

NATO, the 'Eurasian Triangle,' and the Caucasus/Central Asia region

by Michael Liebig

Michael Liebig, from the Schiller Institute, Germany, gave the following presentation to a July 28-29 conference in New Delhi, on the topic of Indian relations with Central Asia. It was sponsored by the Maulana Azad Institute of Asian Studies, based in Calcutta. The proceedings, which will be published in book form, include a written contribution from Schiller Institute founder Helga Zepp-LaRouche on the Eurasian Land-Bridge and the "China-Russia-India strategic triangle."

Zbigniew Brzezinski has decried the Caucasus/Central Asia region as the "Eurasian Balkans." In view of the past years' sequence of bloody conflicts on the territory of former Yugoslavia, culminating in this spring's air war by NATO against Serbia, it is obvious what Brzezinski's characterization entails. Not being specialized in Caucasus/Central Asian affairs, I will focus in my remarks on NATO's new doctrinal—and operational—thrust in respect to the Eurasian core powers and the Caucasus/Central Asia region.

NATO's 'new strategic concept'

The April NATO summit in Washington signified the burial of the trusty "old NATO." Without any substantial public debate, neither in the U.S., nor in Europe, a new "strategic concept" for NATO was introduced. The "old" NATO was based on the principle of collective security, according to Article 5 of the 1949 Washington Treaty, to militarily guarantee the territorial integrity of the clearly defined area of the NATO member-states, against possible attacks by the then-Soviet Union.

In respect to this traditional NATO doctrine, on March 8, the Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Henry Shelton, speaking at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) in London, said: "This narrow view of collective defense is, however, insufficient to counter the more sophisticated and subtle dangers we face today." NATO must "broaden its strategic perspective to protect all of our interests from a myriad of complex, asymmetric threats that span the conflict continuum." NATO must "place new emphasis

on the unpredictable and multi-directional nature of threats such as regional conflict, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism," he stated.

Some two weeks after General Shelton made these remarks, and four weeks before the new NATO doctrine was formally passed, the commencement of NATO's 78-day air war against Yugoslavia over Kosovo, revealed what was lurking behind Shelton's convoluted sentences. The very real, bloody conflict on the territory of former Yugoslavia, which really began in 1989, when Yugoslavia lost its unique position between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, was exploited by NATO as a war which had global-strategic purposes going way beyond the Balkans as such.

The Balkan war's geopolitical aims

NATO's air war against Serbia was to demonstrate:

1. Russia, internally exhausted by International Monetary Fund (IMF)-dictated so-called economic "reform" policies, no longer had any decisive say on the Balkans, traditionally an area of significant Russian influence.

2. China could no longer expect that it was accepted within the framework of the UN Security Council, as a global strategic partner, with whom cooperative solutions for pressing global-strategic issues would be sought. That point was to be demonstrated further by the deliberate bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade on May 7.

3. A strategically weakened continental Western Europe, Germany and France in particular, was to be "taught a lesson." Namely, that it lacked the political and military-strategic strength to oppose geopolitical designs, emanating from within the Anglo-American establishment, even if they contradicted continental Europe's self-interest.

4. Through the economic and infrastructural debility of Serbia, and the intention to install a "pro-Western" regime, a continuous geo-military space is to be created, to fill the gap between NATO in Western-Central Europe and NATO member Turkey, with its special military ties to Israel. Thus, a geo-military land corridor would be created from Europe's Atlantic coastline into the Caucasus/Central Asia region.



Schiller Institute representative Michael Liebig: “The world financial and economic crisis provides a unique ‘flank’ for finding a way out of the current global situation, in both economic and military terms.”

The United States and NATO: the battle within

The third point has specific importance, because uncertainty on this point, leads to serious misassessment. Neither NATO, nor, even more importantly, the United States, can be viewed as “monolithic” entities. At the core of the problem, lies the issue of how the United States will ultimately define its role as the world’s superpower. There are two alternative definitions of the U.S. superpower role:

1. Will the U.S. engage in “productive competition” with the rest of the world, with the emerging great powers China and India, with an eventually recovering Russia, and with Western Europe and Japan? Will the U.S. try to stay ahead, within an overall developing and growing world economy, in which all nations will grow in strength—economically, politically, and also militarily?

