

## OPINION

# SLEEP WALKING TOWARD WW III?

By Richard L. King

In the eve of the centennial anniversary of the start of World War I in 1914, the war to end all wars (which of course it did not), perhaps it's a time to reflect on what, if anything, we've learned from that experience. The simplistic explanation of the cause of World War I was the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. That was not the cause but the trigger. Then what was the cause?

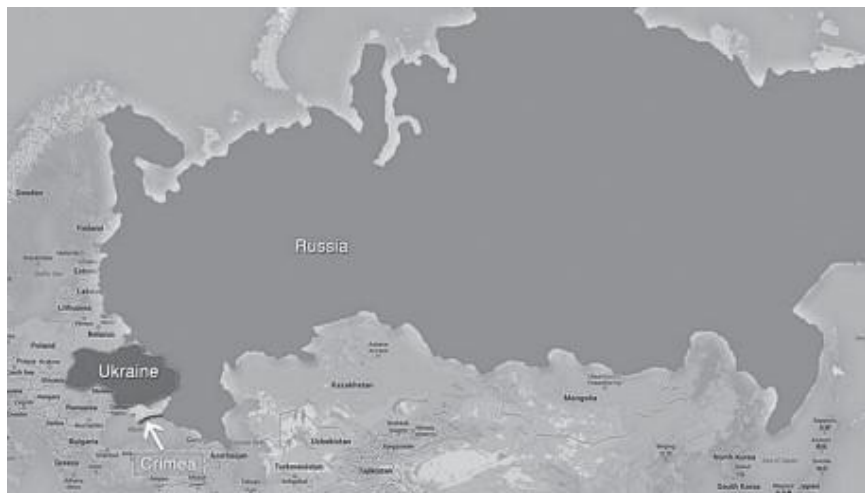
Christopher Clark's excellent book *The Sleepwalkers* shows that events that happened even in a peripheral area, the Balkans, somehow mysteriously led great powers to a conflict that no one really wanted or knew why. The Balkans had no strategic value to France and the British even went so far as to say that a conflict between Germany and France/Russia was of no interest to her.

Today we are being confronted with similar situations with many hot spots the latest being Ukraine, a country where the U.S. has no direct strategic interest but is crucial to Russia's historical values. As Henry Kissinger recently said, Ukraine is not a foreign country to Russia but part of its history. Could this be the trigger for an unwanted WW III? I sure hope not.

Europe was relatively peaceful after the Congress of Vienna was held in 1814-1815 save for a few conflicts such as the Crimean War. That situation changed gradually and then rapidly. What had been a relatively stable balance among great powers changed when Germany was united in 1871 under Prussia.

At the same time two empires, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman began to disintegrate. The humiliating defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian War meant France had to form alliances if it wanted to avoid a similar fate in future conflicts with Germany knowing that it could never match a united Germany in manpower or resources. The loss of Alsace-Lorraine became the holy grail of the French cult of *revanche*. France reached out to Russia. The Franco-Russian alliance in turn caused consternation in Germany. Germany felt boxed in. Germany was also a belated empire.

By the time of its unification much of Africa and Asia were "taken" by Britain, France, Russia and some lesser European countries. When Germany attempted a modest suite of colonial possessions, it was met with dismissive response from Britain. The Kaiser complained bitterly that he was imprisoned by the British navy. Germany believed that it would not be



taken seriously unless it established its own powerful navy. It embarked on an ambitious naval program to challenge the British Navy. Britain was the hegemon in those days, as the U.S. is today feared the rising power of Germany



and sided with France, its historical rival and

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Russia despite the fact it “threatened” British interests in Central Asia and the Far East.

The British felt the threat from Germany was far greater. British Foreign Secretary Edward Grey remarked: If Germany dominated the Continent it would be disagreeable to us as well as to others, for we should be isolated. Britain formed the Entente Cordial with France and the Anglo- Russian Convention with Russia.

Germany in turn formed an alliance with Austro-Hungary and Italy, the Triple Alliance. Europe was divided into two competing and armed camps. Other nations such as the U.S., Romania and Japan later joined the fray.

