than is generally imagined, with great economic potential. Bold changes are still needed in economic policy, along with courageous economic reforms and a fight against bureaucracy and internal corruption. Major projects stretching from Siberia to the Arctic and the Black Sea are currently delayed due to Western sanctions, a key issue that Russian leadership still has to overcome. The most important question is whether Putin will manage to overcome the nation's existing resistance to change. Russia has historically always been prone to internal collapse, which has typically taken place during periods when economic and social troubles were mounting. President Putin's grand economic vision, seen through the Western lens, may at first sight look utopian; nevertheless, Russia may yet surprise itself - and the entire world.

Belarus

Belarus and Russia are likely to proceed with an economic integration program which will integrate the Russian and Belarussian economies far beyond the present level of the Eurasian Economic Union. Both countries' central banks have initially agreed to coordinate their monetary policies, including a floating exchange rate for national currencies and inflation targeting. These are economic steps which point to the increasing likelihood of longer-term political integration.

Turkey

- ❖ Since 2015, a new military doctrine of intervention by Turkey explains the ongoing construction of a significant fleet as a foreign policy tool including its own submarine program. Turkey first maintained that it had legitimate claim to so-called «gray zones» in Greek territorial waters close to the Turkish coast, in an area with many scattered Greek islands, and recently expanded its claims to over half of the Aegean (largely Greek territorial) waters, within the context of its *Blue Homeland* dogma. Its overall strategy has resulted in thousands of violations annually of Greek airspace and maritime water over the past few decades. Turkey plans to build naval bases in the Black Sea and in occupied Northern

Cyprus. It challenges Greece and Cyprus over *continental shelf/exclusive economic zones* and drilling rights for natural gas findings offshore.

- ❖ Turkey has consistently taken important steps in its drive to develop a sizeable global merchant maritime fleet. The Turkish-flagged fleet ranked 15th based on dead-weight (DW) capacity in 2018. The steady rise of the Turkish-controlled fleet reflects a foreign policy *strategic depth dogma*, calling for an active engagement with all its powers in Turkey's immediate and wider neighborhood, while increasing its political and economic influence on the sea routes stretching from the Black Sea to the South-Eastern Mediterranean (through the Aegean Archipelago) and from the Suez Canal to the Red Sea. In terms of peripheral shipping activities, Turkey is ranked among the top 10 countries in shipbuilding/ship repair with a total of 70 yards. The Turkish government's goal is to establish Turkey as an energy hub for oil and gas from Central Asia to Europe.
- ❖ Turkey is striving to boldly reassert its influence over the Eastern Mediterranean, including the Aegean Archipelago, and to rewrite the rules in the region. Through its maritime agreement with Libya – a legally unacceptable document with multiple arbitrary positions – Turkey is attempting to capitalize on the region's energy resources. Longer-term, it hopes to succeed in steadily re-establishing the regional influence of the Ottoman Empire prior to the latter's demise. Its *Blue Homeland* strategy aims to rewrite sovereign rights on maritime areas in the Aegean region. Such an ambitious strategy blends well with Turkey's vision of becoming a super-regional power, its influence stretching from the Balkans to Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, and the Caucasus all the way down to the Middle East. In Central Asia (where Turkey and Kazakhstan have signed a long-term military cooperation agreement), Turkey's foreign policy goals will sooner or later clash with embedded core Russian interests in a region historically under Russian (ex-Soviet) influence. Turkey has been considering joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a political, economic, and security alliance dominated by China, Russia, and Central Asian nations, an action incompatible with its long-standing membership with the NATO Western alliance.
- ❖ The inauguration in November 2019 of the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline by Turkey and Azerbaijan and its connection to the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline will provide Europe with Azerbaijani natural gas from the Caspian Sea at around 10 billion cubic meters annually. Through this pipeline, Turkey will absorb around 6 billion cubic meters of gas annually. It will become a major participant in the Southern Gas Corridor, an alternative to Russian gas piped to Europe. In addition, Russia and Turkey inaugurated TurkStream in January 2020, a gas line from the Russian city of Anapa, across the Black Sea to the European part of Turkey, a double pipeline transporting about 30 billion cubic meters of gas a year, half going to Turkey and the other half to the European markets.

Closing Remarks

In the late 17th century, the Ottoman Empire stretched from the shores of North Africa to Iraq and from Belgrade to the Gulf of Aden. After the two World Wars Turkey has constantly lost territory and been weakened. Turkey's invasion of the once Kurdish-controlled parts of northeastern Syria in late 2019, while possibly marking a low point in overall historical territorial coverage for Turkey, may signify a new era of expansion with a far more aggressive foreign policy, which can only exacerbate strained relationships and possibly ignite conflicts in the wider Middle East/Eastern Mediterranean region.

Turkey is emerging as a major regional power while internationally casting itself as an equal to the US, Russia, China, and the EU. Its gross domestic product, in terms of purchasing power parity, ranked worldwide in 13th place in 2018. It has

a large army which is growing in power and sophistication, although its dedication and efficiency are questionable. Ankara's national policy rests on the notion that an independent, expansionary foreign policy over a broad geographical area is a necessity dictated by Turkey's history and cultural identity. The country's naval doctrine is part of that strategy, whose main objective focuses on challenging Greek sovereignty over the Aegean by implementing the Blue Homeland dogma. Soft power is projected consistently both inside and outside aiming at promoting Turkish history, language, culture, and religion, to create Turkish enclaves in countries in which its diaspora lives in minorities, and to promote religious tradition through the building of mosques and the setting up of Islamic educational institutions round the world. Turkey has fought too many wars with Russia and Iran to trust either; in the end, it may reconcile its differences with the US. How decisively Greece responds to this challenge in terms of its foreign relationships, mainly with the US, the EU, and its other peripheral allies, will either reconfirm and further empower long accepted geopolitical/geostrategic positions while decisively curbing Turkey's grand ambitions in the sensitive Aegean Sea and East Mediterranean region, or will open the way to territorial realignments, new policy formations, and new balances of power which, though faintly detectable can, nevertheless, not at present be sufficiently assessed.

The Arab World (Middle East)

- ❖ President Trump's *Deal of the Century* for permanent peace in the Middle East largely focuses on the younger generations, including those of the Palestinians, who are primarily interested in peace and prosperity, economics rather than politics, and job creation and growth in the war-torn territories. The plan's objective is to allow economic realities to override political issues that remained unsolved for seven decades and which are responsible for the ongoing conflict. The peace plan for the Middle East was initially conceived as a USD 50 billion investment plan, one which should propel growth and prosperity in Palestinian self-governing areas and neighboring countries, including Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon. It may also include a USD 5 billion transportation corridor to connect Gaza with the West Bank. The plan has a precedent, namely, a similar proposal by the UN in 1959. Although both plans have been rejected by Palestinian authorities, the current plan presents another angle to establishment of peace through a largely pragmatic economic prosperity perspective. Saudi Arabia seems to be backing this visionary developmental project. There are indications that a turn in sentiment is taking place among Arab elites, which can easily spread out to the populations at large. This will allow far more room for success than may be generally anticipated - if not specifically for the current plan as exactly presented, nevertheless, for such a direction and platform of thinking.
- ❖ Iran's military strategy rests on the support for militant groups across the Middle East Region, forming an asymmetrical, multidimensional strategy aiming at containing and gradually weakening Israel's, Saudi Arabia's, and other allied forces' power in the long term. It is an integral part of a grand strategy envisaging a regional mega-power role for Iran, extending all the way from the Persian Gulf out to the Mediterranean Sea, with a considerable measure of control over oilfields and vital shipping lanes, including the Strait of Hormuz and Bab-el-Mandeb. These grandiose plans are, however, being hampered by the US's aggressive stance vis-à-vis Iran as well as by public discontent and widespread demonstrations in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon. It is becoming clearer that monetary resources, which are scarce, must be managed prudently, otherwise Iran may be faced with mounting internal sociopolitical and economic problems. Another serious environmental parameter threatening Iran with a national disaster is the problem of severe water shortages due to many years of inefficient water

management: this requires extensive monetary resources and a focus on internal governance and away from revolutionary concepts on which billions have already been spent without any tangible success. The rapid spread of Covid-19 throughout Iran adds another critical dimension to the fate of this country, where the socio-political and economic foundations are coming under serious strain.

- ❖ Iran has an old and well-established bureaucracy, dating back to the 16th century and capable of operating within a strong culture of governance, with an extensive reservoir of talent and experience to allow state administration to run even on autopilot in the event of a serious governing crisis or even war. Some of the biggest challenges to Iranian power may come not from the outside but from within, as new generations of Iranians drift further away from strict religious principles on which the modern Iranian revolution was founded.
- ❖ An alliance in the making between Saudi Arabia and Israel rests on some serious geo-economic and geostrategic considerations. The Saudi Kingdom urgently needs an alternative export route for its oil and is discussing with Israel the possibility of a pipeline to Israeli Eilat 40 km away. This would form a two-way flow of hydrocarbon products: Saudi oil to Israel, and further on to the deep-sea Mediterranean port of Haifa, and beyond to Western markets, and natural gas from Israel to Saudi Arabia. The chokepoints of the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab al-Mandeb in the Red Sea would be avoided, providing an entirely new dimension to Saudi Arabia's oil, as well as future natural gas reserve exports (5th largest in the world) once developed. Both nations could be exporting natural gas to Europe through the Eastern Mediterranean pipeline, which is now in the planning stage. The latter partnership will to a great extent render useless Iran's policies for a *Shiite Crescent* from Iran to the Mediterranean Sea and curb the intensifying sectarianism in the Middle East, which pose a serious threat to regional stability. Riyadh's friendly hand to Israel has a serious, well-calculated background and may be here to last.
- ❖ Saudi Arabia is militarily unprepared for war. Its anti-aircraft systems to a large extent date back to the Gulf War of 1991, and the Saudis are unable to adequately respond militarily without state of the art airborne or ground support. With an insufficient air defense system, a vulnerable infrastructure, and military ineffectiveness, without American or Israeli help, Saudi Arabia cannot stand on its own in a serious military confrontation.
- ❖ Iraq has over the past decade doubled its oil production to almost 4.9 million barrels a day; in late 2019, it became the second largest producer within OPEC, primarily supplying Asian countries. Iraq holds the world's fifth largest crude oil reserves with 140 billion barrels and is attracting the serious attention of the largest international corporate energy players. If the US, on its own initiative or under pressure, were to withdraw its military presence from Iraq, domestic oil and oil reserves could potentially come under Iranian control.
- ❖ The oil-rich United Arab Emirates (UAE) have grown into a true regional military power in the Middle East, with a strong army, a growing armaments sector, and an independent foreign policy. Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, the enigmatic and charismatic ruler, is the driving force behind the UAE's most successful, highly assertive, and extrovert foreign policy. He is probably the most powerful of the Arab rulers and one of the most influential men in the world. The Emirates have built up a well-trained state-of-the-art army, numbering over 60,000 men who have the reputation of being great fighters with outstanding discipline and willpower. The UAE, most notably Abu Dhabi, have excellent relations with Washington and the European capitals. A strong and decisive policy influence is nowhere more evident

than in Libya in the support of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, thereby raising serious barriers to Turkey's expansion plans in Africa, evident also in the containment of extremist Islamist movements in the Middle East.

- ❖ As long as an Iranian-US confrontation continues to loom over Iraqi soil and the strong Shiite anti-Iranian patriotic popular uprising does not offer a clear proposal leading to a solution to Iraq's structural governing problems, the country will not stabilize. Iraq's current chaotic situation is the outcome of competing foreign power centers attempting to unite the country by force, whereas Iraq's long-term solution could be a federation firmly based on the ethnic and religious diversity within the country. In the long run, Iraq is in a unique position to rebuild itself as an independent model state in the Middle East, far removed from *the outdated colonial model of creating a state - based on an army - supported by a strong outside power*. This is a nation in transition where foreign intervention, political power struggles, and popular insurrection combined, will once again reshape the Iraqi government. Future ethnopolitical and economic developments in Iraq will undoubtedly continue to be correlated with a wider evolution of power politics under way throughout the Middle East.
- ❖ The Yemeni crisis is one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. About 80% of the population, that is, 22.5 million people, require some form of humanitarian assistance. At least 17,000 civilians have been killed and over 10,000 injured, while approximately 3.3 million persons have been displaced and about 400,000 children are suffering from severe malnutrition.
- ❖ For millennia, the Nile has been Egypt's lifeblood. Today, too many people are living on too little fertile land, while their needs for water can barely be covered. This will become even worse once upriver Africa's largest dam – *the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance* - goes into operation. The dam, which will be 1,800 meters long and 155 meters high, is located in northwestern Ethiopia, 15 km east of the border with Sudan. Once in operation, sometime between 2023 and 2030, it will block one of the two Nile arteries, the Blue Nile, on its way to Sudan. The reservoir behind the dam is expected to hold around 75 billion cubic meters of water, delivering a hydropower output of up to 6.45 gigawatts, which is one and a half times that of Egypt's famous Aswan dam, making it the largest hydroelectric power plant in Africa as well as the 7th largest in the world. For Ethiopia, this mega-project will become a major source of electricity that will be exported throughout the region and may mean an economic rebirth for this developing country. The duration for the reservoir fill-up, which is critical for Egypt, could be in the range of 3-15 years, this being a matter of agreement between Ethiopia, Sudan, and Egypt. A three-year fill-up period may mean an approximately 50% loss of Egypt's cultivated agricultural area. Six years could mean about 17% loss of arable land drying up. Such statistics could, in fact, create unacceptable scenarios for the government in Egypt. The three main actors are now in discussions to agree on a commonly accepted framework of fill-up and operation for the dam.
- ❖ After years of focusing inward to stabilize its economy and internal political situation, Egypt is feeling confident enough to reassert itself as a strong regional actor in the Middle East. The withdrawal of Egypt, the biggest and militarily most powerful state in the Arab world, from the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA) is a warning for Israel and the US to reassess their strategies regarding the Middle East. Egypt, unlike Israel and Saudi Arabia, does not regard Iran as an existential threat. For Egypt, the upper parts of the Nile and the construction there of hydroelectric dams by Sudan and Ethiopia present the number one strategic foreign policy concern, since the Nile has always been the lifeline of Egypt. Any such project without a strictly agreed framework of operation with

Egypt's explicit approval would be a *casus belli*, and Egypt needs an army powerful enough and undistracted from other major foreign policy interventions to provide sufficient deterrence against such a likelihood. Longer-term, Egypt is focused on preserving its leadership over the Nile, the Red Sea and the Eastern Sahara, where it will inevitably collide with other regional powers competing for influence. The inauguration of its massive, new southern Berenice air and naval base in the Red Sea is an act with huge geostrategic and symbolic power. Egypt's growing importance in the region increases its value to powers like the US, Russia, and China as they pursue their competing goals in the Middle East.

- ❖ As widespread demonstrations and discontent in the Arab world, in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Algeria, and Sudan, simmer in the background, the world may be witnessing the early stages of a second wave of the 2011 Arab Spring. People in the Middle East simply do not want to give up; they fervently believe that freedom and stability can work for their countries. Demonstrators seem to have learned from the mistakes of 2011, although entrenched political/economic/religious elites are putting up serious resistance to change. People seem nevertheless undeterred and strive to stay connected to the world. Their access through the smartphone to social media allows them to establish contact, to network, and create a silent revolution which is gaining in speed and power.
- ❖ While hundreds of people newly infected by the SARS-CoV-2 virus are daily being registered in central and northern Europe, there are only a few dozens of cases reported in major regions of the Middle East (excluding Iran), this surely attributable to the younger age of the populations, who much faster develop collective immunity.

Closing Remarks

The importance of Iran as a nation is indisputable. It is one of the world's oldest and richest cultures, one of the world's 20 biggest countries in terms of territory, economic size, and population, with a diaspora of about 8 million people, located in a geostrategically critical position linking the Middle East with Asia. Iran never became a colonial power nor was it under the protective umbrella of a foreign empire. It did not become a participant in either of the two World Wars, although rival alliances violated its neutrality in both. Consequently, the impact of WWII on Iran was devastating. Unlike its neighbor Turkey, during the Cold War Iran did not join either of the two rival military blocs of NATO or the Warsaw Pact. During the 1970s, until the Iranian revolution of 1978-1979, Iran as a nation-state had established itself externally as a force for peace thanks to its close ties with the Western world, predominantly the US, and maintained neutral relations with both the Soviet Union and China. Internal resentment towards the ruling Shah Pahlavi's rather blundering governing practices and economic policies was, meanwhile, building up. This was imprudently ignored by the Shah, while it escaped the US's attention, ultimately leading to the revolution that forced the Shah to flee the country and the establishment of a theocratic state: a new era had begun for Iran. Iran's ideals, nevertheless, always pointed to a statehood culture possessing a much wider historic, political, and existential reality. As one of the world's oldest nation-states, Iran could open a new chapter in its history that would address the aspirations of its younger generations, while enjoying the renewed attraction of its historical friends and the goodwill of large parts of the international community of nations that respect universal values of freedom. A revamped political culture may emerge, the seeds of which may have started growing inside Iran, instinctively linking politics to concrete issues of real life, to new possibilities, and to new opportunities. This may represent the least expected but still realizable scenario in the future of this historic nation.

Recent surveys indicate that jobs and social freedom appear to be more important to young Arabs than political rights. The latest US peace initiative could well have sown the seeds for future success, and the foundations may have been laid for a peace plan based on monetary input, economic growth, and prosperity, potentially attractive to a wider section of the Arab population, especially the younger generations of professionals and politicians. The thorny Palestinian issue remains high on the agenda, although, at the same time, the positive disposition of the wider Arab world towards Israel as a stabilizing force in the Middle East could also be rising. Religion itself might be losing some of its importance among the younger, better educated Arab generations. The overall aspirations and dreams of young Arabs are neither radical nor revolutionary but are, on the whole, pragmatic, and, as such, Arab youth are probably unlikely to be easily convinced in the coming years by the rhetoric of demagogic personalities offering a utopian future. A wider dialogue is necessary between the Middle East and other African countries on joint developmental efforts and peaceful cooperation, with a strong commitment to accountability, transparency, and the principle that no one is left behind.