2. Or, will the U.S. go the “British imperial way”? That means, the relative strength of the U.S. would be preserved—for some time—by the maximum weakening of all potential strategic competitors. This would mean a world of overall stagnation, decline, and disintegration, including of the United States itself.

The developments of the past ten years demonstrate that the U.S. has not really gained any in-depth, real economic strength, albeit it has kept a leading role in key advanced civilian and military technologies. However, the rest of the world combined, has lost much more in real economic, political, and military power, despite great progress in India,

China, and some other Asian states.

In both analytical and operational-strategic terms, it is of vital importance to make the relevant differentiation in respect to the United States. It is the British-American-Commonwealth (BAC) power group within the U.S. establishment, which has been pushing the second—neo-imperial, British—definition of America’s superpower role. I must emphasize here, that the BAC should not simplistically be confused with “the United States”; the BAC has much influence within the Clinton administration, but is not in total control of the U.S. government.

American foreign and security policy under President Clinton has been largely usurped by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, the devout follower of her mentor Zbigniew Brzezinski, who is the present-day reincarnation of British geopolitician Sir Halford Mackinder. BAC influence on the Clinton administration also flows through Vice President Al Gore, plus his highly influential national security adviser Leon Fuerth, Secretary of Defense William Cohen, and the “permanent bureaucracy”—really, a “parallel government”—in the Pentagon and the intelligence community.

The new NATO strategy has been under intense discussion since January 1998, and, since January 1998, President Clinton had been in the line of fire of the Lewinsky affair. The attempts to neutralize the Clinton Presidency have not abated, even after the failed impeachment coup attempt. To understand the new NATO strategy, the continuing policy fights within the American political situation, as well as the world financial and economic crisis since 1997, must be adequately taken into account.

The new military ‘triad’

It is out of this dynamic, that a fundamental shift in America’s military-strategic approach has emerged: the triad of air warfare, special forces deployments, and so-called information warfare (sometimes called cyberwar). At the same time, the threshold for the “first use” of tactical nuclear weapons, in case the conduct of war along the lines of the “triad” concept does not succeed, is significantly lowered. The ongoing Anglo-American “undeclared” war against Iraq, and the air war against Serbia, have been “test runs” for the new U.S. military strategy, and NATO’s “new strategic concept” is merely an outgrowth of this new U.S. military strategy.

In his London RUSI speech, Shelton attacked those “cynics” who “speculate that America seeks to shift NATO toward some kind of global role,” but then he confirms their suspicions, when he said that NATO must “redefine its mission . . . to reflect the geopolitical landscape to which it is anchored.” This includes the “amorphous,” “asymmetric,” and “complex” threats he sees as being located “beyond NATO territory,” but which Shelton claimed “directly affect NATO’s security.” NATO must have the ability “to respond

quickly and effectively to crises, either within NATO territory or in areas of fundamental interest to the Alliance.” The renowned Austrian military magazine *Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift* is more blunt: “NATO’s strategic orientation will shift from an East-West scenario to a North-South or a West-South-East scenario, and thus cover an operational area which stretches from India to Morocco.”

The ‘West’ and the Caucasus/Central Asia region

Zbigniew Brzezinski’s description of the Caucasus/Central Asia region as the “Eurasian Balkans,” does not just mean some geopolitical hypothesis; he is talking about operational policy of the BAC power group. In the Caucasus/Central Asia region there exists a plethora of most serious, and often bloody conflicts, and these conflicts are being exploited by the BAC, through the U.S. and NATO, for much larger, global geopolitical purposes.

