

# **The Concept of Cold War in Global Politics\***

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The Cold War has ended but its shadow still remains. The term “The New Cold War” has already entered into the lexicon of international politics. Almost every serious confrontation between the United States and Russia or China evokes “The New Cold War” debates. The Cold War reached its true sense because it had achieved to create its own dynamics within time and ceased to exist when those dynamics lost their power. I think this question is a great test in terms of measuring the level that today’s international relations has reached: Are cold wars relevant in a global politics? The answer to be given to this question depends on whether any cold war can be sustained against all the pluralistic tendencies of international relations. It will be negative one because the dynamics unleashed by globalization are likely to marginalize new cold wars regardless of the will to wage and sustain it. For, beyond the will to wage and sustain it, the concept of cold war is a technical issue that can only exist provided that it can achieve to subordinate all the dynamics of the global politics to itself.

Tags: cold war, United States, globalization, pluralism, power

The Cold War has ended but its shadow still remains. The term “The New Cold War” has already entered into the current debates of global politics. Every rising tension between the United States and Russia or China evokes new cold war debates. I believe that the time has come to examine new cold war debates within the realities of IR discipline and determine its value in today’s global politics. Therefore, this paper intends to give a response to Cold War debates that erupts in almost every serious tension between great powers with special emphasis on the United States through the perspective of the new cold war scenarios.

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\* “Global and Regional Powers in a Changing World”, FLASCO- ISA Joint Conference, July 23-25, Buenos Aires.

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The eruption of tension or crises in international politics signifies a lot in terms of testing the state of the current international order. I believe that new cold war debates are useful in order to see the capabilities of great powers given the facts of today's global politics since a true cold war would be meaningless without great powers. So how free and strong are the great powers to wage a cold war apart from their willingness to do it? Beyond that, how capable are they to hold the reins of global politics? Can the facts of global power-regional power balance be adapted to a new cold war? How was the U.S. foreign policy affected by the new facts of global politics? I believe that finding answers to these and other similar questions will make a significant contribution in terms of achieving the goals of this conference.

In this paper, I argue that the cold war is a question of sustainability and the concept of Cold War remains alien to the facts of global politics which renders a new cold war technically impossible.

## **A Perfect Cold War**

The Cold War which we had lived was a perfect a cold war. It was perfect because power increase on behalf of one side meant a direct threat for the other. The formation of mirror images was full. Either side believed to represent what is correct for the whole mankind. There was a perfect polarization that exposed the danger of escalating to a hot confrontation. It had two protagonists who achieved to monopolize world politics.

I define cold war as the highest stage of a polarized tension between two actors whose foreign policy interest signifies a matter of existence for the other. It can occur at the system or at the unit level. Therefore, this does not mean that "The Cold War" is the only cold war model that international order and the system can see. It did not have to be necessarily an ideological stand-off. Great Britain-Imperial Germany

confrontation prior the outbreak of First World War exhibited a cold war at the unit level. But the ideological dimension gave the Cold War the will to make the war a *raison d'être* on behalf of both sides. Without such an ideological dimension, the Cold War would not have lasted for so long and aroused terror for the whole mankind. Even beyond than an ideological stand-off, it was a war that each side fought to protect and spread its way of life as well as world view.

States may enter into long standing tensions with each other. But that may not even be adequate to name such a tension as cold war. Therefore a true cold war must meet some basic prerequisites:

- In Cold War attitudes and perceptions must take on a petrified form that even a small move must be evaluated by the other side as a direct threat to its own existence.
- There must be a consensus within the societies of both sides that there is an enemy which poses a fatal threat to the nation's existence.
- Cold War must always carry the risk of escalating to an all-out war.

When it comes to system level, any cold war would demand additional criterions:

- The international system must be able to subject all the major actors of international relations to itself and to hinder centrifugal forces that would upset the sustainability of the system.
- The Cold War involves an international order that encourages a geopolitical contest encompassing all the political geographies.

So, given the prerequisites of a cold war the question is: Can any cold war tendency between great powers adapt to the international order and system of today and subjugate the dynamics of global politics to itself?