Israel

- ❖ Israel is pursuing a silent strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia and is active in establishing non-aggression treaties with several Arab countries in the Gulf in order to prevent hostilities, neutralize alternative harmful security alliances, cooperate in the fight against terror, and advance economic interests. This initiative is largely part of Israel's diplomatic efforts to isolate Iran in respect to its expansionary policies in the region. Despite Israel's friendly relations with Moscow, its room of action in a Russian-dominated Middle East may become somewhat constrained as well as complex in terms of both tactical and strategic activity lines. The US shift in foreign policy, involving, to a certain extent, its withdrawal from the Middle East while it focuses on its top priorities, i.e., containing China and Russia, has created a new dynamic situation with new balances of power not yet settled in the region.
- ❖ *Leviathan* is the huge natural gas field located in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Israel, deep in the Levantine Basin, an area rich in hydrocarbons. The field is about 130 kms west of Haifa and 1,500 meters deep. *Leviathan* is estimated to hold anywhere between 16 and 25 trillion cubic feet of recoverable natural gas, enough to satisfy Israeli power-generation needs for the next 35 years plus, while still allowing ample room for export. Israel has over the past ten years gone from an energy deficit to currently becoming a net gas exporter, exporting gas to both Jordan and Egypt. Israel's cooperation with Egypt, Cyprus, and Greece in the development of the *EastMed* pipeline will connect the Levantine basin's abundant hydrocarbon reserves with Europe, via Cyprus, Crete, and mainland Greece. Italy, Bulgaria, as well as other countries have indicated their interest in joining the latter energy club, which could, with Israel's leadership participation, develop into a *Southern Mediterranean Energy Silk Road*. Israel could link its *Leviathan* to Cyprus's *Aphrodite* gas field, with one direction of the *EastMed* towards the main European markets and another northbound diversion towards the Balkans and Romania. Egypt, with its *Zohr* gas field, and later Saudi Arabia (via Israel) could also connect to the above-described regional pipeline network. If in the future the Kurdish areas of Iraq and Syria, with their own oil fields, have become part of an independent Kurdish state, they could eventually link up with the Israeli-Greek-Cypriot energy program. Israel's benefits will be twofold. Novel strategic developmental directions will have opened up for the Israeli nation, namely, new alliances within the Arab world and new energy distribution lines towards the EU states, plus exports of high technology, mainly

military systems, to a huge lucrative new market. The transformation of the Eastern Mediterranean into a critical energy hub mainly serving European markets is already creating major geopolitical and geostrategic shifts, as the energy policies of important regional players, notably Russia and Turkey, are directly affected.

- ❖ Israel is employing a highly advanced multilayer active defense system capable of comprehensively protecting the country from missile attack. Arrow-3 and Arrow-2 systems can intercept long-range ballistic missiles outside the atmosphere and medium/long-range ballistic missiles in the upper atmosphere, respectively. David's Sling and Iron Dome intercept missiles the former in the lower atmosphere, including cruise missiles and medium/long-range rockets, and the latter short-range rockets in the lower atmosphere. The Arrow-4 system under development will be capable of intercepting ballistic missiles equipped with multiple warheads in outer space. Israeli advanced technology could in the near future become a highly sophisticated part of the defenses of Europe, and Israel is in talks with a number of European countries regarding its missile defense systems.
- ❖ Israel, with superb technological and military abilities and an innovator in high-tech and civilian industries, can, through its long history of coping with military threats and its expertise in, inter alia, structures resistant to urban warfare, set a new standard for global preparedness in future nuclear conflict situations, offering a comprehensive model for the rest of the world to follow.
- ❖ The Gaza Strip's current inhabitants may not be direct descendants of the ancient Philistines, i.e., of Philistia, *the Five Lords of the Philistines* in Deuteronomistic history embodying five-city states of the southwestern Levant, an ancient core which includes Gaza. The violent struggles of the ancient past may nevertheless, in the modern world, still resonate in Gaza's resistance to peaceable coexistence with the Jewish state.

Closing Remarks

For Israel, the shifting parameters of the new Cold War between superpowers signify both uncertainty and predictability, creating a situation that has a strong bearing upon its tactical, strategic, and nuclear deterrence strategies. Important aspects of the wider antagonism between the US, Russia, and China are affecting Israel's geostrategic planning. Israel's aforementioned meticulous and dynamic situational assessment will, to a certain extent, also shape the choices for the future development of the country's military deterrence, its power projection, and its geostrategic directions. Israeli defense policies will continue to be geared towards one goal, namely, to guarantee a safe and stable Jewish homeland. Consequently, in terms of foreign policy directions, Israel may increasingly be viewed by dominant Arab monarchies as an important pillar of stability throughout the Middle East. This may restart the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace discussions on a new developmental rather than political basis. These have more or less also been the directions of US policymakers in the new «Deal of the Century» peacemaking plan between Israel and the Palestinians, recently unveiled by President Trump. Arab nations are slowly starting to recognize the right of the Jewish people to their ancestral homeland, just as much as they do the Palestinians' claim to their own existential and territorial rights. If Jordan, largely already a state of Palestinians, were, by some means, to accommodate Palestinian demands for their own officially recognized state, some type of stronger cooperation between Israel and Jordan could emerge to bring prosperity and peace to the region and further open up opportunities for creative economic development, growth, and stability this part of the world.

An increasing convergence of national threats is creating a new strategic reality for Israel, making the outbreak of war on several fronts simultaneously a potentially realistic scenario. A sudden, coordinated emergence of these threats would pose serious challenges to Israel. Such a situation calls for a new reorganization of Israel's military capabilities, with the most challenging task being to simultaneously neutralize the above threats while concurrently protecting the country's civilian population and infrastructure. Israel's past military victories across and beyond borders have been of major importance, creating a vivid awareness among its adversaries as to how the Israelis view their military power as well as their deep-seated belief in their own capacities. A strategic military dogma, with conceptual depth and wide-ranging effectiveness, has arisen over time, one that embraces all types of action, whether of defense or of retaliation or involving a full-fledged war. In the first two instances, it neutralizes threats and establishes security and, in the third, it automatically allows for a new regional order to emerge. In the eyes of both allies and enemies, such a framework underlines Israel's belief in its operational superiority, its state-of-the-art technological base, its unparalleled military capabilities, and its crystal-clear view and absolute determination to pursue, by any means necessary, the security of the Israeli homeland. Israel promotes a unifying national narrative among all its citizens and diaspora, imparting a sense of mission as well as a constant commitment to mobilization for collective efforts, both in peacetime and at times of war. It defines the unique strength of a nation probably still in the making, in search of a quest not yet fulfilled.

War is a state characterizing the Arab world, a spatial, historical paradigm associated with the Middle East, overanalyzed, overemphasized, and over-discussed. Peace is the other side of the coin, and if one considers the politically, socially, economically, and technologically advanced status of the Israeli nation, one of the most innovative countries in the world, one may readily recognize the enormous neglected potential hidden under a broad-based, peaceful, regional cooperation platform in the Middle East. If realized, it could open up a chapter of unprecedented prosperity in the region. A huge wealth-wave effect could be propagated through the synergy of Israeli technological excellence and the Arab world's accumulated oil wealth, materialized through an array of industries in advanced communications, information technologies, environmental management, the health sciences, energy, and R & D. It would create numerous opportunities for multilateral relationships and regional development, all within a new common market of peaceful coexistence. Though perhaps at first sight seeming to be a utopian plan, it could, nevertheless, become reality - whether it grows out of intensive peaceful diplomacy or out of war and necessity.

Africa

- ❖ The East African region is home to three major geographical power blocs: the Nile River Basin, the Ethiopian Highlands and the Kenyan Highlands. The Nile River Basin represents East Africa's northernmost core, an integral part of both the Arab and Mediterranean worlds since antiquity, believed to be one of the earliest cradles of civilization. Egypt has always sought to be the leading state in the Middle East/North Africa, while Sudan aims to be a powerful influencing force in East Africa, enjoying proximity and closer cultural ties to the adjacent Arab regions. The Ethiopian Highlands located southeast of the Nile River Basin have, since ancient times, formed another strong power center. In 1991, the highlands were deprived of access to the sea due to the formation of the independent state of Eritrea. South of Ethiopia lies the third core area, represented by Kenya, dominated by Lake Victoria and surrounded by the states of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania. Lake Victoria, Africa's largest lake, has functioned as a

transport hub for over 1,000 years, allowing for the formation of a relatively homogenous sociocultural and linguistic identity for its neighboring countries, which have long formed alliances rather than antagonisms. Somalia has also been active in the power struggles of East Africa, with an ethnic Somali presence in Ethiopia and Kenya. Competition among the cores in East Africa is continuously affected by external influences from Middle Eastern and other world powers in an ongoing effort to mark or expand their presence in East Africa.

- ❖ The East African Community, formed in 1967 and revived in 2000 (an integral part of the African Economic Community), is an intergovernmental organization composed of six countries in the African Great Lakes region. It is a potential precursor to what is projected to be the establishment of the East African Federation, a sovereign state comprised of a federation of its member nations.
- ❖ Ethiopia is opening up its economy and French companies are positioning themselves to actively participate in development of this region of 110 million people. After decades of inefficient, state-led economic growth, Ethiopia is diversifying its dealings with foreign powers, i.e., the US for security and China for infrastructure developmental programs, as well as France, the Gulf States, and Turkey for various investments.
- ❖ The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) aims at removing tariffs on 90% of goods, thereby creating the largest trade zone in the world, with a potential for increase of its intraregional trade by about 50% by 2022. The AfCFTA will have an estimated 1.2 billion consumers, with a combined GDP of over USD 3 trillion. Of the 55 African Union recognized African states, 54 nations have signed the agreement and 28 have ratified it (ratification by 22 nations is the threshold required for the formal implementation of the underlying agreement). Eritrea has not yet signed the agreement but will probably do so. The AfCFTA is on the way to becoming the largest global free trade area since the formation of the World Trade Organization.
- ❖ The security crisis in the vast, desert-like region south of the Sahara, the Sahel region, has reached an alarming level, with an explosion of violence and an exponentially increasing number of displaced people and violent deaths. The countries of the Sahel are among the poorest in the world, with around 80% of inhabitants living in extreme poverty, while the region suffers from increasing government failure. Destabilization in the Sahel could well have started with destabilization in Libya, which was turned into a huge, cheap reservoir of weapons for the militia—helpful lessons for the West's erroneous foreign policies on the African continent. If Sahel violence spills over into the Gulf of Guinea, states such as Ghana or Côte d'Ivoire could experience a reversal in economic development and could drive more people into the arms of extremists and traffickers. An area in central Africa close to the size of Western Europe threatens to sink into anarchy and chaos. A deterioration of the situation in the Sahel will undoubtedly affect Europe, with new migration flows and a significant increase in trafficking and smuggling. European politicians have until now been fighting only symptoms in the region with ample aid from the West which has, however, had no notable effects except to stoke extreme corruption. What is needed in the Sahel is the creation of jobs, enhancement of educational standards, development of health provision infrastructures, proper governing principles, military assistance establishing order out of chaos, and aid provided in a controlled and targeted way. As the Sahel stretches over such a large territory and since Europe possesses neither the necessary extended intelligence capabilities nor the required air support and military capacity, it will remain dependent upon critical American support in the fight against terrorism.

- ❖ In Libya, European foreign policy, having neglected the country for decades, has largely failed. Meanwhile, Europeans have lost their influence over other major parts of Africa. Long overdue efforts are being made to regain a certain degree of influence over the African continent, albeit with highly questionable results. Nations that are acting assertively in Africa and seem to have a clear road plan are France, Russia, and China.
- ❖ South Africa is suffering under governmental inability to pursue the necessary, tough economic policy choices and address the country's growing socioeconomic problems. Problematic areas remain land use, unemployment, corruption, weak growth, and, as mentioned, highly unreliable governance. Internal strife and uncertainty over inefficient implementation of policies are eroding the country's economic foundations and its historic, regional, hegemonic role.

Closing Remarks

What is needed in Africa's multiethnic societies are not benevolent dictators, nor technocratic regimes that push their agendas with a strong hand. What is required is more efficient and forward-thinking democracies where sustainable development will be given a chance, where people will have the freedom to cooperate and decide their own fate. What is needed more than anything else is the full participation of the human factor which, unlike the case of China's growth model exported and applied aggressively to the African continent, today in Africa seems to a great extent to be absent. The continent is nevertheless undoubtedly moving forward, remaining an awakening giant with huge underutilized areas for economic development, a young population, and a market with hundreds of millions of consumers. Africa has indeed the potential to become the largest sociopolitical and economic success story of the 21st century.

Central Asia

- ❖ The Republic of Kazakhstan is the ninth largest country in the world and the world's largest landlocked country, with an area of 2,724,900 sq. km. It is the most dominant nation of Central Asia, located in the middle of the Eurasian landmass, sharing borders with Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan and with a substantial shoreline on the Caspian Sea. Kazakhstan is the second largest oil producer in the post-Soviet space and the largest producer and exporter of uranium in the world, while also being rich in other commodities and mineral resources needed in many industrialized countries. As the hegemonic power in Central Asia, it needs to constantly play an important balancing role in its relationship with both Russia and China. Kazakhstan and China have agreed on a permanent comprehensive strategic partnership, including agricultural exports from Kazakhstan to China and Chinese support in finance, transportation, energy, and logistics under its Belt and Road Initiative. Kazakh is the state language, while the Russian language has equally official status for all levels of administrative and institutional purposes.

Closing Remarks

Central Asia is Russia's historical sphere of influence, but as China has grown more powerful, it too has sought to exert its influence in this strategically located part of the world that connects East with West. This collision of interests will continue to simmer in the background and will remain a dormant time bomb that will either be diffused through intelligent foreign policy initiatives between the two nations, or else continue to undermine hopes for a long-lasting Sino-Russian alliance.

China

- ❖ China's most significant 21st century foreign policy and economic enterprise is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), one of the world's biggest geo-economic developments, consisting of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road Belt. The former links China with Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe on land, while the latter unites the major maritime trade routes from China to Southeast and South Asia and further on to Africa, Europe, to Oceania, and South America. Global infrastructure investment to address *connectivity sectors* and close vital *connectivity gaps* in the BRI could range anywhere between USD 2.8 and 6.5 trillion annually. If actual investments materialize within a currently projected range of USD 1.5 trillion per annum, an investment deficit will build up on the BRI. How this investment shortfall – if real – is to be covered is a question which probably nobody, not even Beijing, can answer today. Estimates should be treated cautiously and may fluctuate with such an enormous program, with many unaccountable factors that could either positively or negatively influence its progress. The BRI has indeed been progressing over the past five years on all fronts and is currently gaining momentum, despite obstacles encountered in its implementation in various countries in Asia, Africa, and Europe. The current Covid-19 pandemic should probably only temporarily dent investment progress. Close to 150 countries and around 30 international organizations, with those numbers constantly on the rise, are participating worldwide in the BRI, with China's investments in 2019 being about USD 200 billion plus and with Chinese companies having to date already secured more than USD 350 billion in construction contracts. China has already invested close to USD 12 billion into ports and has a presence in about 25 ports and close to 20 container terminals worldwide. Trade within the BRI network has to date been worth around USD 1.0 trillion in 2019, while China is expected to increase its imports to about USD 10 trillion over the next five years. The BRI has the dynamic and the potential to reduce travel time via major land-based economic corridors by at least 15% and increase trade by at least 10% and incomes by 5% plus. As envisaged, the BRI has the power to permanently transform the global geopolitical and geo-economic landscape.
- ❖ In South Asia, China's expansion towards the Indian Ocean challenges India's regional dominance. India remains on the sidelines as to the prospects of joining the BRI, as it fears that China will encircle it through its neighbors, which is in fact to a certain extent already happening. Smaller nations, including island nations, view cooperation with China favorably, given its sheer size and the economic and developmental benefits stemming from the funding by China of huge infrastructure projects as part of the BRI. The stakes in South East Asia will continue growing and so will the tensions in the relationships between India, Pakistan, and China. In the Southwestern Pacific, China is solidifying its expansion into the Melanesia island group, including Papua New Guinea, strategically located next to Australia, a region where Australia historically exerted a prominent role. The southwestern subregion of Melanesia includes vital sea lanes to Australia and New Zealand and is a critical sea route for both nations' national security interests. The US is active, assisting both Australia and New Zealand to extend their influence within this strategic Pacific island region to counter China's penetration strategies. China's strategy rests on generous economic proposals possessing a high degree of appeal without any political preconditions.
- ❖ China's BRI has been making significant inroads in Europe despite repeated US warnings to its European allies. China is using the BRI to increase its influence on the continent. In March 2019, Italy confirmed that it would become the 17th European country to join the BRI. In the Balkans, the EU may have

underestimated China's long-term strategy, which has consisted in penetrating the region through the financing of distressed infrastructure.

- ❖ In the Middle East, Chinese companies are operating directly on projects compatible with the *connectivity* goals of the BRI. Huge investments are being made in ports (with a focus on or near critical chokepoints for global oil/gas distribution), energy, trade, joint production development, and in entire new industrial areas. Such projects link China to the Levant and in particular the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean. Major developmental projects are underway in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Egypt, and Israel. With a second Arab Spring in evidence in the background, Middle Eastern countries are eager to rebuild their economies and boost growth to counterbalance domestic conflict, offer growth prospects and prosperity to the public, as well as fully participate in the next wave of globalization. Grand plans for a refocusing of their economies with target dates 2025-2035 have been announced and are being promoted, plans in which China intends to actively participate in their realization.
- ❖ In Africa, the BRI is propelled by the urgent need for infrastructure development and industrialization. It is estimated that one million Chinese people presently live in Africa, and more than 10,000 Chinese companies have already been set up on the continent. China's investments in Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Tanzania serve one purpose, namely, to build railways, harbors, and roads to make it easier to get raw materials from the interior of Africa to the coast and then on to China. Africa is for China not only a supplier of raw materials, but also a sales market, an industrial location, and a potential military partner.
- ❖ In South America, China will remain the top Mercosur trading partner, having surpassed both the EU and the US in trade activity. Its efforts are concentrated on Panama thanks to its strategic location between North and South America and its Atlantic/Pacific Channel. China has been discussing a free trade agreement with Panama.
- ❖ As China does not possess a coastline on the Arctic, it is shaping new bilateral relationships to that end, in particular with Russia and the Nordic countries. China has proposed a number of heavy infrastructure projects in Greenland, i.e., airports, harbors, roads, and railways, to facilitate the extraction of rare earth minerals, as well as for the stationing of scientific research bases and satellite centers. China's drive for a prominent role in the Arctic region also extends to the Danish-owned, self-governing network of the 18 Faroe Islands, located between Norway and Iceland in the North Atlantic Ocean. Its Arctic profile could rise exponentially if Moscow pools its efforts with Beijing. For China, this could become the third leg of the BRI, namely, the *Polar Silk Road*. The Northern Arctic Route could carry at least 20% of China's trade volumes in the coming decade. In the South Pole region in Antarctica, China has been carrying out its 36th scientific expedition, assisting in the completion of its fifth Antarctic scientific station for observation of the ocean, land, ice shelf, atmosphere, biology, the conducting of environmental surveys, as well as the monitoring of under-ice submarine activities.
- ❖ Beijing's ambitious industrial project *Made in China 2025* aims at refocusing China's economy away from labor-intensive manufacturing and toward high-tech and service industries. China is systematically channeling funds into universities and research centers in the pursuit of its research and development priorities. At the same time, it is applying economic state power to access through the BRI markets and resources abroad in a high-stakes ultramarathon to avoid a looming domestic crisis. China is domestically increasing its reliance on the performance of many small and medium-sized companies to revive its economy. As GDP

growth is a function of the number of workers and respective productivity per worker and since China has more workers than any other nation, who are steadily becoming more productive, it is likely that its economy will surpass in productivity and in absolute GDP numbers anything comparable in Europe and the US. If China succeeds in avoiding a dangerous period of stagnation in the next few years as well as any other major sociopolitical, environmental, health (i.e., the current Covid-19 outbreak) or foreign policy shock, it will exponentially multiply its political, economic, and military power, and, with its massive new BRI resources, it will pull neighboring small or even larger countries firmly into its orbit. Longer-term, its willingness to run trade deficits is a key component of China's strategic aim to establish the yuan as a global reserve currency.

