

Scenarios for the Future of the World in Light of the Ukraine Crisis

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

1. Introduction

The recent geopolitical crisis of Ukraine started with an internal political change and the establishment of a pro-Western state in Kyiv in 2014, and the subsequent annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Putin, and the commencement of a separatist process in Donbas in the same year. The above-mentioned geopolitical events led to the formation and development of the idea of a Russian threat to Ukraine among the Ukrainian statemen and citizens, pushing them towards Russia's geopolitical rival, i.e., the West (Europe, the United States and NATO). The process of separatism and the resentment of the Ukrainians against Russia and their inclination towards the West, as well as the support of Western leaders and allies for Ukraine, increased Russia's sensitivity, which led to the spread and complication of the crisis. In this process, the tension escalated to a higher level, namely between the United States and Europe and Russia and its allies, led to the West economic and non-economic sanctions against Russia. The idea of Ukraine partnership with NATO and other Western institutions, such as the European Union, was then reinforced, which raised the security concerns of Russia. To put it another way, Ukrainians sought to join NATO, Russia sought to deny Ukraine membership, and the West sought to attract Ukraine and place it under its umbrella. Therefore, the growing crisis in Ukraine in recent years has been linked to the pattern of global geopolitical and geostrategic rivalry.

Accordingly, the tension in the relations between Russia and Ukraine and their supporters gradually increased and reached its peak in 2022. Finally, the United States and NATO declared the Russian military build-up near the

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

Ukrainian border and the possibility of war and the commencement of Russian military operations and attacks.

On February 2, 2022, Russia recognized the independence of two pro-Russian separatist regions of Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. Moreover, Russia stressed the denial of Ukraine's membership in NATO and the need to ensure the security of the Russians of Ukraine, especially in the newly established republics mentioned above, as well as the guarantee of Russia's security by the West and NATO.

A day later, the Russian Federation Council voted unanimously to authorize President Putin to use military force outside Russia, especially in Ukraine. Then, around 5 am on February 24, 2022, Russian President Putin announced the launch of a special military operation in eastern Ukraine. Minutes later, rockets were fired at Ukraine, including the capital, and Russian ground forces entered Ukraine. Also, the President of Ukraine declared martial law, severance of diplomatic relations with Russia and general mobilization of the people in the country. Russian military operations took place from eastern Ukraine, Belarus, and the Crimean Peninsula into Ukraine (Wikipedia, 2022).

2. Power Structure and Blocs in the Current World

In the global pattern of spatial distribution of power, which has gradually formed after the collapse of bipolar system of the Cold War period (1991), and the beginning of the geopolitical transition period in the world, two power blocs or power zones in two geostrategic realms with two large geostrategic faults in the east and West of Eurasia have emerged, with a geopolitical philosophy that is the source of world politics at various local and global levels. Within this structure, the two sea and land strategies are competing with each other. On one side of the structure, Russia, China, and their allies have been formed on the Eastern Front, in the Eurasian geography in the form of the Shanghai Agreement and the land strategy. At the other side of the structure are the United States, Europe, and Britain and their allies on the Western Front in the Atlantic/Pacific geography in the form of the NATO operating system and sea strategy. Accordingly, the current world has a dual geopolitical structure and two parts, East and West, which is the product of the evolution of the 30 years of Geopolitical Transition Period (GTP) (since 1991). The two coalition systems are in a

state of geostrategic competition at the level of the East and West Eurasian faults, each trying to create spatial expansion for itself and spatial contraction for the other to place the rival in geopolitically inferior position and take control of global sovereignty and management of global politics. The formation process of the above-mentioned geopolitical structure in the world after the beginning of the GTP is expounded and predicted by the author (Hafeznia) and is published in two articles, namely “theory of the emerging geopolitical structure of the world,” and the “theory of the active geostrategic faults of the world,” published many years ago in the Geopolitical Quarterly. The content and concepts of the above-mentioned theories can be understood to some extent in the form of the following spatial models.

