

Leading Article

Active Geostrategic Faults in the World

Mohammad Reza Hafeznia* - Full Professor of Political Geography, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran

In the frame of the paradigm of competition between maritime (sea) and land strategies there are two great geostrategic faults in global scale located at the West and East of the Eurasia that seem to be the origins of current policies in the world. In fact, the global geostrategic confrontations are located in the onshore parts of the Eurasia. These confrontations are limited from East to onshore gap-line between land of Eurasia and Pacific Ocean, and from West to the gap-line between Eurasia and Europe and Africa. It looks that, European states and the USA and the maritime strategy allies have surrounded the land of Eurasia, and challenge the land strategy and its allies and enforce them to the spatial contraction. In opposite, Russia and China as the main actors of the land strategy try to cope with this challenge, and reach to the spatial expansion.

The global powers are in the two sides of these faults. It means that in the East gap-line of Eurasia the USA is in contrast with Russia and China, and in the West gap-line of Eurasia the USA and NATO are in geostrategic confrontation with Russia. These faults have geopolitical nature and philosophy. Because the actors of the both sides try to increase their geopolitical and geographical space in the global level, and also try not to allow the rivals to enter to their spaces. The process of their spatial expansion has two faces:

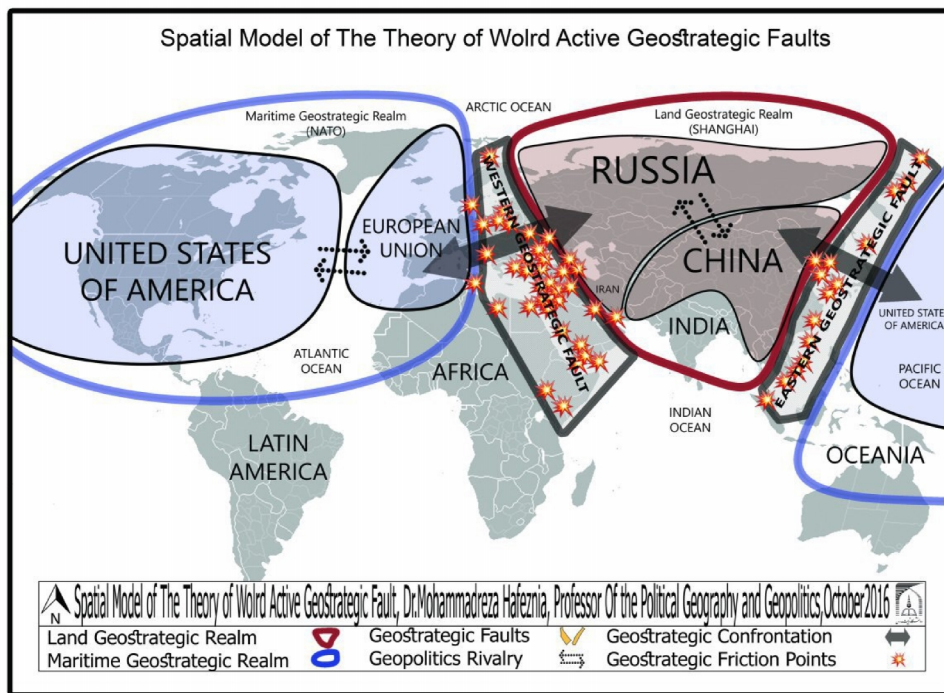
1. Geographical: increase in territory using dominance, annexation and

* E-mail: hafezn_m@modares.ac.ir

occupation methods.

2. Geopolitical: increase in the power of control and influence in other areas.

Today there are five strategic and powerful actors in the global level that are categorized into two main global geostrategic realms. All of them are the UN Security Council members. These actors are as follows: the USA, Britain and France in sea geostrategic front; Russia and China in land geostrategic front.