This situation is not too different from what happened after WWII when the Soviet Union- led Communist block formed the Warsaw Pact and the West under U.S. leadership of the so called Western democracies formed North America Treaty Organization (NATO.) The first NATO Secretary General, Lord Ismay stated in 1949 that the organization’s goal was “to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.” They faced each other for years until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

With no longer any direct threat from each camp the world was poised to reap benefits of a peace dividend. But it did not. The Warsaw Pact disbanded but not NATO. In fact the opposite happened. NATO kept expanding, absorbing many former Warsaw Pact members and is now on the doorstep of Russia. Our former Ambassador to Russia Jack Matlock noted the West gave a “clear commitment not to expand” at the Two Plus Four Treaty signed at the time of unification between East and West Germany.

When the Soviet Union disintegrated, the U.S. became the sole Superpower, a position that even Britain did not enjoy during its long years of Pax Britannia. America thumbed its nose at Russia which was too weak then to do anything about it. What is the purpose of NATO’s expansion other than to contain Russia? While Paul Wolfowitz may be gone, his doctrine is very much alive.

Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere that poses a threat on the order of that posed formerly by the Soviet Union. This is a dominant consideration underlying the new regional defense strategy and requires that we endeavor to prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power.

Since the end of WW II, America has been imposing its will on the rest of the world. America now has over 600 foreign bases and its military budget exceed the next ten countries’ combined spending. American exceptionalism and unilateral actions became the norm including invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan not to mention covert “color” revolutions aimed at regime change. The fiasco in Ukraine when U.S. helped engineered the overthrow of a democratically elected President is the latest of those efforts. It has imposed sanctions on Iran, North Korea and now on Russia.

Russia is now recovering economically from revenues generated by its oil and gas exports. America is crippled by many ruinous wars and its financial melt-down; the unipolar world of the last quarter century is not as solid as it was. Meanwhile at the other end of the Eurasian land mass, China is slowly but surely rising threatening American domination in the Pacific. Kissinger in his book: *On China* mentions that as early as 1907, a senior official of the British Foreign Office, Eyre Crowe, wrote a memorandum and concluded that war between Britain and Germany was inevitable once the latter was united. Kissinger further stated there are some in our State Department who subscribe to Crowe's thesis that a successful Chinese "rise" is incompatible with America's position in the Pacific and by extension the world.

America has been trying to destabilize Western China for years with its covert support of Tibetans and Uyghurs and openly selling military equipment to Taiwan contrary to the Joint Communiqué between U.S. and China signed in 1972. "Pivot to Asia" promoted by former Secretary Hillary Clinton shows its intent to contain China. America encouraged its allies Japan and the Philippines to do its beckoning by stoking aggressive confrontation with China in territorial disputes. How could supporting a revisionist Japan or call the South China Sea, the "West Philippine Sea" promote peace in the Far East?

The so called Trans-Pacific Partnership nominally seeks to manage trade, promote growth, and regionally integrate the economies of the Asia-Pacific region. It is telling China the second biggest economy in the world and a Pacific country is excluded. China is now surrounded by many hostile states. It's absurd for the U.S. to contain both Russia and China simultaneously. It's as if Britain tried to contain both Germany and America at the same time. At the turn of last century, both Germany and America had already exceeded Britain in industrial production.

Some members of the British cabinet indeed considered containing America. What is little known today was that Britain and America almost went to war over the Venezuelan crisis. At least Britain was astute enough not to antagonize both Germany and America at the same time. Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Advisor to Carter in his book: *The Grand Chessboard* described potentially the most dangerous scenario would be a grand coalition of China, Russia, and perhaps Iran, an "anti-hegemonic" coalition united not by ideology but by complementary grievances. That seems to be precisely America's current ill-conceived policy. It is bringing Russia and China closer. The recently concluded 30 year gas deal is just one example of their cooperation. Ironically these two countries still have many historical grievances: after all parts of Russian Siberia belonged to China as recent as the 1850's.

What we now have is a situation similar to what happened before the outset of WWI when two competing blocks of alliances faced each other. Could any unexpected events such as fighting in Ukraine or an incident in Diaoyu Island be the equivalent of Assassination in Sarajevo? I hope not. The result would be nothing less than apocalyptic.

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