Figure (1): Spatial Model of the Theory of the Emerging Geopolitical Structure of the World (Early 21st Century)

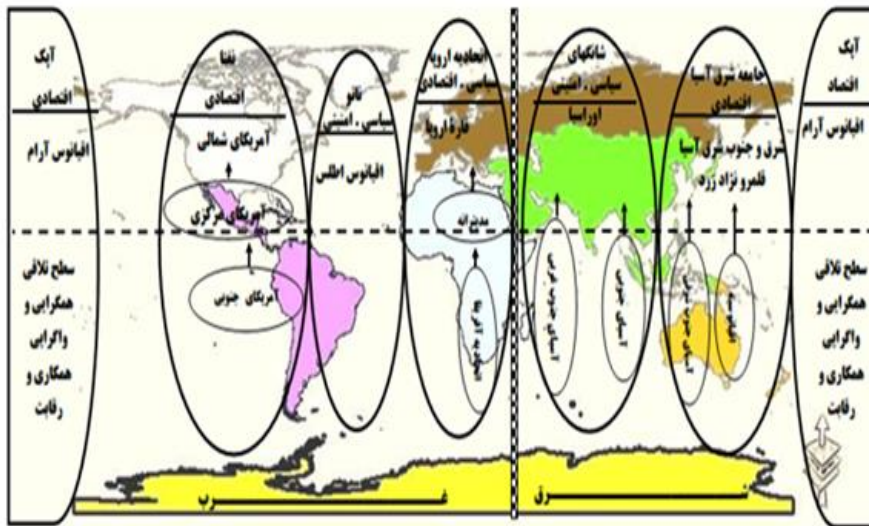
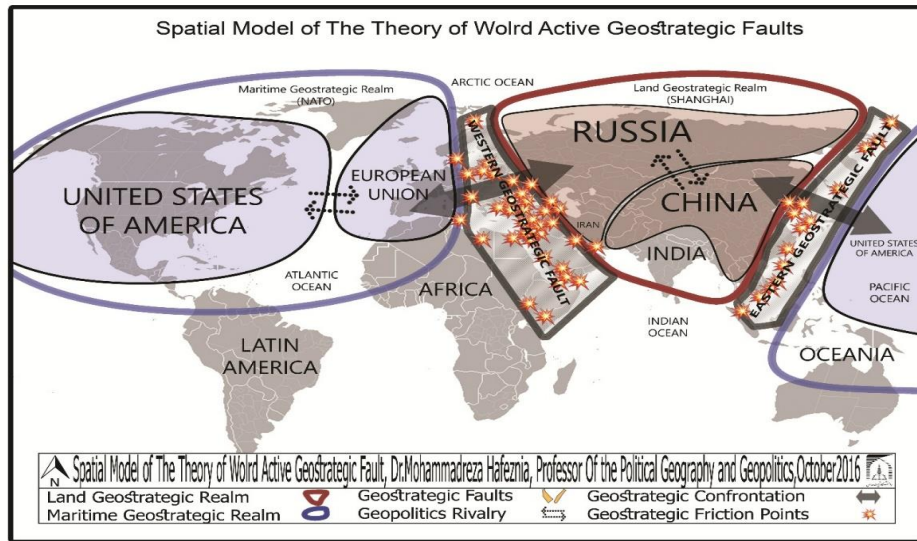


Figure (2): Spatial Model of the Theory of the Active Geostrategic Faults of the World



US and European states and allies of the sea strategy in the Pacific and Atlantic have besieged Russian and China and allies of land strategy in Eurasia land area and have created spatial contraction challenge for them. Russia and China have also confronted with all their might to overcome this challenge and lift the siege and achieve territorialization and spatial expansion in their supposed territory.

On either side of each of these faults are major global power actors who are also members of the UN Security Council, i.e., in the East Eurasian Fault, the United States is in geostrategic confrontation with China and Russia, and in the West Eurasian Fault, Russia is in geostrategic rivalry and confrontation with North America and the European Union as well as NATO. The above-mentioned actors, together with their allies, are struggling for geographical territorialization (occupation and annexation of different lands), and geopolitical territorialization (expansion of sphere of influence, domination and control) in spherical space, as well as distancing rivals from their supposed territories.

Understanding the nature and origin of the Ukraine crisis is possible within the framework and context of global geopolitical and geostrategic

competitions pattern since Ukraine, as a buffer state, is stuck in the cycle of competition and is linked to it. Therefore, the above-mentioned crisis has rapidly become global, becoming a battle field between the two sea and land strategies. Since this crisis has the potential to become a full-fledged global battle, the current paper expounds the impacts of this crisis upon the ultimate fate of the world in the form of probable scenarios.