Today there are two active geostrategic faults in the world as follows:

- A. East Fault, located at the gap of lands of Eurasia with Pacific Ocean**
This fault includes an area from the border of the U.S and Russia in Arctic Ocean and the Bering Strait to the East and Southeast of Asia and the East

of Indian Ocean. This area includes some geographic features like Bering Strait, Bering Sea, Kamchatka Peninsula, the Sea of Okhotsk, Kuril Islands, Japan, the Sea of Japan, the Korean Peninsula, Yellow Sea, East China Sea, South China Sea, Philippine Sea, the island of Taiwan, the Taiwan Strait, the ASEAN region, the Peninsula & Strait of Malacca, Indonesia Islands, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia and the East of Bengal Gulf. This geographical space has geopolitical and geostrategic importance for China and Russia, and it is the Achilles Heel of China and Russia. So, this space can be used by the U.S as the leader of maritime strategy- as a geopolitical and geographical challenge against China and Russia.

The main actors of these faults are the US, Russia and China. In this fault, geostrategic confrontation is primarily between the U.S and China, and then between the U.S and Russia. This space is so vital for Russian military and her strategic navy in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Also, this space has vital geostrategic and geo-economic importance for Chinese vitality and its growing economy. China needs sea regions of the Pacific Ocean for its economic dynamism in order to import energy and raw materials required for economic and industrial activities from different regions of the world and in particular from the Middle East and Persian Gulf, and also to export industrial goods through its neighboring sea areas to the world markets. So, accessibility, control and security of the region in the Pacific and Indian Oceans including shores, islands, water bodies, waterways, straits, import and export ports, shipping lines and routes has vital geo-economic importance for China. From the view point of China, occupation of this space, insecurity in this space or control of this space by rivals mean threatening their national security and the power of maneuver in global economy. China shows intense and offensive reaction to this issue. Exclusion of China from neighboring sea regions in Pacific Ocean means the collapse of China's economy.

From the other hand, the U.S sees China as her rival from different facets

in the future geopolitical structure of the world. The U.S wants to limit and contract China spatially in the neighboring seas like in the Pacific and Indian Oceans in order to keep China in inferiority position. The U.S strategy in this space is to contract China spatially through the presence of her navy, to support China's neighboring states who claim sea areas to the detriment of China, and to challenge Chinese state. Vice versa, China's strategy in this region is to strengthen navy, shift its military maneuver power to the West of Pacific Ocean and near to the U.S borders, to confront with boundary claims of its neighboring states in the Pacific Ocean, West and South China seas, and to annex Macau, Honk Kong and Taiwan to its mainland territory, and to challenge the U.S in the world and in particular in Latin America.

As it is mentioned, there is a competition between the U.S and China and Russia in the space of the East Fault and there are some friction surfaces or points. Friction surfaces or points between the U.S and her alliances with Russia are mainly located at the North Pole, Bering Sea and Strait, Kamchatka Peninsula, and the Kuril Islands in the north of Japan.

Friction surfaces or points between the U.S and her alliances with China are as follows:

1. Korean peninsula as a region of geopolitical competition (North and South Korea).
2. Geopolitical competition between North and South Korea and Japan.
3. Territorial conflict and competition in East China Sea between China and South Korea and Japan as the U.S allies.
4. Territorial claim and sensitivity of China toward Taiwan and the U.S supports.
5. Sea claims of China in South China Sea and ignoring of the claims of the Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia etc. in the region in particular Spratly and Parcel archipelagoes, and offensive reaction of China to any claim in this relation. Vice versa, the U.S supports

claims of these states as her alliances to the detriment of China.

6. The presence of the U.S navy in seas, straits, waterways, and sea passages at the East of China, and holding military maneuver with her alliances in particular with South Korea.
7. Expansionism of China in Pacific Ocean, and protect of islands and sea territories that are claimed by other regional rivals, and also arrest of the U.S Navy forces in the region and holding maneuver in the West of Pacific Ocean and near to the U.S borders.
8. China's sensitivity toward international straits of the region like straits of Korea, Taiwan, Malacca etc.
9. Geopolitical and political challenges for China in the regions of Hong Kong, Sinkiang, Tibet, Taiwan, Beijing etc. that are mostly supported by the US.
10. Former territorialization of China in Hong Kong, Macao, continuing claim on Taiwan Island and country.