- ❖ Although China's Huawei is leading the world in terms of technology and price in the development of the world's new 5G mobile networks, China could face serious competition from European developers Nokia and Ericson, especially if the latter team up with the US. Time is at present clearly on the Chinese side.
- ❖ In China's defensive and offensive warfighting capacities, amphibious warfare strategy is in a prominent position, reflecting readiness for rapid warfare to safeguard its interests in the South China Sea. China's coastguard is the world's largest in terms of fleet and vessel size. The 1,300 or more vessels that are under its direct central control compose an enormous fleet, supported by hundreds of fishing boats and other vessels acting as China's eyes and ears at strategic spots in China's maritime waters. In a conflict, they would play a highly disruptive asymmetrical warfare role, although it is highly unlikely that they will possess the capacity to prevent the US blocking a number of vital geostrategic maritime chokepoints. Chinese naval capabilities, though exponentially growing, cannot at present be compared with the US's massive naval power.
- ❖ China has already tested a hypersonic missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead and of avoiding missile-defense systems. It has also tested its latest-technology intercontinental ballistic missiles, with a range between 12,000 and 15,000 km, able to carry multiple miniaturized nuclear warheads. Beijing is also building a third aircraft carrier, more modern than the two previous ones, which are of Soviet design. China's massive armament program, which is under way in hardware, technical, operational, and digital systems, serves both a defensive but also a major offensive capacity. China is working relentlessly to achieve a qualitative military advantage in fields such as cyberwarfare in order to cover its quantitative nuclear disadvantage to both the US and Russia.
- ❖ In space exploration, China took another important step by launching Queqiao on May 21, 2018, from Xichang Satellite Launch Center. Orbiting the moon, the satellite has made it possible for China to achieve its goal of becoming the first country to make a soft landing on the far side of the moon through its robotic Chang'e 4 lander-rover spacecraft, which achieved the landing on 3rd January, 2019. China has established itself as a credible competitor to the United States and Russia in the next upcoming space race.
- ❖ The Middle Kingdom, the world's most populous nation, is confronted with rapid demographic decline. By around 2025, probably for the first time in recorded history, the scoring on the world's most populous society will go to India, a long-term rival of China. China's demographically declining trend will, in the long run, have adverse consequences for its society and the country's overall national strength.
- ❖ China's most prosperous and stable periods came when Confucian principles were widely accepted and applied in everyday life. As Chinese society grows more

materialistic, a spiritual vacuum is slowly emerging, which the political leadership is trying to fill with communist ideology. At the same time, the installation of an electronic surveillance/monitoring system, unparalleled in sophistication and range, complete with behavioral social scoring bonuses and penalties - intended to exert central control over a vast nation – could give rise to as yet unknown behavioral reactions, possibly disrupting sociopolitical stability.

Closing Remarks

China's vision of modern Eurasianism rests on concepts once envisaged by such medieval nomadic powers as the Mongols and the Tamerlane (Timurid) empire, which however lacked both the strength and the resources for the fulfillment of such a massive endeavor. Chinese Eurasianism, embodied today principally by BRI, is changing the world and creating a new political and economic order based on an international economic network, with wider sociopolitical implications, as envisaged by the Middle Kingdom. It surpasses military alliance models or security arrangements of clusters of states and projects soft economic power in ways unprecedented in human history. As such, it directly confronts the established Anglo-Saxon global system. Europe, part of the Eurasian continent, may accept greater dependence on China, as long as China also embraces a certain degree of dependency on Europe. Russia may be the global power that will most benefit from these dynamic processes, remaining the bridge between Europe and China and cooperating with both regions on the European and Asian continents, while at the same time advancing its own international agenda.

China's GDP in 1980 was about USD 300 billion in current prices, whereas today it is around USD 14 trillion. Such enormous economic growth in such a short time has never been witnessed in human history. Since 1949, life expectancy has climbed from just over 40 to 76 years. In 1949, 21,000 Chinese citizens went to college, whereas in 2018, the number was over 7 million. Since 1990, GDP per capita has risen from about USD 350 in current prices to around USD 10,000, allowing millions of people to rise out of poverty. China has built almost 150,000 kms of highways and more than 120,000 kms of railways. During the same period, it never stopped expanding its military capabilities, which will soon reach a level to challenge US military supremacy. On the negative side, it amassed about USD 6 trillion in public debt and close to USD 8 trillion in household debt (although these may be conservative estimates), while at current projections the main state pension fund will run out of money by the end of the decade. For the last forty years, the West has neither understood nor really appreciated China's national aspirations. Ten years ago, experts doubted that China's economic development could make it a rival of the West. Within a communist system, China achieved the impossible, namely, to establish state capitalism demonstrating unique efficiency, despite its many shortcomings. The Chinese have absorbed into their own academic, industrial, military, and technological system technical and scientific intelligence from the entire world, while remaining a highly protectionist, centralized communist country. They have bought numerous companies in Europe, whereas it has been almost impossible for Europeans to invest in China without having to enter into a joint venture with a Chinese company. China will only open its markets at the point in time when it believes that its corporate sector is competitive enough to withstand international competition. It is difficult to say whether China will succeed in its ambitious goals or whether it will crumble and fall. It has both the determination as a nation and the incredible capacity repeatedly demonstrated to defy expectations, escape conventional economic wisdom, and ultimately succeed where Western political and socioeconomic forecasting tools foresee failure.

China's nationalism, an aggressive trade and foreign policy, sustained economic growth at all costs, and a huge military buildup are viewed with suspicion and

unease throughout the West. Lack of political reform, a strengthening of control in governance and nationwide, and persistent corruption could eventually undermine support for the central government among the public as well as among the intellectual and economic elites of China. A certain level of discomfort, fear, and insecurity clouds the future. The history of the People's Republic of China is nevertheless a gigantic and daring experiment. Whether current policies are internally an anachronistic throwback to authoritarian mass campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s, while externally a highly advanced technological state tries to assertively and systematically spread its influence, or else something much greater and far more visionary - all this remains to be seen.

Taiwan

The importance of Taiwan is enormous in the high-technology domain of the global economy, for a country with a population of about 23 million. Taiwanese corporations have large world market shares in semiconductor manufacturing, chip assembly, and chip design, or components such as lenses and power supply systems. Taiwan is one of the leading global exporters of chip components and related systems/ services.

Japan

- ❖ Japan is the world's third largest economy, with a homogeneous population and a considerable and expanding military force. US guarantees Japanese national security and, in exchange and through its partnership with Japan, the US projects its force across the Korean Peninsula, and further afield towards China and Russia, also partly inhibiting Russia's Vladivostok fleet from venturing into the Pacific Ocean.
- ❖ Japan is racing to reconfirm its status worldwide as technologically the most advanced nation in the world. A number of measures are being taken by the government to reinforce this objective, including new company start-up-support in multiple ministries, development of deregulated special industrial zones, subsidies and tax benefits for investments in innovation, and a new wide-ranging educational reform effort. From 2027, passengers should be able to travel back and forth between the metropolises of Tokyo and Nagoya by train at up to 500 km/h, while partner robots are soon to be introduced as home assistants. The Olympic Games this summer are set to become a showcase for the new innovative strength of old and new companies, where advanced fuel cell technology, self-driving cars and robots, facial recognition technologies, and translation programs will be employed and should attract global attention. Japanese companies currently have a global market share of more than 60 percent in 270 plus different components, intermediate products, and industrial materials.
- ❖ Japan is quietly building up its military, adopting new national defense guidelines with new aircraft and aircraft carrier capacities, keeping a constant eye on the massive increase in Chinese military capabilities. Increases in defense spending have reached all-time highs, with the military budget of Japan due to reach USD 50 billion this year. Japan has lately become increasingly assertive in Southeast Asia and has gradually also started being proactive in mainland Asia in both the economic and political domains. The country is progressively moving from a defense-oriented military to a fully capable offensive strategy, which might at some point include the nuclear option, to effectively address its strategic interests and national defense imperatives in a region with plenty of historically dark memories of wars and aggression.

- ❖ Japan's chronic economic situation is rather unique and probably sustainable in the long run, in as much as its financial system is closed, with government debt almost entirely financed by domestic creditors, while its currency is much more closely managed than the USD, the Euro, or the Pound Sterling.

Closing Remarks

Japanese Emperor Akihito stepped down from the Chrysanthemum Throne after 30 years on 30th April 2019, the first Japanese monarch to abdicate in more than 200 years. His son, Naruhito, ascended the throne as the 126th Emperor of Japan, launching the Japanese era with the name Reiwa, interpreted as «beautiful harmony». Monarchies in Japan exert little formal influence over policy but do carry strong symbolic meaning and can provide in a subtle way insight into political currents and sociocultural shifts, shaping Japan's power structures and ultimately its geopolitical behavior. Akihito, with carefully chosen words, expressed remorse over atrocities committed by the Japanese military during WWII, opening the way and creating the necessary political space for incoming Japanese leaders to cultivate deeper ties in Asian states and ultimately repositioning Japan as an emerging regional political, military, and economic power. Japan is embarking on a new era, marked by intense regional competition, departing from its half century of pacifist foreign policy and international isolation.

India & Pakistan

- ❖ India is the world's largest democracy. It is the world's fifth largest economy (in nominal GDP terms), with growth rates outpacing most countries, and its weight in world affairs is increasing. India plays a key role in containing China, supporting stability in Central and South Asia and protecting oil and trade flows in the Indian Ocean. Its constitution recognizes 22 languages, but there are hundreds if not thousands more spoken across the country, while secularism stands for the equal treatment by the state of all religious groups. In India, individuals continue to largely associate with their own caste. Technologically, the nation is advancing rapidly. India has, nevertheless, yet to find a cohesive way to act *ethnologically* as an entity. For most of its existence, it has followed a decentralized, secular approach to governance. It has recently been experimenting with a centralized approach that promotes a single national identity, a daring and difficult political task.
- ❖ India is one of the fastest growing countries in the world, with its GDP rising at an approximate average 7% rate annually over the last 20 years, thanks to healthy lending and liquidity. It is among the top five countries in the number of startup businesses in the world. Its retail market value is about USD 600 billion, one of the top five retail markets globally. For the modernization of this vast nation, at least USD 6.0 trillion are required in investment over the next five years, about 20% of which would be directed towards infrastructure. Within its economy shadow banking, i.e., non-banking, non-regulated financial institutions play a pivotal role in providing credit and supporting consumption and investment, creating a long-term systemic risk due to the magnitude of the unregulated parts of credit provision. As long as current growth rates are maintained, India has the potential to become the world's third largest economy in absolute terms in the next decade.
- ❖ The status of the Kashmir region in the Himalayas has fueled the dispute between arch-enemies, India and Pakistan, both of which have claimed parts of Kashmir for seven decades. China is also part of that dispute, the main points of friction with India being unresolved border disputes, land claimed by India, a gaping

Indian trade deficit with China, and Indian distrust of Chinese expansion in South Asia. The potential for conflict has increased, among other things, through China's efforts to expand its influence in South Asia as part of its rapidly expanding Belt and Road Initiative. India is observing with much suspicion that an important corridor of the BRI will pass through Pakistan.

- ❖ Fearing encirclement by China's increasing military presence and depending more and more on vital economic maritime lifelines, India is expanding its defense presence across the Indo-Pacific. From the coasts of southeastern Africa to the Malacca Strait and into Southeast and East Asia, India is seeking to strategically forge alliances with local states and gain access to foreign ports and military bases while at the same time building up its naval and air forces and related military infrastructure. In terms of its foreign policy, India cooperates with the US, especially since Russia is forging a deeper strategic convergence with China. However, a serious break with Russia is highly unlikely given India's deep dependence on Russian defense platforms. Although India lacks China's vast economic means and cannot match the size of its naval force, nevertheless, its geographical position is highly advantageous, while it has firm US support working in its favor. India's strategy is to look selectively for targeted strategic advantages by reaching out to its island neighbors, focusing its naval strength on maritime chokepoints, and, above all, ensuring its continuous backing by a powerful ally, the US, exploiting every competitive edge in the ongoing race for dominance over the Indian Ocean.
- ❖ In March 2019, India signed a USD 3 billion intergovernmental agreement with Russia to lease an *Akula* class nuclear-powered attack submarine for 10 years. Russia remains India's largest military supplier. This will be the third submarine India has leased from Russia with a targeted operational date in 2025. *Akula* type submarines are considered to be next only to the newer US nuclear submarines when it comes to stealth and attack capabilities.
- ❖ The Indian Space Research Organization may re-attempt a moon landing by November 2020 after the Chandrayan-2 space mission failed on a scheduled soft moon landing on September 6th, 2019. India is challenging China in the international space race.

Closing Remarks

India, the world's most populous democracy, will defend its position against efforts by Pakistan – its main rival – and China to challenge its sovereignty in any part of its territory. An integral part of its strategy includes an alliance with the US to protect the Indo-Pacific region and in particular the South China Sea from Chinese territorial and sovereignty claims. With China and Russia, the de facto US strategic rivals, the United States has no other choice but to try to win India as an ally for the long term given India's heavy economic and military weight. US objectives, however, only partly overlap with India's strategic interests. India does not feel overly threatened by China's power and does not want to directly confront China. It will seek that fine balance so as to coexist harmoniously with China while at the same time protecting its own territorial rights. India is undoubtedly emerging as an ever-stronger voice on the global stage. It shares some common symbolic background with China, as both nations experienced humiliation by Western powers in the past. Ultimately, it may partially cooperate with the US to the extent that the US will assist India in achieving its own goals and interests, which most probably will fall short of what the US is expecting of India as a permanent reliable geostrategic partner.

Indonesia

With a population of more than 265 million, the Indonesian archipelago, comprising 17,000 islands, is the world's largest island country, the 14th largest country by land area, and the 7th if sea and land are combined. It is by far the largest economy in Southeast Asia. Indonesia has abundant natural resources i.e., oil, coal, natural gas, gold, and metals, as well as agricultural products. The US, China, Japan, India, and Singapore are its main trading partners. With economic growth just over 5%, Indonesia is one of the most attractive markets in the world. In nominal GDP terms, it ranks in 16th place today. With over 40 million Indonesians already belonging to the middle class, Indonesia has the potential to become the 7th largest economy in the world by 2030 and the 4th largest by 2050.

Australia

Australia, in a significant geo-economic policy move, has initiated a strategy to challenge China's global leadership (or near monopoly) position in the supply of rare earth materials, extensively used in the defense and high-tech industries, by utilizing its vast mineral deposits throughout major mines in its territory. A newly signed deal between Australia and the US focusing on critical earth minerals has the potential to open the path for a thriving rare earth industry in Australia.

The US

- ❖ With the US resigning from the UN Human Rights Council, viewing the Council as an institution with untrustworthy tendencies and showing unwarranted ongoing hostility towards Israel, its withdrawal from the Paris climate treaty and UNESCO, and its criticism of the World Trade Organization and reduction of contributions to several UN agencies, the US administration is opening the way for a major overhaul of transnational structures or for a new international system of governance, with far more practicality, objectivity, and fairness.
- ❖ September 2019 was the first month of a positive US oil trade balance since the 1940s, signifying that the US has become a net oil exporter.
- ❖ The share of total wealth in the US held by the wealthiest 1% of the population is around 40%. The wealth gap between the top 10% of the US population and the middle class is over 1000%, increasing another 1000% for the top 1%. These worrisome statistics denote a US trend accelerating since the 1980s and present *an inequality measure* very much in line with the wealth distribution pattern of autocratically run states.
- ❖ Immigration has historically benefitted the wealthy in the US, while, for the poorest strata of the population, it has meant tension and violence. It is this latter darker side of the immigration equation that in the US needs far more efficient handling through policy adjustments. Immigration cannot be stopped; it could, however, be handled more efficiently. The US cannot survive without an inflow of immigrants and the use of low-cost labor; this has been a historical truth underlying the birth and growth of this nation.
- ❖ A new tool in American foreign policy has been the utilization of economic measures for concession to US demands, evident in the US's policy concerning China, Iran, and Russia. US military engagements over the past seven decades have yielded poor results, whereas the use of economic warfare, relying on the hard fact that other countries are heavily dependent on American economic

might, its markets, and the US Dollar, gives Washington an alternative to the military option. A new reality is emerging in US global strategy: in first order comes economic power to shape foreign policy, without excluding the second in line, i.e., military action.

- ❖ The US Army is planning the largest military exercise of the past 25 years, *Defender 2020*, on European soil. This year, 37,000 personnel will participate in ten countries, primarily Germany and Poland, while 20,000 soldiers are being transported from the US to Europe. The exercise will take place throughout April and May 2020.
- ❖ As of 2nd August 2019 the US withdrew from the *Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty)*, an arms control treaty concerning the elimination of intermediate and short range missiles, between the US and the Soviet Union (and by extension to its successor, the Russian Federation) signed on December 8, 1987. The US is now free to deploy its own land-based missiles in the Western Pacific and South China Sea. Politically, the US may encounter difficulties in persuading its allies to allow the positioning of these weapons in their territories, as these areas may thereby automatically become prime targets of both China and Russia. It will, nevertheless, ultimately work its way to strategically station its tactical and strategic weapons in the intended regions.
- ❖ US policymakers will continue to see no value in sustaining arms control pacts as long as Russia and China either violate them or abstain from these treaties while growing their own military capacities at an alarming rate on all fronts.
- ❖ The US Government has established *U.S. Space Command* as the *Eleventh Unified Combatant Command* to ensure the protection of American interests and allow unobstructed access of military operations in space. It puts the US on a clear path to maintaining a competitive advantage in space warfare. The next critical follow-up policy direction will be the establishment of an independent *U.S. Space Force* with a broad space development function, as the sixth branch of US armed forces alongside the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, scheduled for the end of 2020. The US Department of Defense/Joint Artificial Intelligence Center may receive up to USD 300 million for its 2020 budget, nearly triple the amount of the previous year (but far less than what had been requested) in a direct response to China's information technology and AI advances.

