

PEPE ESCOBAR: US and Iran Stuck on Negotiation Ground Zero

Donald Trump says he's 'okay either way', whether there's war with Iran and Tehran seems to be okay with that too, warns Pepe Escobar.

By **Pepe Escobar**

in Paris

Special to Consortium News



All bets are off in the geopolitical insanity stakes when we have the President of the United States (POTUS) glibly **announcing** he could launch a nuclear first strike to end the war in Afghanistan and wipe it “off the face of the earth” in one week. But he'd rather not, so he doesn't have to kill 10 million people.

Apart from the fact that not even a nuclear strike would subdue the legendary fighting spirit of Afghan Pashtuns, the same warped logic – ordering a nuclear first strike as one orders a cheeseburger – could apply to Iran instead of Afghanistan.

Trump once again flip-flopped by declaring that the prospect of a potential war in the Persian Gulf “could go either way, and I'm OK either way it goes,” much to the delight of Beltway-related psychopaths who peddle the notion that Iran is **begging to be bombed**.

No wonder the whole Global South – not to mention the Russia-China strategic partnership – simply cannot trust anything coming from Trump's mouth or tweets, a non-stop

firefight deployed as intimidation tactics.

At least Trump's impotence facing such a determined adversary as Iran is now clear: "It's getting harder for me to want to make a deal with Iran." What remains are empty clichés, such as Iran "behaving very badly" and "the number one state of terror in the world" – the marching order mantra emanating from Tel Aviv.

Even the – illegal – all-out economic war and total blockade against Tehran seems not to be enough. Trump has announced extra sanctions on China because Beijing is "accepting crude oil" from Iran. Chinese companies will simply ignore them.

Okay With 'OK Either Way'

"OK either way" is exactly the kind of response expected by the leadership in Tehran. Prof. Mohammad Marandi of the University of Tehran confirmed to me that Tehran did not offer Trump a "renegotiation" of the JCPOA, or Iran nuclear deal, in exchange for the end of sanctions: "It's not a renegotiation. Iran offered to move forward ratification of additional protocols if Congress removes all sanctions. That would be a big win for Iran. But the US will never accept it."

Marandi also confirmed "there is nothing big going on" between Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and tentative Trump administration negotiator Sen. Rand Paul: "Bolton and Pompeo remain in charge."

The crucial fact is that Tehran rejects a new negotiation with the White House "under any circumstances," as expressed by Hossein Dehghan, the top military adviser to Supreme

Leader Ayatollah Khamenei.

Dehghan once again made it very clear that in case of any sort of military adventure, every single base of the U.S. Empire of Bases across Southwest Asia will be targeted.

This neatly ties in with Iran's by now consolidated new rules of engagement, duly detailed by correspondent Elijah Magnier. We are well into "an-eye-for-an-eye" territory.

And that brings us to the alarming expansion of the sanctions dementia, represented by two Iranian ships loaded with corn stranded off the coast of southern Brazil because energy giant Petrobras, afraid of U.S. sanctions, refuses to refuel them.

Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, a fervent Trump groupie, has turned the country into a tropical U.S. neo-colony in less than seven months. On U.S. sanctions, Bolsonaro said, "We are aligned to their policies. So we do what we have to." Tehran for its part has threatened to cut its imports of corn, soybeans and meat from Brazil – \$2 billion worth of trade a year – unless the refueling is allowed.

This is an extremely serious development. Food is not supposed to be – illegally – sanctioned by the Trump administration. Iran now has to use mostly barter to obtain food – as Tehran cannot remit through the CHIPS-SWIFT banking clearinghouse. If food supplies are also blocked that means that sooner rather than later the Strait of Hormuz may be blocked as well.

Beltway sources confirmed that the highest level of the U.S. government gave the order for Brasilia to stop this food

shipment.

Tehran knows it well – as this is part of the “maximum pressure” campaign, whose goal is ultimately to starve the Iranian population to death in a harrowing game of chicken.

How this may end is described by an ominous quote I already used in some of my previous columns, from a Goldman Sachs derivatives specialist: “If the Strait of Hormuz is closed, the price of oil will rise to a thousand dollars a barrel representing over 45 percent of global GDP, crashing the \$2.5 quadrillion derivatives market and creating a world depression of unprecedented proportions.”

At least the Pentagon seems to understand that a war on Iran will collapse the world economy.

And Now for Something Completely Different

But then, last but not least, there’s the tanker war.

Dutch analyst Maarten van Mourik has noted significant discrepancies involving the UK piracy episode in Gibraltar – the origin of the tanker war. The Grace 1 tanker “was pirated by the Royal Marines in international waters. Gibraltar Straits is an international passage, like the Strait of Hormuz. There is only 3 nautical miles of territorial water around Gibraltar, and even that is disputed.”

Mourik adds, “The size of the Grace 1 ship is 300,000 MT of crude oil, it has a maximum draught of about 22.2 meters and the latest draught via AIS indicated that she was at 22.1 meters, or fully laden. Now, the port of Banyas in Syria, which is where the offshore oil port is, has a maximum draft

of 15 meters. So, in no way could the Grace 1 go there, without first having to offload elsewhere. Probably a very large quantity to get within max draught limitations.”

That ties in with Foreign Minister Javad Zarif refusing on the record to say where Grace 1 was actually heading to, while not confirming the destination was Syria.

The tit-for-tat Iranian response, with the seizure of the Stena Impero navigating under the British flag, is now evolving into Britain calling for a “European-led maritime protection mission” in the Persian Gulf, purportedly to protect ships from Iranian “state piracy.”

Observers may be excused for mistaking it for a Monty Python sketch. Here we have the Ministry of Silly Seizures, which is exiting the EU, begging the EU to embark on a “mission” that is not the same mission of the U.S. “maximum pressure” campaign. And on top of it the mission should not undermine Britain’s commitment to keep the JCPOA in place.

As European nations never recede on a chance to flaunt their dwindling “power” across the Global South, Britain, Germany and France now seem bent on their “mission” to “observe maritime security in the Gulf,” in the words of French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian. At least this won’t be a deployment of joint naval forces – as London insisted. Brussels diplomats confirmed the initial muscular request came from London, but then it was diluted: the EU, NATO and the U.S. should not be involved – at least not directly.

Now compare this with the phone call last week between Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and French President Emmanuel Macron, with Tehran expressing the determination to

“keep all doors open” for the JCPOA. Well, certainly not open to the Monty Python sketch.

That was duly confirmed by Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who said Iran will “not allow disturbance in shipping in this sensitive area,” while Iranian vice-president Eshaq Jahangiri rejected the notion of a “joint European task force” protecting international shipping: “These kinds of coalitions and the presence of foreigners in the region by itself creates insecurity.”

Iran has always been perfectly capable, historically, of protecting that Pentagonese Holy Grail – “freedom of navigation” – in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. Tehran certainly doesn’t need former colonial powers to enforce it. It’s so easy to lose the plot; the current, alarming escalation is only taking place because of the “art of the deal” obsession on imposing an illegal, total economic war on Iran.

Pepe Escobar, a veteran Brazilian journalist, is the correspondent-at-large for Hong Kong-based [Asia Times](#). His latest book is [“2030.”](#) Follow him on [Facebook](#).

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PEPE ESCOBAR: Brazilgate is Turning into Russiagate 2.0

The Intercept's bombshell about Brazilian corruption is being ludicrously spun by the country's media and military as a "Russian conspiracy," writes Pepe Escobar

By **Pepe Escobar**

in Paris

Special to Consortium News



It was a leak, not a hack. Yes: Brazilgate, unleashed by a series of game-changing bombshells published by *The Intercept*, may be turning into a tropical Russiagate.

The Intercept's Deep Throat – an anonymous source – has finally revealed in detail what anyone with half a brain in Brazil already knew: that the judicial/lawfare machinery of the one-sided Car Wash anti-corruption investigation was in fact a massive farce and criminal racket bent on accomplishing four objectives.

- Create the conditions for the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the subsequent ascension of her VP, elite-manipulated puppet, Michel Temer.
- Justify the imprisonment of former president Lula in 2018 – just as he was set to win the latest presidential election in a landslide.
- Facilitate the ascension of the Brazilian extreme-right via Steve Bannon asset (he calls him "Captain") Jair Bolsonaro.
- Install former judge Sergio Moro as a justice minister on steroids capable of enacting a sort of Brazilian Patriot Act – heavy on espionage and light on civil liberties.

Moro, side by side with prosecutor Deltan Dallagnol, who was leading the Public Ministry's 13-strong task force, are the vigilante stars of the lawfare racket. Over the past four years, hyper-concentrated Brazilian mainstream media, floundering in a swamp of fake news, duly glorified these two as Captain Marvel-worthy national heroes. Hubris finally caught up with the swamp.

The Brazilian Goodfellas

The Intercept has promised to release all the files in its possession; chats, audio, videos and pics, a treasure trove allegedly larger than Snowden's. What has been published so far reveals Moro/Dallagnol as a strategic duo in synch, with Moro as a *capo di tutti i capi*, judge, jury and executioner rolled into one – replete with serial fabrications of evidence. This, in itself, is enough to nullify all the Car Wash cases in which he was involved – including Lula's prosecution and successive convictions based on "evidence" that would never hold up in a serious court.

In conjunction with a wealth of gory details, the Twin Peaks principle – the owls are not what they seem – fully applies to Brazilgate. Because the genesis of Car Wash involves none other than the United States government (USG). And not only the Department of Justice (DoJ) – as Lula has been stressing for years in every one of his interviews. The op was Deep State at its lowest.

WikiLeaks had already revealed it from the start, when the NSA started spying on energy giant Petrobras and even Rousseff's smart phone. In parallel, countless nations and individuals have learned how the DoJ's self-attributed

extraterritoriality allows it to go after anyone, anyhow, anywhere.

It has never been about anti-corruption. Instead this is American “justice” interfering in the full geopolitical and geo-economic spheres. The most glaring, recent case, is Huawei’s.

Yet Mafiosi Moro/Dallagnol’s “malign behavior” (to invoke Pentagonese) reached a perverse new level in destroying the national economy of a powerful emerging nation, a BRICS member and acknowledged leader across the Global South.