I need not elaborate on what regional experts at this seminar can do much better. I will just list some areas in the Caucasus-Caspian Sea region, where some sort of “indirect,” politico-military intrusion of the U.S., Turkey, Britain, and/or NATO is occurring. This, despite the fact that Russia—in “institutional,” not just “political” terms—has told the U.S. and its European NATO allies, in no uncertain terms, that any attempt by NATO to expand, and incorporate, directly or indirectly, any of the former Soviet republics, would constitute a “red line.” The word “any” includes, most emphatically, the Baltic republics, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and the Caucasus republics of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

Both the governments of Heidar Aliyev in Azerbaijan and of Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia, are calling for their republics to “join NATO,” “establish U.S. or Turkish bases,” or “bring in NATO or U.S. peacekeeping forces.” On June 29, Murtuz Aleskerov, Azerbaijan’s Speaker of Parliament, said, “Our country seeks to become a NATO member-state.” Under this perspective, Armenian forces could be expelled from the 20% of Azeri territory, which they occupied following the 1992-94 Armenia-Azerbaijan war. On July 1, Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister Giga Burduli said that Georgia had requested “NATO membership.” Azerbaijan has also asked for either NATO, the U.S., or Turkey, to set up military bases on its territory, and both Azerbaijan and Georgia have requested that NATO “peacekeepers” replace the Russian-Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) ones in the Georgian breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and in and around the Armenian region of Karabakh [enclave inside Azerbaijan].

In conjunction with these geopolitical destabilizations, the most dangerous immediate flashpoint is the breakaway republic of Chechnya, which has had, de facto, independent status [from Russia] since August 1996, when Russian troops withdrew. Chechnya is filled with armed gangs, both native

FIGURE 1
The Caucasus chessboard



Chechen extremists and “imported” so-called “Islamic mujahideen,” who operate against the Chechen government of Aslan Maskhadov and stage regular armed provocations in cross-border raids against Russian forces stationed near Chechnya. Since the beginning of this year, these raids have dramatically increased, with over 100 people, mostly troops and police manning border posts, being killed. The “Islamic mujahideen” in Chechnya are financed by Saudi Arabian-Wahhabi networks and supported by Islamic Afghan war veterans and the Taliban. British intelligence has a significant “steering” input into these “Islamic fundamentalist” terrorist networks.

In late March, a bomb went off in the central marketplace of Vladikavkaz, the capital of the Russian-ruled autonomous republic of Northern Ossetia, killing about 60 people. Prior to this, British-steered “Chechen” irregular warfare had focussed on attacking the neighboring autonomous republics of Dagestan and Ingushetia. Since March, the same near-daily pattern of cross-border raids, murder, assassinations of officials, pillaging, and kidnapping, has also hit Northern Ossetia and the Russian territory of Stavropol, which also borders on Chechnya. It was in March, too, that the most spectacular kidnapping occurred, when “Chechen” extremists seized Russian Interior Troops’ Gen. Maj. Gennadi Spigun, an aide to then-Interior Minister Sergei Stepashin.

That kidnapping generated a Russian counter-escalation. Stepashin, as Interior Minister in the government of Prime

Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, a close ally of U.S. Vice President Gore, had been responsible for convincing President Boris Yeltsin to take the fateful decision to invade Chechnya in December 1994. On July 3 this year, Stepashin's hand-picked Interior Minister, Vladimir Rushailo, informed the Federation Council [the upper house of parliament], of a new doctrine of "preemptive attacks" against "Chechen terrorism." Two days later, the first such attacks occurred, as Russian attack helicopters struck gang bases deep inside Chechnya. Such "preemptive" attacks are not to be made only by Russian Army or Interior Troops. On July 12, Interior Minister Rushailo visited Stavropol territory, near the Chechen border, and discussed the arming of Cossack detachments for "defense" of the border region and for cross-border operations into Chechnya.

The big danger in this situation, would be that Yeltsin would be tempted to use an armed conflict in the Caucasus, as a pretext to declare a state of emergency, under which the upcoming December elections to the Duma [the lower house] would be called off, and potentially, the Presidential elections would also be postponed.

