

# BAKU DIALOGUES

## POLICY PERSPECTIVES ON THE SILK ROAD REGION

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# Eurasia, the Hegemon, and the Three Sovereigns

*Pepe Escobar*

It is my contention that there are essentially four truly sovereign states in the world today, at least amongst the major powers: the United States, the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, and the Islamic Republic of Iran. These four sovereigns—I call them the Hegemon and the Three Sovereigns—stand at the vanguard of the ultra-postmodern world, characterized by the supremacy of data algorithms and techno-financialization ruling over politics.

It so happens that these Three Sovereigns constitute the three key nodes of Eurasian integration and the top three existential “threats” to the Hegemon, according to the U.S. National Security Strategy. The story of the young twenty-first century will continue to revolve around the clash between the United States—joined by its NATO

subsidiary—and these three independent Eurasian powers. It is imperative therefore for the core states that make up the Silk Road region to grasp the strategic conceptual trends that stand behind the geopolitical interplay taking place in a part of the world people like Zbigniew Brzezinski rightly called the “world’s axial supercontinent.”

Against all odds, the Silk Road region has managed to become, notwithstanding the few obvious exceptions, a bastion of stability in an increasingly vacillating and unpredictable world. In the coming period, regional leaders will need to figure out how to build upon this foundation of stability to create a region defined by the sort of dynamism that reinforced the stability that serves as the basis of the entire construction. They will have to do so in the context of an ongoing data

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revolution that is reconceptualizing the understanding of sovereignty.

So it is with this introduction that I would ask readers to imagine this admittedly unorthodox headline: “Michel Foucault to the rescue: where shall we find the real Sovereign, now?” To unpack this mysterious phrase we will need to turn to a number of other contemporary thinkers and concepts, many of which may be unfamiliar. Please bear with me.

The most influential philosopher currently writing in the German language—who happens to be a South Korean by birth—is Byung-Chul Han. He has recently been making the argument that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic may very well lead to a redefinition of the concept of sovereignty (in his words: “the sovereign is the one who resorts to data”).

With this in mind, let us attempt to mix this insight with what may constitute the three major interlocking issues further on down the rocky road of twenty-first-century geopolitics: the appalling management of the COVID-19 crisis; the

possible emergence of a new paradigm; and the overall reconfiguration of the international system.

A useful starting point may be to explore some of the ideas contained in the book *Necropolitics* (2019) by

*Against all odds, the Silk Road region has managed to become, notwithstanding the few obvious exceptions, a bastion of stability in an increasingly vacillating and unpredictable world.*

Achille Mbembe, a Sorbonne-educated Cameroonian philosopher and political theorist. The book theorizes the genealogy of the contemporary world, a world plagued by ever-increasing inequality, militarization, and enmity, as

by a resurgence of retrograde forces determined to exclude and subjugate progressive attempts to build a more equitable and just world. One of the main trusts of the book is Mbembe’s attempt to pierce far beyond sovereignty as interpreted in conventional political science and predominant international relations narratives.

Mbembe revisits Michel Foucault’s famous lectures delivered at the College de France in 1975-1976, in which he conceptualized biopower as the domain of life over which power has absolute control. Foucault himself defined biopower as “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the

subjugation of bodies and the control of populations.” On this basis, Mbembe develops the relation of biopower with sovereignty—*Imperium*—and the state of exception, as conceptualized by Giorgio Agamben. Mbembe tells us that, “the ultimate expression of sovereignty is the production of general norms by a body (the *demos*) comprising free and equal individuals.” Then these individuals are considered as full subjects capable of self-understanding, self-consciousness, and self-representation.

Thus politics is defined as a project of autonomy and as the process of reaching an agreement within a collective, through communication and recognition. The problem is that in ultra-postmodernity, this whole project has been shattered. Relations have been debased to a permanent state of Hybrid War.

Late modernity revolved around a paradigm whereby reason is the truth of the subject and politics is the exercise of reason in the public sphere. And that exercise of reason corresponds to the exercise of freedom—a key element for individual autonomy.

Mbembe wistfully evokes the “romance of sovereignty” that rests on the belief that the subject is both master and controlling author of his own meaning. Exercising

sovereignty is about society’s capacity for self-creation with recourse to institutions inspired by specific social and imaginary significations, as Cornelius Castoriadis reminded us in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1975). But, in fact, sovereignty is above all defined as the right to kill in defiance of international law. This has become a characteristic of the various expeditionary adventures conducted around the world for decades by the Hegemon.