Car Wash ravaged the chain of energy production in Brazil, which in turn generated the sale – below market prizes – of plenty of valuable pre-salt oil reserves, the biggest oil discovery of the 21st century.

Car Wash destroyed Brazilian national champions in engineering and civil construction as well as aeronautics (as in Boeing buying Embraer). And Car Wash fatally compromised important national security projects such as the construction of nuclear submarines,

essential for the protection of the “Blue Amazon”.

For the Council of Americas – which Bolsonaro visited back in 2017 – as well as the Council on Foreign Relations–not to mention the “foreign investors”–to have neoliberal Chicago boy Paulo Guedes installed as finance minister was a wet dream. Guedes promised on the record to virtually put all of Brazil for sale. So far, his stint has been an unmitigated failure.

How to Wag the Dog

Mafiosi Moro/Dallagnol were “only a pawn in their game,” to quote Bob Dylan— a game both were oblivious to.

Lula has repeatedly stressed that the key question – for Brazil and the Global South – is sovereignty. Under Bolsonaro, Brazil has been reduced to the status of a banana neo-colony – with plenty of bananas. Leonardo Attuch, editor of the leading portal Brasil247, says “the plan was to destroy Lula, but what was destroyed was the nation.”

As it stands, the BRICS – a very dirty word in the Beltway – have lost their “B”. As much as they may treasure Brazil in Beijing and Moscow, what is delivering for the moment is the “RC” strategic partnership, although Putin and Xi are also doing their best to revive “RIC”, trying to show India’s Modi that Eurasian integration is the way to go, not playing a supporting role in Washington’s fuzzy Indo-Pacific strategy.

And that brings us to the heart of the Brazilgate matter: how Brazil is the coveted prize in the master strategic narrative that conditions everything happening in the geopolitical chessboard for the foreseeable future—the no-holds-barred confrontation between the U.S. and Russia-China.

Already in the Obama era, the U.S. Deep State had identified that to cripple BRICS from the inside, the “weak” strategic node was Brazil. And yes; once again it’s the oil, stupid.

Brazil’s pre-salt oil reserves may be worth as much as a staggering \$30 trillion. The point is not only that the USG wants a piece of the action; the point is how controlling most of Brazil’s oil ties up with interfering with powerful

agribusiness interests. For the Deep State, control of Brazil's oil flow to agribusiness equals containment/leverage against China.

The U.S., Brazil and Argentina, together, produce 82 percent of the world's soybeans – and counting. China craves soybeans. These won't come from Russia or Iran – which on the other hand may supply China with enough oil and natural gas (see, for instance, Power of Siberia I and II). Iran, after all, is one of the pillars of Eurasian integration. Russia may eventually become a soybean export power, but that may take as long as ten years.

The Brazilian military knows that close relations with China – their top trade partner, ahead of the U.S. – are essential, whatever Steve Bannon may rant about. But Russia is a completely different story. Vice-President Hamilton Mourao, in his recent visit to Beijing, where he met with Xi Jinping, sounded like he was reading from a Pentagon press release, telling Brazilian media that Russia is a “malign actor” deploying “hybrid war around the world.”

So the U.S. Deep State may be accomplishing at least part of the ultimate goal: to use Brazil in its *Divide et Impera* strategy of splitting the Russia-China strategic partnership.

It gets much spicier. Car Wash reconditioned as Leak Wash could also be decoded as a massive shadow play; a wag the dog, with the tail composed of two American assets.

Moro was a certified FBI, CIA, DoJ, Deep State asset. His uber-boss would ultimately be Robert Mueller (thus Russiagate). Yet for Team Trump, he would be easily

expendable – even if he's Captain Justice working under the real asset, Bannon boy Bolsonaro. If he falls, Moro would be assured the requisite golden parachute – complete with U.S. residency and talks in American universities.

The Intercept's Greenwald is now celebrated by all strands of the Left as a sort of American/Brazilian Simon Bolivar on steroids – with and in many cases without any irony. Yet there's a huge problem. *The Intercept* is owned by hardcore information-war practitioner [Pierre Omidyar](#).

Whose Hybrid War?

The crucial question ahead is [what the Brazilian military are really up to](#) in this epic swamp – and how deep they are subordinated to Washington's *Divide et Impera*.

It revolves around the all-powerful Cabinet of Institutional Security, known in Brazil by its acronym [GSI](#). GSI stalwarts are all Washington consensus. After the “communist” Lula/Dilma years, these guys are now consolidating a Brazilian Deep State overseeing full spectrum political control, just like in the U.S..

GSI already controls the whole intel apparatus, as well as Foreign Policy and Defense, via a decree surreptitiously released in early June, only a few days before *The Intercept's* bombshell. Even Captain Marvel Moro is subjected to the GSI; they must approve, for instance, everything Moro discusses with the DoJ and the U.S. Deep State.

As I've [discussed](#) with some of my top informed Brazilian interlocutors, crack anthropologist Piero Leirner, who knows in detail how the military think, and Swiss-based

international lawyer and UN adviser Romulus Maya, the U.S. Deep State seems to be positioning itself as the spawning mechanism for the direct ascension of the Brazilian military to power, as well as their guarantors. As in, if you don't follow our script to the letter – basic trade relations only with China; and isolation of Russia – we can swing the pendulum anytime.

After all, the only practical role the USG would see for the Brazilian military – in fact for all Latin America military – is as “war on drugs” shock troops.

There is no smoking gun – yet. But the scenario of Leak Wash as part of an extremely sophisticated, full spectrum dominance psyops, an advanced stage of Hybrid War, must be seriously considered.

For instance, the extreme-right, as well as powerful military sectors and the *Globo* media empire suddenly started spinning that *The Intercept* bombshell is a “Russian conspiracy.”

When one follows the premier military think tank [website](#)—featuring loads of stuff virtually copy and pasted straight from the U.S. Naval War College – it's easy to be startled at how they fervently believe in a Russia-China Hybrid War against Brazil, where the beachhead is provided by “anti-national elements” such as the Left as a whole, Venezuelan Bolivarians, FARC, Hezbollah, LGBT, indigenous peoples, you name it.

After Leak Wash, a concerted fake news blitzkrieg blamed the Telegram app (“they are evil Russians!”) for hacking Moro and Dallagnol's phones. Telegram officially debunked it in

no time.

Then it surfaced that former president Dilma Rousseff and the current Workers' Party president Gleisi Hoffmann paid a ["secret"](#) visit to Moscow only five days before the Leak Wash bombshell. I confirmed the visit with the Duma, as well as the fact that for the Kremlin, Brazil, at least for the moment, is not a priority. Eurasian integration is. That in itself debunks what the extreme-right in Brazil would spin as Dilma asking for Putin's help, who then released his evil hackers.

Leak Wash – Car Wash's season two – may be following the Netflix and HBO pattern. Remember that season three of [True Detective](#) was an absolute smash. We need Mahershala Ali-worthy trackers to sniff out patches of evidence suggesting the Brazilian military – with the full support of the U.S. Deep State – might be instrumentalizing a mix of Leak Wash and "the Russians" Hybrid War to criminalize the Left for good and orchestrate a silent coup to get rid of the Bolsonaro clan and their sub-zoology collective IQ. They want total control – no clownish intermediaries. Will they be biting more bananas than they can chew?

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PEPE ESCOBAR: Iran Squeezed Between

Imperial Psychos and European Cowards

Berlin, Paris and London assumed Tehran could not afford to leave the JCP0A even if it was not receiving any of the promised economic rewards. Now the EU3 are facing the hour of truth, writes Pepe Escobar.

By **Pepe Escobar**

in Bangkok

Special to Consortium News



The Trump administration unilaterally cheated on the 2015 multinational, UN-endorsed JCP0A, or Iran nuclear deal. It has imposed an illegal, worldwide financial and energy blockade on all forms of trade with Iran – from oil and gas to exports of iron, steel, aluminum and copper. For all practical purposes, and in any geopolitical scenario, this is a declaration of war.

Successive U.S. governments have ripped international law to shreds; ditching the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action is only the latest instance. It doesn't matter that Tehran has fulfilled all its commitments to the deal – according to UN inspectors. Once the leadership in Tehran concluded that the U.S. sanctions tsunami is fiercer than ever, it decided to begin partially withdrawing from the deal.

President Hassan Rouhani was adamant: Iran has not left the JCP0A – yet. Tehran's measures are legal under the framework of articles 26 and 36 of the JCP0A – and European officials were informed in advance. But it's clear the EU3 (Germany, France, Britain), who have always insisted on their vocal

support for the JCPOA, must work seriously to alleviate the U.S.-provoked economic disaster to Iran if Tehran has any incentive to continue to abide by the agreement.

Russia and China – the pillars of Eurasia integration, to which Iran adheres – support Tehran's position. This was discussed extensively in Moscow by Sergey Lavrov and Iran's Javad Zarif, perhaps the world's top two foreign ministers.

At the same time, it's politically naïve to believe the Europeans will suddenly grow a backbone.

The comfortable assumption in Berlin, Paris and London was that Tehran could not afford to leave the JCPOA even if it was not receiving any of the economic rewards promised in 2015. Yet now the EU3 are facing the hour of truth.

It's hard to expect anything meaningful coming from an enfeebled Chancellor Angela Merkel, with Berlin already targeted by Washington's trade ire; a Brexit-paralyzed Britain; and a massively unpopular President Emmanuel Macron in France already threatening to impose his own sanctions if Tehran does not agree to limit its ballistic missile program. Tehran will never allow inspections over its thriving missile industry – and this was never part of the JCPOA to begin with.

As it stands, the EU3 are not buying Iranian oil. They are meekly abiding by the U.S. banking and oil/gas sanctions – which are now extended to manufacturing sectors – and doing nothing to protect Iran from its nasty effects. The implementation of INSTEX, the SWIFT alternative for trade with Iran, is languishing. Besides expressing lame “regrets” about the U.S. sanctions, the EU3 are de facto playing the

game on the side of U.S., Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates; and by extension against Russia, China and Iran.