The 'Eurasian Triangle' as enemy-image

The enemy-image of the BAC geopolitical strategy, as reflected in the new American and NATO doctrines, is the so-called "rogue state"—Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the Serbia of Slobodan Milosevic or, perhaps, Iran. But, others, beyond the states mentioned, could very quickly become so-called "rogue states," if they ostensibly or actually threatened the hegemonic power position of the Anglo-American BAC group—be it in the financial-economic, or in the political-military realm. Therefore, there should be no surprise to see the BAC faction turning China increasingly into an enemy-image; that view has gained much acceptance in the U.S. Congress, as well as among many military and intelligence circles. The BAC power group knows that China is still relatively weak and that it would require about 10-20 years to reach the status of a co-superpower. In purely military terms, China's strategic nuclear arsenal is much weaker than that of France or England. The BAC faction wants to stop China, before it becomes a superpower. This has not eluded the Chinese, who have qualitatively strengthened their strategic cooperation with Russia—with its still impressive strategic nuclear forces.

The leading BAC elites are committed to breaking this Russian-Chinese cooperation, and to isolate China, calculating that an isolated China could not withstand a global power showdown. That is why the BAC used the Yeltsin apparatus and the Boris Berezovsky complex to bring down the Primakov government in Russia. India, which has become a nuclear power, also constitutes a potential "rogue state" as well; the more so, if India works together with Russia and China, in the economic and political-strategic realm. Thus, the "Eurasian

triangle"—China, Russia, and India—has become the principal geopolitical enemy-image of the BAC elites.

Western Europe caught in the middle

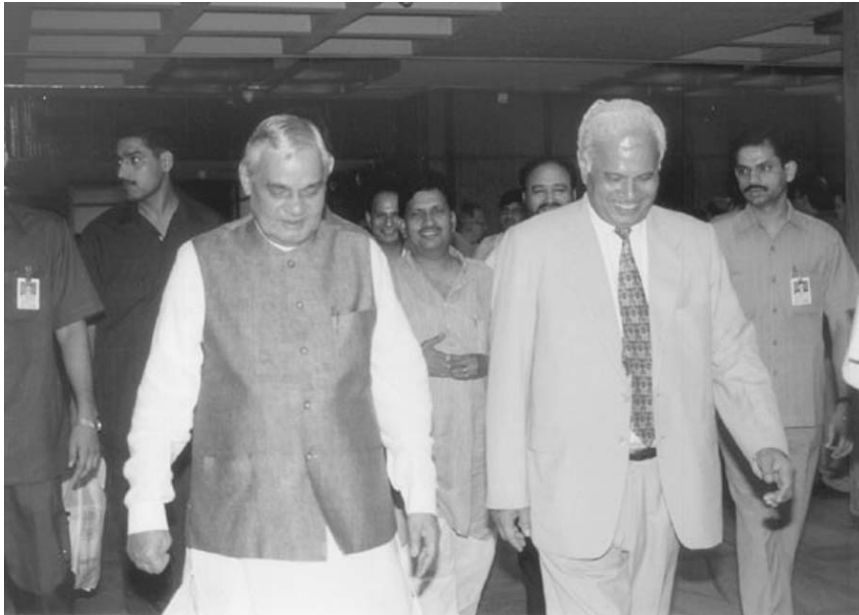
On the one hand, the BAC elites need the logistical and military potential of NATO in Western continental Europe, for their global strategy, because they have lost much real economic and military-logistical substance in the U.S. over the last ten years, even though this is mostly not acknowledged in the public realm. On the other hand, they would

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like to avoid the political tensions and frictions with Western continental Europe, which inevitably emerge in the event of a transatlantic coalition forged to move militarily against a third party. A careful analysis of the recent Balkan war demonstrates this clearly. This is even more the case, if Western continental Europe considers itself not threatened by the third party or parties, or if Europe has substantial common interests with the would-be enemy.

