

# America's claims to Eurasian hegemony

by Dr Dr h. c. Arne C. Seifert\*

Published by Zeit-Fragen, English Edition  
17 April 2024, No 7, ISSN 1664-7963  
PO Box 247, CH-9602 Bazenheid, Switzerland

***“European self-determination can take place only as emancipation from America.” (Egon Bahr)***

At *Atlantik-Brücke* in Berlin in December 2021, the director of the US “Defence Program” at the *Centre for a New American Security* in Washington, Elbridge Colby, explained America’s insistence that NATO must participate in a “great power competition” between the USA, Russia, and China and with what goals: “If NATO did not already exist, it would have to be created now.” It is essentially a security alliance and, with 29 member states, is very broadly based. But, Colby added, “I am not sure whether it is sufficiently cohesive. [...] What it lacks is a real threat, like that of the Soviet Union. [...] If Europe shouldered more responsibility towards Russia, it would allow the United States to focus even more on China.”<sup>1</sup>

## **‘Allied partners’ to control the Eurasian landmass**

For the US, there was and is no question that it is eager to integrate other “allied partners” into NATO. According to the Congressional Research Service, in January 2021, “US alliances and partnerships, including NATO, which was created to prevent the Soviet Union (now Russia) from becoming a regional hegemon over Europe”, are regarded as bases for “large-scale, long-term US military operations against China and Russia”.<sup>2</sup>

It is obvious against this background that this is the basis of an American effort, as earlier mentioned, to control the Eurasian landmass with the help of NATO’s expansion eastward across Eurasia.

## **Construction of a ‘threat’: Russia**

Colby’s insistence that Russia is a “real threat” strikes a chord in Germany. The *German Council on Foreign Relations* (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik) presented a “Strategic Reassessment of Russia” on 8 November 2023. The DGAP, which receives 27 per cent of its funding from the Federal Foreign Office, the Federal Ministry of Defence, and the European Commission, consistently beats the drums of war against Russia. “The question for NATO and Germany is no longer whether they will ever be able to wage war against another country, but only when they will do so”, the November report reads. “In its new strategic concept, NATO describes Russia as the greatest and most urgent threat to the security of its 31 allies and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. In contrast to earlier analyses, the alliance no longer rules out an attack by Russia. [...] The clock will start ticking as soon as the fierce fighting in Ukraine comes to a halt”.

### **Egon Bahr: ‘Our self-determination stands alongside and not against America’**

What a monstrosity! What a blow to the “peace identity” of European states, with which they started the EU and later the process represented by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe after the Second World War. Also brushed aside are *Egon Bahr’s* visions, dating to 1990, of European self-determination. The prominent Social Democratic politician articulated these visions at the Cold War’s end. “At that time, the realisation began to grow that European self-determination after the end of the Soviet Union could take place only as emancipation from America”, Bahr said in a keynote speech to the *German-Russian Forum* in Berlin. As he elaborated,

*Our emancipation from America becomes self-evident and irrefutable. Our self-determination stands alongside and not against America. [...] If American behaviour can give the impression of their wanting to bring Russia to its knees, then I share Horst Teltschik’s\*\* opinion that this is sheer madness; Napoleon and Hitler have already tried it. Kissinger and Gorbachev, Kohl and Schmidt have issued warnings for our present time. [...] We cannot give up Russia just because America does not like it.*

### **Forgetting history: The new German war apologists**

Among the many things the new German war apologists have forgotten are the immediate warnings against an eastward expansion of NATO, which the USSR issued at the beginning of the two-plus-four negotiations for the *Treaty on the Final Settlement with regard to Germany* on 5 May 1990. (Do not forget this date!) *Hans-Dietrich Genscher*, foreign minister at the time, recorded in his memoirs the words with which *Eduard Shevardnadze*, then the Soviet foreign minister, admonished a united Germany and its trans-Atlantic allies. He warned against extending NATO eastward, “For us, NATO is what it has always been, a military bloc facing us with a doctrine of a certain orientation and subject to the precondition of being able to deliver the first nuclear strike. [...] If attempts are made to corner us in matters relating to our security, this will – and I say this quite openly – lead to a situation in which our political flexibility is abruptly restricted.”