As it is mentioned, in the East Fault of Eurasia, the U.S as a leader of maritime strategy and her alliances in the Pacific Ocean including Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Japan, Philippines, Taiwan, South Korea, Brunei, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore etc. are in geostrategic competition and confrontation with main states of land strategy including China, Russia and North Korea. In this fault, NATO is not important actor and the U.S lonely or with her alliances in the region is in competition and confrontation with China and Russia.

B. West Fault, the meeting surface of Eurasia, Europe and Africa

This Fault is located at the west of Eurasia, and includes an area from the Barents Sea in Arctic Ocean and Scandinavia peninsula to the South and the horn of Africa and the West of Indian Ocean. The space has different geographic features like sea, lake, state, gulf, peninsula, cape, strait, waterway, island, river, canal, mountain, etc. which has geostrategic values from the view points of regional and global powers.

These geographical features are as follows: air, ship and submarine routes of the Arctic; countries of Finland, Sweden and Norway in Scandinavian Peninsula; Baltic sea and all of its spatial components; countries of Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania and the region of Kaliningrad in Russia; countries of Germany, Poland, Belarus and Ukraine; the Black Sea region and its geographical features such as the sea of Azov, the Crimea, and countries of Romania and Bulgaria; the Caucasus and the countries of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia; Turkey as the center of gravity of this Fault; the East of the Mediterranean including Greece, Cyprus, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan and Egypt; the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden; straits of Skagerrak, the Bosphorus, the Dardanelles, Suez, Gibraltar, Bab-el-Mandeb and Hormuz; countries of Iran and Iraq; Persian Gulf and Cooperation Council; Saudi Arabia peninsula and Yemen; the region of Horn of Africa including Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Ethiopia and partly Kenya; waterways and shipping routes of East Indian Ocean in Sea of Oman and Arab and Gulf of Aden and Eastern coast of Somalia and Africa.

Rival geostrategic actors of the West Fault of Eurasia includes: the USA, EU and Britain with the centrality of NATO as a sea strategic complex from one hand, and Russia and its classic alliances as a heritage of land strategy in the Cold War era from the other hand. Besides, Russia has attracted Iran as a new alliance and has strengthened its relations with Iran to the strategic level, military cooperation, and cooperation in the military operations in the Middle east and in particular in Syria.

Five places and spaces have strategic importance for Russia to guarantee its geostrategic maneuver in Near Abroad and to confront with the threat of rivals in particular with the USA as a leader of sea strategy. So, Russia will never resign voluntarily the control and sovereignty of these spaces, and will seriously try to protect them. These spaces are as follows:

1. North Caucasus region,
2. Kuril island in Pacific Ocean and north of Japan,

3. Kaliningrad in the shore of Baltic sea,
4. Crimea peninsula in Black Sea,
5. East shores of Syria in Mediterranean Sea, in particular Tartus and Latakia.

In opponent point, the USA and her sea strategy allies try to make control of these places to the detriment of Russia. This issue is the main cause of geostrategic competition and confrontation between the U.S and NATO with Russia. Like military conflicts in the Caucasus; the Black Sea and Ukraine; the Baltic sea and countries of Lithuania, Belarus, Poland and Kaliningrad; East Mediterranean, Syria and Iraq.