Rise of the Imperial Psychos

As Tehran de facto kicked the ball to the European court, both EU3 options are dire. To meaningfully defend the JCP0A will invite a ballistic reaction from the Trump administration. To behave like poodles – the most probable course of action – means emboldening even more the psychopaths doubling as imperial functionaries bent on a hot war against Iran at all costs; [Koch brothers Big Oil asset](#) and enraptured evangelist, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and paid [Mujahideen-e Khalq asset](#) and notorious intel manipulator, National Security Advisor John Bolton.

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The Pompeo-Bolton gangster maneuver is hardly Bismarck's *Realpolitik*. It consists of relentlessly pushing Tehran to make a mistake, any mistake, in terms of “violating” its obligations under the JCP0A, so that this may be sold to gullible American public opinion as the proverbial “threat” to the “rules-based order” doubling as a *casus belli*.

There's one thing the no-holds-barred U.S. economic war against Iran has managed to achieve: internal unity in the Islamic Republic. Team Rouhani's initial aim for the JCP0A was to open up to Western trade (trade with Asia was always on) and somewhat curtail the power of the IRGC, or Revolutionary Guards, which control vast sectors of the Iranian economy.

Washington's economic war proved instead the IRGC was right all along, echoing the finely-tuned geopolitical sentiment of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, who always emphasized the Americans cannot be trusted, ever.

And as much as Washington has branded the IRGC a "terrorist organization," Tehran replied in kind, branding CENTCOM the same.

Independent Persian Gulf oil traders dismiss the notion that the kleptocrat House of Saud – de facto run by Jared "of Arabia" Kushner's Whatsapp pal Mohammed bin Salman (MbS), the Saudi crown prince – holds up to 2.5 million barrels of oil a day in spare capacity capable of replacing Iran's 2 million barrels of exports (out of 3.45 million of total daily production). The House of Saud seems more interested in hiking oil prices for Asian customers.

Faulty Blockade

Washington's energy trade blockade of Iran is bound to fail.

China will continue to buy its 650,000 barrels a day – and may even buy more. Multiple Chinese companies trade technology and industrial services for Iranian oil.

Pakistan, Iraq and Turkey – all bordering Iran – will continue to buy Iranian high-quality light crude by every method of payment (including gold) and transportation available, formal or informal. Baghdad's trade relationship with Tehran will continue to thrive.

As economic suffocation won't suffice, Plan B is – what else – the threat of a hot war.

It's by now established that the info, in fact rumors, about alleged Iranian maneuvers to attack U.S. interests in the Gulf was relayed to Bolton by the Mossad, at the White House, with Israeli National Security Adviser Meir Ben Shabbat personally briefing Bolton.

Everyone is aware of the corollary: a "reposition of assets" (in Pentagonese) – from the USS Abraham Lincoln carrier strike group deployment to four B-52 bombers landing in Al Udeid Air base in Qatar, all part of a "warning" to Iran.

A pre-war roaring crescendo now engulfs the Lebanese front as well as the Iranian front.

Reasons for Psychotic Rage

Iran's GDP is similar to Thailand's, and its military budget is similar to Singapore's. Bullying Iran is a geopolitical and geo-economic absurdity. Iran may be an emerging Global South actor – it could easily be a member of the G20 – but can never be construed as a "threat" to the U.S.

Yet Iran provokes psychopathic imperial functionaries to a paroxysm of rage for three serious reasons. Neocons never mind that trying to destroy Iraq cost over \$6 trillion – and it was a major war crime, a political disaster, and an economic abyss all rolled into one. Trying to destroy Iran will cost untold trillions more.

The most glaring reason for the irrational hatred is the fact the Islamic Republic is one of the very few nations on the planet consistently defying the hegemon – for four decades now.

The second reason is that Iran, just like Venezuela – and

this is a combined war front – have committed the supreme anathema; trading on energy bypassing the petrodollar, the foundation stone of U.S. hegemony.

The third (invisible) reason is that to attack Iran is to disable emerging Eurasia integration, just like using NSA spying to ultimately put Brazil in the bag was an attack on Latin American integration.

The non-stop hysteria over whether President Donald Trump is being maneuvered into war on Iran by his pet psychopaths –



well, he actually directed Iran to “Call me” – eludes the Big Picture. As shown before, a possible shut down of the Strait of Hormuz, whatever the reasons, would be like a major meteor impact on the global economy. And that would inevitably translate as no Trump reelection in 2020.

The Strait of Hormuz would never need to be blocked if all the oil Iran is able to export is bought by China, other Asian clients and even Russia – which could relabel it. But Tehran wouldn’t blink on blocking Hormuz if faced with total economic strangulation.

According to a dissident U.S. intel expert, “the United

States is at a clear disadvantage in that if the Strait of Hormuz is shut the U.S. collapses. But if the U.S. can divert Russia from defending Iran, then Iran can be attacked and Russia will have accomplished nothing, as the neocons do not want detente with Russia and China. Trump does want detente but the Deep State does not intend to permit it.”

Assuming this scenario is correct, the usual suspects in the United States government are trying to divert Putin from the Strait of Hormuz question while keeping Trump weakened, as the neocons proceed 24/7 on the business of strangling Iran. It’s hard to see Putin falling for this not exactly elaborate trap.

Not Bluffing

So what happens next? Professor Mohammad Marandi at the Faculty of World Studies of the University of Tehran offers quite a sobering perspective: “After 60 days Iran will push things even further. I don’t think the Iranians are bluffing. They will also be pushing back at the Saudis and the Emiratis by different means.”

Marandi, ominously, sees “further escalation” ahead:

“Iranians have been preparing for war with the United States ever since the Iraq invasion in 2003. After what they’ve seen in Libya, in Syria, Yemen, Venezuela, they know that the Americans and Europeans are utterly brutal. The whole shore of the Persian Gulf on the Iranian side and the Gulf of Oman is full of tunnels and underground high-tech missiles. The Persian Gulf is full of ships equipped with highly developed sea-to-sea missiles. If

there is real war, all the oil and gas facilities in the region will be destroyed, all the tankers will be destroyed.”

And if that show comes to pass, Marandi regards the Strait of Hormuz as the “sideshow”:

“The Americans will be driven out of Iraq. Iraq exports 4 million barrels of oil a day; that would probably come to an end, through strikes and other means. It would be catastrophic for the Americans. It would be catastrophic for the world – and for Iran as well. But the Americans would simply not win.”

So as Marandi explains it – and Iranian public opinion now largely agrees – the Islamic Republic has leverage because they know “the Americans can’t afford to go to war. Crazyies like Pompeo and Bolton may want it, but many in the establishment don’t.”

Tehran may have developed a modified MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction) framework as leverage, mostly to push Trump ally MbS to cool down. “Assuming,” adds Marandi, “the madmen don’t get the upper hand, and if they do, then it’s war. But for the time being, I think that’s highly unlikely.”

All Options on the Table?

In Cold War 2.0 terms, from Central Asia to the Eastern Mediterranean and from the Indian Ocean to the Caspian Sea, Tehran is able to count on quite a set of formal and informal alliances. That not only centers on the Beirut-Damascus-Baghdad-Tehran-Herat axis, but also includes Turkey

and Qatar. And most important of all, the top actors on the Eurasian integration chessboard: the Russia and China in strategic partnership.

When Zarif met Lavrov last week in Moscow, they discussed virtually everything: Syria (they negotiate together in the Astana, now Nur-Sultan process), the Caspian, the Caucasus, Central Asia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (of which Iran will become a member), the JCPOA and Venezuela.

The Trump administration was dragged kicking and screaming to meet Kim Jong-Un at the same table because of the DPRK's intercontinental ballistic missile tests. And then Kim ordered extra missile tests because, in his own words, as quoted by KCNA, "genuine peace and security of the country are guaranteed only by the strong physical force capable of defending its sovereignty."

Global South Watching

The overwhelming majority of Global South nations are watching the U.S. neocon offensive to ultimately strangle "the Iranian people", aware more than ever that Iran may be bullied to extinction because it does not possess a nuclear deterrent. The IRGC has reached the same conclusion.

That would mean the death of the JCPOA – and the Return of the Living Dead of "all options on the table."

But then, there'll be twists and turns in the Art of the (Demented) Deal. So what if, and it's a major "if", Donald Trump is being held hostage by his pet psychopaths?

Let The Dealer speak:



“We hope we don’t have to do anything with regard to the use of military force...We can make a deal, a fair deal. ... We just don’t want them to have nuclear weapons. Not too much to ask. And we would help put them back into great shape. They’re in bad shape right now. I look forward to the day where we can actually help Iran. We’re not looking to hurt Iran. I want them to be strong and great and have a great economy... We have no secrets. And they can be very, very strong, financially. They have great potential.”

Then again, Ayatollah Khamenei said: the Americans cannot be trusted, ever.

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PEPE ESCOBAR: The Eagle, the Bear and the Dragon

The eagle has conveniently forgotten that the original, Ancient Silk Road linked the dragon with the Roman empire for centuries – with no interlopers outside of Eurasia, muses Pepe Escobar.

By [Pepe Escobar](#)

Special to Consortium News



Once upon a time, deep into the night in selected campfires across the deserts of Southwest Asia, I used to tell a fable about the eagle, the bear and the dragon – much to the amusement of my Arab and Persian interlocutors.

It was about how, in the young 21st century, the eagle, the bear and the dragon had taken their (furry) gloves off and engaged in what turned out to be Cold War 2.0.

As we approach the end of the second decade of this already incandescent century, perhaps it's fruitful to upgrade the fable. With all due respect to Jean de la Fontaine, excuse me while I kiss the (desert) sky again.

Long gone are the days when a frustrated bear repeatedly offered to cooperate with the eagle and its minions on a burning question: nuclear missiles.

The bear repeatedly argued that the deployment of interceptor missiles and radars in that land of the blind leading the blind – Europe – was a threat. The eagle repeatedly argued that this is to protect us from those rogue Persians.

Now the eagle – claiming the dragon is getting an easy ride – has torn down every treaty in sight and is bent on deploying nuclear missiles in selected eastern parts of the land of the blind leading the blind, essentially targeting the bear.