Closing Remarks

The United States has been instrumental in shaping the global economic order for the past 75 years, while it has been the world's largest economy for the entire 20th century and still is. Its 2019 nominal GDP totaled about USD 21.45 trillion, accounting for nearly a quarter of the global economy. It has the largest voting share in both the IMF and the World Bank, transnational institutions responsible for direct economic support and assistance of various nations around the globe. In the IMF, the US share of votes (about 16.50%) is large enough to allow it unique veto power over any action the fund may try to take, putting the US in a position to direct the Organization's overall course. Its influence is similar within the World Bank. Through the international SWIFT payment system, the US controls international transactions and the effectiveness of global economic sanctions. Russia and China have worked out alternatives to these US-tied mechanisms but are still far from forming substitutes equal in effectiveness and global reach.

A strengthening of historical US alliances in the Middle East and the Asian-Pacific region will considerably help to retain US influence in Eurasia while limiting the

breadth, scope, and intensity of China's, Russia's, and Iran's activities in the above area. The US's influence across Eurasia will be strengthened with generous long-lasting economic cooperation offers to nations strategically located in the region, India being at the top of the list. The US has to find a way to cooperate with Europe not only under the military NATO umbrella but also in large-scale economic issues. Its policies, with all the necessary adjustments to deal with emerging challenges, should contain a friendlier reconciliatory tone towards China if the goal is to sustain, to the extent possible, the existing world order. If such a policy is not only theoretically but also practically feasible, it would certainly raise possibilities for long-lasting security in Eurasia - a foreign policy task that requires an incredible effort from Western and Chinese politicians. History provides little reassurance as to the possibilities for success in this matter, but it is certainly worthwhile aiming for such a goal.

The US continues to be deeply engaged in the world and any discussions about disengagement remain unrelated to true American foreign policy and corresponding action. The US is redefining its trade relationship with China and is most likely on a collision course with the rising Asian giant. It remains on the alert regarding North Korea and the possibility, despite bilateral talks, that N. Korea will ultimately attempt to deploy intercontinental nuclear armed ballistic missiles. The US Navy periodically conducts freedom of navigation operations in the East and South China Seas in response to escalating Chinese territorial claims. The US will continue to militarily support Japan. In South Asia, the US is engaged in end-phase negotiations with the Taliban to bring an end to the 17-year war in Afghanistan. In the Middle East, it is actively pursuing an Iran containment strategy, which country exerts powerful influence in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen while also pursuing an ambitious grand strategy to dominate the entire region. An arc of Iranian power reaching from Central Asia to the Mediterranean presents a clear geostrategic threat to numerous Arab nations in the wider region and to US global strategy. The US's strategic military alliance with the state of Israel remains intact. US strategy has remained unaltered over time in Europe: no single power should dominate the European continent. In Europe, the US has significant military outposts, including Poland in Central and Romania in Eastern Europe, though the likelihood of a Russian attack in Europe remains, in our view, very low. Given the importance of the Russian factor for Europe, the geopolitical equation that the European continent seeks to solve is a delicate and complicated one, since Europe cannot afford a split with the still dominant global power, the US. Despite media noise and multiple opinions circulating the globe in monotonous ever repetitive cycles, the plain truth is that, although US foreign policy evolves dynamically according to circumstances, it always contains continuity at its core dictated by necessity. That is true today and we see absolutely no disruption on the horizon. The US remains deeply engaged globally and this is not about to change.

Latin America

- ❖ Mexico has replaced China as the United States' top trade partner, with Canada and China competing for second and third place. Mexico has the 15th largest economy in the world measured in nominal USD GDP figures. Globalization may not be dead, but regionalization is rising with intraregional trading registering a healthy increase.
- ❖ Venezuela has the largest proven oil reserves in the world, probably over 300 billion barrels, which is why Russian oil companies have been investing in the Venezuelan energy sector. Venezuela is a potential market for Russian wheat as well as medical and engineering products. Uruguay and Argentina account for

about 12% of Russian dairy imports, with Argentina being the second largest supplier after Belarus of cheese to Russia.

- ❖ Guyana on the Atlantic South American coast located between Venezuela, Brazil, and Suriname will over the next decade become one of the world's leading producers of oil on a per capita basis. It could also make the country one of the most important US allies in the region, especially in the light of a continuing highly unstable political situation in Venezuela.
- ❖ South America is no longer a turnaround growth story but rather a risk region for the global economy. Protests throughout Latin America, mostly concentrated on its Pacific west side, have their origin in several years or decades of weak growth, the disappointed hopes of the middle class, high-income gaps, inadequate public services, and the continuing extreme levels of corruption. Wealth is accumulated, with economic elites representing around 1% of the population but controlling about 30% of national wealth. At the same time, career advancement of the ordinary citizen has worsened considerably.

Closing Remarks

In South America, anti-government protests are challenging the US's influential role and its relations in the region. Throughout South America two opposing systems are fighting for sociopolitical and economic dominance. One is aligned with open-market, fiscally conservative and the second with socially controlled, interventionist, public spending policies, forming alternating political cycles. They are further aligned with respectively different global powers, the former with the US and the latter primarily with Russia and/or China. Such cycles have their origin in the colonial pasts of Latin American nations and in their collective experiences with US-driven economic policies. As global economic pressures intensify, polarization between the two camps competing for influence becomes more pronounced and relations grow more strained, creating interventionist openings and respective opportunities for other powers outside the Western hemisphere and, in particular, Russia and China. Russia has been concentrating primarily on the Caribbean, predominantly Venezuela, due to its proximity to the US and its existing Cold War political ties in the region, which Russia has maintained. China faces a more challenging task, as its ties with South America do not have any historical background and can only rest on economic and commercial platforms, manifested through the offering of favorable financing for various commercial, infrastructure, and natural resources projects. As China pursues this path, it seeks over time to develop what is lacking, that is, a more permanent political base in South America.

Geopolitics

- ❖ The ongoing trade confrontation between China and the US is not a temporary issue as both nations have different geopolitical viewpoints, which makes it highly unlikely that a viable long-term solution to their dispute will be found anytime soon. China is a sophisticated competitor and the US will need a strategy, which is not yet evident, to counter Chinese ambitions. The Chinese possess strategy, patience, and huge financial resources to bring the Eurasian region under their control, while the US will, with all its might, try not to allow any single nation to attain such a level of power as to dominate the Eurasian continent, either entirely or controlling a major part of it. Beijing is building up its military capabilities at an alarmingly fast pace, enhancing its naval power and army as well as its cyber and nuclear warfare capacities. If China succeeds in dominating its surrounding seas, then its power projection will expand more easily over the Pacific and Indian Oceans, providing control over vital maritime routes. As this giant geopolitical and

geostrategic game unfolds at a multidimensional level, with peaks and lows in intensity, the possibility of an outright military US-China confrontation will be looming in the background with a continuously higher likelihood of actually breaking out. In this intensifying struggle, both nations will maximize their efforts to win allies. The roles of Russia as a nuclear superpower and of India as a nuclear and rapidly growing regional power will be decisive, as they could certainly tilt the balance of power to one or the other side. China and Russia are already at an advanced stage of a longer-term diplomatic friendship and cooperation, whereas the US is trying to win over India onto its side, a questionable endeavor. Modern China, being native to the Eurasian landmass, has the advantages of a disciplined, methodological, long-term policy planning approach. The outcome of such a power struggle, unfolding over the current decade, could well be, in the end, a multipolar world where Western dominance will have permanently become an issue of the past and where power will have to be shared among multiple players.

- ❖ For centuries, competition over the Black Sea has made it an area of repeated conflict. The contest has historically been most pronounced between Russia and Turkey, which have fought countless wars to secure access to the Black Sea and the surrounding countries. The denial by the West of a critical buffer zone has driven Russia to intervene in Ukraine. Old struggles once again manifest themselves in the form of energy or political disputes but should ultimately in their true origin be viewed as the regeneration of historic geopolitical, geostrategic, confrontational themes.
- ❖ From Eastern Europe to the Caucasus and further into Central Asia, the United States is engaged in an ongoing strategic effort to increase ties with countries in the former Soviet periphery. The battle for influence in Central Asia is complicated further through China's fast advancing Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) program and its ambition for control of the vast Eurasian landmass. Any effort by the US to infiltrate Russia's borderlands will, in turn, elicit a sharp Russian response and will shape Moscow's policy initiatives aimed against the West, which would likely manifest themselves with a variety of soft and hard policy directives, including economic measures, hybrid warfare tactics, sophisticated propaganda, and direct intervention or other military action, Moscow reclaiming what it considers its own peripheral space of influence.
- ❖ Central Asia as a region forms a natural buffer zone for Russia, separating it from unstable areas of the Middle East and from such actions as war, extremism, and terrorism. From an economic point of view, Russia recognizes Central Asia as a region through which key routes supply energy and other goods to growing markets like China, India, and Pakistan. China views the Central Asian countries as geographical space through which trade routes run that are critical for the BRI, as a growing market for Chinese products, and as a source of essential natural resources. In this extensive geographical space, China has far more reasons to cooperate than to compete or, even worse, to clash with Russia, in fact sharing, as it does, most of Moscow's security concerns. Moscow and Beijing do not see each other as direct rivals in Central Asia, at least not in the near future and as long as they have one main major adversary, the US. Consequently, China may be willing, for the time being, to take a backseat in Central Asia and will not enter into a regional supremacy race with Moscow. Since the formation of the *Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)* in 1992, Russia has been the main security guarantor for Central Asian countries, and in particular Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Tajikistan, and, towards its western European borders, Belarus. Russia has deep and firmly established ties in Central Asia, and its embedded interests in the region are both strategic and economic. Although it is increasingly facing competition for influence, no other nation will for the foreseeable future

match Russia's presence, its ability to massively project power, and its overall impact and influence in the region.

- ❖ Historic, ancient, and deeply rooted tensions between the Slavic and Han civilizations could, over the long run, emerge in Sino-Russian relationships. Chinese territorial expansion, based on historical claims, into Russia's thinly populated far eastern region bordering the Pacific could be the trigger. Vladivostok, home port of the Russian Pacific Fleet and the largest Russian port on the Pacific coast, is a strategic node and could find itself at the heart of such a potential conflict. It is too early to attempt an answer to the question as to whether the recently established Russian-Chinese ties are of a true strategic, long-lasting nature or whether China, with its growing geopolitical objectives, which intersect and potentially clash with Russian strategic plans in Eurasia, will prevail and whether this will, at some point in the future, lead to military conflict between the two Eurasian giants.
- ❖ Both China and Russia have increased their influence on the African continent through investment, money, and foreign policy initiatives. Russian interests in Africa are characterized by diversified levels of support to various states, providing Moscow with openings to rich raw-material resource bases. Moscow may be in the process of constructing a naval base on Sudan's Red Sea coast to expand its influence over the Horn of Africa and strengthen its presence over the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. Russia is also working on agreements with Eritrea and Egypt on naval and military logistics bases. China is primarily active in Central and East Africa, with the financing of major infrastructure projects, i.e., roads, railway lines, and ports, which could directly serve its maritime Belt and Road program, the harvesting of natural resources, political influence in the region, and the control of vital maritime links. Competition over the continent's major natural resources and the corresponding jockeying for new alliances among African states and global powers represents yet another evolving battle for world supremacy, a new stage of competition between Russia, China, and the US.
- ❖ The Middle East is becoming a major geopolitical centrum of world power competition, with the three continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe, but also three seas, namely, the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Arabian Sea, intersecting there. The Black and the Caspian Seas also indirectly lead to the Levant via their production and energy distribution lines. Four maritime strategic channels, those of the Bosphorus, the Dardanelles, Bab al-Mandeb, and Hormuz, also point to the Middle East. The Gulf States have begun to seek ways to enhance their cooperation ties with China for the achievement of economic transformation, reducing their over-reliance on the energy sector and ultimately strengthening their positions in an increasingly vulnerable geopolitical environment, without severing their alliances with the US. Mediterranean peripheral and borderline nations, including Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Egypt, Libya, and Israel, are all active in the region's huge, emerging energy exploration sector. The Middle East, notwithstanding its present-day ethnic, political, and social conflicts and its religious fanaticism, can become a game changer for the strategic objectives of major world and regional powers, intermingled in a delicate game of seeking new balances, or ultimately contributing inadvertently towards the redrawing of existing political and territorial statuses.
- ❖ The geopolitical power struggle over the Horn of Africa reflects political and economic conflicts in the wider region. Central to this has been the proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran in Yemen. Djibouti, a French colony until 1977, lies between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden on the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, translation of the Arabic «Gate of Tears». This geostrategically important location connects Africa with the Middle East and provides a gateway to Asia, with Yemen

just a few miles away on the opposite coast. All trade transported by sea between Asia and Europe passes by Djibouti, which renders it the most important port in South-East Africa. A blockage of the passage into the Red Sea would precipitate a major world crisis and could be devastating for the world economy. A number of major nations have military bases in Djibouti, namely, the US, France, Italy, Japan, and China, with the French military base hosting troops from Germany and Spain, while Saudi Arabia is planning to establish one, and India is also a likely candidate. The Horn of Africa, with Djibouti the epicenter of world power concentration, is a region with immense geostrategic weight closely related to what is happening in the Middle East and will play a major role in any major conflict breaking out in the wider region.

- ❖ South America is situated on the periphery of the global system, in the Southern Hemisphere. The continent, washed by two oceans, the Atlantic and the Pacific, and accounting for approximately one-third of the global landmass and one-tenth of its population, is fairly distant from the rest of the world. The Caribbean, including the northern coast of South America, plays a key role in US maritime security. The northern nations of South America represent the border area between North and South America. Venezuela is the country with the largest petroleum deposits worldwide - estimated at over 300 billion barrels of proven and about 1.3 trillion barrels of recoverable heavy oil in the Orinoco oil belt. Brazil and Colombia play a pivotal role in South American geopolitics. Brazil is characterized by its large size, its natural boundaries, and its north-south divide, the north dominated by the vast Amazon River region and the Guiana Highlands. Venezuelan migrants fleeing the ongoing crisis present a serious challenge for Brazil, potentially resulting in the creation of a borderland between the two countries that could pull the outer reaches of Brazil away from its core. Brazil's access to the Pacific depends on sea lanes running past Venezuela and the Caribbean through the Panama Canal. Disruptions in this sea route could have major implications for the Brazilian economy. Colombia is a bicoastal nation with access to both the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, with its mountain masses and the Magdalena River dissecting the country, making overland transportation between the Pacific and Atlantic coasts difficult. The vast majority of Colombia's exports and imports are routed through the Atlantic Ocean, with Pacific ports and infrastructure to a large extent neglected. Colombia has overcome some of its weaknesses and challenges - the consequence of its bordering five different countries - such as territorial disputes and tensions with Venezuela over resource-rich areas, by simply aligning itself with the United States. The vast southern American territories undoubtedly remain under the geostrategic influence of the US, and if the US were forced to remind an outside power of this fact, it would certainly do so.
- ❖ Australia is militarizing the waters off its eastern coast to solidify its control over the Coral Sea by upgrading military infrastructure and establishing a permanent Australian naval force. The goal is to deny to any foreign power hostile to Australia's interests use of any island countries that could block trade in and out of Australia, or, in a worst-case scenario, their using them as a springboard for invasion. Both China and Australia are drawing their defensive lines with three buffer states between them: Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. It is around these three island nations that the real battle for supremacy in the Pacific will primarily be fought in the coming decades, a competition still in its infancy.
- ❖ With the inauguration in 2016 of the Russian Cathedral of the Holy Trinity in one of the most prestigious locations in the French capital, on the left bank of the Seine and a short distance from the Eiffel Tower, Moscow prominently displays its aim of becoming the leader of Ecumenical Orthodoxy, the *Third Rome*, to which it has been aspiring since 1453. It therefore directly challenges *the Christian*

Orthodox Ecumenical role of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, its Byzantine Empire heritage, and the power of Orthodox Christian Hellenism. The power of symbols is coming back with unforeseen intensity. Hellenism and Pan-Slavism collide once again, and Paris, one of the most important cultural centers of the world, with today this Russian symbol at the heart of it, highlights the vast, overarching dimensions of the confrontation.

Closing Remarks

Any future evolvement in terms of the EU as a potential fourth global pole of power as well as its direction, form and potential role on the Eurasian and African fronts, are open issues not yet discernible. European powers are not non-existent; they are simply still dormant. The only active exception is France, with its initiatives on the European-Russian rapprochement front, on the EU's overall security and foreign policy, and in the Middle East, which may well indicate its emerging leading role within Europe.

The Russian-Chinese partnership may have significantly more substance and strategic depth than is generally assumed. It reflects both Moscow's disenchantment with the West and possibly a long-term redirection of its foreign policy towards the East and China. Both nations, Russia and China, adhere to a worldview that is different from the US's long-established one, while both are challenged by the US, the longstanding doctrine of which stands for a division of the Eurasian landmass among multiple smaller power centers. For the West, the loss of Russia in a China-dominated world could translate into a geopolitical catastrophe, reversing almost one thousand years of western European economic as well as cultural influence eastwards. Through large parts of its history, Russia was strongly influenced predominantly by the Byzantine and later the European civilizations. If Russia were lost to the West, Chinese influence could well spread to most of Eurasia and all the way up to the Arctic. This would open the way for Chinese influence right up to the edges of Eastern Europe. For its part, Moscow aims for a multipolar world, denying the US's global role as the sole dominant power. A disengagement of Russia's foreign policy from Europe does hold, from both a historical and geopolitical viewpoint, certain merit, although in a world swept by strong currents of change, such a development is not at all certain. Putin's foreign policy emphasizes Russia's East Slavic roots and European heritage as well as its Asian ethnicities. Russian political elites are aiming for a Russia far more independent but also diversified, open-mindedly embracing numerous geographical regions and different ethnicities in its foreign policy. The net positive or negative outcome of such multidimensional policy directions for Russia, for Europe, and for their interrelationship, whether they are sustainable or whether for one or the other reason they are reversed, will all depend on many factors and can therefore at this point not be assessed, and even less predicted. They will become far clearer by the middle of this decade. They also depend on the West's reaction and its openings and offers to Russia (visible in the latest foreign policy initiatives of France's President). US reaction to the development of European-Russian, European-Chinese, and Sino-Russian relationships is another influencing parameter. Such global geopolitical realignments have, historically, almost always been accompanied by strong projection of both soft and military power. Although history is said to frequently repeat itself, in our current age of major paradigm shifts, it may simply defy the rule and allow something new to be born ...

