

Russia and China: The (Re)Emergent Great Powers and the Impact in the World System

Interview by Jorge Nascimento Rodrigues (Editor of GurusOnline.tv)
<http://www.gurusonline.tv/uk/conteudos/kissane.asp>

Jorge Nascimento Rodrigues: *Do you think Russia can develop an historical similar pattern with the Germany power cycle since the beginning of the XX Century? I am not meaning that Putin or his successors are an Hitler copy and Russia will change from the present "mild" authoritarian regime for a fascist and open imperialist one, but due the decline in the power cycle and the inflection with Putin emergence, can we assist in this window of 15 years to a similar strategy of power projection and risk of conflicts, for instance in the shatter belt of Russia, in Europe and Asia, or even in the Arctic?*

Dylan Kissane: Of the power curves I mapped, Russia's is closest to emerging in a German-style pattern. A similar argument might be made for the United States, however the rate of rise and decline in the case of the US is less pronounced. If this is the case then a similar strategy to German expansionism of the 20th century might well emerge. Eastern Europe - particularly East Moldova/Transnistria, Georgia and perhaps East Ukraine to start with - would be obvious targets of an expansionist Russia, as would the Central Asian states. The Arctic, though, is an interesting case as not only is the expansionism under Putin already taking place today, I think there is a possibility Russia might actually succeed in having their claim recognized under international law. The question then becomes whether Russia's activities in the Arctic are really expansionist under a soft authoritarian government or just 'righting a geographical wrong' with modern sub-ocean research.

JNR: *So, do you think the German "model" can be cloned?*

DK: Is it possible for Russia to follow a 20th century German path? Yes, I believe so. Is it likely? I think it is more likely than not. The places to watch are where any German-style expansion will take place but I think we can be more specific and point to specific Eastern European territory that would be the equivalent of the Hitler's Sudetenland in the shape of Transnistria, Georgia and East Ukraine. Also we could look to recent moves against the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty by Russia and, perhaps, deployment of new weapons systems by Russia in Kaliningrad.

JNR: *Benchmarking Russia and China power cycles, it seems that the riskier situation is more in the side of Russia's counter-offensive in its decline cycle, than in the rising cycle of China. Do you agree?*

DK: I do. On the long term trend, Russia is more likely to experience a critical point on its power cycle curve than China. Indeed, China's rise remains inevitable and will continue towards 2030. This makes Russia 'riskier' though probably not for Australia (the focus of my study). As you will note from my paper, I was specifically seeking the implications of the curves for Australian policy in Asia and I discounted the trends for states outside of the region. Offensive action on the part of Russia seem most likely in the region surrounding Russia rather than in the Asia-Pacific region and, thus, I discounted the likely approaching Russian critical point in favour of analysis of China, the US and Japan.

JNR: *Benchmarking US power cycle and China power cycle, do you think in the next 15 years we can have a first clear power projection from China, as the US did in the beginning of the XX Century? When I refer power projection I do not mean the present soft power offensive coming from China regarding Asia (including Australia), Africa and Latin America.*

DK: As China continues to rise in power I think hard power-projections are inevitable. Most would immediately look to Taiwan as the obvious choice for Chinese power projection but a focus only on Taiwan blinds the analyst to the greater regional ambitions of China. Instead we might look to a strengthening of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) pact or a more Sino-centric orientation of that pact. We might also look for Chinese investment in aerospace technologies and submarine technologies which would be an essential part of any hard power projection by China. The soft power offensive, however, remains important to consider. If we look at the US example in the Middle East today we see a hard power offensive (the war in Iraq) followed by a soft power offensive (instilling democracy, winning hearts and minds) has not worked well at all for the Americans. The Chinese model (soft power, then hard power) might be more effective in winning allies and achieving Chinese ends in Asia.

JNR: *What do you think of Japan? Despite its defeat in the WWII and the crash in its geo-economic offensive of the 1980's and beginning of the 1990's, its cycle power continues in a rising curve. What can you forecast from this Japanese resilience?*

DK: I think forecasting a growing share of the power in the system is not unreasonable. Japan's rise, however, may prove to be more sustainable than the rise of its East Asian neighbour, China - one might forecast that. The Japanese example, though, should not be considered in isolation to the Chinese and US curves. The US is in decline and the shift in power is to East Asia, specifically Japan and China. Though China is forecast to be the predominant power in the world system in 2015, Japan is predicted to reach power parity with the US at around 2030.