3. Current Russia's Geopolitical Goals

1. Recovery and revitalization of the geographical and geopolitical realm of the former Soviet Union, and their reunification with Russia;
 2. Spatial expansion to achieve a stable security guarantee, and creating a buffer zone around it and distancing rivals (US, NATO and China) away from Russia's territory and national space;
 3. Implementing the policy of deterrence in the annexation of the former Soviet space components to the geopolitical realm of rivals, especially the United States and NATO;
 4. The realization of the geopolitical dream of Eurasianism and the integration of Russian power and sovereignty over Eurasia land (the traditional Russian imperialistic idea, as well as the new imperialistic idea of Alexander Dugin);
 5. Achieving global power and sovereignty by placing the Atlantic structure (Britain and the United States) and China in an inferior geopolitical position;
- It seems that Russia's recent military invasion to Ukraine is in line with these goals.

4. Ukraine's Geopolitical Characteristics (Provoker of the Current Crisis)

1. Being in a geopolitical buffer position between Russia and NATO and the European Union;
2. Having a transit and control position between the two spatial systems of Asia and Europe (energy pipelines and the one Belt and one Road Initiative);
3. Being in the geographical space of Eurasia land and proximity to Russia, and therefore part of the dream of Russian Eurasianism;

4. Having a divided space and human structure, or a broken state (East and West);
5. Having a joint and gate position at the junction of two world power blocs and also a western geostrategic fault;
6. The second-level power of the Slavic geopolitical system in the world, and consequently having the inherent potential of rivalry and confrontation with Russia as the first-level power of the Slavic geopolitical system;
7. The historical structural connection with Russia, as well as the attitude of the Russians towards Ukraine and Kyiv as the spatial ancestor of Russia;
8. Having the economic and nutrition value of the geographical space of Ukraine with the fertile soil of Chernozem, as a grain depot;
9. Having geographical infrastructure and superstructure values including strategic maritime position (Black Sea and Crimean Peninsula), space and nuclear technological capacities, industries, science and technology, agriculture, natural resources, water resources, specialized manpower, mines and minerals;
10. Proximity to the largest military alliance in the world (NATO) and the European Union;
11. Access to Moscow and western Russia, as a means of controlling Russia by geostrategic rivals;
12. The existence of a sense of Ukrainian national identity and nationalism independent of Russian identity among the majority of the Ukrainian population, as the source of otherness imaginary, dissent, rivalry, secession, separatism, confrontation and resistance against the Russians.

Figure (3): Cover Image of Alexander Dugin's bBook with a Russian Eurasianism Design



(Source: Wikipedia, The Foundations of Geopolitics, by Alexander Dugin, www.wikipedia.org)

5. Probable scenarios for the future of the world in light of the Ukraine crisis

Scenario 1: (Limited and Controlled War, with Russia' Superiority)

In other words, the control of the crisis within the borders of Ukraine and finally the ceasefire and the end of the conflict with Russia's superiority in light of bilateral, multilateral and international political and diplomatic negotiations and efforts.

Results

1. Fulfilling Russia's goals and aspirations in the Ukraine war and strengthening the idea of Eurasianism in the Russian political space;
2. The return of Ukraine to the buffer position or becoming a geopolitical realm of Russia;
3. Elevating Russia's geopolitical rank in Eurasia and the world;
4. Increasing Russia's bargaining power in regional and global affairs and expanding its sphere of influence in the traditional western realms;

5. Improving and developing Russia's bilateral and multilateral relations with its allies and partial systems, especially in Shanghai, BRICS, and so on;
6. The growth of Russian space temptations for geographical and geopolitical expansion, especially in the west and south;
7. Substantial change in the world power balance in favor of Russia and to the detriment of the United States, Europe and NATO;
8. Reducing material and human costs, relative guarantee of international peace and security and continuity of human life.

Scenario 2: (Limited and Controlled War, with Russia's Defeat)

In other words, the resistance of the Ukrainians with the support of Russia's rivals (US, Europe and NATO) and the end of the war and crisis with the defeat of Russia within the borders of Ukraine.

Results

1. Lowering the geopolitical rank of Russia in the region and the world, and in return elevating the rank of Ukraine;
2. Changing the world power balance in favor of the family of maritime strategy (US, Europe, NATO and their allies) and elevating their geopolitical rank in the world;
- 3- Changes in the spatial, political, legal, and economic structures of the world in favor of the United States, NATO and its allies;
4. Space contraction of Russia and its transformation into a normal, inferior and controllable state;
5. China's placement in a relatively inferior geopolitical position and intensification of the process of rivalry and confrontation between the United States and the family of sea strategy with China.