Geostrategy

- ❖ If NATO continues to increase its military presence on Russia's western borders, Russia may deploy additional troops to its southern and western military districts in retaliatory symmetrical action with the unfolding of NATO's strategies. Moscow is increasingly concerned about NATO's military buildup in Norway, notably the modernization of airfields and submarine ports.
- ❖ As the US and Germany may not need each other strategically to the extent that they used to, the issue of Germany becoming a self-reliant nuclear power could arise at some point in the future, a task which Germany possesses the technology to accomplish fairly fast if it decided to do so.
- ❖ The tripartite partnership between Israel, Greece, and Cyprus may become an important element of Eastern Mediterranean security for the remainder of the 21st century, reinforced by the support of the US through the 2019 *Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act (EastMed Act)*. As the East Mediterranean is emerging as a geographical area of huge geoeconomic and geostrategic value, the *EastMed Act* is creating the foundation platform for a decisive, long-range US strategy to meet new challenges and opportunities in the region. Turkey's expansionist and hostile attitude is drawing the Eastern Mediterranean *axis of democracy* even more closely together. The magnitude of the new hydrocarbon energy discoveries will, in addition, encourage the EU to play a bigger role in future developments in the region. Over the long run, strategic cooperation between Greece, Israel, Cyprus, and Egypt with US support can make an enormous contribution to regional security and to economic development in the region, although the still ambivalent US position towards Turkey casts a shadow over the reliability of the US umbrella of security against Turkish aggression.
- ❖ The *Suwalki Gap* (image on page 77) is the only strategic passage connecting the operational base of NATO in Poland to the Baltic states and is consequently vulnerable to any Russian military advances. The connection of the Baltic states with the rest of western Europe effectively depends on the control of that passage. Similarly, the *Smolensk Gate*, located between the Dnieper and Dzwina Rivers, is an area which historically has served as the primary invasion avenue from Russia to Poland through Belarus, making it an outmost strategic spot in Central-Eastern Europe. These geopolitical realities simply designate Poland as the key country in the geostrategic layout of Central Europe.
- ❖ The Black Sea is a region deeply connected to Russian interests and any Western operations there will be watched closely and will elicit a strong response from Russia. If the US deploys new intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Europe, Belarus and Russia will most probably consider a joint response, such as the setting up of a Russian air base in Belarus.
- ❖ The Kremlin is demonstrating in Syria how a foreign policy poker game can be won even with modest cards. Moscow's recipe is a combination of diplomacy, military alertness, flexibility, creative will, and ruthlessness. Russia, capitalizing on a US partial withdrawal, has been taking over from the US the control of an entire buffer zone in northeastern Syria. The Kremlin has come one step closer to its goal of extending Assad's reign over the entire Syrian territory, although within this process, it risks damaging its alliance with Turkey, which, in any case, has never been one of strategic depth and endurance. The successful Russian strategies in Syria should also be a warning about things to come in a region much closer to Europe: Ukraine's Donbass.

THE SUWALKI & SMOLENSK PASSAGES

GEOSTRATEGIC GATES IN EUROPEAN GEOGRAPHY



- ❖ Russia has been devoting considerable attention to the Arctic, steadily increasing its infrastructure and military presence there. The Arctic is of growing geopolitical and geo-economic importance, as it contains about 13% of world's oil deposits and about 30% of undiscovered world natural gas reserves. Russia is in the process of militarily upgrading the Siberian coast, which in the Arctic allows it the complete control of the *Northern Sea Route*, at the same time possibly influencing the *Northwest Passage* on Canada's side. With the opening of new commercial shipping routes through the Arctic waters, the level of control of the region or parts of the region will become imperative from a geostrategic point of view. The deployment of US warships in the Arctic marks its clear objectives as a leading contestant for Arctic resources and territorial control.

NORTHERN ARCTIC MARITIME ROUTES



- ❖ Saudi-Iranian and Israeli-Iranian enmities largely define the foundation of regional dynamics out of which an Israeli-Saudi shadow alliance has emerged. The establishment of Iran as the leading regional power is, beyond any doubt, counter to both Israeli and US geostrategic interests.
- ❖ The aim of the US in the Middle East is to inhibit the creation of a permanent Iranian sphere of control stretching from Iran through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon to the Mediterranean Sea and to prevent Iran from developing nuclear military capacity. Although the US and Russia may be engaged in a new cold war, they do share some common objectives in the Middle East, in as much as neither power wants to see Iran gain a more permanent foothold in Syria. Within this framework

comes the Russian initiative for a new multilateral security arrangement in the Middle East involving a transnational organizational set-up along the lines of the *Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)*, involving multiple nations predominantly Russia, China, India, and the US. This theoretically interesting but, practically speaking, most likely unattainable plan still leaves the most important question open regarding Iran's nuclear program and the possibilities of Iran becoming militarily a nuclear power, a prospect viewed by Israel as a direct threat to its national security.

- ❖ The twin maritime lanes in the Strait of Hormuz hold the keys to the safe passage of about half of the known oil supplies of the world. China maintains a strategic high-tech maritime post in Gwadar on the Arabian Sea in the Baluchistan province of Pakistan, establishing a strategic link between *its maritime and its continental silk roads*, effectively connecting energy lines from the Arabian Peninsula to corresponding energy nodes in western China. From Gwadar, China could significantly influence, if not control, the maritime traffic through the Straits of Hormuz. This forms part of China's strategic expansion of its energy and transportation infrastructure and distribution lines through Central Asia all the way down to Iran. A potential military conflict between the US and Iran could therefore send Iran straight into a China alliance. From Gwadar, oil and gas could easily flow in abundance to China, bypassing the Straits of Malacca, a vulnerable maritime passage for China. Iran - a hydrocarbon-rich energy state with a coastline of 2,440 kms (plus 740 kms on the Caspian Sea) extending through the Straits of Hormuz into the Indian Ocean - stretching from Iraq and Kuwait to Pakistan and India, forms the core of China's long-term geopolitical strategy, a strategy which could, to a large extent, hold the keys to the development of Central Asia.
- ❖ India and Australia are deeply concerned about Chinese economic and military encroachment into their traditional spheres of influence, manifesting itself in the series of deep-water ports China is building in strategically valuable locations throughout the Indo-Pacific along its *Maritime Silk Road*. China has ownership stakes in nearly two-thirds of the world's 50 largest container ports, with the necessary logistics support in a number of ports allowing it to sustain potential naval deployments in areas as distant as the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Atlantic Ocean. The US, Japan, India, and Australia may as a group never evolve into a formal security alliance, but their partial strategic convergence will be a key determinant in preserving the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.
- ❖ China's primary strategic interest is maintaining its territorial integrity and, in that respect, a potential American blockage of its maritime access to the South and the East China Seas could be devastating. Conversely, an extension of China's fast-growing maritime power into sea lanes that would force the US to retreat from the Western Pacific is geostrategically unacceptable to the US and could be a cause for war. US naval presence around the China seas is creating an existential threat for China, this causing China to implement a policy which would maximize risks of substantial collateral damage for naval forces if a military confrontation in its vast maritime region were to occur, hopefully prompting the US and/or Japan plus their allies to avoid such a confrontation. On the Japanese side, a new aggressive national military strategy is creating a sufficient threat to China, compelling it not to challenge Japanese interests. In that respect, the nuclear option appears to be the only truly effective future avenue for Japan. In this intricate and complicated economic and military power game, also involving other growing players in the region such as Australia and India, the US still retains the upper hand thanks to its massive military capacity, while from a foreign policy and military strategy view, one could possibly argue that it still maintains far

more space for action than any other major power. From the Sea of Japan to the East and South China Seas down to the Strait of Malacca and the Indian Ocean and eastward to the Philippine Sea and the Pacific Ocean, the existing US presence is vital, while China will inevitably continue developing maritime defensive and offensive power to try and deny the US complete sea lane control. A factor of strategic importance which could further complicate the balance of power in this sensitive region and present an additional challenge for US military planners is the fortification of China's alliance with Russia. Japan, on its side, will become far more active in its foreign policy while proceeding with the rapid development of advanced offensive military capacities and responding to China's growing maritime power, meantime remaining firmly under the US security umbrella.

- ❖ China's *no-first-use nuclear doctrine* cannot be verified nor be trusted (as the country is not party to any nuclear-arms treaty), nor will Beijing disclose its true military planning, real nuclear capacities and offensive/defensive strategies. In any potential future confrontation with the US, China may employ unconventional military tactics. In US military war simulations, the US in most cases loses the war to China when the latter employs unconventional war techniques, which have their roots in ancient Chinese warfare, while winning in all conventional war scenarios. Probably like no other nation in the world, China has been exploring the strategic weaknesses, as well as offensive and defensive capacities of IT systems, plus the key military, intelligence, and economic systems along with the infrastructure layouts of its adversaries.
- ❖ China and Russia are engaging the US in almost every part of the southern hemisphere, in such places as Venezuela and the Caribbean, as well as in more distant regions such as Africa and the North Pole. China's strategically evolving mega-investments throughout the world in many cases involve, beyond the economic aspect, also a security and military objective.
- ❖ *The Monroe Doctrine*, delivered by the 5th US President James Monroe in his Seventh Annual Message to Congress on December 2nd, 1823, was a United States policy declaration asserting that the Old and the New World are distinct systems and spheres and explicitly opposing European colonialism in the Americas, the latter being viewed as a hostile disposition towards the US. Translated into today's geostrategic terms, the doctrine, still alive and well, means that the US would oppose any foreign power extending its active reach to the Western Hemisphere, i.e., the Americas. Particularly relevant to the US side of the Atlantic is the projection of military power by Russia and China in the Caribbean and Venezuela. In particular, Russia's involvement in the Caribbean and Latin America rests on the ongoing effort to increase its presence in the Western Hemisphere. U.S.-Russian and US-Chinese rivalries are therefore coming rather too close to home for the US, i.e., the stationing of Russian military aircraft in Venezuela and activities of Russian submarines in the Gulf of Mexico. This could trigger a response on the part of the US as a strong reminder of the US's historical unchallengeable spheres of influence.

Closing Remarks

US grand strategy has three overriding objectives. The first and most important by far is the containment of China in its bid for world supremacy. The other two are the containment of Russia and Iran. The theater of potential US-Chinese interaction/confrontation is the vast sea area from the Sea of Japan to the South China Sea and Indonesia. Regarding the US's second objective, the geographical interaction space with Russia lies predominantly in the former Soviet regions of the north-east European plain as well as in the Black Sea region. Poland in the north and Romania in the east are American allies. Adding Turkey to the alliance

is strengthening the US's position considerably, while containing both Russian military power and Iran's expansionary policies, the latter forming the US's third strategic objective. Turkey does not forget that the United States' protective umbrella guaranteed its sovereignty against Soviet threats during the Cold War, this having been offered without any US territorial ambitions vis-à-vis Turkey, unlike in its alliances with Russia and Iran. Turkey within the NATO alliance (despite all the problems it has recently been creating) compliments for the US the Romanian-U.S. Black Sea alliance while at the same time erecting a barrier against Russian and Iranian expansion. A US-Turkey foreign relations rapprochement, which in our view is highly likely, could be compatible with long-term Turkish interests, especially if the US became accommodative to certain of Turkey's own expansionary policies. A reconfirmation of a US-Turkey alliance could, nevertheless, create challenges for another US strategic ally, namely Greece, given Turkey's territorial claims over the Aegean archipelago and the South-East Mediterranean energy rich maritime region. Only with a lot of goodwill, persistent effort, and high diplomacy on each of the three sides can such differences eventually be reconciled.

US foreign policy calls for a selective disengagement from regions and processes costing the US dearly in human, monetary, and material resources. The US has probably spent close to USD 6.0 trillion on wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and Syria since 2001 and has lost about 7,000 American soldiers in combat in Afghanistan and Iraq. Within this period and in the latter war zones, about 800,000 people have lost their lives as a result of fighting, of which almost 340,000 have been civilians. Around 21 million individuals have been displaced due to related violence. The much publicized partial retreat of the US from the Middle East involves implications gradually unfolding for a region where power balances are unstable and delicate and confrontational risks and volatility are high: any such retreat, if it ultimately materializes, could, in our view, only be partial. Emerging regional alliances in the Middle East are being organized primarily to confront the expansionary goals of Iran. The most profound change in the region will be the enhanced role of Israel, which, unlike in earlier times, will now be regarded by powerful Arab states, i.e., Saudi Arabia, U.A.E., Jordan, and Egypt, as a highly stable and strong local actor with which longer-term cooperation is indeed feasible for the ultimate restoration of the region's stability.

Core US strategy, in place for a century, is concentrating on absolute security for North America by controlling the surrounding oceanic space to prevent any invasion or blockade. In addition, the US strives to ensure that no single dominating power will emerge in Eurasia, thereby protecting its own hegemonial world position. Post Brexit, the UK will likely strengthen its relationship with the US to a new level not seen since the aftermath of WWII, with a corresponding economic distancing from China. Ultimately for Britain, it being traditionally a maritime nation, the stronger bonding with the US will be a natural, historically validated policy direction of important military and geostrategic value, especially in the volatile times ahead.

Art

Art and artistic expression can be important indicators of things to come, of incubating or emerging trends, especially in times of global socioeconomic, political, and cultural change. Artistic expression manifested in artworks and through the fluidity of words – an integral element of art – has increasingly become important to people of all ages in this new, digitally dominated century. A novel form of written expression, «textspeak», with or without abbreviations, represents, in essence, part of the continuous evolution of language. Art, as an early indicator of things to come, should be taken seriously into consideration by

strategists and decision-makers, whether in politics, business, or the social domains as being equally important for understanding the current environment and as valuable input for the medium- or longer-term planning horizon. Art and culture document actual ways of life and, through hidden creative and innovative forces, can open exciting new windows for understanding life and human interaction. A mapping of contemporary art shows a preference for large exhibits, which, however, tend to be hollow in meaning and devoid of the spiritual, all too often incorporating elements of violence and squalor, devastated landscapes, a focus on the material, representation of the absurd and the asymmetric, a mix of heterogeneous materials all creating an incoherent mosaic, with no unifying vision, yet possessing its unique style, a desperate search for the codes and patterns of a new world that has not yet emerged.

We have therefore deliberately placed this small though important section just before the Epilogue of our global analysis, simply presenting, without any further comments, some of the artistic positions, either in their exact textual form or in the interpretation of their artistic expression, with reference sources being exhibitions and other art forums around the world.

- *This is not what it is ...*
- *Fear ... run ... exit ...*
- *Strangers everywhere ...*
- *A group of us scattered still over the huge celebration grounds ...*
- *I looked you in the eyes spontaneously and truly ... in silent times with dead feelings ... alone*
- *I do not understand, I cannot explain and will not even try to do so ...*
- *I am not your possession ...*
- *We are being resented and hated for our freedom ...*
- *No miracles happen here ... not yet ...*
- *Heaven representing a place where there has never been action ...*
- *They form a solid framework, resembling a chorus repeating all the accepted points and norms, allowing for the drama to continue, which could otherwise turn into a comedy or a tragic farse ...*
- *Echoes of voices in high fortifications, all empires laid still, held in arrest, all the pain inflicted explained here, all weapons packaged, all castles not yet completed, all hearts still unbroken ...*
- *There is a different way of looking at things ... language allows us to develop a new vision, new thoughts and interact with others to instantly alter every single moment of our lives, everything around the real world ...*
- *The human aspiration and the longing for freedom requires a comprehension of different languages to understand different cultures and attitudes in multiple times and places ... all of which express the same human desires, needs and aspirations ... there is a different way of looking at things ... a way we do not know yet ...*
- *Self-portrait as a wall dividing a black part representing life lived and what is left as white space representing life-to-come ...*
- *The Cycladic light dancing on an Aegean island... a white wall as the imaginary background for an unlimited number of transformations, a place of light, wonder, sadness and joy, a place of solitude, a place where dreams become reality, a place for the soul, of material absence, a place of eternal discovery, a place of divine realization ... a journey to the unknown, a journey of transformation towards a day when everything will change, a day when we will change too ...*

Epilogue

Highlights

The World at a Glance

- *From Europe, to the Middle East, to Asia, Africa, and South America, the world shows sign of destabilization, with no identifiable single cause in the traditional manner of thinking. The powerful rise of China, the resurrection of the Russian imperium, shifts in the global financial system, which since 2008 have not yet been fully assimilated, the vulnerability of the global health system confronted with new viral pandemics, as is the case of the current Covid-19 virus, and changes in US foreign policy and global strategy, are parameters contributing towards the uncertainty felt throughout large segments of the world's population.*
- *Today's liberal international order is supported by a framework of rules, alliances, and institutions thanks to which the world has enjoyed relative peace and prosperity since 1945. Without the exertion of the hegemonial power of the US, the old liberal order will die, and a new sociopolitical order will emerge, under the influence of new global players and the unrestrained competition of regional powers in a radically different multipolar world.*
- *Over the coming few years, nothing less than the preservation of democracy is at stake, as the risks inherent in digital technology may lead to a more autocratic world, the end of liberal policies, and the transformation of parliamentary democracy. The positive side is the multitude of opportunities opening up in a world where any desired information will be instantly available and large segments of the world's population will have instant access to governing processes, from digitally held elections to referendums and other forms of participatory democracy.*
- *Russia is far more resilient to any of the US sanctions and other economic punitive measures than Western analysts might expect. Russia relies on oil revenues to fund its foreign policy and well calculated interventionist strategies in places like Syria. The consequences of the all-out oil price war between Moscow and Riyadh could have a serious impact not only on the Russian economy, but also on President Putin's wider aims for Russian influence throughout the globe, especially in the Middle East. Prolonged oil prices lower than USD 45 per barrel could have a disruptive effect on the competition between global powers and also become a game changer for the Middle East. They will probably not cancel out but will certainly influence or even dent Russia's aims to expand its global reach strategically and to challenge the US in multiple theaters, in Eurasia, the Middle East, and Africa. It will be interesting to see how President Putin's policies will be shaped and the respective response to the above challenge.*
- *If Russian ties with China on energy links, trade and military cooperation acquire true lasting substance, while China, together with Russia and possibly a cooperating Europe may decisively dominate the entire Eurasian continent. This represents the annulment of the validity of a historic US geostrategic dogma and could elicit a highly assertive US response.*
- *The history of Russian-German relations since Germany's unification in 1871 has consisted of tentative attempts at cooperation followed by catastrophic wars and near-wars. Despite Russian openings to the East, the temptation to try again, on the assumption that this time will be different, remains strong – and it may well be that this time is different*
- *Despite the propaganda which wants Russia and the West as enemies, a highly observant part of Russian society regards its European neighbors as friends. Russia could, naturally, one day return to the common house of a democratic Europe in which the various nations cooperate in peaceful competition: wishful thinking or a least expected potential reality?*