### **Restriction of political flexibility**

It remains to be seen how a state’s leadership will think after a lengthy period during which hostilities are unfurling. However, it can be held true that the most dangerous component of such a period is that an enemy’s desire for peace cannot be easily predicted. In the case of Russia, the question of whether a lack of predictability will lead to war remained unanswered for decades, which means it was not unfounded: A nation’s disposition to fight can be greater than the process of fighting itself, as long as there is no certainty to the contrary.

### **The US has openly formulated its claim to hegemony**

America has not concealed its political intentions towards Russia, nor the attendant executive role of NATO. President Biden confirmed these intentions in the “US National Security Strategy” of October 2022:

*Our enduring role: [...] Although the international environment has become more controversial, the United States remains the world’s leading power [...]. The most pressing strategic challenge facing our vision comes from powers that combine authoritarian*

*governance with a revisionist foreign policy [...] and export an illiberal model of international order.*

The final phrases refer to Russia and China as opponents and enemies. This goes back to the years immediately after the end of the East-West conflict. What lends this its global importance is the fact that the nuclear powers Russia and US confronted each other; the US developed this line of confrontation regardless of the dissolution of system antagonism; the US has to this day continued this clearly hegemonic strategy of military encirclement of Russia, involving its regional allies, with the eastern expansion of NATO, and it has expanded this encirclement territorially in Eurasia.

### **A chronicle of power politics**

Timeline: in 1991, President *George Bush Sr.* interpreted the peaceful end of the Cold War together with the crisis in the Soviet Union as opening the way for his change of strategy towards a unipolar world order. An order, as the *Austrian Military Journal* of the Federal Ministry of Defence quoted Bush, “in which the US shapes the rest of the world instead of reacting to it”. He elaborated at the time, “The American armed forces were given the task of defending the unipolar *Pax Americana* and ensuring that no regional hegemon on any continent jeopardises the global leadership role of the USA”.

In turn, *George Bush Jr.* presented his “Greater Middle East” strategy at the G8 summit at Sea Island in June 2004 as a practical forward strategy. He understood it as a political agenda to restructure that region by “promoting peace, democracy, human dignity, the rule of law, economic opportunity and security”. He declared the fall of *Saddam Hussein* to be a prerequisite for the “democratisation” of the Greater Middle East region. It is particularly notable that the US and Britain went on to wage a war of aggression without having been threatened themselves.

Their “disposition to fight”, to return to my earlier thought, thus became a reality, any “certainty of the contrary” dispelled. This was also the moment when access to the Eurasian landmass was initially envisaged.

In June 2006, US Secretary of State *Condoleezza Rice* extended Bush’s geostrategic plan to Central Asia, parts of South Asia (Pakistan, Kashmir, West India), and the Persian Gulf. In doing so, she opened up paths for the US up to Russia’s southern neighbours. The new geostrategic constellation was to enable the US to advance from the Middle East via Afghanistan and Pakistan into the immediate vicinity of the states of Central Asia (the former Soviet republics) and neighbouring China. The Russian Federation, to be noted, regards the Central Asian states as its “near abroad”. At that time, the US failed to realise Rice’s plans because the pertinent Middle Eastern states declined to cooperate.

### **Today it is called ‘the rules-based order’**

We find the manifestation of this strategic thinking, three decades later, in Washington’s current claims to global hegemony disguised as the defence of a “rules-based international order”. Thus, the US Congress postulated in Report No. 117-667, Part I, on 30 December 2022: “*The United States leads the free, open, and rules-based international order.*

*The United States, European Union, the United Kingdom, and other European countries are close partners, sharing values grounded in democracy, human rights, transparency, and the rules-based international order established after World War II” (emphasis A. S.)*

This assembly of American allies is none other than NATO, an integration that serves America's global hegemony. In the following I will trace how NATO and its pact system fit into the US strategy towards Eurasia/Russia/China within the framework of the new great power competition. This concerns a phase of American geostrategy to control the Eurasian landmass by integrating Eurasia into the trans-Atlantic sphere by way of NATO's European eastward expansion. This effectively transformed NATO's expansion project such that the alliance carelessly and provocatively burdened itself with the adventure of a NATO-Eurasia "continentalisation".

