

World Politics: The Geopolitical Wrestle between the Old Order and the New Forces

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In 2015, the geopolitical wrestle between great powers keeps heating up dramatically, which becomes even more violent between countries on behalf of the existing hegemonies and the re-revival or the rising of "new forces". With the continuously fermenting crisis in Ukraine and the rapidly increasing turmoil in the Middle East as well as the warming tensions of the South China Sea, the three global great powers China, the U.S. and Russia are tending to reoccupy the central position on the international political stage by the traditional geopolitical game with its abnormally eye-catching state.

Russia launched the "second battlefield" of land power competition in Syria with the US

The outbreak of Syria's civil strife in March 2011 has caused more than a quarter of a million people to death and made more than 400 million refugees flee away the country and nearly 10 million people became displaced. Facing with the long years of constant chaos of Syria, Russia which remained calm and silent all the time finally chose to intervene, that is, to take armed intervention in Syria so as to help its most steadfast ally in the Middle East-- President Bashar al-Assad to stabilize the domestic situation against the opposition and the armed extremist, while at the same time to ensure Russia the only estuary and strategic foothold in the Mediterranean.

In September 2015, Russian President Vladimir Putin suddenly announced that at Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's request, the Russian army was going to launch air strikes towards the Islamic state (hereafter referred to as IS) forces inside of Syria. On Sep. 30th, the Russian air force began to carry out the military action against extremist organizations inside Syria. On Oct. 7th, Russia again implemented the four warships which were halted in the Caspian Sea before to launch 26 newly cruise missiles towards the IS 11 targets. During the past over a month, The Russian Aerospace Defiance Forces or VKO has made aerial bombardment to thousands of IS targets. At the same time, the ground force and air force of both Syria and Russia began to do cooperative combat and launched a massive counter offensive, giving a heavy blow to the IS forces.

When the US and Europe stay at the shock moment, Russia has already completed continuous movements to the Middle East issue, making a

Along with the increasingly heated Ukraine crisis, the chaos in the Middle East and the tension over the South China Sea Issue, the fierce competitions between China, the US and Russia comes gradually to the stage.

set of beautiful combinative strikes. Not long after the air raid, Russia united with Iraq, Iran and Syria setting the counterterrorism intelligence information center in Baghdad, jointly coping with threats including the expansion of the extremist organizations such as IS, thus establishing a regional antiterrorism alliance led by Russia. On Oct. 20th, Syria President Bashar al-Assad who had never travelled abroad since the outbreak of Syria civil war was suddenly been invited to visit Moscow and had a meeting with Putin, which thus broke the blockade of Western diplomacy to Bashar al-Assad. During the meeting, Putin showed that Russia would continuously made its best efforts to support Bashar al-Assad both from the military action and political aspects to fight against the terrorist forces inside Syria. On Nov. 23rd, Putin made again his visit to Iran again after 8 years, he also announced to relieve the ban on the enriched uranium that Russia provided to Iran and began to deliver the latest "S-300PMU2" air-defense missile. Russia made its mighty "return" in the chess game of the geopolitical strategically competition in Middle East, making the geopolitical situation in Syria and even the Middle East changed overnight and opening the "second battlefield" of Russia and the US land power competition.

From all the time, the US defines the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad as "dictatorship" and clearly requires Bashar to step down. At the same time, the US has been offering to the Syrian opposition enormous economic and military aids. The US helped to train the armed opposition personnel, determined to overthrow the regime of Bashar al-Assad and even spare the cost of pampering and conniving the expansion of the IS extremist organization. Therefore, the US was extremely dissatisfied with Russian's a series of supports for Bashar al-Assad and thus made wantonly criticize to Russia, accusing it was taking the opportunity to attack against Bashar's so-called "moderate" opposition faction in the name of "antiterrorism". At the same time, the US was forced to make some adjustments on the existing policy in order to deal with Russia' continuous movements in Syria. On Oct. 30th, 2015, the US announced an additional \$100 million in aid to the Syrian opposition coalition. On October 31, 2015, Obama authorized and dispatched "less than 50 people" the Special Forces to northern Syria, aiming at coordinating and training local opposition Armed Forces to combat IS. This was the first time that the US sent troops into the ground war field in Syria.