### **New Facts of Global Politics**

Today's international system demonstrates a hybrid character which does not compare to any other past international system. No matter how far it has departed from a polar character, it has never meant a total break from the previous international system. As the product of Cold War national security state, NSA does not quit monitoring even her long standing ally Germany. Therefore, the international system of today exhibits the features of the previous international system as well as the current one. Certainly every international system ushers in new realities of its own from which there is no return to the previous international system. This hybrid character could be well observed in the emerging contest between globalization and geopolitics in the post-Cold War world. With the boosting of effect of *The End of History*, post-Cold War international system seemed as if globalization would be powerful enough to put an end to the geopolitical logic of traditional world politics. Because in the era of globalization, ideas and products have made much greater sense than the physical location of the actors. Instead of geographical value, human capital and democracy and human rights standards would determine a state's position. Globalization has indeed marginalized the "rankings and ratings" of the Cold War inviting more transparency by human development indexes, transparency indexes, gender equality indexes etc. Yet it would not be easy to wipe geopolitics off the map of global politics. Geopolitics could well demonstrate that it could stay many long years on the world map. Because it has been understood that there are fault lines which made ethnic, separatist and other types of tensions come to surface at

any time. It has been seen that Russia is to remain one of the constants of world politics and so is NATO. With the rise of China, a new geopolitics is about to emerge in the East Asia. However today's geopolitical logic serves to containing threats rather than serving to expansionist goals. Even if geopolitics will continue to have a considerable influence in world politics, it will never be able to be the main motive when it comes to question of the actor behavior. We can observe this hybrid character also in the normative dimension since the United Nations is governed by five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council whereas almost no state can isolate itself from the normative dimension of the international system.

Regardless of how much hybrid it is, I believe that there is a dynamic that drifts global politics towards a condition that primarily the great powers will not be pleasant with. As we all know, great powers have been the main driving force of world politics throughout the diplomatic history. Without the impact of great powers international relations would hardly ever to gain a true system character. Yet today's international system has signified unpleasant symptoms on behalf of great powers. Perhaps they are living the greatest crisis in their journeys through the diplomatic history in a time when they possess the most sophisticated arms in their inventory. Great powers have become much more vulnerable towards the emerging threats and crises economically, politically and militarily. Gone are the days when Churchill and Stalin made "Percentages Agreement" in 1944 on a piece of paper. Even if it may seem to some people that the international system is evolving toward multipolarity, it is not hard to see this is just one of the common illusions of world politics. Great powers have lost their status of being the propelling power of world politics and rather they have begun to show the signs of demonstrating adaptive behavior to the facts of global politics. International system functions much more

random than ever which leaves great powers more exposed to face unexpected agendas in their foreign policies. While randomness is not alien to IR, random behavior has become one of the basic features of the international system. Therefore the form that the system has taken makes it harder on behalf of state actors to concentrate on their presumed foreign policy objectives. This phenomenon is better understood by the responses great powers have given on behalf of protecting their interests.

Global powers face difficulties in pursuing one straight path in their foreign policies as opposed to the heydays of geopolitics. They cannot focus on a fixed agenda. Global powers have to cope with multi foreign policy agendas simultaneously that none of which has an absolute priority over the other. It is not easy on behalf of great powers to concentrate on a single foreign policy agenda. They have lost their concentration on one path in a world of proliferations, pirates, mobile HQs, springs and, spying scandals and the leaks. Where should the world's sole superpower United States focus on? Is it Ukraine, Iraq or South China Sea? What does a Taliban-free Afghanistan mean if it can be replaced by other locations in Asia or in Africa? How about the worsening relations with Germany because of the NSA incident? Every emerging issue also means an invitation to the participation of new actors. Global powers have to be prepared to the unexpected results of their foreign policies they pursue. The stronger the interaction between the actors of international relations, the more foreign policies is open to unexpected results. Interaction capability between all the actors of international relations is much stronger and it has gained a dynamic of its own. Any foreign behavior policy might be followed by authority crises, financial crises, or legitimacy crises in any country concerned. When global powers over concentrate on an issue, this can well signify an invitation