Apparently, the BAC's desire is for Western continental Europe to accept and adopt, as far as possible, the new American military strategy, within the context of the "new NATO," but without continental Europe "meddling" too much in global political and strategic affairs. Obviously, Western continental Europe is torn between Anglo-American pressure to accept the transformation of NATO, on the one hand, and the attempt to prevent a "new Cold War" in Eurasia, on the other. The long-term economic and strategic interests for Europe's survival, demand that it stay out of any political or even military confrontation of the "West" with Russia or China. At the same time, it is in Europe's basic interest to prevent a transatlantic split with the United States.

Coming from Germany, I should note that there exists



Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (left) shown entering the New Delhi conference, where he gave the keynote address. With him is Prof. Devendra Kaushik (right), chairman of the Maulana Azad Institute for Asian Studies in Calcutta.

among foreign and security policy experts, a significant recognition of the emerging “Eurasian triangle,” involving India, China, and Russia. An important indication was this year’s Wehrkunde conference in Munich, Germany. The annual Wehrkunde conference is one of NATO’s most prestigious events, which is usually addressed by the defense and/or foreign ministers of the U.S., Germany, France, and Britain. Since 1992, high-level Russian government and military representatives have also been participating. This year, for the first time, Mei Zhaorong of China’s Institute of Foreign Affairs, and H.E. Brajesh Mishra, National Security Adviser to the Prime Minister of India, addressed the Wehrkunde conference. I know from senior conference participants, that the Indian and Chinese presence in Munich was meant to make a very definite point, in recognizing the two great Asian powers’ standing in global strategic affairs. Besides, the two contributions were seen as exceptionally refreshing, considering the usual conceptual redundancy in NATO’s foreign and security community.

In Germany, there is some definite recognition about the strategic necessity that a “Eurasian triangle” emerge. How would you expect otherwise, when Zbigniew Brzezinski states, that for the United States, continental “Europe [is] not a partner, but a protectorate”? Brzezinski said so in Vienna in late June, in front of a dozen heads of state from Central and Eastern Europe, who responded by shaking their heads in bewilderment. Brzezinski added that “global hegemony” is not the right way to characterize America’s role; American “omnipotence” would be a better characterization.

It is, therefore, quite natural that the nations of continen-

tal Europe would wish to see a strong, stable, and economically developing China and India, and a recovering Russia, as well as the deepening strategic cooperation among these three great Asian/Eurasian powers. And, one should add, such a state of affairs in Eurasia, is in the best long-term self-interest of the United States, whose very own development and prosperity depends on stable and prospering partners in Eurasia.

Eurasia: the triangle and the Land-Bridge

Obviously, in the political-strategic and military-technical realm, the “Eurasian triangle” has made significant progress, especially in the past months. However, if a new “Euro-atlantic” versus “Eurasian” Cold War, with exploding regional conflicts, is to be prevented, something more than a quasi-mirror image, “geopolitical counter-

design” is necessary.

The political-strategic and military cooperation in Eurasia among China, India, and Russia, needs a sound economic basis. Here enters the economic development strategy of the Eurasian Land-Bridge, or the New Silk Road, which the Schiller Institute and the American politician and economist Lyndon LaRouche have been promoting for several years. The Eurasian triangle, in political-strategic terms, and the Eurasian Land-Bridge, in economic terms, are the two sides of the same coin, so to speak.

Here we have to address a truly fundamental point, without which any attempt to draw a truthful picture of the global strategic situation must become blurred and disorienting: the global financial and economic crisis.

The world financial crisis

Currently, conventional wisdom will concede that, over the past two years, there has been an unfortunate series of crises in the world financial system: an “Asia crisis,” a “Russia crisis,” a “Brazil crisis,” a real depression in Japan’s economy, and “irrational exuberance” on Wall Street, which was Alan Greenspan’s way of describing financial asset price inflation. I would simply call it an utterly unsustainable financial bubble. But, conventional wisdom will categorically deny that all these financial and economic eruptions during the past two years, are anything other than just different expressions, symptoms, or “fronts,” of one global and systemic financial crisis.

