

With the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact (July 1, 1991) followed by the rapid collapse of the Soviet Union five months later (December 31, 1991), the Cold War, which had lasted 45 years, ended in a victory for the United States, writes Joseph E Fallon. But while "there were no direct military campaigns between the two main antagonists, the United States and the Soviet Union ...billions of dollars and millions of lives were lost in the fight."

The consequence of the collapse was momentous. It elevated the United States to a level unprecedented in world history. Instead of being one of two rival superpowers, it was now the world's sole hyperpower "a state that dominates all other states in every domain (i.e., military, culture, economy, etc.); it has no rivals that can match its capabilities."

The post-Cold War world became a unipolar world based on Pax Americana - "a period of relative peace and stability that extended throughout the area of American influence" maintained by the United States through "endless military deployments."

According to the Congressional Research Service -- "a public policy research institute of the United States Congress" â€“ the United States has engaged in "at least 251 military interventions between 1991 and 2022." This compares with 218 in the previous 200 years and those included the Civil War, World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam.

Therefore, continuation of a unipolar world order rests on the ability of the United States to intervene whenever and wherever, without limit, without challenge. Can this be done indefinitely? No.

"The U.S. is experiencing 'hegemonic overreach' defined a 'the contradiction between the hegemon's growing military-political commitments and its slipping economic capability relative to rising challenger states.'" The key challengers are Russia and China.

Since January 1992, the strategy of the United States has been to maintain a post-Cold War unipolar world order.

The tactics of the United States have been to apply the Cold War policy of containment to Russia and China. Containment being adaptation and application of the Rimland theory to United States Foreign Policy. According to the author of the Rimland theory, Yale Professor Nicholas John Spykman, "Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia, who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world". Implementing those tactics rely on "expeditionary warfare, where we [the United States] push forces forward and operate out of relatively safe bases and sanctuaries."

The logistics of the United States have been to keep those forward bases supplied and the supply lines to them secure.

With the eastward expansion of NATO and the commencement of Beijing's "Belt and Road Initiative" to link the economies of Eurasia to China, the capability of the United States to successfully continue such strategy, tactics, and logistics is fast eroding.

Containment provoked what should have been an anticipated reaction from Russia and China. While the U.S. controls the Rimland, Russia strengthened its defensive positions against NATO expansion in Western Eurasia, then launched an invasion of Ukraine. While Ukraine is not a member of NATO, it is the de facto "soft underbelly" of NATO.

China, for its part, responded by projecting its military power farther out into the Western Pacific. "This is a structural challenge that, to some extent, has been gradually emerging over the last two decades." China is now in position to attack Guam, the key base for the United States in the Central Pacific. If China could neutralize Guam, logistics would force the United States out of the Western Pacific. The new defence line for the United States would be the third island chain centred on Hawaii 4,000 miles to the east.

This leaves Micronesia and Melanesia open to Chinese economic, military, and political penetration, posing a threat to Hawaii. After Hawaii, the next defensive line for the United States is the West Coast of North America.

If Russia and China can collaborate, diplomatically, militarily, and logistically, they may be able to neutralize the strategic advantage of the United States, i.e., military technology, and, thereby, undermine the unipolar world order. This is a distinct possibility. The fall of the Soviet Union was due to economic collapse, not military defeat. The limitations on the military power of the United States were demonstrated in Afghanistan in 2021. After twenty years of war, the United States, despite unrivalled military technology, was defeated by Taliban insurgents.

"The United States has more power; its foes have more willpower...Since 1945, Americans have experienced little except military frustration, stalemate, and loss."

Currently, the United States military "is too small and too old to fight on numerous fronts. Force drawdowns since the end of the Cold War and 20 years of fighting in the Middle East have left the U.S. military a shell of its former self."

In their 2023 article, "Addressing the U.S. Military Recruiting Crisis", David Barno and Norma Bensahel noted "During the last fiscal year, the Army missed its recruiting goal by 15,000 active-duty soldiers, or 25 percent of its target. This shortfall forced the Army to cut its planned active-duty end strength from 476,000 to 466,000.

And the current fiscal year is likely to be even worse. Army officials project that active end strength could shrink by as much as 20,000 soldiers by September, down to 445,000. That means that the nation's primary land force could plummet by as much as 7 percent in only two years â€” at a time when its missions are increasing in Europe and even in the Pacific, where the Army provides many of the critical wartime theatre enablers without which the other services cannot function."