What's more important is that even though the US was strongly dissatisfied with Russia's military action, it had no choice but accept a *Fait Accompli* reluctantly. On Oc. 20th, the Ministry of national defense of both the US and Russia signed a flight safety memorandum of understanding, including the flight safety distance when the two

planes meeting in Syrian airspace, radio frequency and operation rules. The memorandum became effective immediately after signs, applying to the fighters and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) of the US, Russia and all the members from the international alliance combating IS. The purpose is to reduce the risk of air combat in-between the US and Russia military aircrafts. After the memorandum came into effect, the armed forces of both Russia and the US started all-weather contacts and decided the mechanisms of cooperation including how to provide each other mutual assistances in crisis situations. On Mar. 11, 2015, the US and Russia held a joint military drill with one fighter respectively, simulating the corresponding actions that the crew and ground troops should take when the two sides get dangerously close to each in order to avoid the occurrence of false events.

On the occasion when Russia and the US fought at close quarter in the Middle East based on their own geopolitical interests, the two precipitate terrorist attacks happened -- A Russian airliner crashed in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and Paris terrorist attack on Nov. 13rd -- made the relations between Russia and the US appeared to be overturned. Facing with the increasingly serious challenges of terrorism, the American President Obama on Nov. 18th firstly called Russia "constructive partnership" in the negotiation on the Syrian issue and claimed that the US would be devoted to search for approaches of easing tensions which would be accepted by the both sides. While Russia appeals to cooperate with France and other western countries to sign agreements in order to establish an "antiterrorist alliance" against the threat of extremism. As the preliminary strategic coordination between the US and Russia started, the door to the solution of Syria crisis was finally opened.

All parties continue to rival over the Ukraine issue

On the occasion that Russia implemented air strikes on Syria winning the attention of the world, the strategic competition around the Ukraine issue between the US and Europe and Russia has not been weakened.

Although with the "Normandy Quartet talks" held the leaders of the four countries of Russia, Ukraine, France, Germany in February 2015, in Minsk, Belarus, all the parties concerned with the Ukraine crisis agreed the ceasefire from Feb.15th, the Ukrainian crisis has been eased. However, the situation in eastern Ukrainian is far from being calm down, conflicts between folk armed militias and government forces would still occur from time to time, the peaceful prospects of Ukraine remains bleak and unpredictable.

Firstly, the relationship between Russia and Ukraine is still tight. For instance, Ukraine has repeatedly accused Russia of continuously

supporting to the folk armed militias in eastern Ukraine and announced sanctions against Russia on its more than 20 airline operators with prohibitions of not allowing these enterprises' flight into and over Ukrainian airspace. Then Russia adopted similar "ban of flying" to a number of Ukraine airlines. On Oct. 25th, 2015, Russia and Ukraine officially interrupted the direct flights between both countries.

Secondly, the US and Europe continues their sanctions to Russia. Since Crimea was incorporated into Russia, Moscow's relations with Washington and Europe fell to the low point of the post Cold War Era. In order to punish Russia, decisions were made by the western countries headed by the US on the G20 summit held in Turkey in November 2015 that the economic sanctions to Russia would be extended for another six months until the July of next year, which means the relationship between the US and Europe and Russia would not be eased in the short term.

Thirdly, what's more important is that the mutual intimidation and deterrence between Russia and the US and NATO "muscle showing" will continue to be upgraded, the smell of gunpowder grows increasingly strong. The US has already begun to deploy heavy weapons in the Baltic region while NATO has continued to hold large-scale joint military drills and form a rapid response force. And Russia also tit for tat, by holding military drills and missile launching tests, it gave back a tough response to the strategic pressure applied by NATO. For example, in Aug. 2015, the US led and started the Europe's largest joint air training ever since the end of the cold war, about 11 NATO allies of nearly 5000 soldiers held exercises to deal with "Russia's increasingly aggressive action". NATO held large-scale military drills named "Trident contact" in countries such as Italy, Spain and Portugal as well as Atlantic and Mediterranean sea areas from Oct. 3rd to Nov. 6th. This military drill features itself with the largest scale military exercise that NATO held since the year of 2002 with more than 30 countries and over 3.6 million soldiers to participate in. The purpose is aimed to level up the "war preparing ability" under the background of Ukraine crisis. On Oct. 28th, NATO announced again that it would send 4000 soldiers to Poland, Estonia, Lithuania and other 7 NATO allies bordered Russia in order to respond to the "security threats from Russia". However, Russia is not a sign of weakness. It has continuously conducted several missile tests on October 30, including an intercontinental ballistic missile "Aspen" and two submarine transcontinental ballistic missiles. In addition to that, the "Tu-160" strategic bombers, the Caspian Sea Fleet ships and "Iskander" K missile have launched multiple different types of cruise missiles. Russia thus can be declaimed to have held a strong "comprehensive nuclear war capacity" through the exercise of the large-scale "nuclear showdown". On October

30, two Russian "Tu-142" anti-submarine aircraft flew at a low altitude close to the US "Ronald Reagan" the nuclear powered aircraft carrier less than a sea mile, resulting in the military aircrafts of the US scrambled to implement intercept. The often seen dangerous game of "cat and mouse" between the US and Russia during the cold war is frequently staged again. On Nov. 10, 2015, Russian media "accidentally" exposed the "strategic nuclear torpedo" scheme, which from another perspective confirms that President Vladimir Putin determined to "recover strategic nuclear balance with American no matter at any cost". Subsequently, the US announced in public that it would begin to develop the intercontinental ballistic missile systems of highway mobile.