- *Huge strategic shifts taking place on the Eurasian landmass include a re-emerging Europe with a closer, friendlier connection to Russia and an accommodative cooperative attitude towards China. Vision, commitment, and depth of political thought puts France at the helm of European leadership for at least the next decade.*
- *Islam should not only be regarded as a world religion but also as a global sociopolitical force and therefore an entity of massive proportions.*
- *It remains to be seen whether the Covid-19 pandemic becomes a serious setback for the socio-political and economic opening of the African continent.*
- *Geopolitical/geostrategic risks will weigh heavily on the global economy over the next 5-7 years as the fourth and last generational world cycle comes to its conclusion - amid conflicts, social upheavals, revolutions, and wars - opening the doors to a new global golden era of reconstruction and growth in sociopolitical, economic, demographic, health sciences, and cultural systems.*

Politics

- *To effectively address a new, emerging, multipolar world, the West should abandon its arrogant policies and its evangelical attitudes, which presume to dictate to different civilizations and cultures what it views as the «correct» sociopolitical system and human rights framework.*
- *After the two World Wars, winds of historical change are sweeping once again across the European continent, prompting European politicians to address the much-needed political, social, economic, and security challenges shaping the postmodern world. Past affluence and the US security umbrella have not helped Europe to give birth to a renewed vision for the future. Without a new, grand, visionary plan of action – which we believe is, out of pure necessity, in the early stages of emerging - the continent risks ontological extinction.*
- *The struggle for dominance in the European Union favors France – marking a historic leadership change in Europe. Germany will still be a dominant, though not the sole, leading force in European politics.*
- *Attempts of masses of migrants to cross the Greek-Turkish borders, both on the mainland and across the Aegean Sea, could prove to be a big political test for the Greek government but may also become a huge challenge for the EU, as the ultimate desired direction for most of these migrants are the wealthier EU states. Greece-Turkey relations may become increasingly strained to the point of a potential military clash, while EU-Turkey relations could also worsen considerably.*
- *A small group of prominent Greek shipowners has joined forces and is calling on all powerful Greek business leaders to join forces to help the country overcome the immigration crisis that was artificially created by Turkey and one which also challenges European safety, social cohesion, and solidarity. The main purpose of the movement – to a great extent involving the wealthy and powerful Greek diaspora - is the strengthening of Greek diplomacy through effective lobbying in the most powerful political centers on the planet and especially in the Oval Office.*
- *The United Kingdom has left the EU with an agreement in place. The compromises the UK government will have to make will, on the one hand, politically divide the country, while, on the other, will give Britain a new and fresh economic and political impetus.*
- *Trump will probably win the next elections. One way or the other, «Trumpism» will outlast Trump, providing powerful new social and political directions for the US.*
- *The US regards its positions vis-à-vis China as a contest between a free open world versus a closed authoritarian system. This may indeed be a valid view; however, it is only a subjective one showing just one side of the coin. The West should also learn to see things from a vastly different civilizational angle, namely, that of the East versus the West, one that presents a different but still valid*

reality. Only then do chances arise that confrontations and conflicts may be resolved in a harmonious win-win approach.

- *Iran's political ideology, evidenced, for example, in its foreign affairs strategy, is driven by an apocalyptic vision and a sense of divine messianic mission. The West should, as a starting point, acknowledge the strong theological motivations explaining Iran's ideological strategy and foreign policy stance towards the Muslim world and towards the West in order to then effectively seek to work out a peaceful solution to an otherwise escalating potential conflict.*
- *In Egypt today, young people inherently understand that pan-Arabism is a failure. As Egypt gradually opens itself up to the West, western nations face the challenge of trying to design strategies that allow Egypt to communicate more openly with Europe and Israel as well as selectively with other moderate Arab nations. The latter process will certainly help towards the improvement of Egyptian economic performance, democratization, and human rights standards. The evolving new energy forum of the East Mediterranean will be one potential platform in this direction.*
- *In the oil price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia, both sides are extremely dependent on finding a compromise. The topic has three dimensions: a geopolitical (Iran and Saudi Arabia), an industrial policy, and a state finance dimension.*
- *The Greek Orthodox Church through its missions is making a gradual opening in all 56 countries in Africa for the spread of the Gospel's teachings.*
- *China's goal may be to gradually absorb Hong Kong into the framework of a new political reality. Hong Kong's trajectory could well be a foretaste of Taiwan's future as regards its relations with China.*
- *Trade pacts are falling apart, while new bilateral and regional trade deals are emerging. China is, despite US threats, penetrating global economies as a supplier of 5G wireless systems. The US is enacting sanctions against Germany and any European participant that allows NordStream 2 to come into operation. Transnational organizations are being forced to make changes in their structure and mission as the result of the withdrawal of US support. Historic alliances are being annulled; new alliances are being formed. Larger and smaller power centers across the globe are taking sides and closing ranks in expectation of oncoming battles and confrontations in all spheres of human activity.*

Economics

- *The shadows of the trade conflict between the US and China conceal a mega-confrontation of technology giants over global dominance in the high tech/communications scene. Europe is relatively small in the above corporate power clash but is technologically highly advanced and will, through mergers and transnational cooperations, most probably reposition itself as a participant in this worldwide market share competition.*
- *A major cause of the 1998 Asian crisis was the high level of foreign debt among banks and companies. There is no financial crisis looming in China since the foreign exposure in its debt is relatively small. China's growth may, nevertheless, drop in 2020 as low as 3% on its GDP, as the result of the Covid-19 outbreak effects, which means that its massive economy, which helped drag the world out of the economic slump following the 2008 crisis, will not be present this time, negatively affecting the world economy. Nevertheless, China is already using the situation to stimulate its economy to counter said negative impact in terms of both fiscal and monetary measures. The risk of global economic disruptions due to the present coronavirus crisis remains high, though, in our view, temporary.*
- *The adoption of blockchain technology and the use of cryptocurrencies in international payments continues to remain limited due to long transaction payment times, high costs, exchange rate volatility, digital wallet security issues,*

and a still widespread lack of acceptance of the new digital currencies by major merchants.

- The Covid-19 global health crisis may provide a stimulus in the potential use of digital currencies as a means to avoid or contain the spread of diseases worldwide.*
- The international chip market has become the new worldwide economic trend indicator.*
- The largest energy corporation in the world, Exxon Mobile, has a market capitalization only about 1/7 that of Apple or Microsoft, marking the long-term irreversible decline worldwide of the oil sector.*
- In a new technology-driven economy, official data in standard GDP measures may understate both GDP and productivity gains while entirely neglecting innovative ways to measure the economic input/output from the utilization of modern digital/telecommunications platforms, artificial intelligence (AI), and their exponentially increasing contribution to economic activity and their effects on inflation.*
- A highly dangerous notion is that governments can deal with mounting economic problems through an unlimited money supply, fueling continued productivity growth and full employment, as well as through the raising of taxes. These absurd modern economic notions point to one fact: politicians and central bankers are not prepared for the next downturn, which could bring with it not only the collapse of Modern Monetary Theory but also unprecedented global unrest and possibly a far more authoritarian world.*
- Uncertainty stemming from geopolitical/geostrategic and health risk is one of the chief drivers of below average economic performance in much of the world.*
- Exactly when the Covid-19 pandemic will have run its course and/or been defeated by medical means is a question of time, but, economically speaking, inter alia it is leading to broken supply chains, which creates cracks in payment chains, which in turn can lead to serious financial crises. Business, industrial supply chains, and international payout flows are expected to be restored in about 6 – 8 months after the crisis has started to subside: this time should not be far off.*
- The massive injection of new money due to the Covid-19 pandemic in an already heavily indebted world may longer term damage the global financial system, triggering a global economic crisis at a future date and ultimately a worldwide «financial reset», its form not yet easily discernible. Ultimately, debt will somehow be «normalized» to some new valuation, creating the background for a new economic start. The new emerging environment will certainly rest on digital technology platforms with unprecedented transformative power for the entire world and every aspect of human activity.*
- During the current transitional times, the long-term fundamental elements of the analysis of companies, as well as technical analysis of stock market behavior and the charting of investment strategies, should predominantly be complimented by vital input from the disciplines of geopolitics/geostrategy. Without the skills to understand the latter disciplines and the overriding importance of their input, even the best asset strategies will fail to achieve stability, safety, and clients' security objectives. Only a limited number of financial institutions and asset managers worldwide pay sufficient attention to and are aware of these imperatives and are becoming sensitive and responding to the related issues by directly incorporating them in their analyses and strategies.*

Socio-political Positions & State Governance

- The post-1945 liberal order is being challenged by:
More protagonists than partners: a polycentric world is on the rise.
The political «left» and «right», which are losing their appeal and their representative power among populations, leaving a political vacuum.*

Connectivity based on advanced telecommunication technologies together with digitization, which are creating new competing narratives and becoming the biggest game changer in a new world.

The US becoming less of a constructive global leader and far more a global force wishing to preserve an «America first» dominant position in the world.

A new global attitude of assertiveness is on the rise, bringing with it a clash between established vs. rising powers.

- *In a pseudo-democracy, elections correspond to voting until a «correct» result is achieved. The foundations of liberal democracy are shaking as the world increasingly faces the above-described politically biased, showcase processes. Ultimately, it will be up to voters, who essentially hold the power, to decide whether liberal democracy can still be saved.*
- *Direct or indirect anti-Semitism, in whatever form or shape, should not be acceptable in Europe's democratic socio-political structures. Europe is showing a serious democratic deficit in matters of freedom of expression. Nevertheless, the recent publication of a German intelligence report on antisemitism in the country may mark a turning point, as it has become the first official acknowledgement of a major problem existing not only in Germany but throughout Europe.*
- *Multiculturalism when combined with the suppression of Christian roots is a dangerous social narrative constituting a direct attack on the European civilization.*
- *Demonstrations arising spontaneously all over the world, from the Middle East to Latin America and Asia, show an emerging trend: the desire for democracy in politically oppressed states and in nations governed in an autocratic way exists, is alive, and is growing and is an invisible power co-shaping the world of tomorrow.*
- *Regulation worldwide of the cybertechnology sector, which today is largely absent, could increase safety and safeguard democracy throughout the entire world.*
- *A colossal manmade global state machine has the characteristics of an impersonal inhuman construction which indifferently, cold-bloodedly holds billions of individuals prisoner under pressure and daily stress. This is a largely untold story of human sorrow, and, at the same time, the profoundest and most negative characteristic of manmade modern civilization.*

Science & Technology

- *The smartphone as a pocket computer has, in just over a decade, achieved the status of the driver of the digitization of the global economy.*
- *A society in which communication and, ultimately, participation is biometrically mediated could lead to a totalitarian world. If, in the future, machines disclose people's innermost human mental state, the bioproduct of analysis, whether real or false, threatens free society with chaos and collapse.*
- *AI has the qualities and characteristics of a systemic, all-encompassing, disruptive technology, not just altering the economic landscape but also the very structure and fabric of society.*
- *If utilized correctly and beneficially for humanity, modern digital and communication technologies comprise a modern-day miracle with unparalleled potential as a positive regenerator of human progress. The leaders of our modern technological age are the corporate giants engaged in research & development, the use and the dissemination of technology, their responsibilities extending over a wide economic, educational, civic, and sociopolitical domain.*
- *The endeavor for computer developers entails, as far as technical realization goes, something unachievable in its very substance and its functioning, namely, the paradox to integrate consciousness within the AI process, an impossible task due to the former's supernatural substance.*
- *Venturing within the realms of AI with the insufficiently understood parameter of intelligence linked with the even less understood factor of consciousness is a*

highly questionable human endeavor as to its end result, as well as to the qualitative and quantitative aspects of its transformative power. If approached humbly it could revolutionize life on planet earth - otherwise, it could destroy life.

- *A terrifying point of no return may suddenly arrive when machines outstrip human thinking and robots using advanced AI capabilities no longer need human intelligence.*
- *Cryopreservation will increasingly contribute in the transformation of governance and ethics, and ultimately the very relationship between life and death, becoming a new confrontational line in the relationship between Creator and creation.*

The Environment

- *The surging global interest in increasingly destructive climate change and its manmade environmental impact is a multidisciplinary issue involving ideology, science, politics, and religion, and will lead to increased polarization in Western societies.*

Health

- *Researchers in the US have developed a potential vaccine for SARS-CoV-2 using a novel approach which essentially uses human molecules to create proteins which, in effect, stimulate an immune reaction. The process is being used for the first time to develop a vaccine for humans. The speed with which this potential vaccine was developed, including the entire process of testing directly on humans, is unprecedented. Similar developments in a highly compressed time frame are in progress in China, Russia, Israel, the EU as well as in various scientific research centers around the world.*
- *Marijuana use is becoming epidemic across the US and Europe given that it is increasingly being legalized throughout the West, as well as in numerous countries worldwide. However, its potentially highly detrimental impact on such critical areas as occupational and road safety, security-related functions including military service, its effect on the family and on children, on human cognitive functions, and on a country's overall health in general have not been sufficiently researched, neither have proper measures been taken by nations round the world to protect society from its abuse.*
- *The emerging global issue of future policies for the sustainability of public health against pandemics has important sociopolitical and global governance implications.*

Militarization & Security

- *Reliable defense and deterrence on the basis of an appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional, and missile defense capabilities remains a core element of NATO's strategy to prevent conflict and war. Cybersecurity comprises an important parameter within this process.*
- *NATO may have become an alliance that has in certain ways outgrown its purpose and mission. If an international crisis of high intensity emerges, a new genuinely European defense structure could very quickly be created. An independent European foreign policy and credible military capability could potentially use NATO infrastructure in an EU grand defense strategy.*
- *Germany, France, and the UK will continue to cooperate on the intelligence level on cybersecurity/defense and on other threats to Europe regardless of the Brexit development.*
- *Turkey's choice of a Russian-made air defense system may be in anticipation of an aerial military conflict with a NATO member in the future, an area of concern for Greece, the EU, and NATO. If Turkey were to launch a nuclear weapons program in the future, the move could have a domino effect on the region. Saudi*

Arabia, Egypt, Syria, and Greece might be tempted to launch their own nuclear programs.

- *Trump's plan for peace in the Middle East, resting on economic fundamentals and guaranteeing economic well-being while de-emphasizing political issues, does contain a very important parameter, namely, that differences can be expressed in alternative and less violent ways. It therefore holds potential for a peaceful settlement on the basis of economic development for the entire region.*
- *Russia, backed by China, is proposing a radical overhaul of the security architecture in the Middle East region, resting on a collective security concept entailing the creation of a coalition of all stakeholders, including Iran, that would be the vehicle for the resolution of conflicts across the region – a plan, however, with theoretical merit but small chances of materializing in practice.*
- *The use of economic power rather than military warfare, as exercised by the US today, could be highly effective while leaving the room open for the delivery of targeted military action, as, when, and where needed.*
- *The US, Russia, China, and India will, in the 21st century, compete in space for leadership in military, communication, and intelligence capabilities.*
- *International treaties should prohibit the development of weapon systems in which technology and not a human being makes life and death decisions in a military confrontation. Otherwise, a dangerous door opens and the world places itself on an autopilot/self-destruction course.*
- *The historical truth that nuclear weapons, although weapons of mass destruction, ultimately contribute towards world stability (for the reason that their incalculable power of destruction is a deterrent to going to war, also known as MAD – Mutually Assured Destruction), may only partially hold true in a world of multiple confrontational fronts, where the possibilities of nuclear weapon use by one or the other rogue state is bound to dramatically increase.*

Geopolitics – Geostrategy

- *The United States will continue to view the potential emergence of a dominant power in Eurasia, whether that is China or Russia, uniting the Eurasian landmasses as a strategic threat to the US global hegemonic position. Many great powers have dreamed of ruling Eurasia but have ultimately been prevented from such an objective by Eurasia's tremendous diversity.*
- *Transatlantic military cooperation, especially in the European theater, will continue, but in different form. A Europe that is stronger militarily will inevitably emerge, probably under the force of external events of profound geostrategic significance. France will assume a new leading role over Europe: Germany may accept the leadership shift and provide the necessary support.*
- *Europe remains largely a continental power and so does Russia in contrast to maritime nations, e.g., the US, the UK, and Greece. Due to the powerful global realignments taking place, «sea» vs. «continent» will remain critical, in principle explaining the core reason for the UK's departure from the EU.*
- *A new era of unprecedented cooperation between the US and the UK could be dawning with the election of Boris Johnson in the UK. It will most likely be further strengthened by a re-election of President Trump in 2020. The Anglo-Saxon bloc is closing its ranks; global maritime powers are realigning themselves for the upcoming large-scale confrontations of the current decade. Greece belongs among the great sea powers due to possessing the world's largest merchant fleet: it also belongs to a major continental bloc, Europe. Intricate, efficient, innovative diplomacy will be the key to success for this small country, the ever-shining cradle of Western civilization.*
- *A potential US withdrawal from Turkey (which we think unlikely) and the subsequent loss of its military facilities there, notably Incirlik, are replaceable with other locations in the region. The worrying aspect of such a scenario could be a potential redirection of Turkey's policies towards nuclear armament.*

- *The Middle East is the convergence point of three continents, Asia, Africa, and Europe, lending it immense geopolitical significance. Competition among the key players in the region is at a peak and geopolitical relationships and balances in the Middle East are changing rapidly. The wider region of the Levant faces the Mediterranean and, by extension, the Aegean and the Black Seas in the north, the Caspian Sea in the north-east, the Red and the Arabian Seas, and, by extension, the Indian Ocean in the south/south-east. It contains two of the world's leading waterway passages for transportation of energy products: the Bab al-Mandeb Strait leading to the Red Sea and via the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean, and the Strait of Hormuz leading into the Persian Gulf. The Middle East remains the top oil supplier in the world and has its largest oil and gas reserves. Although new strategic alliance patterns are already emerging, geostrategic balances in the wider region will remain fluid and will not stabilize until the middle of the present decade.*
- *Iran will have to compromise on US (and Israeli) security demands, notably its nuclear armament program and its expansionist policies in the Middle East or respond militarily in one or the other way. In the first case, a questionable level of peace could be established for the short/medium term; in the second, a major war may erupt in the Middle East with the potential to spread out over the entire region and the south-eastern Mediterranean basin. It will create a new power status with a not as yet easily discernible architecture.*
- *Iran's location serves as a strategic oil and gas two-way distribution gateway connecting the Caspian Sea with the Persian Gulf. The diminishing presence of the US in this energy-important region is systematically being filled in by China, which is constantly expanding its area of influence and diluting the US's influence over energy transmission lines in the Eurasian and African continents.*
- *Israel, the US's permanent ally in the Middle East, views Iran as its biggest adversary, perceived to be critical to the very survival of the Jewish nation. Turkey's vision for an imperial leading role in the wider region, from the Balkans to the Middle East, still remains focused on this direction. Meanwhile, its ambitions directly clash with Greece's position of firmly defending its territorial rights in the Aegean Sea and its core participation role in the new Southeast Mediterranean energy equation, as the leading distribution corridor towards Europe. An understanding of these key notions can shed light on almost all potential future developments in this sensitive region.*
- *Russia, already the only significant military force in both the Black and the Caspian Sea regions, will retain and expand its geostrategic monopoly in the area, controlling pipelines and transferring a significant part of the Caspian Basin's oil reserves to world markets, notably Europe. Russia is expanding its energy distribution lines into Europe by bypassing Ukraine through two new pipeline systems, one north, «Nord Stream 2», through the Baltic Sea directly into Germany, and one south, «TurkStream», through the Black Sea and Turkey into Europe. This strengthens Russia's overall geostrategic position in Eurasia and weakens Ukraine's as a vital energy distribution nation.*
- *Ukraine and Belarus are the outermost areas on a geographical axis westward where Russia can create unparalleled strategic military depth in any confrontation (unlikely in our view) with the West. Both nations should be viewed as a vast border of shifting geopolitical currents between Europe and Russia.*
- *Moscow's military moves do not form an expansionist strategy but rather a strategy of preservation and solidification in geographical areas where historically it already maintained a presence, whether in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, or the Middle East/Africa. It is a risk-averse strategy, well calculated and planned and surgically executed, aiming at keeping the West at bay and using every opportunity for further advancing Russia's long-term goals. Russia's power is neither soft nor strong but rather «intelligent» and «sharp».*
- *The great-power competition under full development between the United States, China, and Russia will inevitably bring into play the Korean Peninsula, historically*

located between empires. North Korea will probably continue an ambivalent policy so as not to dismantle its nuclear missile program.