Scenario 3: (Immediate Ceasefire and Compromise)

In this scenario, Ukraine and Russia reach an agreement in light of bilateral and multilateral talks and declare an unconditional ceasefire, and the Russian army will return to the international borders.

Results

1. Defusing or ending the crisis with the least human, material and economic losses;
2. Establishing neutrality and supporting geopolitical buffer position as well as Ukraine's independence;

3. Ensuring peace and security in Eurasia and the world territories;
4. Maintaining the stability of the current geopolitical situation in the world, and the continuation of the geopolitical transition period (GTP) in the world.

Scenario 4: (Unlimited but Controllable War)

The escalation of the military conflict and its expansion beyond Ukraine territory and the surrounding areas of Russia, as well as NATO realm in Europe.

Results

1. The beginning of a full-fledged world war in the Eurasian and Atlantic regions with the first superiority of Russia, and then NATO and the United States superiority;
2. Increasing the efforts of the weakened United Nations, China, India and other countries of the world to control the parties of the conflict, and to halt the crisis;
3. The spread of civil and citizenship protests around the world for peace and hatred of war and conflict, especially in Russia, Europe and the United States;
4. Elevating China's geopolitical rank in the world system as an intact and decisive power in the future world system.

Scenario 5: (Unlimited and Uncontrollable War)

The escalation of the military conflict and its spread beyond the borders of Ukraine and the adjacent areas of Russia, as well as NATO realm and then to the whole world.

Results

1. Confrontation of the allied of the two sea and land strategies with each other and spread of full-scale, destructive and nuclear war to the whole world and interplanetary and stellar spaces;
2. Destruction of civilizational, economic, biological, technological, residential and communicational heritage of human being in the world;
3. Imposition of physical and mental suffering, famine and infectious diseases on nations and human beings all over the world;
4. Threat to human life and the possibility of extinction of the human generation and other living beings.

6. Some propositions:

Among the five scenarios proposed in the Ukraine crisis:

1. The third scenario is the best scenario and contains a good message for nations and human beings, but the probability of its occurrence is low.
2. The first and second scenarios are not desirable scenarios because of their consequences, but their probability is high.
3. If the first scenario is not plausible and, on the contrary, the second scenario is more likely to occur, then the fourth scenario will be on Russia's agenda, which is worrying and will send the other side (NATO and USA) into full-scale war. Appearance of this situation would be very dreadful, therefore, everyone should try to end the crisis in Ukraine in the short term.
4. The fifth scenario is the worst-case scenario, and contains a warning message for humanity and the inhabitants of the planet.
5. Given the current situation of the crisis in Ukraine and the growing confrontation between the two states, there is a possibility of a fourth scenario (unlimited but controllable war). Because the full-scale civilian war has already begun in the world, and the proper grounds for the expansion and globalization of the military dimension of the war are intensifying. In this scenario, it is possible for Russia to win the war in the short term. But if the war is eroded and in the long run the final victory will be with the maritime strategy. This is because the maritime strategy has advantages such as circumferential position in relation to Russia, military capability as well as internal cohesion, and is capable of gaining the war initiative. Russia, however, has the tools of power, such as military and nuclear power, space power and energy power. But the maritime strategy, which also has the tools of that power, has a better chance of controlling the World War initiative in case it maintains internal cohesion because of its geographical location.
6. In the anarchistic and uncontrollable conditions of the limited world war (Scenario 4), the possibility of a world-wide and global war (Scenario 5 or the worst-case scenario) is not unlikely.
7. The rivalry and conflict between the two blocs of world power, i.e., the allies and family of two sea and land strategies in the present world, have an imperialistic nature done continuously and increasingly for controlling and dominating more geographical spaces in the geostrategic realm of Eurasia and also the Atlantic/Pacific and for the benefit of its bloc and to the detriment of the rival bloc.

8. The process of this spatial conflict between the blocs of power does not have a humanistic philosophy for global security and peace. In fact, this process is an imperialistic war, founded by the imperialist political leaders and the dictatorship of the two rival world power blocs, that its spiral, material and financial costs, unfortunately, must be paid first by nations and citizens of geographical spaces involved, such as Ukraine, and then by the whole human being.

References

1. Hafeznia, M, R. (2010). Emerging Geopolitical Structure in the World, *Geopolitics Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 3.
2. Hafeznia, M.R. (2016). Theory of the active geostrategic faults of the world, *Geopolitics Quarterly*, Vol.12, No.4.
3. Wikipedia (2022). ' attack of Russia to Ukraine. www.wikipedia.org. [**In Persian**]