

## Preface

For centuries trade and connectivity, more than conflicts and divisions, have defined the Eurasian space. Much more, they have been the constituting elements of an early “globalized” world system. This pre-dated both the Europe-centered global economic system - as it started to emerge in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century – and the Westphalian world order based on nation state sovereignty, as it emerged by the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This book is about the re-emergence of intra-Eurasian connectivity, trade and supply chains, and the infrastructural and industrial exoskeleton underpinning it.

For the past decades energy resources and energy trade (oil, gas and raw materials) have defined the Eurasian political economy. During the 90s and the early 2000s it was trade in oil and gas, that made possible for the energy-rich countries of continental Eurasia to integrate with the European, and eventually with the global markets. Then, since the middle of the 2000s and increasingly after the 2008 financial and economic crisis, the massive reorientation of Eurasian energy flows toward the rapidly growing Asian (and Chinese) markets has opened an era of greater integration across the entire continent and besides traditional ties with Europe. Eurasia has become commercially more interconnected and potentially self-sustaining.

Today, Eurasian commercial ties are growing both increasingly diversified-transcending energy trade – and bidirectional, largely by-passing the West and thus reinforcing the crisis of the Western-centered world system. Doubtless, the acceleration in EU-China trade has been crucial in deepening trade ties between the two edges of the continent. The opening-up of the Eurasian heartland, the increase in intra-Eurasian trade along with the rise of affluent middle classes in both Asia and the Middle East, and the spread of polycentric city clusters across the continent have, however, energized the transformation of value and supply chains and increased the demand for improved domestic and cross-regional transport networks in the vast space “in-between” Asia and Europe.

This is, indeed, the single most relevant event at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as it is transforming the world economic structure, accelerating changes in the world order and forcing both decision makers and scholars to reconsider the role geography and geographic space play in international politics. While China is crucial for this process, this book is not exclusively about China, as

structural ongoing transformations, while energized by China, are driven by the interests of a different and complex web of actors, both private and public. As we shall see, the remaking of Eurasia is indeed a task too complex for the ambitions and possibilities of one single country or one single strategy.

On a more theoretical level, the remaking and integration of Eurasia challenges common assumptions on the nature and evolution of the world order. Analysis on the decline of the liberal world tend to confuse the order shaped by the West with the world system itself. In fact, as this book shall show, a world order is not the same as a world system. While the latter is defined by the changing economic and power interactions among the international actors across time and space, the former defines the rules which regulate these interactions in a historically defined period. As Henry Kissinger, one of the great supporter of the Westphalian order, has recently argued there is no such thing as “one” world order, but different understandings of order which co-exist in one interlinked world system. It is easy to forget, for example, that the order originated in Westphalia and which is today at stake was never meant to be global in scope. In fact, it developed in a geographical limited part of the World and was originally tailored for managing the disputes among the European nation states. It was the worldwide expansion of the European powers and their rising hegemony during the 18th and the 19th century which made “the *jus publicum Europaeum*” the benchmark and forerunner of what eventually became accepted as the international order after WWII. This was reformed, enforced and guaranteed by the United States and the multilateral institutions it created, once Europe destroyed itself and its reputation in two world wars.

Before “going global”, however, the Westphalian order, coexisted for at least two centuries – from the middle of the 17th century to the middle of the 19th century – with a declining but much older Eurasian world order. The Westphalian order was based on the notion of the nation state and on the recognition of the inviolability of territorial sovereignty within defined borders. This order reflected the need for regulating war and territorial conquest among increasingly centralized nation states which developed by conquering and absorbing the network of cities and trade entrepôts which had made possible for Europe to take active part in the Eurasian world system.

On the contrary, the Eurasian system was based on a series of competing but interconnected, multiethnic, multinational, nomadic, semi-sedentary and sedentary empires, with continuously shifting borders. Its order was guaranteed less by a legal framework and more by the logic of trade exchange and connectivity across a web of cities which acted as connecting nodes beyond the somehow fluid borders of overlapping empires. China, for example, which as Kissinger argues, used to have a hierarchic understanding of its own order and was the most

comparable to a European territorial state, was continuously faced by this peculiar “borderless”, non-hierarchic Eurasian order to which it had eventually adapted.

Against this backdrop, this book discusses continuity and transformations in today’s world system from a long-term perspective. Here the underlying historical-analytical argument is that Eurasian integration today is not some aberration driven by the hegemonic ambition of one country, even though hegemonic claims might lurk behind the strategies of China or Russia. In many ways, it is a return to the norm. Today’s Eurasia, including both continental countries and the maritime regions of West Asia and South Asia, starts to astonishingly resemble the multipolar and vibrant “global economy” of the early Eurasian “world system.”