- *China may not challenge Russia's political model, but it could within the next decade challenge Russia in such coveted regions as the Arctic or in the Eastern Russian territories. The Russian-Chinese alliance could prove to be a temporary relationship, but it also holds the potential for a deep, long-lasting strategic convergence: the validation of either of the two positions will become evident over the next five years. Either way, it will constitute a parameter of utmost geostrategic significance.*
- *China's political aspiration for a national rejuvenation relate to an ideal replete with symbolism, sentiment, and one that China's population fully embraces. China's economy, infrastructure, technological base, and military structures are all interrelated, integrated, and directed towards a 21st century imperial nation. The dynamically evolving confrontation between China and the US cannot be put in a clear historical context; its potential outcome is also unclear at this stage.*
- *Japan will gradually increase its leading regional role in a coalition with the US, aiming to militarily contain China, while Australia and India, with selectively overlapping objectives, will become more active in the South Pacific and Indian oceans, respectively.*
- *Globalization is inevitably bringing nations closer together, while cyberspace provides another dimension, a powerful global interlinking of countries and their activities whether in the sociopolitical, economic, or cultural domains. This fuels innovation worldwide, but we do not share the view that this renders geographical borders weaker or in any way weakens geopolitical issues. Despite the fact that 5G communications and cybertechnologies, including cyberwarfare, will increasingly be employed round the globe, geography will remain the determining geostrategic parameter in sensitive regions of the world. Space has permanently entered the geography of global geopolitics in the 21st century.*
- *Economic sanctions are a valuable foreign policy tool, though only to the extent that it is fully realized that the opponent may ultimately not comply and choose a military response. In fact, economic sanctions can become so effective that a military response becomes the only viable alternative.*
- *Successful war follows the path of deception, while the ultimate aim and optimal achievement is to defeat the enemy without even entering into battle: one should carefully watch China on this.*
- *Almost all major historical turning points in world history were determined on the seas. Greek shipping will propagate Greece's historical identity worldwide, while Greece will continue to have an important say in the geopolitics of the world's oceans.*
- *History and the nature of geopolitics teach that established powers rarely cede their dominance to up-and-coming new powers without a fight. The US-China rivalry will continue regardless of trade negotiations and can only be viewed within that historical truth.*
- *Geopolitics is about geography that defines nations, about politics, and about battles. It is about political leaders acting within the context of historical turning points. It is about the great heroes of the past and their accomplishments, it is about the defense of territories and the conquest of new space within the history of the human race, about the generations to be born as well as the legends they will create for history and for future generations..*

Conflict Areas

- *As China continues with the militarization of islands, including artificial maritime outposts in the South China Sea, and building up naval, air, and missile capabilities, it creates continuously larger difficulties for other nations to navigate freely in those waters. Seven countries have claims on maritime space in the South China Sea through which numerous important shipping lines run, namely,*

China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, and the Philippines. In this geostrategic maritime region, China claims all land areas including islands, reefs, and rocks within the so-called nine-dash line.

SOUTH CHINA SEA China's Nine-Dash Line



The United States and all other countries in the region claim the right to free shipping in the South China Sea, which China opposes, due to its own territorial claims. Dickey situations constantly emerge between aircraft and ships of various armed forces; an accident which could happen any time could lead to serious tensions or even war between the two major powers, namely, the US and China. The same conflictual situation often arises in the East China Sea with a group of

islands known as Senkaku/Diaoyu (in Japanese/Chinese). The question of the islands is extremely emotional for both countries, which see their national pride violated by any likely or actual actions of the other side. De-escalation is difficult and the situation could easily get out of control. An armed conflict over Senkaku/Diaoyu would draw in the US which has declared that the military assistance that it has contractually guaranteed to Tokyo in the event of a military attack also applies to the disputed islands.

- By treating China's coastguard and other naval military proxies in the same way as China's navy, the US is upgrading its strategy in the East/South China Seas, which is becoming a potential area where a China-US military conflict could start.*
- The Korean peninsula, because of its strategic location, has long been the scene of wars. North Korea knows that it cannot militarily reunite the peninsula. The South Korean army is technologically superior to the North Korean, while, moreover, about 25,000 American soldiers are stationed in the south. For North Korea, nuclear weapons serve as a deterrent. Neither side will willingly start a war; nevertheless, the greatest danger is a miscalculation. The peninsula remains a hot spot for a future military conflict, the consequences of which would be global.*
- Any increase in Russian influence in Belarus will directly threaten Poland. Belarus and Ukraine are regions exposed to the likelihood of a NATO-Russia confrontation*
- Turkey continues on an aggressive path in the Eastern Mediterranean with its hydrocarbon drilling operations, despite strong opposition from Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt. Its Blue Homeland policy, with territorial claims on the Aegean archipelago, predominantly on Greece's islands, is part of Turkey's national expansionist strategy. Assisted by the Turkish security and military forces, attempted penetration by massive numbers of migrants of Greece's north-eastern borders with Turkey on the river Evros, as well as continuous military provocation by Turkey's naval and air forces in the Aegean archipelago, is creating a background that may well ignite a military clash between Turkey and Greece.*
- Israel and parts of Europe are within reach of Iranian missiles. The range of known Iranian rockets is approximately 2,000 km, with 3,000 km the assumed range of new weapons. Israel may, in one or the other way, militarily clash with Iran, directly or indirectly through the latter's proxies in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, or Gaza. The likelihood of a third Lebanon war waged by Israel against Hezbollah has significantly increased as Hezbollah has markedly increased its strength and offensive capacities. The Middle East is a global hot spot carrying the potential for a far wider conflict encompassing the entire Levant, parts of the Arabian Peninsula, and Iran. If the US, Russia, and Turkey get involved, a far wider geographical spread of the conflict is possible.*
- The Arctic, where European and North American interests intersect with those of Russia and China, is a less probable though still a potential future military confrontation area.*
- Stability around the globe will decrease during this new decade, with military conflicts erupting where they did not exist before, while intensifying in places where they already exist. The Middle East including Iran, the South East Mediterranean and Aegean region, Belarus/Ukraine and the Black Sea, and the East/South China Seas should be viewed as potential future war hot spot regions. During this turbulent decade, regional wars rather than an all-out major war may be the most likely pattern regarding conflict between major competing world powers.*

Concluding Remarks

For more than 100 years, the Anglo-Saxon world embodied the promise of democracy, freedom, law and order, personal self-determination, well-defined property rights, and open markets. Globalization, which has been the way out of poverty for millions of people, has been partly based on these principles. Today,

there is valid questioning on the sustainability of that dominant order and a looming danger that less democratic – according to Western liberal standards – systems may replace the Anglo-Saxon void with a new world governance model. The principles of Western liberal order, namely, freedom, open economies, pragmatism, and legal certainty, with English as the international language par excellence, nevertheless, still hold a certain attractive power and continue to represent the soft power component of the Western model.

Europe as a continent conveys the notion of a continuous landmass, clearly separated by water from other similar geographical entities, with the exception being its contiguity to Asia. Europe's history has a historical complexity conditioned by spatial discontinuity, though constantly connecting through its amphibious character with faraway lands. The sea around Europe has provided the material and intellectual resources for its survival, also characterizing its culture: freedom, curiosity, enterprising spirit, change, meritocracy. Ancient Greece, the essence and gravity center of the Mediterranean world, is the root of European civilization. It consisted of a network of states linked together by an ever-changing set of maritime connections. Globally, as networks prevail that are closer to the maritime than the continental model, the world of strict hierarchies will give way to a world dominated by a complex web of horizontal links. European ingenuity, with its diversity of viewpoints, a result of its fragmented geography and history, may, despite its current difficulties, be ultimately capable of responding to this major historical challenge, transforming its structure into a confederation of independent states contained in unity. Through land extending into Russia and Eurasia and through the fact that its southern sea, i.e., the Mediterranean, reaches Africa and, further afield, the Atlantic Ocean, Europe will continue to be an exceedingly important part of the world.

The importance of the «multipolar world» as a foreign policy strategic dogma for Russia, actively pursued by President Putin for the last two decades, actually has its origins some years back under Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yevgeny Primakov (1996 – 1998), during the presidency of Boris Yeltsin. In that period, Russia envisaged the formation of a cooperating strategic triangle, consisting of Russia, China, and India, its creation resting on a common resentment of Western domination. Along the same affiliated lines rests another policy, namely, the «de-Europeanization» of Russia, though the latter is less clear as to intent and potential realization and will, with certainty, be influenced by European policy responses towards Russia. Putin's current foreign policy is not a random, superficial approach. It rests on a strong ideological foundation - the recurrence of a grand historical cycle of Russian strategic foreign policy thought - and is contingent upon the way Russia intends to position itself in Eurasia. Of the three major world powers claiming a new global dominance role, none will probably emerge as an absolute clear winner. Nevertheless, Russia may emerge as a relative winner for one single reason: it is the only one that has not only kept but also reinforced its connection to its history, values, tradition, and religious belief. That gives Russia endurance, stability, inner strength, and, above all, spiritual power not only to make the right decisions and take the correspondingly appropriate action, but also to capitalize on the mistakes and failures of its competitors. Russia maintains harmony between the material and the spiritual deep in the heart of this imperial nation, out of which grows enduring wisdom and power.

China's growth is undoubtedly one of the most important economic events in history. The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation presents an ideological vision through which China becomes the dominant world power, ending a century of humiliation under the influence of other imperial powers. China's grand strategy encompasses the concept of a Chinese world order supported by

history/mythology: this holds that all Chinese are descendants of the Yellow Emperor, a religious and cosmic ruler alleged to have lived some time in the mid-third millennium BCE, the initiator of Chinese culture, conferring a powerful symbolism within Chinese nationalism. China's leadership may be looking back to a mythologized past with a single Emperor bringing the whole world together in harmony and glory. The core of China's global strategy is unprecedented economic, industrial, and military power all synergistically interconnected. China, with about a USD 14.30 trillion GDP, could surpass the US's output in less than a decade, having already done so in terms of total trade volume. China's economic plan rests on three pillars. One is the «Belt and Road Initiative» (BRI), a mainland and maritime strategy integrating Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America into a global economic system with China at its center. The second is the «Made in China 2025» plan envisioning advanced high-quality manufacturing capabilities and dominance in strategic industries from robotics, aerospace, heavy manufacturing, IT/electronics/communications and shipping, all assisted by state-of-the-art R & D facilities. The third leg, in full interaction and synergy with the other two, is military power. The BRI provides the geography and the facilities for an expanding Chinese economic and military framework, its objectives being the unimpeded growth of national interests. China is pursuing dominance across fields as diverse as economic strategy, conventional and nuclear military capabilities, undersea and space warfare, outer-space technologies, artificial intelligence, and quantum computing. China's grand strategy encompasses virtually all regions of the earth and all oceans, the latter providing the maritime connectivity between continents. In view of this methodological approach, multinational institutions will in many cases have to ultimately align their strategies with one of the two main competing poles, i.e., US vs. China, as vital international business parameters have to be replanned, notably marketing strategies and production and supply chains. The big question is whether America's ingenuity, confidence, and willpower, unparalleled since its inception as a nation, in alliance with other great Western powers, can outcompete China in its long-term unconventional, asymmetric strategic thinking, planning and operational skills, uniting the key elements of purpose, time, space, and means towards the optimal employment of resources for the achievement of its strategic objectives.

The world is currently in a state of profound change, characterized by the impoverishment of political discourse along with collapsing, opposing, and contradictory social positions, all features of the last phase of an era which is in retreat as something new is being born. One of the questions being posed is that of the increasingly complex relationship between technology, business, society, and politics. Different social systems use technology for very different purposes. Technological totalitarianism relates, on the extreme scale, to what technology can do with states and democracies. The expectation that free enterprise automatically leads to free societies is a naïve notion that does not hold. Technological totalitarianism and geo-ideological competition in today's world form an amalgam which is evolving and changing the world in a dynamic and unpredictable way. Tendencies towards technological extremism are by no means limited to authoritarian regimes. The mastery of information technology will determine to a considerable extent which states dominate in the 21st century. The Internet of Things, though without doubt capable of forming a virtual global village connecting people, can also become a global prison enabling unlimited surveillance. Social media have a massive impact on democracy and the way politics is conducted. Such an impact can acquire vastly positive but also extremely negative characteristics. The open society is often weaker than its authoritarian challengers, but it has an invaluable advantage: the ability to self-correct through constant critical debates. Given that the distinction between what is local and what is global has lost its meaning, as boundaries melt in a digital

society where technology rules in most domains of life, social media and tech-companies need to work together with governments and engage in creating social platforms for the benefit of society. These parameters are becoming the largest drivers, ultimately defining what will be either positive or negative socio-political change worldwide.

In today's world, «democratic socialism» is the world's dominant ideology advocating that policies of the world's nations must be coordinated more and more closely with one another. The socio-political position and the corresponding lines of thought behind democratic socialism point to the creation of a world government that can be established via a world currency. The specter of a dystopia arises as the critical question becomes: Who will be the provider of world money: the international community or the free market? If it is the former, then fiat money will continue to undermine the freedom of the individual, at least as we define freedom today. The global paper money system is already a gigantic misconception being saved from collapse by low or zero/below zero interest rates and the expansion of the money supply. The next crisis will increase the likelihood that a world currency may appear as the solution to avert a systemic collapse. Libra would be a private currency, and it could even become a private global currency, but as it is backed by national fiat currencies it carries inherently all the economic defects that the state currencies have. The world's central bank system policies have greatly increased inflation potential and may ultimately be willingly or unwillingly preparing the ground for the creation of a single world currency. Whether such developments mean financial enlightenment for mankind or a descent into a claustrophobic economic and human freedom abyss depends on the generation of creative ideas, the extent of public participation, and the emerging global dialogue on all these issues. Cryptocurrencies have a positive disruption potential reflecting the growing awareness among people all over the world that the free market can provide better money than governments can with their central banks. If this alternative position - opposing the «world governance» notion - prevails during the socio-cultural, political and economic battles ahead, it will ultimately mean that a new liberal opening for the world has been established and the struggle for individual freedom and the enterprising innovative spirit of individuals and corporations are emerging as the winners in a new epoch.