All That Glitters is Silk

Roughly two decades after what top bear Putin defined as “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century”,

he proposed a form of USSR light; a political/economic body called the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

The idea was to have the EAEU interact with the EU – the top institution of the motley crew congregated as the blind leading the blind.

The eagle not only rejected the possible integration; it came up with a modified color revolution scenario to unplug Ukraine from the EAEU.

Even earlier than that, the eagle had wanted to set up a New Silk Road under its total control. The eagle had conveniently forgotten that the original, Ancient Silk Road linked the dragon with the Roman empire for centuries – with no interlopers outside of Eurasia.

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So one can imagine the eagle's stupor when the dragon irrupted on the global stage with its own super-charged New Silk Roads – upgrading the bear original idea of a free trade area “from Lisbon to Vladivostok” to a multi-connectivity corridor, terrestrial and maritime, from eastern China to western Europe and everything in between, spanning the whole of Eurasia.

Facing this new paradigm the blind, well, remained blind for as long as anyone could remember; they simply could not get their act together.

The eagle, meanwhile, was incrementally raising the stakes. It launched what amounted for all practical purposes to a

progressively weaponized encirclement of the dragon.



The eagle made a series of moves that amount to inciting nations bordering the South China Sea to antagonize the dragon, while repositioning an array of toys – nuclear submarines, aircraft carriers, fighter jets – closer and closer to the dragon's territory.

All the time, what the dragon saw – and continues to see – is a battered eagle trying to muscle its way out of an irreversible decline by trying to intimidate, isolate and sabotage the dragon's irreversible ascent back to where it has been for 18 of the past 20 centuries; enthroned as the king of the jungle.

A key vector is that Eurasia-wide players know that under the new laws of the jungle the dragon simply can't – and won't – be reduced to the status of a supporting actor. And Eurasia-wide players are too smart to embark on a Cold War 2.0 that will undermine Eurasia itself.

The eagle's reaction to the dragon's New Silk strategy took some time to swing from inaction to outright demonization – complementing the joint description of both the dragon and the bear as existential threats.

And yet, for all the spinning crossfire, Eurasia-wide players are not exactly impressed anymore with an eagle empire armed to its teeth. Especially after the eagle's crest was severely damaged by failure upon hunting failure in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. Eagle aircraft carriers patrolling the eastern part of Mare Nostrum are not exactly scaring the bear, the Persians and the Syrians.

A "reset" between the eagle and the bear was always a myth. It took some time – and much financial distress – for the bear to realize there won't be any reset, while the dragon only saw a reset towards open confrontation.

After establishing itself, slowly but surely, as the most advanced military power on the planet, with hypersonic know-how, the bear came to a startling conclusion: we don't care anymore about what the eagle says – or does.

Under the Raging Volcano

Meanwhile, the dragon kept expanding, inexorably, across all Asian latitudes as well as Africa, Latin America and even across the unemployment-infested pastures of the austerity-hit blind leading the blind.

The dragon is firmly assured that, if cornered to the point of resorting to a nuclear option, it holds the power to make the eagle's staggering deficit explode, degrade its credit rating to junk, and wreak havoc in the global financial system.

No wonder the eagle, under an all-enveloping paranoid cloud of cognitive dissonance, feeding state propaganda 24/7 to its subjects and minions, keeps spewing out lava like a

raging volcano – dispensing sanctions to a great deal of the planet, entertaining regime change wet dreams, launching a total energy embargo against the Persians, resurrecting the “war on terra”, and aiming to punish like a Bat Out Of Hell any journalist, publisher or whistleblower revealing its inner machinations.

It hurts, so bad, to admit that the political/economic center of a new multipolar world will be Asia – actually Eurasia.

As the eagle got more and more threatening, the bear and the dragon got closer and closer in their strategic partnership. Now both bear and dragon have too many strategic links across the planet to be intimidated by the eagle’s massive Empire of Bases or those periodic coalitions of the (somewhat reluctant) willing.

To match comprehensive, in-progress Eurasia integration, of which the New Silk Roads are the graphic symbol, the eagle’s fury, unleashed, has nothing to offer – except rehashing a war against Islam coupled with the weaponized cornering of both bear and dragon.

Then there’s Persia – those master chess players. The eagle has been gunning for the Persians ever since they got rid of the eagle’s proconsul, the Shah, in 1979 – and this after the eagle and perfidious Albion had already smashed democracy to place the Shah, who made Saddam look like Gandhi, in power in 1953.

The eagle wants all that oil and natural gas back – not to mention a new Shah as the new gendarme of the Persian Gulf. The difference is now the bear and the dragon are saying No

Way. What is the eagle to do? Set up the false flag to end all false flags?

This is where we stand now. And once again, we reach the end – though not the endgame. There’s still no moral to this revamped fable. We continue to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Our only, slim hope is that a bunch of Hollow Men obsessed by the Second Coming won’t turn Cold War 2.0 into Armageddon.

Pepe Escobar, a veteran Brazilian journalist, is the correspondent-at-large for Hong Kong-based [Asia Times](#). His latest book is [“2030.”](#) Follow him on [Facebook](#).

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PEPE ESCOBAR: War on Iran & Calling America’s Bluff

Vast swathes of the West seem not to realize that if the Strait of Hormuz is shut down a global depression will follow, writes Pepe Escobar.

By [Pepe Escobar](#)

Special to Consortium News



The Trump administration once again has graphically demonstrated that in the young, turbulent 21st century, “international law” and “national sovereignty” already belong to the Realm of the Walking Dead.

As if a deluge of sanctions against a great deal of the planet was not enough, the latest “offer you can’t refuse” conveyed by a gangster posing as diplomat, Consul Minimus Mike Pompeo, now essentially orders the whole planet to submit to the one and only arbiter of world trade: Washington.

First the Trump administration unilaterally smashed a multinational, UN-endorsed agreement, the JCPOA, or Iran nuclear deal. Now the waivers that magnanimously allowed eight nations to import oil from Iran without incurring imperial wrath in the form of sanctions will expire on May 2 and won’t be renewed.

President Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Iran deal upheld his highest obligation: to protect the safety and security of the American people.

Why Iran sanctions are necessary: <https://t.co/YQtmSA9hZX>
[pic.twitter.com/n5r8mhZTl5](https://t.co/n5r8mhZTl5)

– The White House (@WhiteHouse) [August 6, 2018](#)

The eight nations are a mix of Eurasian powers: China, India, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Turkey, Italy and Greece.

Apart from the trademark toxic cocktail of hubris, illegality, arrogance/ignorance and geopolitical/geo-economic infantilism inbuilt in this foreign policy decision, the notion that Washington can decide who’s allowed to be an energy provider to emerging superpower China does not even qualify as laughable. Much more alarming is the fact that imposing a total embargo of Iranian oil exports is no less than an act of war.

Ultimate Neocon Wet Dream

Those subscribing to the ultimate U.S, neocon and Zionist wet dream – regime change in Iran – may rejoice at this declaration of war. But as Professor Mohammad Marandi of the University of Tehran has elegantly argued, “If the Trump regime miscalculates, the house can easily come crashing down on its head.”

Reflecting the fact Tehran seems to have no illusions regarding the utter folly ahead, the Iranian leadership – if provoked to a point of no return, Marandi additionally told me – can get as far as “destroying everything on the other side of the Persian Gulf and chasing the U.S. out of Iraq and Afghanistan. When the U.S. escalates, Iran escalates. Now it depends on the U.S. how far things go.”

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This red alert from a sensible academic perfectly dovetails with what’s happening with the structure of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) – recently branded a “terrorist organization” by the United States. In perfect symmetry, Iran’s Supreme National Security Council also branded the U.S. Central Command – CENTCOM – and “all the forces connected to it” as a terrorist group.

The new IRGC commander-in-chief is Brigadier General Hossein Salami, 58. Since 2009 he was the deputy of previous commander Mohamad al-Jafari, a soft spoken but tough as nails gentleman I met in Tehran two years ago. Salami, as well as Jafari, is a veteran of the Iran-Iraq war; that is, he has actual combat experience. And Tehran sources assure me that he can be even tougher than Jafari.



In tandem, IRGC Navy Commander Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri has evoked the unthinkable in terms of what might develop out

of the U.S. total embargo on Iran oil exports; Tehran could block the Strait of Hormuz.

Western Oblivion

Vast swathes of the ruling classes across the West seem to be oblivious to the reality that if Hormuz is shut down, the result will be an absolutely cataclysmic global economic depression.

Warren Buffett, among other investors, has routinely qualified the 2.5 quadrillion derivatives market as a weapon of financial mass destruction. As it stands, these derivatives are used – illegally – to drain no less than a trillion U.S. dollars a year out of the market in manipulated profits.

Considering historical precedents, Washington may eventually be able to set up a Persian Gulf of Tonkin false flag. But what next?

If Tehran were totally cornered by Washington, with no way out, the de facto nuclear option of shutting down the Strait

of Hormuz would instantly cut off 25 percent of the global oil supply. Oil prices could rise to over \$500 a barrel, to even \$1000 a barrel. The 2.5 quadrillion of derivatives would start a chain reaction of destruction.

Unlike the shortage of credit during the 2008 financial crisis, the shortage of oil could not be made up by fiat instruments. Simply because the oil is not there. Not even Russia would be able to re-stabilize the market.

It's an open secret in private conversations at the Harvard Club – or at Pentagon war-games for that matter – that in case of a war on Iran, the U.S. Navy would not be able to keep the Strait of Hormuz open.

Russian SS-NX-26 Yakhont missiles – with a top speed of Mach 2.9 – are lining up the Iranian northern shore of the Strait of Hormuz. There's no way U.S. aircraft carriers can defend a barrage of Yakhont missiles.

Then there are the SS-N-22 Sunburn supersonic anti-ship missiles – already exported to China and India – flying ultra-low at 1,500 miles an hour with dodging capacity, and extremely mobile; they can be fired from a flatbed truck, and were designed to defeat the U.S. Aegis radar defense system.

What Will China Do?

The full-frontal attack on Iran reveals how the Trump administration bets on breaking Eurasia integration via what would be its weakest node; the three key nodes are China, Russia and Iran. These three actors interconnect the whole spectrum; Belt and Road Initiative; the Eurasia Economic

Union; the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; the International North-South Transportation Corridor; the expansion of BRICS Plus.