Critical regions and friction points between Russia and the U.S & NATO and their alliances are as follows:

1. Geopolitical competition and territorialization in Arctic Ocean by Russia, the U.S and NATO.
2. Enlargement of NATO to the East and near to Russian borders and annexation of former Warsaw member states, and in opposite Russia's resistance in this relation.
3. Strategic and military deployment of the US, NATO and Russia in Baltic Sea, Kola Peninsula, Skagerrak Strait, Kaliningrad and the states of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Scandinavian Peninsula.
4. Strategic and military deployment of Russia and U.S & NATO in Belarus from one hand, and Poland and Germany from the other hand.
5. Geopolitical competition and military conflicts of the parties in Ukraine along with territorial separatism and autonomism in Eastern Ukraine and the division of Ukraine to two influence areas.
6. Crimea annexation crisis to the Russia and oppositeness of the U.S and NATO and their allies with this issue.
7. Geopolitical and military competition between Russia and the U.S and NATO in Black Sea region along with separatism crisis in the East of Georgia, NATO military maneuvers with the participation of Bulgaria

and Romania as former members of the Warsaw Pact and current members of NATO and EU.

8. Geopolitical crisis of Caucasus region including Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan, Ossetia, Abkhazia, Karabakh and competition between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as internal political crises in Caucasus countries.
9. Geopolitical competition to control and exploit the Bosphorus, the Dardanelles, Suez Canal, Bab-el-Mandeb straits.
10. Internal, regional and neighborhood geopolitical and political crisis of Turkey and its vulnerable security, because it is located at the geographical gravity of West Fault and meeting point of the world and regional geopolitical inputs (UN, US, Russia, Caucasus, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Kurdistan, Greece, Israel).
11. Geopolitical and political crisis in Lebanon.
12. Geopolitical and political crisis of Israel and Palestine in Gaza strip and the West bank and the challenge of recognition of each other.
13. The crisis of Muslim states and in Particular Iran with Israel on denying recognition of this regime.
14. Jerusalem geopolitical crisis and conflict between Muslims, Christians and Judaists over control of this space.
15. Sea and territorial disputes and water resources crisis between Israel and neighboring countries, especially Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Saudi Arabia.
16. Geopolitical and geostrategic crisis of Cyprus, and conflict between Turkey and Greece and Turk and Greece people and political structures living in the island.
17. Geopolitical crisis between Saudi Arabia and Egypt in the Gulf of Aqaba and its islands, Red Sea, the Arabic region, the Sunni world and so on.
18. Domestic and regional political and geopolitical crisis in Egypt.

19. Complicated political and geopolitical crisis in Syria and geostrategic crisis of the east coast of Syria.
20. Kurdish regional crisis, especially in Turkey, Iraq and Syria.
21. Geopolitical and political crisis of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, along with its local, regional, trans-regional (Muslim world) and global effects.
22. Geopolitical and political crises in Iraq.
23. Diluted and slept Geopolitical crises in the Red Sea region.
24. Geopolitical crisis in the Persian Gulf between Iran and Saudi Arabia and GCC countries and its regional and trans-regional dimensions in Iraq, Syria, East Mediterranean, the Muslim world, etc.
25. Political and geopolitical crisis in Bahrain.
26. Geopolitical and political crisis between Yemen and Saudi Arabia and the GCC.
27. Domestic and regional political and geopolitical crisis of Yemen in the Gulf of Aden, South Yemen, the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb and the Red Sea and Socotra Island.
28. Echoes of the crisis in Iran's relations with the Arab League and structures of Semitic and Arabic.
29. Geopolitical and political crisis in the Northern and Southern and Western Sudan (Darfur).
30. Pirate's crisis and insecurity in the international shipping routes in the Gulf of Aden and waters of East Africa.
31. Geopolitical crisis in the Horn of Africa between Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia and so on.
32. Political and security crisis and failed state with extremist groups such as al-Shabaab in Somalia.
33. Echoes of the crisis in the Horn of Africa and Somalia in Kenya's security.
34. Political/ social crises and Arabic Revolution in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Syria etc.

35. Human displacement and influx of immigrants & refugees affected by conflict in the Middle East, especially Iraq and Syria to Western Europe via Turkey, Greece, the Mediterranean (sea of death), and Italy, etc.