Foucault’s notion of biopower must be freshly examined in the myriad declinations of the state of exception and the state of siege. Biopower in Foucault divides people into those allowed to live and those who must die. Now biopower is applied in much more subtle ways—especially through economic sanctions capable of provoking slow death.

Control presupposes a distribution of human species into groups, a subdivision of the population into subgroups, and the establishment of a biological divide between these subgroups. Foucault used to relate the whole process to racism—a concept that was not simply based on the color of one’s skin, as in the black/white dichotomy, but one that took into account all sorts of racial and ethnic gradations presupposing Western hegemony.

Now, Mbembe stresses how “racial thinking more than class thinking (where class is an operator defining history as an economic struggle between classes) has been the ever-present shadow hovering over Western political thought and practice, especially when the point was to contrive the inhumanity of foreign peoples and the sort of domination to be exercised over them.” For Foucault, racism is above all a *technology* allowing the exercise of biopower. In the economy of biopower, the function of racism is to regulate the distribution of death and to enable the state’s killing machine. It goes without saying that this biopower mechanism is inbuilt in the functioning of all modern states.

Mbembe reminds us how the material premise of Nazi extermination is to be found in colonial imperialism and in the serialization of technical mechanisms for outing people to death, developed between the industrial revolution—as shown, for instance, in Priya Sati’s *Empire of Guns* (2018)—and the First World War. That’s how the working classes and the “stateless people” of the industrial world found their equivalent in the “savages” or “barbarians” of the colonial world.

There is no question that an adequate historical narrative of the rise of modern terror—and modern

terror in slow motion—needs to address the legacy of slavery, one of the first instances of biopolitical experimentation. As Mbembe stresses, the structure of the plantation system—and its dire consequences—express the paradoxical figure of the state of exception. The slave condition includes loss of home, loss of rights over his/her body, and loss of political status. Think of Nagorno-Karabakh (“Artsakh is Armenia, and that’s it”) or Palestine, for that matter (“there are no Palestinians”). Loss is equal to absolute domination, alienation and social death—as in de facto expulsion from humanity. The colony—and the apartheid system—operates a synthesis between massacre and bureaucracy, that “incarnation of Western rationality” as noted by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951).

The point is that the technologies that produced Nazism have a strong affinity to those that resulted in the plantation and the colony. And as Foucault showed, Nazism and Stalinism only amplified a series of already existing mechanisms of Western European social and political formation: subjugation of the body, health regulations, social Darwinism, eugenics, medico-legal theories on heredity, degeneration, and race.

The colony thus represents a place in which sovereignty fundamentally consists in exercising a power outside the law and in which “peace” assumes the face of Endless War. Not by accident did the Pentagon reinvented the concept—the terminology used was “the long war”—immediately after 9/11. This ties in with the definition of sovereignty by Carl Schmitt in the early twentieth century: the “power to decide the state of exception.” Think of the Hegemon’s hot wars (Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya) and proxy wars (Syria, Yemen).

Late modern colonial occupation is a disciplinary, biopolitical, and necropolitical mix. Mbembe concludes that the “most accomplished form of necropower” is the neo-colonial occupation of Palestine, featuring no continuity between ground and the sky; drones crammed with sensors; aerial reconnaissance jets; early warning Hawkeye procedures; assault helicopters; satellites; techniques of hologrammatization; medieval siege warfare adapted to the networked sprawl of urban refugee camps and systematic bulldozing.

Obviously, there are other necropower examples, as well. Zygmunt Bauman noted already in the 2000s that the wars of globalization are not about conquest, acquisition, and takeover of territory. Mbembe

stresses they are, “ideally, hit-and-run affairs,” manifestations of which have been seen recently in parts of the Silk Road region.

What is emerging alongside conventional armies—NATO in Afghanistan surrounded by a maze of contractors, for instance—are “war machines,” as in a corporate bastardization of the concept elaborated in the 1980 book *A Thousand Plateaus* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. This metamorphosis defines, for instance, the mini-galaxy of “moderate rebels” in Syria. They borrow from regular armies and incorporate new elements adapted to the principle of segmentation and deterritorialization—a mix between a political organization and a mercantile enterprise, operating through capture and depredation.

Mbembe shows how necropolitics is reconfiguring the relations between resistance (think the Axis of Resistance: Iran, Iraq, Syria, Hezbollah), sacrifice (as in fighting ISIS/Daesh jihadi fanaticism), and terror (as applied by strands of “moderate rebels”). The Hegemon, for its part, continues to practice Necropower—as in deploying weapons in the interest of maximally destroying people’s living conditions and creating what Mbembe defines as “death-worlds,” namely unique forms of social existence in which vast populations have the status of living dead.