So there's no question the Russia-China strategic partnership will be watching Iran's back. It's no accident that the trio is among the top existential "threats" to the U.S., according to the Pentagon. Beijing knows how the U.S. Navy is able to cut it off from its energy sources. And that's why Beijing is strategically increasing imports of oil and natural gas from Russia; engineering the "escape from Malacca" also must take into account a hypothetical U.S. takeover of the Strait of Hormuz.

A plausible scenario involves Moscow acting to defuse the extremely volatile U.S.-Iran confrontation, with the Kremlin and the Ministry of Defense trying to persuade President Donald Trump and the Pentagon from any direct attack against the IRGC. The inevitable counterpart is the rise of covert ops, the possible staging of false flags and all manner of shady Hybrid War techniques deployed not only against the IRGC, directly and indirectly, but against Iranian interests everywhere. For all practical purposes, the U.S. and Iran are at war.

Within the framework of the larger Eurasia break-up scenario, the Trump administration does profit from Wahhabi and Zionist psychopathic hatred of Shi'ites. The "maximum pressure" on Iran counts on Jared of Arabia Kushner's close WhatsApp pal Mohammad bin Salman (MbS) in Riyadh and MbS's mentor in Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Zayed, to replace the shortfall of Iranian oil in the market. But that's nonsense – as quite a few wily Persian Gulf traders are adamant Riyadh won't

“absorb Iran’s market share” because the extra oil is not there.

Much of what lies ahead in the oil embargo saga depends on the reaction of assorted vassals and semi-vassals. Japan won’t have the guts to go against Washington. Turkey will put up a fight. Italy, via Salvini, will lobby for a waiver. India is very complicated; New Delhi is investing in Iran’s Chabahar port as the key hub of its own Silk Road, and closely cooperates with Tehran within the INSTC framework. Would a shameful betrayal be in the cards?

China, it goes without saying, will simply ignore Washington.

Iran will find ways to get the oil flowing because the demand won’t simply vanish with a magic wave of an American hand. It’s time for creative solutions. Why not, for instance, refuel ships in international waters, accepting gold, all sorts of cash, debit cards, bank transfers in rubles, yuan, rupees and rials – and everything bookable on a website?

Now that’s a way Iran can use its tanker fleet to make a killing. Some of the tankers could be parked in – you got it – the Strait of Hormuz, with an eye on the price at Jebel Ali in the UAE to make sure this is the real deal. Add to it a duty free for the ships crews. What’s not to like? Ship owners will save fortunes on fuel bills, and crews will get all sorts of stuff at 90 percent discount in the duty free.

And let’s see whether the EU has grown a spine – and really turbo-charge their Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) alternative payment network conceived after the Trump administration

ditched the JCP0A. Because more than breaking up Eurasia integration and implementing neocon regime change, this is about the ultimate anathema; Iran is being mercilessly punished because it has bypassed the U.S. dollar on energy trade.

Pepe Escobar, a veteran Brazilian journalist, is the correspondent-at-large for Hong Kong-based [Asia Times](#). His latest book is ["2030."](#) Follow him on [Facebook](#).

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The Assange Arrest: You Have the Right to Remain Silent

The arrest of Julian Assange was an act of revenge by the U.S. government that strikes at the heart of journalism, writes Pepe Escobar.

By Pepe Escobar

Asia Times



The date – April 11, 2019 – will live in infamy in the annals of Western “values” and “freedom of expression.” The image is stark. A handcuffed journalist and publisher dragged out by force from the inside of an embassy, clutching a [Gore Vidal book](#), the “History of the U.S. National Security State.”

The mechanism is brutal. WikiLeaks co-founder Julian Assange was arrested because the United States demanded this from

the Tory British government, which for its part meekly claimed it did not pressure Ecuador to revoke Assange's asylum.

The U.S. magically erases Ecuador's financial troubles, ordering the IMF to release a providential \$4.2-billion loan. Immediately after, Ecuadorian diplomats "invite" the London Metropolitan Police to come inside their embassy to arrest their long-term guest.

Let's cut to the chase. Julian Assange is not a U.S. citizen, he's an Australian. WikiLeaks is not a U.S.-based media organization. If the US government gets Assange extradited, prosecuted and incarcerated, it will legitimize its right to go after anyone, anyhow, anywhere, anytime.

Call it The Killing of Journalism.

Get Me That Password?

The case by the U.S. Department of Justice (DoJ) against Assange is flimsy at best. Everything has to do essentially with the release of classified info in 2010 – 90,000 military files on Afghanistan, 400,000 files on Iraq and 250,000 diplomatic cables spanning most of the planet.

Assange is allegedly guilty of helping Chelsea Manning, the former U.S. Army intel analyst, to get these documents. But it gets trickier. He's also allegedly guilty of "encouraging" Manning to collect more information.

There's no other way to interpret that. This amounts, no holds barred, to all-out criminalization of journalistic practice.

For the moment, Assange is charged with “conspiracy to commit computer intrusion.” The indictment argues that Assange helped Manning to crack a password stored on Pentagon computers linked to the Secret Internet Protocol Network (SIPRNet). [Though a closer look at the indictment shows the alleged help was to obscure Manning’s identity and not intrude into a DOD computer.]

In March 2010 chat logs obtained by the U.S. government, Manning talks to someone alternatively named “Ox” and “press association.” The DoJ is convinced this interlocutor is Assange. But they must conclusively prove it.

Manning and this person, allegedly Assange, engaged in “discussions.” “During an exchange, Manning told Assange that ‘after this upload, that’s all I really have got left.’ To which Assange replied: ‘Curious eyes never run dry in my experience.’”

None of this holds up. U.S. corporate media routinely publishes illegal leaks of classified information. Manning offered the documents he had already downloaded to both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*— and he was rejected. Only then did he approach WikiLeaks.

The allegation that Assange tried to help crack a computer password has been doing the rounds since 2010. The DoJ under Obama refused to go for it, aware of what it would mean in terms of potentially outlawing investigative journalism.

No wonder U.S. corporate media, deprived of a major scoop, subsequently started to dismiss WikiLeaks as a Russian agent.

The Nuclear Option

The great Daniel “Pentagon Papers” Ellsberg had already warned back in 2017:

“Obama having opened the legal campaign against the press by going after the roots of investigative reporting on national security – the sources – Trump is going to go after the gatherers/gardeners themselves (and their bosses, publishers). To switch the metaphor, an indictment of Assange is a ‘first use’ of ‘the nuclear option’ against the First Amendment protection of a free press.”

The current DoJ charges – basically stealing a computer password – are just the tip of the avalanche. At least for now, publishing is not a crime. Yet if extradited, Assange may be additionally charged with extra conspiracies and even violation of the 1917 Espionage Act.

Even if they must still seek consent from London to bring further charges, there’s no shortage of DoJ lawyers able to apply sophistry to conjure a crime out of thin air.

Jennifer Robinson, Assange’s very able lawyer, has correctly stressed his arrest is “a free speech issue” because it “is all about the ways in which journalists can communicate with their sources.” The invaluable Ray McGovern, who knows one or two things about the U.S. intel community, has evoked a requiem of the fourth estate.

The full context of Assange’s arrest comes to light when examined as sequential to Chelsea Manning spending a month in solitary confinement in a Virginia jail for refusing to

denounce Assange in front of a grand jury. There's no doubt the DoJ tactic is to break Manning by any means available.

Here's [Manning's legal team](#):

“The indictment against Julian Assange unsealed today was obtained a year to the day before Chelsea appeared before the grand jury and refused to give testimony. The fact that this indictment has existed for over a year underscores what Chelsea's legal team and Chelsea herself have been saying since she was first issued a subpoena to appear in front of a Federal Grand Jury in the Eastern District of Virginia – that compelling Chelsea to testify would have been duplicative of evidence already in the possession of the grand jury, and was not needed in order for U.S. Attorneys to obtain an indictment of Mr Assange.”

The Deep State Attacks

The ball is now in a UK court. Assange will most certainly linger in prison for a few months for skipping bail while the extradition to the U.S. dossier proceeds. The DoJ arguably has discussed with London how a “correct” judge may deliver the desired outcome.

Assange is a publisher. He leaked absolutely nothing. *The New York Times*, as well as *The Guardian*, also published what Manning uncovered. [Collateral Murder](#), among tens of thousands of pieces of evidence, should always be at the forefront of the whole discussion – this is about war crimes committed in Afghanistan and Iraq.

So it's no wonder the U.S. Deep State will never forgive

Manning and Assange, even as *The New York Times*, in another glaring instance of double standards, may get a pass. The drama will eventually need closure at the Eastern District of Virginia because the national security and intel apparatus has been working on this screenplay, full-time, for years.

As CIA director, Mike Pompeo did cut to the chase: "It is time to call out WikiLeaks for what it really is: a non-state hostile intelligence service often abetted by state actors like Russia."

What amounts to a de facto declaration of war underlines how dangerous WikiLeaks actually is, just because it practiced investigative journalism.

The current DoJ charges have absolutely nothing to do with the debunked Russia-gate. But expect the subsequent political football to be bombastic.

The Trump camp at the moment is divided. Assange is either a pop hero fighting the Deep State swamp or a lowly Kremlin stooge. At the same time, Joe Manchin, a southerner Democrat Senator, rejoices, on the record, as an ersatz 19th-century plantation owner, that Assange is now "our property." The Democrat strategy will be to use Assange to get to Trump.

And then there's the EU, of which Britain may eventually not be part of, later rather than sooner. The EU will be very vigilant on Assange being extradited to "Trump's America," as the Deep State makes sure that journalists everywhere actually do have a right, to always remain silent.

Pepe Escobar, a veteran Brazilian journalist, is the

correspondent-at-large for Hong Kong-based Asia Times. His latest book is "2030." Follow him on Facebook.

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PEPE ESCOBAR: Empire of Chaos in Hybrid War Overdrive

The Trump administration's foreign policy may be easily deconstructed as a crossover between The Sopranos and late-night comedy, writes Pepe Escobar.