to uncertainties in their foreign policies. Every move of a great power whether it be a balancing act or a military intervention will suffice to invite new problems. The agenda of great powers have been intensely subjected to the increasing influences by the actors of non-state entities, the individual and the people in the street. Under the pressure of such dynamics, there is no way of returning to the traditional international politics. The polar logic of traditional international politics has vanished. It is certain that balance of power cannot function as the prime regulator of the international system. There is even no way to oligopolization let alone to monopolization of power by the great powers. Because great powers of today are vulnerable to economic crises and cannot take too much risks in their foreign policies. They have to keep their social and economic indicators over a certain standard. When domestic well-being could not be held apart from foreign policy, presumed foreign policy agendas can lose their priorities at any time.

The tragedy that great powers face has been the direct consequences of the changing aspects of power concept. The power in the hands of the great powers is living its poorest days. Power concentration is at the lowest level; it has been something fluid. For, power has become a much more diffused phenomenon. Whether there has remained any structure of international politics is another debate, in classical sense, structure is not of any kind to allow any power concentration. Power is one day in the hands of Mahdi Army, one day in the hands of Assange, one day in the hands of the masses in Cairo or a rebel leader anywhere in the world.<sup>1</sup> Today's global politics has left no *Heartland* type power capital to be focused on and seized. The goal of the Concert of Europe was to keep the international order in status quo and this goal was achieved because power concentration was full.

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed analysis of diffusion of power see Moisés Naim, *The End of Power*, New York, Basic Books, 2013, pp.129-158.

Congress diplomacy was adequate for that. States knew how to become powerful because it was something to be reached by the military might. Therefore, the more power was concentrated, the easier it was to seize and monopolize it if possible. In today's global politics, power matters if it has the ability to cope effectively with an emerging issue and to gather the largest coalition possible within the international community. Military might does not mean much in global politics if it means increasing costs. It bears significance in so far as they serve to general equilibrium and prevent other great powers getting strategic advantages at the expense of a great power. In the old sense of world politics, great power struggles based on territorial acquisitions or forming spheres of influences have vanished. Besides, every state has come to the point of realizing that it has some responsibility as a member of the international community.

The trend which has accelerated the waning influence of great powers also stems from the decentralized character of global politics. Globalization has overwhelmingly been thought to work in favor of hegemonic states and multinationals. We have to admit that it has been an undermined fact how regional powers have benefited a lot from the process globalization in setting their own priorities. Global powers may have been the prime beneficiary of globalization; but regional powers have also benefited from it. Therefore, it must be admitted that one of the consequences of globalization has been the undeniable rise of regional powers. Because quite a significant number of regional powers have achieved to utilize from the benefits of globalization. They adapted their human capital to the facts of globalization and learned how to compete. They achieved to attract a considerable amount of foreign direct investment. They have re-organized globalization in a sense. As a corollary of this, relations between regional powers and global powers have



faced fluctuations since regional powers have also achieved to set their own foreign policy priorities. The foreign policy interests of the regional actors have ceased to overlap with those of their traditional great power allies. Because the regions have gained a momentum of their own by clinching the autonomous sub-system character of the international system.

With the waning influence of the global powers, it has been revealed that traditional global-regional power distinctions can no more be sustained as it used to be. Global powers can no longer enjoy expanding goals as a choice in their own foreign policies. Moreover, I believe that in this age, states can longer fit to traditional regional and global power formats. The regions have created their own dynamics that can well ward off global powers pursuing influence policies. Great powers can no longer base their foreign policies on long-term relations with regional allies. Regional powers have departed from being staunch allies or friends of the great powers. An international crisis can manifest itself in a way that even global power and regional power distinction becomes blurred. Because any key actor can play a vital role that can bring about setbacks in the policies of great powers. The dynamics of the regional sub-systems are so strong that even global powers would feel compelled to adapt themselves. While no global power is a global power in old sense, no regional power can keep its position in the old sense. For the gap between even great and small power might not reflect the physical gap. Barrack Obama may have called Russia as a regional power, but when it comes to Russian-German relations it will signify a lot.<sup>2</sup> Germany's relations with the third parties have risen to key position in the determining the course of Western polices. Likewise, US-Iranian relations have become much more crucial than say Franco-Anglo relations. Therefore, regional-