Byung Chul-Han takes the conceptual consequences of Mbembe’s analysis one step beyond. Necropower is the least of our problems when the whole Kantian world—predicated on a faith that humanity, as a free and autonomous subject, shapes the formative and legislative instance of knowledge—is dead.

The new emerging paradigm is the product of a Copernican anthropological turn. Data is the New Sovereign. Man has abdicated the role of producer of knowledge to the profit of data. Data-ism thus finishes off whatever lineaments of idealism and humanism had characterized the Enlightenment. Knowledge is now produced by a binary (war) machine—and that, of course, applies to Necropower as well. Man himself has been reduced to a mere and calculable accumulation of data.

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*Data is the New Sovereign. Man has abdicated the role of producer of knowledge to the profit of data.*

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The consequence is inevitable: total communication coincides with total vigilance. We have entered the realm of what may be called “Discipline and Punish 2.0.” Our whole reality—or, to evoke the late Jean Baudrillard, our whole simulacra—is subjected to the logic of non-stop for-profit

production taking place under relentless pressure.

Algorithms are capable of numerization yet are incapable of producing a narrative. To think is way more substantive than to merely calculate. In other words, there is an erotic aspect to thinking, which traces its roots back to classical Greek philosophy: remember “Eros, the most ancient God according to Parmenides,” to quote Martin Heidegger. Deep down, to exercise free thinking is to play, as Georges Bataille used to say. “We are all players,” Baudrillard stressed, “in ardent wait for those occasionally rational chains to dissipate.” To think is essentially subversive. Calculus is erotic and rectilinear;

thinking implies a sinuous trajectory: *Homo ludens*. Thus Byung Chul-Han’s formulation: from Myth to Data, real, critical, creative thinking totally lost its playful element.

And so we come to the COVID-19 pandemic. Here it would be helpful to refer to the writings of Giorgio Agamben, who did in fact square the circle: it’s not that citizens across the West have the right to health safety, he has written, it’s the fact that now they have been juridically *forced* to be

healthy. And that, in a nutshell, is what biosecurity—a data process—is all about.

Obviously, there are conventional advantages to biosecurity. Nonetheless—and equally obviously—we cannot escape the fact that biosecurity is an ultra-efficient governance paradigm. Citizens have had it imposed with virtually no political debate whatsoever. The enforcement, as Agamben has noted, killed “any political activity and any social relation as the maximum example of civic participation [in the West].”

That is how the West came to experience social distancing as an entirely new, unprecedented political model—with a (flawed) digital matrix replacing human interaction, which by definition from now on will be regarded as fundamentally suspicious and politically “contagious.”

Agamben had to be appalled by this “concept for the destiny of human society that in many aspects seems to have borrowed from religions in decline the apocalyptic idea of the end of the world.” In ultra-postmodernity, economics had already replaced politics—as in everything subjected to the diktats of financial capitalism. Now the economy is being absorbed by “the new biosecurity paradigm to which every other imperative must be sacrificed.”

Nassim Taleb’s concept of “anti-fragile,” elaborated in a 2012 book of the same name, might be helpful here. “Antifragility is beyond resilience or robustness. The resilient resists shocks and stays the same; the antifragile gets better,” he writes. “This property is behind everything that has changed with time: evolution, culture, ideas, revolutions, political systems, technological innovation, cultural and economic success, corporate survival, [...] even our own existence as a species on this planet.” The classic example of something antifragile is Hydra, the Greek mythological creature that has numerous heads. When one is cut off, two grow back in its place.

As he explains, “Antifragile is the antidote to Black Swans.” The modern world may increase technical knowledge, but it will also make things more fragile. “Black Swans hijack our brains, making us feel we ‘sort of’ or ‘almost’ predicted them, because they are retrospectively explainable. We don’t realize the role of these Swans in life because of this illusion of predictability.” The potency of randomness is underestimated: “when we see it, we fear it and overreact. Because of this fear and thirst for order, some human systems, by disrupting the invisible or not so visible logic of things, tend to be exposed to harm

from Black Swans and almost never get any benefit.” The central point of the Black Swan problem, Taleb says, “is that the odds of rare events are simply not computable.”

Yet COVID-19 was a Black Swan, but only of a sort: after all, deciding elites knew for quite some time that something like it was inevitably coming—even as mediocre Western politicians were caught totally unprepared.