The United States military is also too weak and too unprepared to fight and win a major war, let alone simultaneous wars on two fronts each half a world away from the other. This was

confirmed in the annual report of The Heritage Foundation on United States military preparedness - the "2023 Index of U.S. Military Strength."

Moreover, the military has been politicized undermining unity and combat effectiveness. "Woke ideology undermines military readiness in various ways. It undermines cohesiveness by emphasizing differences based on race, ethnicity, and sex. It undermines leadership authority by introducing questions about whether promotion is based on merit or quota requirements. It leads to military personnel serving in specialties and areas for which they are not qualified or ready. And it takes time and resources away from training activities and weapons development that contribute to readiness."

Further weakening combat readiness of the United States military is the dramatic decline in its purchasing power for salaries, supplies, and equipment due to budget cuts and inflation. "Not only is the Army's total obligation authority (TOA) declining in real terms, but due to inflation, those declines have resulted in an additional loss of buying power since 2018. Combined losses from 2018 to 2023 total $59 billion." An outcome due to "hegemonic overreach."

By collaborating, Russia and China can exploit these vulnerabilities. "For example, if the United States were to engage Russia in a direct confrontation, it will be forced to deploy military equipment and personnel from all over the world to the Eastern European front.

By doing so, the U.S. would be forced to draw forces from other regions of the world, such as the West Pacific, where our presence is critical in deterring China. Should the United States engage China in a direct confrontation, it would then have to redeploy troops and equipment from the Eastern European front to the Pacific. The United States does not possess the material, logistics, or manpower to engage in two wars simultaneously.

On December 12, 2021, Newsweek reported "an unprecedented bond between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping has allowed the United States' two top rivals to force President Joe Biden into a two-front crisis that could spread his administration too thin to respond adequately to either. And should a shooting war erupt, there's little guarantee the U.S. would come out on top."

In a March 2021 interview with Yahoo News, David Ochmanek, senior analyst at RAND

Corporation and former deputy assistant secretary of defence for force development stated "What many Americans don't realize is that years of classified Pentagon war games strongly suggest that the U.S. military would lose that war...Whenever we war-gamed a Taiwan scenario over the years, our Blue Team routinely got its ass handed to it, because in that scenario time is a precious commodity and it plays to China's strength in terms of proximity and capabilities...At that point the trend in our war games was not just that we were losing, but we were losing faster [Air Force Lt. Gen. S. Clinton] Hinote, said."

With limited resources and confronted with threats on two-fronts, Europe and the Pacific, the United States has chosen not to focus on China, the greater military and economic threat. Instead, it concentrates on Russia, confounding Russia with the Soviet Union and the present with the Cold War. The United States supplies arms to Ukraine and imposes sanctions on Russia in the belief, shared by its media supporters, Russia will fragment as did the Soviet Union.

So, on March 6, 2022, Thomas Friedman writing in The New York Times hailed the use of sanctions proclaiming, "The Cancelation of Mother Russia Is Underway". "The most important innovation in this war is the use of the economic equivalent of a nuclear bomb, simultaneously deployed by a superpower and by super empowered people. The United States, along with the European Union and Britain, has imposed sanctions on Russia that are crippling its economy, critically threatening companies and shattering the savings of millions of Russians at an unprecedented speed and scope that bring to mind a nuclear blast...because the world is now so wired, super empowered individuals, companies and social activist groups can pile on their own sanctions and boycotts, without any government orders, amplifying the isolation and economic strangulation of Russia beyond what nation-states are likely to do. These new actors â€” a kind of global ad hoc pro-Ukraine-resistance-solidarity-movement â€” are collectively cancelling Putin and Russia.'

However, the use of sanctions are often, as in this case, a sign of the sponsors' political and military weakness. The League of Nations' failed sanctions on Italy, October 11, 1935, to July 15, 1936, for invading Ethiopia is a case in point. With Russia, sanctions have similarly failed. Sanctions have not ended the war. Most of the world, in particular China and India, the world's second and sixth largest economies, respectively, have refused to impose sanctions on Russia. Even United States allies Israel and the oil-rich states of the Middle East refuse to impose sanctions on Russia.

In the long-term, the sanctions imposed on Russia by the United States, member states of NATO, Australia, South Korea, and Japan may more negatively impact their respective

economies than Russia's. And in the process undermine their united opposition to Russia. Japan, the world's third largest economy, has already broken ranks on sanctions because of its economic dependence on Russian oil.