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<sup>2</sup> "Obama Answers Critics, Dismissing Russia as a Regional Power" March 25 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/26/world/europe/hague-summit-focuses-on-preventing-trafficking-of-nuclear-materials.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/26/world/europe/hague-summit-focuses-on-preventing-trafficking-of-nuclear-materials.html?_r=0), 14.07.2014.

regional power relationship or global-regional power relationship in classical sense may outweigh any classical great power relations. Besides, any regional actor can vanguard the idea, movement or an initiative and mobilize global powers on behalf of global responsibility. They are well able to change the foreign policy agendas of the great powers. The initiative by Turkey and Brazil on resolving the issue on Iran's nuclear enrichment program had implications for global power-regional power relations. For a classical regional power does not fit to the regional role the regional actors have been thought to be play. Global power-regional power distinction is more likely to depend on the peculiarity of the case in question. If a great power holding the status of a superpower is not strong enough to assimilate all the sub-systemic dynamics, that means being world power or global power has lost its traditional meaning. As a result of these, it is likely that global powers can hope to find ultimate solutions to their foreign policy problems in so far as they cooperate with the regional powers and adapt themselves to the realities of the region concerned.

The portray that we have drawn about the state of the great powers fits mainly to the United States. For, all these facts of global politics make the greatest impact on the foreign policy realities of the United States. While the nature of the international system has changed, so has the nature of U.S. foreign policy. Richard Haas was correct when he confirmed Charles Krauthammer's famous phrase "The Unipolar Moment".<sup>3</sup> It was only a moment that has passed away. "The Operation Desert Storm" against Saddam Hussein in 1991 which liberated Kuwait was thought to be the beginning of a unipolar era. Ironically, it has been understood that it was just one of the illusions of world politics by the capture of Mosul by ISIS.

When it is obvious that there is no return to the traditional U.S. foreign policy, it means U.S. foreign policy faces structural problems that it cannot rescue

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Haas, U.S. Foreign Policy in a Nonpolar World, Foreign Affairs, May/June 2008, pp.44-57.

herself. These structural problems stem mainly from the dramatic de-centralization in global politics. When the significance of geopolitics in American foreign policy had to decline and regions have become more autonomous, it has signified end of any unipolar world or any dream on behalf of the United States. While the era of Pax Americana is over, she has also lost her usual fixed path in her journey as a superpower. One of the striking indicators of this reality has been observed in the fluctuating relations with her traditional allies such as Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia. She can longer set any fixed foreign policy priority. About the ongoing Russia-Ukraine tension, she cannot estimate how this tension will end and how long it will continue to occupy her foreign relations. As a superpower can she find a ultimate solution to emerging anarchy in Syria and Iraq? Even if Afghanistan could be reached to stability, it will be far from providing security guarantee for the United States. The dissolution of Iraq has pushed the United States to cooperate with Iran. How will this affect her relations with Saudi Arabia and Israel? In the Far East, U.S.-China relations have entered into a new phase that will be much more open to crises. Besides, it is most likely that in the upcoming years U.S.-Japan relations will have to change.

As a consequence of all these, the U.S. foreign policy has come to the point of not determining properly where to concentrate on and to which issue to give priority. No issue has an absolute priority over the other in American foreign policy and every new issue can be marginalized by other at any time. In strategic terms, it has been much harder for the United States to determine her center of gravity in global politics compared with say a decade ago. Therefore, it is not surprising that Walter Russell Mead does not expect that any strategic consensus to be reached among the foreign policy elites about the international order to be envisioned on

behalf U.S. foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> When it becomes harder and harder for the United States to make superpower moves, the concept of superpower does not go much beyond than exhibiting quantitative indicators of how a superpower must be.