The major trade mark of this “pre-European” world system was its internal commercial unity, which used to exist parallel to geopolitical conflicts among different empires. Trade and Transport were the backbone of this early world system and an interconnected network of both sea and land routes played a key role in it. While in different periods sea trade was ancillary to overland trade and vice-versa, land and sea routes have always been complementary to each other. This is the reason why ports—hinterland connections become as important as overland routes for the internal unity of the system. In different times, changes in political stability in the territories crossed by the routes shifted trade volumes among the routes. However, the continent generally kept its cohesion as one interconnected entity where trade kept flowing. For this reason, no power has ever been able to exert durable hegemonic control over the entire system or impose its own “order”, as the system itself consisted of a web of different orders.

Therefore, the global system, that the merchant and industrial capitalism of the Western European states helped shaping since the early 16<sup>th</sup> century was by no means created by them as much more inherited, “restructured” and expanded. It, in fact largely emerged *because of the implosion* of the pre-existing Eurasian world system the Europeans had been for so long confronted with and peripheral part of. It was the world system Europe started shaping since the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, inherited from the old Eurasian system, which paved the way for the emergence of the Westphalian *order*/ which served as “regulatory” tool for the new system.

Today, the world is, again, undergoing a similar radical and epochal transformation. Ten years after the outbreak of the financial and economic crisis, the stability of the liberal order is threatened and the economic globalization which accelerated in the post-Cold war era seems to have come to an abrupt and unexpected stop, as a more protectionist, authoritarian and nationalist world emerges, prone to various degrees of economic and political instability. Particularly in the West, the crisis of the European Union and the election of an isolationist and

unpredictable US President seem to herald the end of the transatlantic order based on shared values and interests, guarantor of free markets, open economies and liberal democracy. Meanwhile the spread of transnational economic integration has directly challenged the concept of sovereignty on which the international order has been based.

Infact the crisis of the liberal-Westphalian order can be considered the result not only of the “retreat of the west” but also of uncertainties related to the “rise of the rest” within an economically interconnected world. For instance, China and Russia are developing own visions which are seemly based on different and opposite understandings of the international order. While Russia is considered a revisionist but more regional power, China is alternatively perceived as the emerging global power which will form its own political and economic order or an opportunistic country which capitalizes from the existing order but is reluctant to share responsibilities for it. It seems that either chaos, destabilization and de-globalization must follow the end of the old order or the “rise” of aggressive powers like China and Russia will lead to a new world with less order, less open, less free, less interconnected and more prone to conflicts.

It is hence no wonder, that the analysis of the causes of the perceived decline of the world order has become very popular among practitioners and scholars in the West. Some like Richard Haas or Henry Kissinger rightly affirm that the order which is now coming to an end is not simply the post-cold war order but the one which had its origins in the European nation state system and in the concept of sovereignty as it developed in the middle of the 17th century with the Westphalian Peace.

As we shall argue, however, the cause of its crisis is less the end of the classical concept of sovereignty, followed by disorder or of by “an alternative” order. In this book we argue that it is the evolution, transformation and fragmentation of the economic and commercial structure of the world system as shaped by Europe in the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century which is coming to an end. While it is still too early to predict what kind of world order(s) will emerge from the combined effect of the diminishing centrality of the transatlantic World and the (re)emergence of a plethora of new and old actors, we indeed need to consider first how the world “system” has been reshaped in the past two decades.

In fact, the transition from a Western led to a less Western-centered order has been in its making since the globalization unfolded almost two decades ago, hence since the world system which underpinned the liberal world order has been transforming. Against this backdrop, it seems to us that, while a tectonic shift in distribution of economic (and political) centers of power to the south and the east has been taking place at least since the end of the Soviet Union and the acceleration of the globalization has weakened the nation state and the classical concept

of state sovereignty, the single structural event which drives and defines the “re-structuration” of the world system at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is, indeed, the reemergence of the space in-between the two old “world orders” of Europe and Asia as a contestable but integrating and interconnecting one. If the “old” liberal order originated in Europe, was enforced and implemented across the two shores of the Atlantic, the making and the emergence of a new world order will be determined by the integration of the enormous Eurasian space: horizontally, between Europe and the Pacific across Central Eurasia and vertically, between the vast continental landmass and its maritime rim stretching from the Middle East to South Asia across the Indian Ocean.

This book will deal with the evolving nature of this integration focusing on its main actors, its driving forces and the crucial role trade and transport connectivity will play in defining the re-emergence of the “Eurasian” order.

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