The sharp increasing intensity over sovereignty the South China Sea

In the Asia Pacific region, the competition over the South China Sea issue between China and the US stepped into to a new level, which also made the tensions situation of the South China Sea reached a new climax. Ever since 2015, due to China's land reclamation project carried out in the South China Sea, the US began to frequently accused China in public over the South China Sea issue and instigated a provocation. In July 15th, the new US Navy's Pacific Fleet Commander Swift boarded the "P-8A Poseidon" reconnaissance aircraft and participated in the seven hours reconnaissance mission in the South China Sea. On Oct. 27, the US Navy sent "Larsen" Aegis missile destroyer to protect the so-called "freedom of navigation" and entered to cruise around the Subi Reef and Mischief Reef of the South China Sea within 12 nautical miles, which then was monitored and tracked as well as warned by the two Chinese naval vessels. With the start of American warships 'cruise in the Islands of the South China Sea, the US began to come to the stage from behind the scenes and had direct confrontation with China, which also unveiled the competition prelude of the Sino-US in the South China Sea.

The Chinese government has declared its strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition towards a series of serious behaviors of America to China's sovereignty and security interests, which also endangered the safety of Chinese personnel on the reef and facilities and damaged peace and stability in the region. On Oct. 29th, the Chinese Navy Admiral Wu Shengli, alerted in the video call to the Chief of Naval Operations Richardson that if the US continued to proceed "dangerous provocations" in the disputed waters of the South China Sea, the two sides were likely to "be seen in a severe and urgent situation which would even be out of hand". But the US apparently was unwilling to change its policies. On Nov. 2ed, the Pentagon asserted that the US would send warships into the Islands of the South China Sea within 12 nautical miles carrying out cruise

twice each quarter, which means that the provocative behavior of the US would be normalized and systematized. On Nov. 5th, the United States Defense Secretary Ashton Carter boarded on the US Navy "Theodore Roosevelt", the nuclear-power aircraft carrier which then cruised in the South China Sea, he blamed again China for "trying to undermine the regional stability and balance of power". On July 11st, Carter delivered a speech at a defense forum in the Reagan Library of California, he clearly regarded China and Russian as "the potential threat" to the world, claiming that "this is the challenge that the whole era is confronted with, just as the time of Reagan's era". When facing with the threat of Russia and the rise of China, we must innovate the way of protecting the United States." And we should also ensure that the US will continue to transfer its strategic center to the Asia Pacific region, send the "most advanced and most sophisticated" Navy and its weapons and equipment as well as invest in the field of space, networks, missile defense and electronic warfare areas so as to cope with China's related actions. The US again sent two B-52 strategic bombers to the South China Sea for patrol mission and later flew close to in the airspace around the construction reef Island of the South China Sea in the middle of the night On Nov. 8th to the next morning. The above mentioned provocative actions of the America has already constituted the most serious challenge China met that the US launched to China's sovereignty in the South China Sea and impaired deeply the already fragile strategic mutual trust between China and the US and also provoked a new round of tension of the regional security situation.

In the upcoming year, the tense competition based upon the traditional geopolitical interests will continue to dominate the logic of the great powers. Given that the Ukraine issue concerns the core interests of Russia for which Russia would unlikely to make a compromise on its strategic interests, the confrontation between Russia and the US and Europe and the "quasi cold war" tends to be continued. And Syria is like the bridge tower of Russian who intervened in the Middle East and kept its traditional influence, for which reason Russia would not easily make concessions. Similarly, the dispute over the Islands and reefs of the South China Sea not only concerns China's territorial integrity and sovereignty, but also the staging base for China to step out the offshore and surge forwards the ocean. However, America, for the sake of keeping the sea hegemony in Asia Pacific would certainly try a variety of military, political and diplomatic means, taking the protection of the "freedom of navigation" and "regional stability" as excuses to constrain and handicap China. Besides, the sea power competition between China and the US in the South China Sea will exist for a long time, even the possibility of

sharpening and upgrading will not be ruled out. However, it is not a wise decision for America whose comprehensive national strength remains in decline to implement competitions with China and Russia at the same time with more difficulties and obstacles.

Translator/ Liu Ling