### **Why Any Kind of Cold War Cannot Come Back?**

Cold War could endure because the bipolar system was strong enough not to allow any centrifugal forces that would undermine it. That is why despite the détente process, it did not take too long for the so-called “Second Cold War” to begin because Cold War had gained its own momentum. While the détente process in 1970s was underway, it could be well undermined by the geopolitical conditioning of the era. Angola, Somali and Ethiopia were appealing enough for the Soviet Union in order to get a stronghold in the African front. The document called “Basic Principles of Relations between United States and the Soviet Union” signed in 1972 which anticipated that neither side would seek unilateral benefits detrimental to the other side has not changed anything. With this very geopolitical conditioning, Soviet Union did not hesitate to invade Afghanistan in 1979. The Cold War ended when the international system was subjected to the effects of centrifugal forces. The peoples of the East Bloc stroke a fatal blow to the course of the Cold War.

I believe that the crisis beginning with Maidan movement causing Cold War debates to flare up in the world media has ushered in its answers as well. When Ukrainian President Yanukovic cancelled the treaty with the EU, people in the street reacted, overthrew the administration, Russia-Ukraine tension emerged, paramilitary groups have emerged as a new actor in the Russian speaking parts of the country. This incident was sufficient enough to demonstrate how states may face unexpected results and also how they are open to staying behind the course of the international

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How It Changed The World*, New York Alfred A. Knopf, 2001, pp. 322-323.

issues. Still the leaderless publics have a great say in determining the course of the conflict. This crisis has demonstrated how the West and Russia make their moves by taking the realities of the global economy into account. Besides, Turkish-Russian relations have not changed much. Turkey has made cautious steps due to her energy dependency to Russia. On the other hand, while the West and especially United States focused on Ukraine, Iraq began to crumble. Even Iraq has become a new priority for Russian foreign policy itself. Despite the Munich jargon of Zbigniew Brzezinski, Russia-Ukraine tension could not achieve to monopolize the agenda of international relations leaving its throne to the emerging issues of global politics.<sup>5</sup> NSA spy scandal has demonstrated that the Western alliance will not speak with one voice in its security policies.

All these mean no other thing than the manifestation of issue-led world. Every new development by the actors is able to signify an invitation to new dynamics. Issues have acquired the capacity of gaining its own dynamic and create unexpected situations one behalf of the states. Every issue is powerful to create its own agenda by drifting states behind itself. While a dispute is underway, *WikiLeaks* may be part of the dispute, possible deaths in protest actions may set boundaries the actions of the either side, sides involved may realize how their economies are vulnerable to the consequences of interdependence, an NGO may participate in a dispute by rising as a new actor and so on.

In global politics, transnational issues have gained a dynamic of their own. When transnational issues have reached to the strength of changing the agenda of global politics so rapidly, they do not leave much chance to polarized relations taking

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<sup>5</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski: After Putin's Aggression in Ukraine, the West Must Be Ready to Respond, March 3, 2014 [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/zbigniew-brzezinski-after-putins-aggression-in-ukraine-the-west-must-be-ready-to-respond/2014/03/03/25b3f928-a2f5-11e3-84d4-e59b1709222c\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/zbigniew-brzezinski-after-putins-aggression-in-ukraine-the-west-must-be-ready-to-respond/2014/03/03/25b3f928-a2f5-11e3-84d4-e59b1709222c_story.html), 15.07.2014

root among states. Because the Cold War is no such thing that you can give five minutes break and then simply say “Where were we?” Due to the intensity of the transnational issues any rival states may feel compelled to cooperate in a field while they remain rivals in another field because foreign policies of today have become much more open to the emergence of new issues. Why does the agenda in international politics of today so rapidly shifting from another to another issue? States had to face agendas they were not quite familiar with. 9/11 was the extreme example of this trend. The dynamics unleashed by multiple centers have accelerated at an enormous speed. Actually the traditional center concept in international politics has almost vanished. There is no more a fixed threat or terror center. Anywhere is able to become a center or just one of the centers depending on the issue. The cover of the one of recent issues of *The Economist* was the “Terror’s New HQ” pointing out the ISIS threat in Iraq and Syria.<sup>6</sup> No one can make a true estimation on how long it will remain so or resist the emergence of new HQs. An original international system with the boost of globalization has emerged with issues rapidly moving from one to another. By challenging the hegemony of states, non-state actors have clinched their positions as constants of global politics and have turned into behaving units. Individuals have been well-equipped to manifest their reactions to any hegemon in the international system. This has accelerated the interaction capacity within the system and it has departed from being a system of encouraging traditional power struggles. When these dramatic facts of international politics make the greatest impact on the United States, that means one of the indispensable protagonists of the Cold War would be absent and without the participation of the United States any tension would not take on a cold war character.