Antifragile might lead, optimistically, to a reduction in fragility and greater robustness. Yet there is no evidence, so far, that a “reduction in fragility” within the framework of the current international system, such as it is, will invariably lead towards “greater robustness.” In fact, the international system has never been so fragile as it is presently. What we do have is plenty of indications that the system collapse is being refitted, at breakneck speed, as digital neo-feudalism. To repeat: we are witnessing the onset of data as the New Sovereign.

Asian-wide collectivist spirit and discipline in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic—especially in Confucianist-influenced societies—has worked irrespective of the political system within which the countries in question are

organized. But the key point is not that Asian disciplinary society might be seen as a model for the West. We already live in a digital global Panopticum—a sort of Foucault-on-steroids situation. Social network vigilance—and censorship—deployed by the Silicon Valley behemoths has already been internalized. All our data as citizens is trafficked and instantly marketized for private profit. So digital neo-feudalism was already in effect even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In previous writings I had called it “surveillance turbo-neoliberalism” in which there is no inbuilt “freedom” in the Western sense and everything is accomplished by voluntary servitude. Biopolitical surveillance is just a further layer in the whole process—the final frontier, so to speak—because now, as Foucault taught us, this

paradigm controls our own bodies. “Liberalism” has been reduced to road kill a long time ago. The point is not that China may eventually become the model for the West but rather that the West may have been set up for an endless biopolitical quarantine without people even noticing it.

In realpolitik terms, the post-lockdown turbo-capitalist framework points to a calcification of the

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sort of illiberalism privileged by the one percent in the West, coupled with naked turbo-financialization boosted by the reinforced exploitation of an exhausted and now increasingly unemployed workforce.

Throughout the pandemic, the plutocrats at the helm of hegemonic capital interests—well-equipped to coopt and even sabotage anything that threatens their standing—have not stood on the sides. Consider the long planned World Economic Forum’s initiative, scheduled to take place in January 2021, called The Great Reset. According to the World Economic Forum, it is defined as a “commitment to jointly and urgently build the foundations of our economic and social system for a more fair, sustainable and resilient future.”

This “reset” is meant to elaborate a “new social contract centered on human dignity, social justice and where societal progress does not fall behind economic development” by “connecting key global governmental and business leaders in Davos with a global multistakeholder network in 400 cities around the world for a forward-oriented dialogue driven by the younger generation.”

So the planet may rest in peace: Davos Man will push the button, and a Brave New World will enlighten us all.

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But let us come back to the real world. Apart from the Hegemon, arguably there are only three real Sovereigns left in ultrapostmodernity: Russia, China and Iran. NATO members are not more than unevenly glorified vassals, as U.S. President Donald Trump has ironically made rather evident in various public statements.

To repeat: these Three Sovereigns happen to constitute, simultaneously, the three key nodes of Eurasia integration and are defined as constituting the top three existential “threats” to the Hegemon, according to the U.S. National Security Strategy. The story of the young twenty-first century will continue to revolve around the clash between the Hegemon and Eurasia’s three independent major powers.

At his June 2020 Moscow Parade speech celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the allied victory in Second World War, Vladimir Putin, while stressing “friendship and trust between nations” and the necessity to achieve a “common reliable

security system,” made it clear that the Western neoliberal system is facing the worst financial meltdown in recorded history. He underscored the point that a new international system will, by necessity, have to be brought online. Otherwise, he noted, the world will be facing the imposition of a de facto hybrid neofascist “solution.”

Russia, China, and Iran are not intended to become constitutive elements of the Davos “Great Reset.” As it stands, Moscow and Beijing are more like playing “dragon in the fog”—a delightful Chinese concept evoked by former Kremlin adviser Alexey Chesnakov according to which a strong player, in a complex space, is able to strike at his competitors at any moment from an unexpected angle.

This is the key takeaway from the lengthy telephone conversation held between Putin and Xi Jinping in mid-July in which they discussed virtually all aspects of the evolving Russo-Chinese strategic partnership—a conversation that took place against the background of Russia’s constitutional referendum and the announcement of the new

national security law in Hong Kong. According to the official Chinese readout of the call, Xi referred explicitly to “external sabotage and intervention” in his discussion with Putin.

As much as “external sabotage and intervention” is bound to reach fever pitch, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), complete with all its

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various branches and derivations—polar, space, health, information, and so on—will continue to be deployed as the Chinese roadmap for the twenty-first century, which has seen partnerships established with virtually all the countries of the Silk Road region, as well as many, many more.