By Pepe Escobar

in Bangkok

Special to Consortium News



Is this the Age of Anxiety? The Age of Stupidity? The Age of Hybrid War? Or all of the above?

As right populism learns to use algorithms, artificial intelligence (AI) and media convergence, the Empire of Chaos, in parallel, is unleashing all-out hybrid and semiotic war.

Dick Cheney's Global War on Terror (GWOT) is back, metastasized as a hybrid mongrel.

But GWOT would not be GWOT without a Wild West scarecrow. Enter Hamza bin Laden, son of Osama. On the same day the State Department announced a \$1 million bounty on his head, the so-called "UN Security Council IS and Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee" declared Hamza the next al-Qaeda leader.

Since January 2017, Hamza has been a Specially Designated Global Terrorist by the State Department – on par with his deceased Dad, back in the early 2000s. The Beltway intel community “believes” Hamza resides “in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region.”

Remember these are the same people who “believed” former Taliban leader Mullah Omar resided in Quetta, Baluchistan, when in fact he was safely ensconced only a few miles away from a massive U.S. military base in Zabul, Afghanistan.

Considering that Jabhat al-Nusra, or al-Qaeda in Syria, for all practical purposes, was defined as no more than “moderate rebels” by the Beltway intel community, it’s safe to infer that new scarecrow Hamza is also a “moderate”. And yet he’s more dangerous than vanished fake Caliph Abu Baqr al-Baghdadi. Talk about a masterful example of culture jamming.

Show Me The Big Picture

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Hamza bin Laden is the son of deceased former al-Qa'ida leader Usama bin Laden and is emerging as a leader in the al-Qa'ida franchise. He has released audio and video messages on the Internet, calling on his followers to launch attacks against the United States and its Western allies.

The U.S. government is offering rewards for information about Hamza bin Laden. Absolute confidentiality is assured and relocation may be available. If you have information, please contact the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate or info@rewardsforjustice.net.

Hamza Bin Laden



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A hefty case can be made that the Empire of Chaos currently has no allies; it's essentially surrounded by an assortment of vassals, puppets and comprador 5th columnist elites professing varied degrees of – sometimes reluctant – obedience.

The Trump administration's foreign policy may be easily deconstructed as a crossover between The Sopranos and late-night comedy – as in the whole episode of designating State Department/CIA regime change, lab experiment Random Dude as President of Venezuela. Legendary cultural critic Walter Benjamin would have called it “the aestheticization of politics,” (turning politics into art), as he did about the Nazis, but this time it's the Looney Tunes version.

To add to the conceptual confusion, despite countless “an offer you can't refuse” antics unleashed by psychopaths of the John Bolton and Mike Pompeo variety, there's this startling nugget. Former

Iranian diplomat Amir Moussavi has revealed that Trump himself demanded to visit Tehran, and was duly rebuffed. “Two European states, two Arab countries and one Southeast Asian state” were mediating a series of messages relayed by Trump and his son-in-law Jared “of Arabia” Kushner, according to Moussavi.

Is there a method to this madness? An attempt at a Grand Narrative would go something like this: ISIS/Daesh may have been sidelined – for now; they are not useful anymore, so the U.S. must fight the larger “evil”: Tehran. GWOT has been revived, and though Hamza bin Laden has been designated the new Caliph, GWOT has shifted to Iran.

When we mix this with the recent India-Pakistan scuffle, a wider message emerges. There was absolutely no interest by Prime Minister Imran Kahn, the Pakistani Army and the Pakistani intelligence, ISI, to launch an attack on India in Kashmir. Pakistan was about to run out of money and about to be bolstered by the U.S., via Saudi Arabia with \$20 billion and an IMF loan.

At the same time, there were two almost simultaneous terrorist attacks launched from Pakistan – against Iran and against India in mid-February. There’s no smoking gun yet, but these attacks may have been manipulated by a foreign intelligence agency. The Cui Bono riddle is which state would profit immensely from a war between Pakistan and Iran and/or a war between Pakistan and India.

The bottom line: hiding in the shadow of plausible deniability – according to which what we understand as reality is nothing but pure perception – the Empire of Chaos will resort to the chaos of no-holds-barred hybrid war to avoid “losing” the Eurasian heartland.

Show Me How Many Hybrid Plans You Got

What applies to the heartland of course also applies to the backyard.

The case of Venezuela shows that the “all options on the table”

scenario has been de facto aborted by Russia, outlined in an [astounding briefing](#) by Maria Zakharova, spokeswoman of the Russian Foreign Ministry, and then subsequently [detailed](#) by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

Meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj at a crucial RIC (part of BRICS) summit in China, Lavrov said, "Russia keeps a close eye on brazen US attempts to create an artificial pretext for a military intervention in Venezuela... The actual implementation of these threats is pulling in military equipment and training [US] Special Forces."

Lavrov explained how Washington was engaged in acquiring mortars and portable air defense systems "in an East European country, and mov(ing) them closer to Venezuela by an airline of a regime that is... rather absolutely obedient to Washington in the post-Soviet space."

The U.S. attempt at regime change in Venezuela has been so far unsuccessful in several ways. Plan A – a classic color revolution - has miserably failed, in part because of a lack of decent local intelligence. Plan B was a soft version of humanitarian imperialism, with a resuscitation of the nefarious, Libya-tested [responsibility to protect \(R2P\)](#); it also failed, especially when the American tale that the Venezuelan government burnt humanitarian aid trucks at the border with Colombia was a lie, exposed by *The New York Times*, no less.

Plan C was a classic Hybrid War technique: a [cyberattack](#), replete with a revival of [Nitro Zeus](#), which shut down 80 percent of Venezuela's electricity.

That plan had already been [exposed](#) by WikiLeaks, via a 2010 memo by a U.S.-funded, Belgrade-based color revolution scam that helped train self-proclaimed "President" Random Dude, when he was just known as Juan Guaidó. The leaked memo said that attacking the Venezuelan power grid would be a "watershed event" that "would

likely have the impact of galvanizing public unrest in a way that no opposition group could ever hope to generate.”

But even that was not enough.

That leaves Plan D – which is essentially to try to starve the Venezuelan population to death via viciously lethal additional sanctions. Sanctioned Syria and sanctioned Iran didn't collapse. Even boasting myriad comprador elites aggregated in the Lima group, exceptionalists may have to come to grips with the fact that deploying the Monroe doctrine essentially to contain China's influence in the young 21st century is no “cakewalk.”

Plan E—for extreme—would be U.S. military action, which Bolton won't take off the table.

Show Me the Way to the Next War Game

So where do all these myriad weaponizations of chaos theory leave us? Nowhere, if they don't follow the money. Local comprador elites must be lavishly rewarded, otherwise you're stuck in hybrid swamp territory. That was the case in Brazil – and that's why the most sophisticated hybrid war case history so far has been a success.

In 2013, Edward Snowden and WikiLeaks revealed how the NSA was spying on Brazilian energy giant Petrobras and the Dilma Rousseff government beginning in 2010. Afterwards, a complex, rolling judicial-business-political-financial-media coup ended up reaching its two main objectives; in 2016, with the impeachment of Rousseff, and in 2018, with Lula thrown in jail.

Now comes arguably the juiciest piece of the puzzle. Petrobras was supposed to pay \$853 million to the U.S. Department of Justice for not going to trial for crimes it was being accused of in America. But then a dodgy deal was struck according to which the fine will be transferred to a Brazilian fund as long as Petrobras commits to relay confidential information about its businesses to the United States government.

Hybrid war against BRICS member Brazil worked like a charm, but trying it against nuclear superpower Russia is a completely different ball game. U.S. analysts, in another case of culture jamming, even accuse Russia itself of deploying hybrid war – a concept actually invented in the U.S. within a counter-terrorism context; applied during the occupation of Iraq and later metastasized across the color revolution spectrum; and featuring, among others, in an [article](#) co-authored by former Pentagon head James “Mad Dog” Mattis in 2005 when he was a mere lieutenant general.

At a recent conference about Russia’s military strategy, Chief of General Staff Gen. Valery Gerasimov stressed that the Russian armed forces must increase both their “classic” and “asymmetrical” potential. In the U.S. this is interpreted as subversion/propaganda hybrid war techniques as applied in Ukraine and in the largely debunked Russia-gate. Instead, Russian strategists refer to these techniques as “complex approach” and “new generation war”.

Santa Monica’s RAND Corporation still sticks to good ol’ hot war scenarios. They have been holding “Red on Blue” [war games](#) simulations since 1952 – modeling how the proverbial “existential threats” could use asymmetric strategies. The latest [Red on Blue](#) was not exactly swell. RAND analyst David Ochmanek famously said that with Blue representing the current U.S. military potential and Red representing Russia-China in a conventional war, “Blue gets its ass handed to it.”

None of this will convince Empire of Chaos functionary Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who recently told a Senate Armed Services Committee that the Pentagon will continue to [refuse](#) a “no first use” nuclear strategy. Aspiring Dr. Strangeloves actually believe the U.S. can start a nuclear war and get away with it.

Talk about the Age of Hybrid Stupidity going out with a bang.

Pepe Escobar, a veteran Brazilian journalist, is the correspondent-at-large for Hong Kong-based [Asia Times](#). His latest book is ["2030."](#) Follow him on [Facebook](#).

Eric Hobsbawm, the Joy of History and All That Jazz

The writer's global appeal will remain something for the history books, writes Pepe Escobar.

By [Pepe Escobar](#)

[Asia Times](#)



We all lose by not having Eric Hobsbawm absorb the geopolitical dementia of the early 21st century to later refine it in sharp, crisp historical analysis.

A new, exhaustive biography, ["Eric Hobsbawm: A Life in History,"](#) by his former student and [Regius Professor](#) of history emeritus at Cambridge, Richard Evans – out now in the U.K. and in the U.S. in April – allows us to evaluate the extent of our loss.

It all starts with – what else – an undying love of good books: "In the end, one doesn't just read them, one lives with them. That's civilization." That's so apt coming from someone who in 1940, during the war, read "100 pages of Stendhal on the back of a lorry – a gesture of civilization."