The manifold crises in different segments of the financial system, can no longer be adequately explained just as con-

crete, localized situations or abnormalities. The above-mentioned series of recent financial disasters, as typified by the so-called Asia crisis, are not an arbitrary accumulation of isolated crises of different, specific origins. What is really important, is not the individual causality of the specific episodes, but the causality for the series of crises.

Their denial of the global and systemic nature of the situation, explains the complete failure of the crisis-management policies of the IMF and the G-7 governments and central banks. None of these institutions, to date, has in the least been able to “re-stabilize” the global financial system. These crisis-management actions have only “bought some time” for keeping the current system going, by actually worsening its overall condition, through the combination of vast bailout packages, IMF “conditionalities,” and massive central bank liquidity pumping. Whenever, during the past two years, the financial situation was declared to be “back under control,” for sure, the next, and worse, crisis was about to hit. And so it will be this very autumn.

The Clausewitzian transposition

This global financial-economic crisis entails a twofold strategic dynamic. First, the really dangerous one: the economic-financial crisis becoming a military-strategic crisis as well. Here, one must comprehend the Clausewitzian transposition of the financial-economic crisis into a military-strategic crisis. For the current global strategic situation, the Clausewitz dictum, that “war is the continuation of politics by other means,” remains as valid as ever. Economic-financial problems, which governments are politically unwilling and/or incapable of resolving effectively, by means of economic and financial policy changes, tend to get “resolved” by “other means.”

During the October-November 1998 turning point in the global financial crisis, the BAC’s current confrontation/war drive was enacted. First came the “undeclared” war against Iraq, using the faked “Butler Report” as a pretext. Second, came the drive to qualitatively transform NATO, by ramming through the neo-imperial “New Strategic Concept.” Then came the war in the Balkans, which could have been diplomatically averted, if Russia’s and the UN’s involvement had not been deliberately obstructed, before March 24.

Back to Clausewitz’s dictum, that “war is the continuation of politics by other means.” “Politics” is the totality of political, economic-financial, social, and cultural factors. The content of politics is primarily determined by the existence or absence of economic, social, and cultural development. Ultimately, that decides whether there is war or not, whether there is development or not. The politics of development does not need a continuation “by other means.” A strategy of development is “self-sufficient,” so to speak, as it can realize its aims by economic, political, and cultural means. A policy of economic, social, and cultural decline, erosion and disintegration, however, necessarily leads to its

continuation by other means—confrontation, pressure by force, and war. War may take many forms: conventional war, civil war, irregular war, or war with WMD [weapons of mass destruction]. A strategy of non-development inevitably leads to an “entropic quantum jump” into the regime of war.

The crisis as an opportunity

But, there is a second option that can be brought about by the shock effects of the global economic and financial crisis. These shock effects can lead to a reversal in the power rela-

The inescapable need to structurally reorganize the global financial system and to re-stimulate the world economy, opens up enormous chances for the Eurasian Land-Bridge, if China, India, and Russia are determined to act at the right moment. Nothing short of such a transnational mega-development project will re-stimulate the largely depressed industrial capabilities of Europe, Japan, and the core real economy of the United States.

tions within the United States and continental Western Europe, that is, within NATO. As a consequence of a systemic meltdown in world financial affairs, what seems currently to be the “omnipotence” of the BAC power group, acting through the IMF and similar “international financial institutions,” might be transformed into the equivalent of the “emperor with no clothes.” The inescapable need to structurally reorganize the global financial system and to re-stimulate the world economy, opens up enormous chances for the Eurasian Land-Bridge, if China, India, and Russia are determined to act at the right moment. Nothing short of such a transnational mega-development project will re-stimulate the largely depressed industrial capabilities of Europe, Japan, and the core real economy of the United States.

Thus, the world financial and economic crisis provides a unique “flank” for finding a way out of the current global situation, in both economic and military terms. Here lies the unique chance for spoiling the geopolitical design to enact a “Euro-atlantic” versus “Eurasian” Cold War, with lots of “hot” regional conflicts exploding across Eurasia. Here lies the unique chance for an alternative to the Caucasus/Central Asia region becoming the “Eurasian Balkans.”