What is more, Biden's 2022 National Security Strategy sets its sights on the Global South as the external hinterland of Russia and China. "We will influence their behaviour and compete with them", this document reads. Disguised as a fight against terrorism, Biden's declared objective is at once reflected in a NATO Strategy 2030, which was issued on 14 June 2021. A "reflection group" appointed by

NATO Secretary General *Jens Stoltenberg* and chaired by the German politician and former federal minister *Thomas de Maizière*, proposed that the trans-Atlantic alliance should substantially expand its geostrategic operational area:

*"NATO has long been aware of the fact that, in addition to threats from the "East", there are also dangers and diffuse risks to the security of the Alliance from the "South". However, a clear separation between these two flanks is becoming less important: the South and the East are linked at the seams (and geographically through the Western Balkans) with regard to Russia, which is playing an increasingly important role in the Mediterranean region. In the next ten years, a 360-degree security concept in which the South gains in importance for NATO will therefore be a must."*

### **Counteracting the emergence of 'hegemons in Eurasia'**

The *US Congressional Research Service* (CSR)<sup>3</sup> reflected on the Eurasia question as follows. The following passage is notable for its forthright clarity:

*"A specific key element of the traditional US role in the world since World War II – one that US policymakers do not often state explicitly in public – has been to oppose the emergence of regional hegemons in Eurasia.*

*This objective reflects a US perspective on geopolitics and grand strategy developed by US strategists and policymakers during and in the years immediately after World War II that incorporates key judgments.*

*Although US policymakers do not often state explicitly in public the goal of preventing the emergence of regional hegemons in Eurasia, U.S. military operations in World War I and World War II, as well as numerous US military wartime and day-to-day operations since World War II (and nonmilitary elements of US national strategy since World War II), appear to have been carried out in no small part in support of this goal."*

According to the corresponding document from the *US Congressional Research Service*, updated in 2023 (<https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R43838/95>), the US is pursuing the following intentions with this strategy:

*Geopolitics. "Given the amount of people, resources, and economic activity in Eurasia, a regional hegemon in Eurasia would represent a concentration of power large enough to be able to threaten vital U.S. interests."*

*Political intervention.* “Eurasia is not dependably self-regulating in terms of preventing the emergence of regional hegemonies, meaning that the countries of Eurasia [...] may need assistance from one or more countries outside Eurasia to be able to do this dependably”.

*Geostrategic-military intention.* “The goal of preventing the emergence of regional hegemonies in Eurasia is a major reason why the U.S. military is structured with force elements that enable it to deploy from the United States, cross broad expanses of ocean and air space, and then conduct sustained, large-scale military operations upon arrival in Eurasia or the waters and airspace surrounding Eurasia. Force elements associated with this goal include, among other things, an Air Force with significant numbers of long-range bombers, long-range surveillance aircraft, long-range airlift aircraft, and aerial refueling tankers, and a Navy with significant numbers of aircraft carriers.”

*Time horizons:* The “Open End”. The generic term “era” is used in US doctrine for “international relations under conditions of long-term strategic rivalry” after the end of the Cold War (“Post-Cold War Era of International Relations”, available at <https://crsreports.congress.gov>). This de facto amounts to an “open end”. The US locates the beginning of this era in the “seizure and annexation of Crimea by Russia in March 2014”, its “actions in eastern Ukraine”, and “China’s actions in the East and South China Seas”. They see these events as a “threat to core elements of the international order shaped by the US”. In other words, the era of “long-term strategic rivalry” is already a reality and characterises America’s positioning in the Ukraine conflict and far beyond.

### **Europe’s impasse**

Engaging with America’s Eurasian ambitions, showing solidarity, or even “joining the fight” would prove to be an impasse for Europe, as with Biden’s declaration of his intent to influence the behaviour of the Global South as the immediate hinterland of Russia and China, Central Asia is moving into the OSCE area.

Central Asia comprises the centre of the European-Asian subcontinent. Its states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – form a huge block bordering Russia and China.

With its 2,724,900 square kilometers, Kazakhstan alone is the ninth-largest country in the world by area and stretches across two time zones. Central Asia, especially its largest state, Kazakhstan, plays a key role in Eurasian regional transport and its communication systems with Russia, China, the Caspian Sea area, Iran, the Caucasus, and Europe. China’s transit to Europe runs via Kazakhstan. The latter can be considered one of the “new powers of the South”. In 2023, it held the chairmanship of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which accounts for around 40 per cent of the world’s population.