At the time “the English boy” born in Alexandria, Egypt in June 1917, was not contemplating the idea of becoming a professional historian. He’d rather write “proletarian literature.” During a stressful – historical – juncture when Hitler announced he expected to take up residence in London within a fortnight, Hobsbawm was already determined that “I want to write so that everyone recognizes the houses and streets, smells the flowers, feels the passions.” In the end, he somehow achieved his dream – to be a historian.

Readers in five continents know that Hobsbawm always defined himself as a Marxist. It says a lot about British intelligence that MI5 spent a lot of time and energy tracking Hobsbawm while totally bypassing the “Cambridge Five” who were merrily passing secrets to the USSR – Blunt, Burgess, Cairncross, MacLean and Philby – all of them, unlike Hobsbawm, Brit establishment to the core.

The book details delightful personal vignettes, such as this of Hobsbawm in Paris in the early 1950s, “observing the passing scene from the approved cafes such as the Flore or the Rhumerie” and mingling with, among others, Lucien Goldmann, Roland Barthes and Edgar Morin, the great Henri Cartier-Bresson, going to jazz clubs, and interacting with intellectuals who were either unorthodox Marxists or drifting away from Marxism for good. He got to know Jean-Paul Sartre quite well – sharing the odd mutton curry at La Coupole.

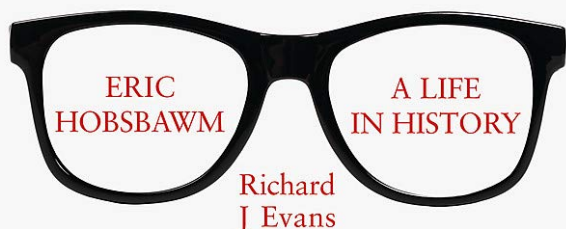
At the time both the French and the British Communist Party were hardcore Stalinist, totally unlike Hobsbawm. No wonder the party in Paris never invited him to any meetings. Hobsbawm was a consummate political pragmatist. He may have

been a communist, of course, but never sectarian. His loyalty, above all, was to the broad cause of socialism. As Evans stresses, “he believed consistently in the unity of the Left, not in any kind of Marxist sectarianism.”

All That Jazz

The official “Made in the U.S.S.R.” party line on jazz was extremely negative during the Stalinist era. Then, rehabilitation ensued. By 1962 jazz was all the rage, for instance, in Czechoslovakia. That’s when jazz – and especially the blues – started to be sold across the “real socialism” sphere as the music of the oppressed black working class in capitalist America.

Enter Hobsbawm as jazz critic of the *New Statesman*, under the pseudonym Francis Newton. At the time, late 1950s to early 1960s, journalism was despised by British academia. Swinging from jazz clubs and concerts to the quasi-mythical hipster hangout, the Downbeat Club in Old Compton Street in Soho, Hobsbawm pulled it off as a cultural reporter instead of music critic. Many in academia were oblivious to his alter ego.



Hobsbawm 's jazz criticism is fascinating in itself. He was attracted by the cerebral classicism of the modern jazz quartet, rejecting "the old, full-blooded, spontaneous jazz ... because it reminds them of oppression, illiteracy, of Negroes clowning to wheedle crumbs from the whites."

He didn't get Miles Davis – "surprisingly narrow technical and emotional range" – or Thelonius Monk – "neither the technical mastery nor the staying power" of Duke Ellington. On the other hand, he found Ornette Coleman "unforgettable." He would always display a positively gloomy vision of mass-produced pop. Hobsbawm was a marvelous interviewee. I wish I could have asked him back in the 1980s what he thought of David Bowie.

Evans does full justice to the importance of the "Age" trilogy.

'The Age of Revolution,' following European history from 1789 to 1848, made a splash with its formidable thesis tracing the simultaneous impact of the "dual revolution," the French political and ideological and the British

industrial; essentially, the foundation of the modern world.

The concept of “dual revolution” would become seminal in every historical writing and teaching of the past half-century. No one before Hobsbawm had shown that the Industrial Revolution was due to Britannia ruling the waves, which enabled it to create a virtual monopoly of cotton exports to India and Latin America.

He also definitely showed how the French bourgeoisie, as a “coherent social group,” drove political change “when the French monarchy, mired in deep financial crisis following the War of Independence in the U.S., lost the support of the feudal aristocracy.”

By the time ‘The Age of Capital’ was out, in the mid-1970s, Hobsbawm had clinched a triple treat; academic recognition, vast commercial success, full respect and recognition by the British establishment.

“The Age of Empire,” chronicling the “long 19th century” from 1789 to 1914, unveiled a magnificent concept also essential to any future historical scholarship. Arguably the best summary ever of Hobsbawm’s prodigious gifts was offered in a review by Perry Anderson:

“...economy of synthesis; vividness of detail; global scope, yet acute sense of regional difference; polymathic fluency, equally at ease with crops and stock markets, nations and classes, statesmen and peasants, sciences and arts; breadth of sympathies for disparate social agents;

power of analytic narrative; and not least a style of remarkable clarity and energy, whose signature is the sudden bolt of metaphoric electricity across the even surface of cool, pungent argument.”

The Universalist Project

Hobsbawm instinctively knew already in 1989 what would happen after the collapse of the U.S.S.R. At a conference in Sweden, as recalled by French historian Patrick Fridenson, he prophesized: “With the Soviet Union you have had peace; you are going to have war.”

Later on, in 1990, he would write: “The fall of the Soviet-type system, about which all illusion had long gone, is less significant than the apparent end of the dream of which it was the nightmare version.”

No wonder Hobsbawm was a critic of nationalism and identity politics. He always stressed, “the political project of the left is universalist.” Nations were no more than artificial constructs – see, for instance, the British empire arbitrarily demarcating the borders of Afghanistan and Iraq, among others.

Hobsbawm’s “Age of Extremes” turned him into a global superstar. But there are flaws. Essentially, the point of view is centered on Vienna, Berlin and London. There is no comprehensive analysis of the ascension of the American bourgeoisie, or the turbulence across East Asia. The book actually revolves around the history of the decline of a Western civilization that totally betrayed the 19th-century promise of cultural and material flowering.

At dinner parties, Hobsbawm eschewed small talk and behaved as a true political party animal. He wanted to cut to the chase right away. As his editor at Penguin, Stuart Proffitt, recalled: "The quality of his information from around the world, in extreme old age – this must have been when he was 93, 94, something like that – but he knew exactly what was going on all over the world. I mean, he was like a sort of one-man *Economist Intelligence Unit*. It was really, really extraordinary."

Hobsbawm the Brazilian

Hobsbawm may have become widely respected in the U.S., due to his academic stints, and in India, but in Brazil he became larger-than-life. His books sold almost a million copies. He was essential in shaping the political thinking of two former presidents, Cardoso and Lula.

In 1975, during the military dictatorship, he was invited to the first major conference featuring leftist intellectuals such as Arno Mayer from Princeton and Juan Linz from Yale. Talking fluently about Brazilian peasant millenarian movements, he had the guts to declare he was a Marxist historian, planting a seed that would engender the end of the military dictatorship in the following decade.

It's impossible to understand where Eric Hobsbawm was coming from without the essential background provided by Evans. Hobsbawm became acquainted with Marxist theory and an ideal of communism in the early 1930s, when the Communist Party seemed to many young people of his generation to embody the only possible hope of defeating Nazism and building a better world.

So this spectacle of a great mass movement sharing common ideals forged in Hobsbawm a lifelong, visceral emotional sense of belonging, healing the scars in his shattered family life. Evans sums it all up: "This feeling lasted, buried deep in his soul, for the rest of his life."

And that's how we should also understand his passion for jazz – the search for a community that provided some sort of emotional equivalent of a family.

Hobsbawm never followed the party line. Only intellectual amoebas could possibly accuse him of being a Stalinist. He did, consciously, remain part of a global network of fellow leftist intellectuals for the rest of his life. In a nutshell, he was a crossover Marxist, an absolutely unique, polyphonic, intellectual mix shaped by myriad influences.

And the greatest thing is that he was, above all, one helluva writer. It was literature that guided him to history. And that's why, ashes to ashes, his global appeal will remain something for the history books.

Pepe Escobar, a veteran Brazilian journalist, is the correspondent-at-large for Hong Kong-based [Asia Times](#). His latest book is ["2030."](#) Follow him on [Facebook](#).

PEPE ESCOBAR: MAGA Misses the Eurasia Train

While China and Russia solidify their economic and political alliance, the U.S. is missing an historic chance to join a multilateral world, clinging instead to military empire,

argues Pepe Escobar.

By **Pepe Escobar**

in Milan

Special to Consortium News



We should know by now that the heart of the 21st Century Great Game is the myriad layers of the battle between the United States and the partnership of Russia and China.

Even the U.S. National Defense Strategy says so: “The central challenge to U.S. prosperity and security is the reemergence of long-term, strategic competition by ... revisionist powers.” The recently published assessment on U.S. defense implications of China’s global expansion says so too.

The clash will frame the emergence of a possibly new, post-ideological, strategic world order amidst an extremely volatile unpredictability in which peace is war and an accident may spark a nuclear confrontation.

The U.S. vs. Russia and China will keep challenging the West’s obsession in deriding “illiberalism,” a fearful, rhetorical exercise that equates Russian democracy with China’s one party rule, Iran’s demo-theocracy and Turkey’s neo-Ottoman revival.

It’s immaterial that Russia’s economy is one-tenth of China’s. From boosting trade that bypasses the U.S. dollar, to increasing joint military exercises, the Russia-China symbiosis is poised to advance beyond political and ideological affinities.

China badly needs Russian know-how in its military industry. Beijing will turn this knowledge into plenty of dual use, civilian-military innovations.

The long game indicates Russia and China will break down language and cultural barriers to lead Eurasian integration against American economic hegemony backed by military might.

One could say the Eurasian century is already upon us. The era of the West shaping the world at will (a mere blip of history) is already over. This is despite Western elite denials and fulminations against the so-called “morally reprehensible,” “forces of instability” and “existential threats.”

Standard Chartered, the British financial services company, using a mix of purchasing power exchange rates and GDP growth, has projected that the top five economies in 2030 will be China, the U.S., India, Japan and Russia. These will be followed by Germany, Indonesia, Brazil, Turkey and the UK. Asia will extend its middle class as they are slowly killed off across the West.