The crisis of refugees which is the result of the crisis in the Middle East and the Mediterranean region, has been reflected in crisis in the internal and regional security of the EU countries and has challenged the integrity and existence of the EU.

The motivation of confrontation and competition of great powers in the Western World have also geopolitical nature and philosophy. It means that the two parties are intended to expansionism and territorialization geographically and geopolitically in the rivals area and outer space, and campaign against rival using political, military, economic, and media methods in real and cyber spaces. Sea Strategy actors led by the US, try to influence in the traditional geopolitical areas of Russia as the inheritor of the former Soviet Union in the Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, the Middle East, Persian Gulf, Indian Ocean and the East of Russia's boundaries so that to implement a strategy of containment and to contract Russia spatially, and imprison her within their borders to limit its international maneuverability and the power of competition with sea strategy. Russia foreign ministry on January 12th, 2017 described the U.S military presence in Poland and Germany as the policy of surrounding Russia by this state and her allies. Under the leadership of Putin, Russia aspires to become the main actor and system maker and effective global power, and by adopting an offensive political and operational strategy try to break the US, NATO and Europe spatial contraction strategy against herself. In this strategy, Russia not only emphasizes on the processing and protection of their traditional geopolitical territories in the Eurasia and Africa (such as Syria, India, Yemen, Egypt, Libya, Cuba, the Caucasus, Central Asia, etc.), but also search of new geographic and geopolitical expanding in the neighboring spaces. Also, Russia tries to enter the traditional geopolitical territories of sea strategy in

order to Challenge the U.S and NATO. Relation with Iran, Japan, the Philippines, Egypt, the Persian Gulf, Greece, Turkey, the European Union (except of Britain), and Members of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, China, India and South Africa) could be examples of the geopolitical challenges created by Russia for the US, and the members of maritime strategy.

Here is necessary to be mentioned some points as below:

1- West Eurasian Geostrategic Fault is more chaotic and more critical than Eastern Fault, and two rival land and sea strategies and their allies at different levels of local, regional, trans-regional and global are in conflict. In the West Fault, major players are Russia and its allies from one hand, and the U.S and NATO and their alliances from the other hand. In other words, in the western fault the two main actors are U.S and NATO against Russia (as a major player of land strategy), but in the eastern fault one actor of the maritime strategy namely the U.S is against the two main actors of land strategy namely China and Russia.

2- Although the main actors within the framework of each of the global geostrategic realms have common policy and position toward rival structure (namely China and Russia act jointly against the U.S and NATO/Europe Union), but the great powers inside the each of these geostrategic realms compete with each other geopolitically based on their perception of interests. It means that within the land strategy, Russia competes with China and within the maritime or sea strategy, the U.S competes with the European Union, geopolitically.

3- In addition to these active Faults, there are other geostrategic faults in the north and south of Eurasia which are not so active. Such as North Arctic Ocean fault which is semi-active and geostrategic confrontation is between Russia with U.S and the members of NATO in the region. In the south of Eurasia and Indian Ocean there is no so active geostrategic fault. Because China, Russia, USA and NATO have no geographical connection, moreover, they have common interest in the region, so there is no

geostrategic confrontation among them.

4- Geostrategic Faults can be displaced. For example, if the European Union to be collapsed, or the geopolitical competition among USA and Europe to be intensified, the western Fault can be transferred to the west and the shores of the Atlantic Ocean.

5- Besides the geostrategic faults around Eurasia, there are some active and semi-active geopolitical faults in other part of the world. For example, in Africa there is an active geopolitical fault located in the north of Equator line with the religious, cultural and political nature. Around this fault there are many small scale clashes. Also in the America continent, there is a semi-active geopolitical fault between the North America and the Latin America with the cultural, ideological, social and economic nature. There is another active geopolitical fault in the Mediterranean basin between Europe and Middle East with religious, cultural, social and political nature.