While the transfer of arms to Ukraine has equally failed to deter or defeat Russia, it has undermined the national security of the United States. The Wall Street Journal reported on August 29, 2022, "The war in Ukraine has depleted American stocks of some types of ammunition and the Pentagon has been slow to replenish its arsenal, sparking concerns among U.S. officials that American military readiness could be jeopardized by the shortage."

Three months later, The Wall Street Journal reported "The flow of weapons to Ukraine is now running up against the longer-term demands of a U.S. strategy to arm Taiwan to help it defend itself against a possible invasion by China, according to congressional and government officials familiar with the matter...the conflict in Ukraine is exacerbating a nearly $19 billion backlog of weapons bound for Taiwan, further delaying efforts to arm the island as tensions with China escalate."

Moreover, "The war in Ukraine has exposed deficiencies in America's defence industrial base that could jeopardize the ability to fight a war with China. The capabilities for fighting are also essential for deterring China."

In war, the greatest ally for China is the greatest enemy for the United States - geography. Taiwan is 100 miles from the coast of China, but 6,700 miles from the West Coast of the United States; 5,000 miles from Hawaii, and 1,400 miles from Guam. The vast distances between the United States and its bases in Japan, South Korea and the Philippines, half a world away, makes resupplying those bases in times of war a logistical nightmare.

The U S Defense Department's May 16, 2022, Pacific Deterrence Initiative stated: "Currently DoD lacks the logistics posture and capability to sustain the force or support operations in a contested environment." Proving the United States has long forgotten the maxim of World War II General Omar Bradley: "Amateurs talk strategy, professionals talk logistics." A year later the US has started to plan to accelerate replacement of inventory supplied to Ukraine, but stocks are dangerously low. Other Western suppliers to Ukraine are slower still to replenish.

To compensate for its military unpreparedness to successfully oppose a potential Chinese invasion of Taiwan, the United States has sought to strengthen its position in the Pacific by negotiating a trilateral security pact with the U.K. and Australia, termed AUKUS. This is currently based around new nuclear attack submarines based in West Australia and land forces, probably in Australia's Northern Territory.

But again, vast distances separate the three parties making the ability of AUKUS to aid the United States in any conflict with China over Taiwan negligible. Australia's Fremantle naval base is 4,400 miles from Taiwan; the Gulf is 6,400 miles away; Europe is over 11,100 miles away. While the United Kingdom has a naval support base in Singapore and garrisons in Brunei their military effectiveness is small and can be easily neutralized by Chinese forces in the South China Sea.

A broadly unsupported Nimitz class carrier would take 8 days at full speed to travel from the Gulf to the South China Sea (at the time of writing, no carrier was serving with the US 5th Fleet there). By the time the United States, Australia or the United Kingdom deployed sufficient forces to the region to deter a Chinese invasion of Taiwan that invasion could have already occurred.

So forward deployment on threat would be essential â€“ at the risk of adding to tension. The USA has at the moment at various stages of readiness 11 strike carriers and 9 amphibious assault vessels (equipped with a handful of US Marine Corps F-35B aircraft and each capable of conveying a Marine Expeditionary Unit of 1600+. But at least half these units are base ported on the east coast of the USA. Perhaps the greatest contribution European nations could make would be to be able to form up quickly two carrier groups based around their notional 6 carriers, plus aircraft flying from the UK Sovereign Bases on Cyprus in the Mediterranean, to take on guard duties in the North Atlantic and Gulf so all US resources could be focussed on the South China Sea if the need arose.)

In 2019, the BBC reported on research by the US Studies Centre, University of Sydney, Australia, pointing "to Beijing's extraordinary arsenal of missiles that threaten the key bases of the US and its allies. These installations, it asserts, 'could be rendered useless by precision strikes in the opening hours of a conflict...Chinese counter-intervention systems,' the Australian study notes, 'have undermined America's ability to project power into the Indo-pacific, raising the risk that China could use limited force to achieve a fait accompli victory before America can respond, challenging US security guarantees in the process...Two key factors - focus and proximity - mean that in Asia, China is already a superpower to rival the US."

Should the United States lose both its proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and a war with China over Taiwan then limitations of strategy, tactics, and logistics will have coalesced into "a perfect storm" that will accelerate the ongoing decline of the United States as the world's first, and possibly last, hyperpower.

What then becomes of the United States? What then becomes of the world's post-Cold War political order? As Simone De Beauvoir observed, "If you live long enough, you'll see that every victory turns into a defeat."

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