Hop on the Trans-Eurasia Express

A case can be made that Beijing’s elites are fascinated at how Russia, in less than two decades, has returned to semi-superpower status after the devastation of the Yeltsin years.

That happened to a large extent due to science and technology. The most graphic example is the unmatched, state-of-the-art weaponry unveiled by President Vladimir Putin in his March 1, 2018 [speech](#).

In practice, Russia and China will be advancing the alignment of China's New Silk Roads, or Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with Russia's Eurasia Economic Union (EAEU).

There's ample potential for a Trans-Eurasia Express network of land and maritime transport corridors to be up and running by the middle of next decade, including, for instance, road and railway bridges connecting China with Russia across the Heilongjiang River.

Following serious trilateral talks involving Russia, India and Iran last November, closer attention is being paid to the International North-South Transportation Corridor (INSTC), a 7,200-km long lane mixing sea and rail routes essentially linking the Indian Ocean with the Persian Gulf through Iran and Russia and further on down the road, to Europe.

Imagine cargo transiting from all over India to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas, then overland to Bandar Anzali, an Iranian port on the Caspian Sea, and then on to the Russian southern port of Astrakhan, and after that to Europe by rail. From New Delhi's point of view, that means shipping costs reduced by up to 40 percent, and Mumbai-to-Moscow in only 20 days.

Down the line, INSTC will merge with BRI – as in Chinese-led corridors linked with the India-Iran-Russia route into a global transport network.

This is happening just as Japan is looking at the Trans-Siberian Railway – which will be upgraded throughout the next decade – to improve its connections with Russia, China

and the Koreas. Japan is now a top investor in Russia and at the same time very much interested in a Korea peace deal. That would free Tokyo from massive defense spending conditioned by Washington's rules. The EAEU free trade agreements with ASEAN can be added to that.

Especially over these past four years, Russia has also learned how to attract Chinese investment and wealth, aware that Beijing's system mass-produces virtually everything and knows how to market it globally, while Moscow needs to fight every block in the book dreamed up by Washington.

The Huawei-Venezuela "Axis of Evil"

While Washington remains a bipartisan prisoner to the Russophobic Platonic cave – where Cold War shadows on the wall are taken as reality – MAGA is missing the train to Eurasia.

A many-headed hydra, MAGA, stripped to the bone, could be read as a non-ideological antidote to the Empire's global adventurism. Trump, in his non-strategic, shambolic way, proposed at least in theory the return to a social contract in the U.S. MAGA in theory would translate into jobs, opportunities for small businesses, low taxes and no more foreign wars.

It's nostalgia for the 1950s and 60s before the Vietnam quagmire and before "Made in the USA" was slowly and deliberately dismantled. What's left are tens of trillions of national debt; a quadrillion in derivatives; the Deep State running amok; and a lot of pumped up fear of evil Russians, devious Chinese, Persian mullahs, the troika of tyranny, the Belt and Road, Huawei, and illegal aliens.

More than a Hobbesian “war of all against all” or carping about the “Western rules-based system” being under attack, the fear is actually of the strategic challenge posed by Russia and China, which seeks a return to rule by international law.

MAGA would thrive if hitched to a ride on the Eurasia integration train: more jobs and more business opportunities instead of more foreign wars. Yet MAGA won't happen – to a large extent because what really makes Trump tick is his policy of energy dominance to decisively interfere with Russia and China's development.

The Pentagon and the “intel community” pushed the Trump administration to go after Huawei, branded as a nest of spies, while pressuring key allies Germany, Japan and Italy to follow. Germany and Japan permit the U.S. to control the key nodes in the extremities of Eurasia. Italy is essentially a large NATO base.

The U.S. Department of Justice requested the extradition of Huawei CFO Meng Wanzhou from Canada last Tuesday, adding a notch to the Trump administration's geopolitical tactic of “blunt force trauma.”

Add to it that Huawei – based in Shenzhen and owned by its workers as shareholders – is killing Apple across Asia and in most latitudes across the Global South. The real the battle is over 5G, in which China aims to upstage the U.S., while upgrading capacity and production quality.

The digital economy in China is already larger than the GDP of France or the UK. It's based on the BATX companies (Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, Xiaomi), Didi (the Chinese Uber),

e-commerce giant JD.com and Huawei. These Big Seven are a state within a civilization – an ecosystem they've constructed themselves, investing fortunes in big data, artificial intelligence (AI) and the internet. American giants – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Google – are absent from this enormous market.

Moreover, Huawei's sophisticated encryption system in telecom equipment prevents interception by the NSA. That helps account for its extreme popularity all across the Global South, in contrast to the Five Eyes (U.S., UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand) electronic espionage network.

The economic war on Huawei is also directly connected to the expansion of BRI across 70 Asian, European and African nations, constituting a Eurasia-wide network of commerce, investment and infrastructure able to turn geopolitical and geo-economic relations, as we know them, upside down.

Greater Eurasia Beckons

Whatever China does won't alter the Deep State's obsession about "an aggression against our vital interests," as stated by the National Defense Strategy. The dominant Pentagon narrative in years to come will be about China "intending to impose, in the short term, its hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region, and catch the United States off-guard in order to achieve future global pre-eminence." This is mixed with a belief that Russia wants to "crush NATO" and "sabotage the democratic process in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine."

During my recent travels along the northern part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), I saw once again

how China is upgrading highways, building dams, railways and bridges that are useful not only for its own economic expansion but also for its neighbors' development. Compare it to U.S. wars – as in Iraq and Libya – where dams, railways and bridges are destroyed.

Russian diplomacy is all but winning the New Cold War – as diagnosed by Prof. Stephen Cohen in his latest book, War with Russia: From Putin and Ukraine to Trump and Russiagate.

Moscow mixes serious warnings with diverse strategies, such as resurrecting the South Stream gas pipeline to supply Europe as an extension of Turk Stream after the Trump administration also furiously opposed the Nord Stream 2 pipeline with sanctions on Russia. Meanwhile, Moscow ramps up energy exports to China.

The advance of the Belt and Road Initiative is linked to Russian security and energy exports, including the Northern Sea Route, as an alternative future transportation corridor to Central Asia. Russia emerges then as the top security guarantee for Eurasian trade and economic integration.

Last month in Moscow, I discussed Greater Eurasia– by now established as the overarching concept of Russian foreign policy – with top Russian analysts. They told me Putin is on board. He referred to Eurasia recently as “not a chessboard or a geopolitical playground, but our peaceful and prosperous home.”

Needless to say, U.S. think tanks dismiss the idea as “abortive”. They ignore Prof. Sergey Karaganov, who as early as mid-2017 was arguing that Greater Eurasia could serve as a platform for “a trilateral dialogue on global problems and

international strategic stability between Russia, the United States and China.”

As much as the Beltway may refuse it, “The center of gravity of global trade is now shifting from the high seas toward the vast continental interior of Eurasia.”

Beijing Skirts the Dollar

Beijing is realizing it can't meet its geo-economic goals on energy, security, and trade without bypassing the U.S. dollar.

According to the IMF, 62 percent of global central bank reserves were still held in U.S. dollars by the second quarter of 2018. Around 43 per cent of international transactions on SWIFT are still in U.S. dollars. Even as China, in 2018, was the single largest contributor to global GDP growth, at 27.2 percent, the yuan still only accounts for 1 percent of international payments, and 1.8 per cent of all reserve assets held by central banks.

It takes time, but change is on the way. China's cross-border payment network for yuan transactions was launched less than four years ago. Integration between the Russian Mir payment system and Chinese Union Pay appears inevitable.

Bye Bye Drs. K and Zbig

Russia and China are developing the ultimate nightmare for those former shamans of U.S. foreign policy, Henry Kissinger and the late Zbigniew “Grand Chessboard” Brzezinski.

Back in 1972 Kissinger was the mastermind – with logistical help from Pakistan – of the Nixon moment in China. That was

classic Divide and Rule, separating China from the USSR. Two years ago, before Trump's inauguration, Dr. K's advice dispensed at Trump Tower meetings consisted of a modified Divide and Rule: the seduction of Russia to contain China.

The Kissinger doctrine rules that, geopolitically, the U.S. is just "an island off the shores of the large landmass of Eurasia." Domination "by a single power of either of Eurasia's two principal spheres – Europe or Asia – remains a good definition of strategic danger for America, Cold War or no Cold War," as Kissinger said. "For such a grouping would have the capacity to outstrip America economically and, in the end, militarily."

The Zbig doctrine ran along similar lines. The objectives were to prevent collusion and maintain security among the EU-NATO vassals; keep tributaries pliant; keep the barbarians (a.k.a. Russians and allies) from coming together; most of all prevent the emergence of a hostile coalition (as in today's Russia-China alliance) capable of challenging U.S. hegemony; and submit Germany, Russia, Japan, Iran, and China to permanent Divide and Rule.

Thus the despair of the current National Security Strategy, forecasting China displacing the United States "to achieve global preeminence in the future," through BRI's supra-continental reach.

The "policy" to counteract such "threats" is sanctions, sanctions, and more unilateral sanctions, coupled with an inflation of absurd notions peddled across the Beltway – such as that Russia is aiding and abetting the re-conquest

of the Arab world by Persia. Also that Beijing will ditch the “[paper tiger](#)” “[Made in China 2025](#)” plan for its major upgrade in global, high-tech manufacturing just because Trump hates it.

Once in a blue moon a U.S. report actually gets it right, such as in Beijing [speeding up an array of BRI projects](#); as a modified Sun Tzu tactic deployed by President Xi Jinping.

At the June 2016 Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, [Professor Xiang Lanxin](#), director of the Centre of One Belt and One Road Studies at the [China National Institute for SCO International Exchange and Judicial Cooperation](#), defined BRI as an avenue to a “post-Westphalian world.” The journey is just beginning; a new geopolitical and economic era is at hand. And the U.S. is being left behind at the station.

Pepe Escobar, a veteran Brazilian journalist, is the correspondent-at-large for Hong Kong-based [Asia Times](#). His latest book is [2030](#). Follow him on [Facebook](#).

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