This can be considered a Euro-Asian geopolitical centre of gravity. As with the BRICS, it is one of the dynamic international forces that provide the impetus for fundamental changes in the global balance of power in a new multipolar world. The trans-Atlantic West resists these changes and collectively endeavors to break up these opposing forces. Central Asia, and in this case Kazakhstan, is a focal point. Particularly in the context of the conflict in Ukraine, it is being besieged and blackmailed with the “question of loyalty”: “Us or Russia and China?”

In summary, it can be said that a largely common denominator is emerging among the Central Asian states, China, and the Arab Gulf states in terms of international political expectations, principles, behaviour, agreements, and coordination.

Similar or even analogous developments can be observed in economic policy. The summit meetings, agreements, and orientations of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation contain an enormous number of common contemporary economic, social, cultural, national, transnational, and cross-border projects.

### Conclusion

EU-Europe should immediately revitalise its potential for the “civilizing” of conflicts, for war prevention, and peaceful coexistence. Its Eurasian position must be developed with foresight for mutual benefit. The latter is of central importance in terms of perspective, as no one else can enjoy a similar continental neighbourhood in emergent multipolar centres such as China, Russia, Central Asia, and Europe. A relationship of peaceful coexistence and cooperation could develop them together into a global economic centre of gravity. Nothing can be expected from America and NATO in this direction at present. •

\*\* *Horst Teltschik* is a former German political official. He was a close confidant of *Helmut Kohl* and worked in the Federal Chancellery. He chaired the *Munich Security Conference* from 1999 to 2008. (Editor’s note)

1 Colby, Elbridge. *The number one national security priority is great power competition*, *Atlantik-Brücke* of 21 December 2021

2 “US Role in the World: Background and Issues for Congress”, p 4, updated 19 January 2021, *Congressional Research Service*, <https://crsreports.congress.gov>, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R44891.pdf>

3 *Congressional Research Service*, “Defense Primer: Geography, Strategy, and US Force Design”, updated 19 April 2022 and 2023.

### Author:



Dr Dr h. c. Arne Clemens Seifert, (born 1937 in Berlin), Ambassador Rd.; Senior Research Fellow, WeltTrends Institute for International Politics, Potsdam, Germany.

.Graduated Institute of International Relations Studies, Moscow, specializing in Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, graduated 1963. Doctorate at the Institute for International Labour Movement, Berlin, 1977. Dr h. c. at the Orient Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences 2017.

Functions in the Foreign Ministry of the GDR 1964–1990: Arab States Division, worked in Egypt, Jordan; Sector Head Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan; Scientific Assistant to the Deputy Minister for Asia, Africa; Ambassador to the State of Kuwait 1982–1987; Head of Department 1987–1990.

After 1990: OSCE Mission to Tajikistan-peace building related to the Tajik civil war; Central Asia Advisor at the Centre for OSCE Research (CORE), Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg, specialising in OSCE and Central Asia research – Secular – Islamic Confidence Building; civil prevention of religious radicalization in Central Asia, transformation and political processes in Central Asia. Multiple publications in German, English and Russian. Recent publications include “Dialog und Transformation – 25 Jahre OSZE- und Zentralasienforschung” (Dialogue and Transformation – 25 years of research on the OSCE and Central Asia), Nomos; “Islamischer Aufbruch in Zentralasien – Spezifika religiöser Radikalisierungsprävention” (Islamic revival in Central Asia – Specifics of prevention of religious radicalisation), OSCE Yearbook Vol. 24, 2018; “Friedliche Koexistenz in unserer Zeit – Der neue Kalte Krieg und die Friedensfrage (Peaceful coexistence in our time – The new Cold War and the question of peace)”, WeltTrends, 2021; “‘Regelbasierte internationale Ordnung’ versus post-koloniale Emanzipation – Grenzen und Sackgassen eines globalen Hegemonieprojekts” (“Rules-based international order” versus post-colonial emancipation – limits and dead ends of a global hegemony project), WeltTrends 2022.