«Anthropocene» is the new term coined to define a new geological age. Humans have already changed the climate, some of the consequences being a dangerous rise in sea levels, ocean acidity, and rapidly increasing air and ocean temperatures. Even if there were no further burning of fossil fuels, climate change and acidification will continue. The human race is, for the first time in history, physically redesigning the earth: for example, in the Arctic, about 75 percent of the ice-free mainland no longer constitutes natural habitat. Mountains are being removed, river valleys intersected, river flows are being changed, the water cycle is artificially being controlled through the creation of many thousands of new reservoirs. The effects are erosion processes that exceed natural material displacement, river deltas shrinking, one third of coral reefs being considered lost and one third as damaged. Destruction of habitats on land and in the waters means the loss of biodiversity, leading to the extermination of hundreds of thousands of animals and plants. Techno-fossils, i.e., concrete and brick fragments, aluminum, and above all plastic waste, are building up on the planet, their huge quantities growing exponentially. In addition, new minerals as well as novel radioactive isotopes and elements that are deposited in rock layers are being produced and utilized with unknown consequences for the planet and for the health of future generations. Never before has a single species changed the Earth's ecosystem as massively and irreversibly as modern-day man. Where all of this leads is scientifically an open question. It could signify a very bleak and unsustainable future for humanity - or else a new living paradigm with as yet

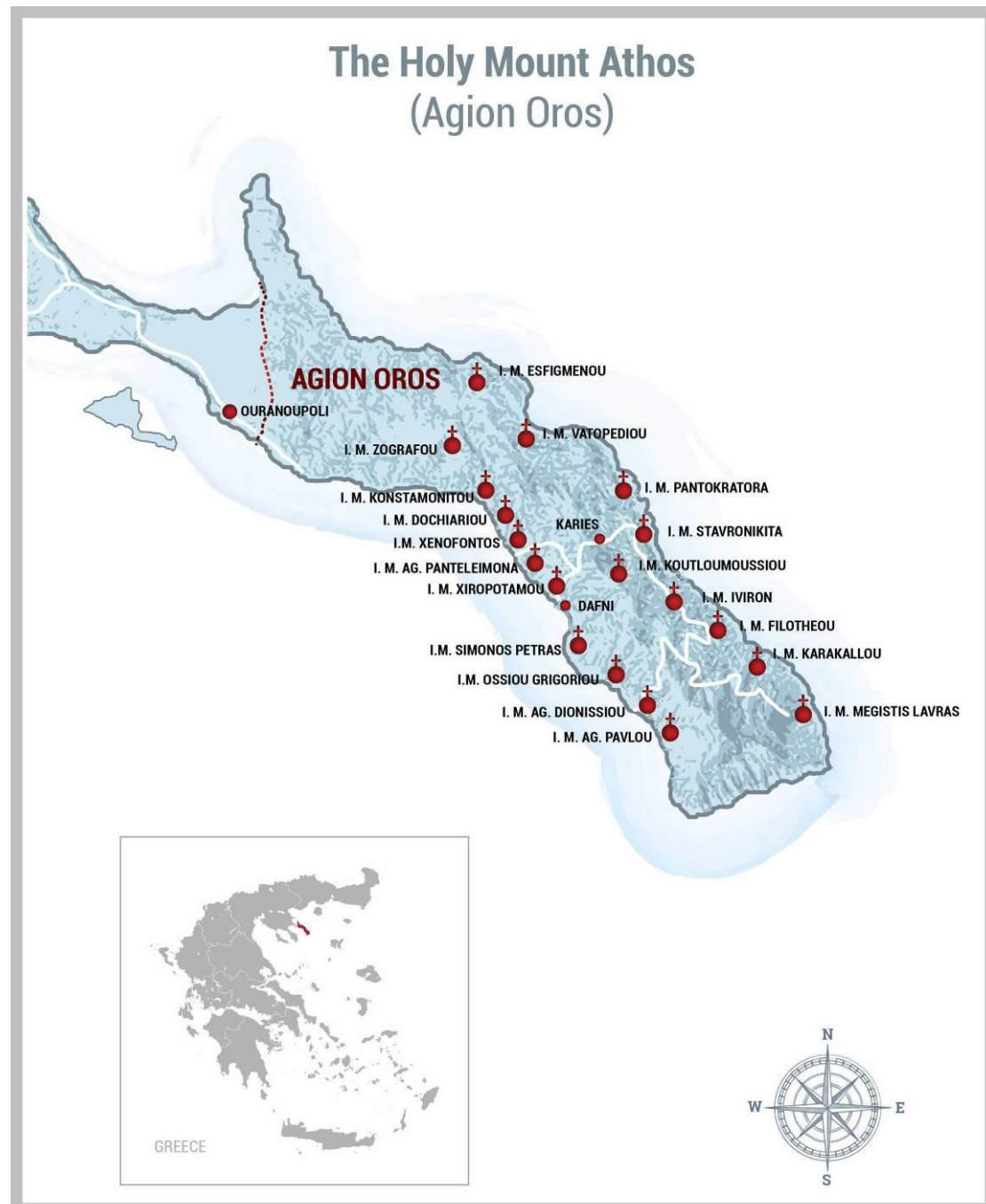
indefinable and radically different parameters to what we are used to. What is certain is that humanity is on a confrontational course with its own planet and, possibly, with the very powers of divine universal creation, attempting to redesign the planet for better or worse to suit a new epoch.

The sea is regaining its economic and strategic importance, while space is opening up new frontiers. Struggles and potential forthcoming confrontations will continue to center around the control of the seas, while battles will be waged in space for the control of vital information, communication and digital warfare coordination links. Sea and space will become inextricably connected in tomorrow's battles for world dominance. The US will continue to dominate the world's seas despite being challenged by China. China shrank when in the past it destroyed its sea force: today, it is again opening up to the sea, a huge undertaking of immense geostrategic significance. Greece will remain a leading maritime nation in terms of its global commercial fleet, one of the worldwide carriers of such intangible values as ideology and symbolism, culture, history, and belief.

Certain things may change in the post-pandemic Covid-19 period throughout the world, but not radically, since respective new trends were already intact even before the Covid-19 outbreak, such as remote work, working from home, flexible, alternate, and staggered work schedules, more electronic shopping, a cashless society, etc. Certain trends may simply be accelerated. What we trust will have been learned is better global and nationwide preparedness of the healthcare and health science systems, government health planning carried out in a more globally coordinated manner, and, importantly, better and early health crisis management with consequently fewer human casualties and lower levels of panic over any similar future event. The Covid-19 pandemic is not the end of the world; it is not the great reset that will signal the conclusion of the stormy period of global sociopolitical, cultural, economic, and geopolitical cataclysmic adjustments and transformations. It is merely one of the catalysts of change in a series of crises expected to unfold during the present decade. The world will eventually stabilize towards the mid/latter part of the present decade and open up to a new golden period of growth and prosperity to last for many years, assuming, hopefully, that it has survived the violent confrontational currents of change within this present decade.

Politicians have a perfect reason to spend more money and they will, from both a social and a political perspective, do so, during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. Surely the ultimate lesson to be learned from this crisis is the folly of our self-seeking, egoistic attitudes that are so rife in the current age, our belief that we can act immorally, arbitrarily, and indiscriminately - and then deal with any negative situation, any crisis, that we ourselves may have caused via means that sometimes produce even more confusion and disorder. As we experience now, out of the blue, a tiny invisible organism invades our bodies and instantly creates chaos in all our institutions and systems around the globe. Humanity has to grow out of this profoundly self-centred - and thus essentially sightless - manner of behaving and become humbler, attaining the awareness that the laws of the universe, the laws that govern life on our planet and throughout the cosmos, are not somehow subservient to us humans, nor to our scientific knowledge and know-how, nor to our multiple accomplishments, but reside in divine creation. Therefore, expressing and demonstrating gratitude to God for all His gifts to humanity, and praying to Him for the fast resolution of this current threat and for His help in all future crises for the entire world - these are activities that automatically raise the level of human thought and acts from the material to the divine sphere and attract both personal and collective blessings at all levels of

human endeavour, whether political, scientific, cultural, or social, which will then spread abroad in the form of wellbeing for the entire planet.



Greece is the country where the eternal meets with the past, the future, and the present in one single reality ... a country where dreams, aspirations, and ideals come true, enveloped in an aura of wisdom accumulated over the millennia ... a country which, from the ancient past to the Byzantine era and to the present day, carries with it the wisdom of the ages ... the birthplace of democracy and the beacon of Western civilization ... the roots of Christianity preserved unaltered and pure in its Eastern Orthodox tradition. Greece is the place where democracy, history, tradition, culture, and spirituality merge, while still allowing for the coexistence of a highly pluralist society ... a country which, as an «ethnos», transcends geographical borders, its diaspora carrying throughout the world the wisdom of the ages. Greece is the forerunner of all important sociopolitical trends

related to our Western civilization ... a country capable of transmitting the lights of spirituality to a Europe that has forgotten the true meaning of life in a depressive avalanche of materialistic meaninglessness, a European continent which has largely lost its true links to Christianity. Greece is a small nation which has, throughout its history, gone through multiple catastrophic periods, wars, and crises but has always emerged stronger and wiser ... the place where young people still dream, paint their aspirations on the azure-blue skies and later see them become reality. Greece is the nation where the lights of the glorious 1,000-year Byzantine era still flicker in the thousands of Orthodox Christian Churches during numberless nights of Holy Services in every corner of this country, on plains, valleys, mountains, seashores, and islands, in Holy Monasteries and on Holy Mount Athos, where the convergence of thousands of prayers day and night support and cure human sadness, create true joy and new hopes in shattered lives, alleviate fears and pain in famines, wars, and other catastrophic events ... the place where theology, empirically expressed as «being in God», becomes the story of human encounter with the «Logos» and «Grace» within the realm of the «Divine Light», beyond any concept of human logic, human wisdom, or scientific knowledge. This is our beloved country, Greece; this is the country the world is rediscovering today; this has been Hellenism throughout the ages!

Studying the Holy Scriptures leads to elevation of the spirit above all laws of physical creation, in which one begins to discern the Act of Divine Self-Revelation. This is the introduction to the Holy Grace of Theology, not as a human science but as a state of the Knowledge of God and Communion with the Divine. Manmade crises have as their deeper cause always a spiritual crisis and can act as catalysts for change for the better or for the worse. We should and we will remain focused on the positive side of developments to come on our planet. Ultimately, anything miraculous that takes place in the souls of only a few individuals scattered around the Earth can also take place within a multitude of souls, which can again lead humanity to a great rebirth ...

Supplement

On Russia ...

Observations from a visit to Moscow, during the celebrations on September 7th, 2019, of the 872nd birthday of a city established in 1147 AD.

Moscow, the city of all cities, where everything is imposing, grandiose, imperial. History, tradition, Christian roots, everything melts into a pandemonium of impressions, a city that never stops, people on the go, vibrant, energetic, confident, filled with optimism and with a smile on their face, patiently awaiting a glorious future yet to arrive. Moscow is a capital city of 20 million inhabitants, bustling with life 24 hours a day. Underground, a monumental metro system, 240 stations connecting every part of this mega-city, a veritable subterranean museum, each station a distinct work of art with classical paintings, statues, mosaics, all-porcelain chandeliers, everything depicting scenes from Russia's historical past. On September 7th, 2019, we were informed that 8 million people were commuting for Moscow's national day festivities using their spectacular subway system. Moscow is a city that is continuously growing and is meticulously clean, everything orderly, all infrastructure including public utilities and transportation systems in place, efficiently coordinated, functioning, and well-maintained. This is the story of a nation reflected in its capital city, a nation proud of its history, its successes and defeats, its great endeavors and battles, hardship and glory combined, with belief in its destiny, with an ideology and vision for the

future, with assurance and confidence in divine power and with a strong leadership committed to restoring Russia to its one-time greatness. One cannot but make the comparison between Russia and the West, from Europe to the US and beyond: then, the traits the West is lacking becoming eminently apparent, traits which Europe once possessed and transmitted to the United States, with which a remarkable European destiny was charted and a great American nation was built by its Founding Fathers. Traits, however, which have been gradually lost since those early days in both Europe and the United States.

Russia has a good educational system based on meritocracy, adequate healthcare, and excellent food quality based on strict quality control processes. Technology may not be evident in every aspect of daily life, especially in the rural areas, but this does not mean that Russia is technologically inferior to Western democracies or to Asian states. In fact, Russia is, at its core, highly advanced technologically. Russia, we would argue, is a nation on the rise, it is an empire on the rise with a powerful new culture full of symbolism, symbolism that creates national pride and transforms past glory into future national successes. A nation retaining its symbols everywhere, symbols that project the past into the present and further into the future. The obsession of Western think tanks, policy makers, and strategy analysts in predicting that, merely on the basis of economic numbers, Russia will disintegrate, is simplistic and superficial and actually sounds more like wishful thinking. Such projections do not take into account critical intangible elements, and most importantly belief, tradition, love for one's nation, endurance, patience, ideals, and the power of symbolism, all parameters which in the West have long ago lost their meaning and unfortunately also their applicability. Like every system, Russia could fail: any state can fail, but in our view, Russia will remain unchallenged by external factors. Perhaps one vulnerability of Russia lies in its system of leadership succession and, by extension, in upheavals coming about just before or during the periods of such processes. Another weakness is the transformation of its economy into a fully competitive diversified global economy and not one one-sidedly dependent on oil/gas revenues, something that has suddenly become quite relevant with the sharp drop of oil prices, a highly challenging financial issue for the Russian economy. Although a weakness historically does exist around leadership and power struggles in the Kremlin, Russia may in both instances surprise the West, and its present leader may surprise the West too. Due to his true love for his nation, President Putin may also leave a powerful succession legacy, defying weak moments of Russian history. President Putin managed to install a sense of order that is evident in every aspect of life, in every aspect of the governing mechanism and its structure, ultimately, in everyday life, throughout this vast nation.

On the only Sunday we stayed in Moscow we enjoyed the Divine Liturgy in the Holy Church of the Epiphany built in the mid-16th century, which, in the past, also served as Moscow's Metropolis. Another day we spent travelling 70 km to the north-east of Moscow, crossing vast expanses of lush fields in order to visit the Holy Trinity Saint Sergius Lavra in the town of Sergiev Posad (Zagorsk). This is a huge monastic compound, founded in 1337 AD, and constitutes one of the most important spiritual centers in Russia. Intense emotions of delight at the beauty and glory of it all - which are difficult to put in writing!

On the Power of Symbolism ...

Closing notes on the «power of symbolism», glimpses presented in a comparative way and providing a certain indication from a different qualitative angle of the inherent intangible strengths of some of the most important actors on the world scene, either in confrontational antagonism or in synergy, all contributors to the shaping of a new world.

The USA, the de facto still dominant world power, has, after WWII, gradually lost its symbolism, its symbolic power, which was at its height during the early days of its creation as a noble nation by its Founding Fathers. In contrast, Russia, despite periods of intense internal turbulence, revolutions, and national catastrophes, has not only retained its symbolism but is even reinforcing its symbolic power, especially since the break-up of the Soviet Union. The nature of its symbolism lies in the nation's strong faith in the Russian Orthodox Christian faith. Europe, which has largely lost its symbolism and its links to its Christian identity, is, however, in the process of reinventing itself, in the course of which it could return to its past symbols and strength, otherwise it will probably be undermined by strong forces of disintegration and will consequently remain on the sidelines in the oncoming battles for world supremacy. Israel has kept ancient Jewish symbolism alive, a process constantly fueling a strong sense of national identity and a sense of purpose for the future. Israel's future may reside just as much in the Middle Eastern region, where lie its historical roots, as in the Mediterranean basin and in its renewed warm relations with Cyprus and Greece, which countries could thus become a bridge to Europe for the Israeli nation. China, one of the oldest nations in the world and once rich in symbolism, is being infiltrated by materialism from the West, thereby potentially losing its own ancient ideology and symbolic power. It remains to be seen whether it will be able to hold on to what remains of its huge, rich, and ancient heritage and symbolic power and reinvigorate it. If it does so, it will also succeed in becoming one of the leading world powers of this century and beyond. India, experimenting with a new single national ethnic identity model, may possibly emerge as the bearer of new symbolic power, the glorious heritage of its ancient civilization. Together with Russia and China, it is one of the great nations of the Eurasian/Asian landmass and its destiny surely remains there. Japan, with a long and prestigious history, has largely retained its symbols. It will remain a great power in Asia. Its future status remains unsure as it antagonizes great Eurasian powers while retaining its close ties to the United States. Greece is the bearer nation of maximum symbolic and civilizational power emanating from the ancient and classical periods, through the Roman and further on to the Byzantine-Christian Orthodox eras. It has lost some of its symbolic power since the creation of the modern Greek state, following its Revolution for Independence in 1821, having been influenced by the European humanistic era. It has started once again to shine with all the glory and the wisdom of its 5000-year history, the cradle of Western civilization. Europe may become the main beneficiary of such symbolic power.

On Greece ...

The narrative of Greece is firmly established on a line of continuity, stretching splendidly from antiquity, to the Byzantine era, to modern Hellenism. The ancient heritage of Greece has always made it stand out as a special case within Europe. The interaction of the spirit of Europe with the Greek spirit goes both ways, through the imprint of Europe's scholastic value system on Greece and, by metaphor, through the transmission of ancient Hellenism to European culture and civilization. This is, in our view, a relationship which will qualitatively always weigh heavier on Greece's side because of the Hellenic nation's incredibly strong symbolic power. Looking into the past, the one thousand years of the Byzantine Empire - Christian Orthodox and predominantly speaking the Greek language - indelibly marked Greek culture forever. Greece and Europe have important dogmatic differences in their belief systems, which characterize two different cultural/civilizational systems. The former has a divine perspective at its center, while the latter is an anthropocentric system, born of the European Age of Enlightenment. Two archetypal categories, Roman versus Greek, represent two

sides of the coin, namely, the cosmopolitan, Western, contemporary view of life and the Orthodox, Eastern, local/traditional view of life. Their relationship, though not entirely incompatible, is nevertheless competitive. Contemporary Greek society inherently carries both types, allowing it to possess a fluid reality that is constantly changing according to the various surrounding political and social developments.

In the 1820s, waging a war for its independence from the Ottoman Empire, Greece became for the world an early symbol of escape from «the domination of empire». The Greek victory won on European soil translated in European reference and metaphor as freedom from the dynasts who had kept so many Europeans under autocratic rule. In the 1920's, the Greek-Turkish population exchange, numbering two million Christians and Muslims in the interest of national homogeneity, was the largest such organized refugee movement in history. In the Greek-Italian war in the winter of 1940-41, Greece was the first country to successfully fight back against the Axis powers. The fall of its military junta in 1974 marked the country's subsequent (1981) full membership in the European Union and opened the way for the global wave of democratization of the 1980s and '90s, in South America, Southeast Asia, Eastern Europe, and sub-Saharan Africa. It also pointed the way for EU enlargement, becoming the voice for the democratic continent, reaching west, south, and east. Greece, according to contemporary historian Mark Mazower, has been at the forefront of European evolution for the past 200 years, paving the way for the future of Europe. Greece will continue pointing towards developmental directions for the countries of the late modernization, constituting an early and distinctive indicator for developing states of the modern post-colonial world from the second half of the 20th century onwards. Greece's position is neither solely in the East nor in the West but is at the forefront of these two great geographical and cultural spheres, characterized by an unending dynamic. The relationship between Greece and Europe is a timeless act of love-hate, mutual admiration and sympathy and mutual suspicion and discomfort. In the end, the net-net outcome has been a win-win position for both Europe and Greece.

On Holy Mount Athos, in a centuries-old Byzantine Monastery, a spiritual Elder sits during an all-night ceremony quiet in his pew seemingly sleeping. In truth, he is praying for peace and harmony in the world and with his entire existence he is bathed in divine light. This is the essence of the Eastern Orthodox tradition, pure spiritual power which the Western world has almost entirely lost. Whether in Holy Mount Athos, in the Holy Land, in Jerusalem, or in the thousands of Christian Orthodox Monasteries in Greece or around the globe, Greece is still the holder of this divine tradition, which, through active prayer, continues to help the entire world.

On Miracles ...

A miracle is a natural event of the supernatural world ... the world is full of unseen miracles happening every day, most of them are sadly being missed ... and, together with them, the human longing for happiness is also gone ...

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