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<sup>6</sup> The Economist, “Terror’s New HQ: The Rise of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, June 14<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> 2014.

The Cold War involves geopolitics of its own and such geopolitics does not exist and cannot be re-created. We have observed that Turkish-Russian relations have not changed much after Russian annexation of Crimea. Regional powers have no interest in being part of great power game of geopolitics. They have either no longer interest in tying their foreign policies just to one great power. For, regional powers are well aware that they will not be punished if their foreign policies do not go in harmony with those of the great powers. Because this is not an international system that would allow great powers to punish the actions of regional powers. Even if geopolitics will keep occupying certain energy of world politics, it will not be determinative enough to impel global powers to chase geopolitical goals. For, geopolitics involves a concentrated power capital to be seized. Yet the power has become a diffused phenomenon as I have mentioned above.

Any cold war type will not find a chance to survive in the emerging international system because economic goals will keep its distinct value apart from political goals. In the Cold War political, economic, military and technological power complemented each other in order to weaken the other side. Such a harmony no longer exists. Power has lost its fungibility. Economic power has found rational to divorce from military power. Persisting in military supremacy can be at the expense of economic objectives. They will be compelled to realize that the costs will surpass the benefits. While keeping as well as reaching high standards of living is a goal of its own, states can no longer risk adventurous foreign policies at the expense of economic goals. The candidates of the new Cold War cannot keep it permanent at the expense of letting others concentrating on technological advances. As Randall Schweller has underlined, "Get richer and avoid catastrophic military contests" has

been the new motto of great powers.<sup>7</sup> As getting richer does not recognize any borders, it does not leave much chance to the formation of polarized alignments.

This fact gains significance especially when it comes to China. China will do her best to utilize from the international economic order until she rises to a real great power status. That is why, it is highly unlikely that any China-U.S. confrontation will lead to a new cold war. As long as there is a minimum interdependence between China and the U.S., both sides will hesitate to pass the red line. Besides, Far East sub-system is strong to create its own dynamics not to allow any long-standing confrontation between China and the United States. Some actors will definitely choose neutrality. No regional actor can easily risk its economic indicators worsening on behalf of allying with any side.

Under these circumstances, even if there emerges a willingness to start a Cold War, no power will achieve to subject all the actors to itself, for current international system is not in the state of affairs to care about any cold war. Even it is not in the position of fully implementing the prerequisites of a system. Rather than states, the system has become rogue itself.<sup>8</sup> Even if the first moves of Cold War are made, it will not mean much since the protagonists will feel alienated and therefore it would not be possible technically to render it sustainable. The protagonists of the “new cold war” will face difficulties in making the single priority in their foreign policies. Because any Cold War conditioning will not be strong enough to resist the dynamics global politics which is always in flux. There is no reason why Gates Foundation should behave in harmony with the U.S. foreign policy or adapt itself to the conditions of any confrontation. It will keep executing its own agenda distinct from the states. In other words, the international system will not give any chance in the

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<sup>7</sup> Randall L. Schweller, *Maxwell's Demon and the Golden Apple*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014, p.97.

<sup>8</sup> Schweller explains this phenomenon with “entropy”.



name of rendering cold war type confrontations permanent. In such a plural world, it would not be possible at the same time to impose a fixed cold war behavior on any domestic society let alone plural Western societies.

There is no doubt that as long as great powers remain a fact of global politics, cold war debates will never stay out of the popular debates of global politics. Because as distinct from any material return, great power quests for hegemony will continue to be a goal of its own which will not cease to evoke cold war type confrontations. Yet, no matter how serious such confrontations are, they will not go beyond than satisfying great power fantasies.

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