In parallel with BRI, Russia is advancing the Eurasia Economic Union (EAEU) as well as its own New Silk Road vectors focused on Arctic development, space exploration, biospheric engineering, and fusion power. BRI and EAEU are in a process of congruence and achieving, slowly but surely, some sort of merger. For instance, the development of the Russian Far East is one of the great projects of the twenty-first century, which is conceived to be achieved in

partnership with China, Japan, South Korea, and India.

The interpolation of BRI and EAEU is an open system, based on a set of principles, with a special place for “win-win” partnerships in trade, economics, and politics. The Western equivalent would be the Westphalian system that established modern nation-states in 1648. The Peace of Westphalia is in fact an open system that enshrined the concept of state sovereignty into international law, and that centuries later was set in stone by the United Nations Charter. It is a “win-win” partnership in the sense that every state, whatever its size and economic importance, has an equal right to sovereignty. So any rumblings by Western oligarchies hinting at a post-Westphalian system—something that was somewhat advanced in the past several decades by humanitarian imperialist interventions of the Kosovo and Libya kind—in fact constitute a threat to what until recently was established as a moderate, best-of-possible-worlds level playing field.

On the “external sabotage and intervention” front, China seems to be overtaking Russia as a primary focus of American (and to a much lesser extend European) opprobrium. Virtually every move seems to be converging towards provoking a fragmentation of China,

with the intention of atrophying it geopolitically to a level, in the wild dreams of some Western policy-makers, comparable to the “century of humiliation.”

Yan Xuetong, Dean of the Institute of International Relations at Tsinghua University, recently argued that Cold War 2.0, unlike the original Cold War, will be essentially a technological competition. As a direct hot war is unthinkable, considering the inevitability of nuclear escalation, myriad forms of Hybrid War, some already in effect, will proliferate.

That, in itself, will be already crystallizing the onset of a “post-Westphalian” scenario, with scores of nation states dragged into a decoupling scenario and forced to take sides. Reference models will vanish. Xenophobia and hyper-nationalism with fascistic traits will prevail. International law—already thrown in the dustbin of history with the onset, ironically, of the doctrine of the end of history by the Hegemon around the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall—will be rendered meaningless.

For at least a few decades the Hegemon, based on its global military reach, was able to offer a geopolitical and geoeconomic framework in which at least some selected players enjoyed political and economic benefits. China—in

terms of trade and investment—was one of them.

But since Xi’s 2013 announcement establishing the vision of BRI as a matchless roadmap for globalization 2.0—in fact, as the only credible game in town—the process of decoupling became all but inevitable.

BRI is the embryo of a transformation of the international system—a soft reinvention of capitalism. What Putin had proposed at the Munich Security Conference in the 2000s (unsuccessfully, it turned out) was re-packaged and re-proposed by Xi in the 2010s. This time, what was on offer quickly found an audience in vast parts of not only the Silk Road region but also amongst the members of the Non-aligned Movement and other parts of the Global South (not to mention member states of the European Union), as it emphasized China’s civilizational discipline and ability to independently innovate.

It is as if in a post-Planet Lockdown environment, the world may need to keep pace with China or risk getting left in the dust. With this we may turn for a moment to Iran.

The case of Iran is extremely complex—not least because of the delicate political balancing inbuilt in a unique Shia theo-democracy. Even facing the Hegemon’s relentless “maximum pressure,” Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has managed to regiment society by drawing on the formidable Shia ethic of resistance. As a priceless geostrategic prize, and confronted not only by the Hegemon but also Israel and assorted Arab regimes, Iran has at least managed to improve relations with key neighbors (and important New Silk Road actors) Turkey and Pakistan.

Yet the game-changers are really Russia and China. The Three Sovereigns, slowly but surely, are on their way to harmonize their different payment systems; the possibility is open for these to eventually merge in the near

future, bypassing the U.S. dollar. After the end of the Iran nuclear deal-related UN sanctions this year, Iran may be admitted as a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The recently announced 25-year strategic partnership with China, which covers multiple fields, solidifies Iran as a key New Silk Road

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node and enhances China's national security in the context of securing yet another reliable energy provider.

What should lie ahead is an enhanced Turkey-Iran-Pakistan partnership, interlinked with the SCO agenda, advancing the integration of West Asia with South Asia in which Iran plays the double role of energy provider and key transit route. As much as investing in connectivity with the Arab world—the Iran-Iraq-Syria-Lebanon road and rail axis—Tehran should also advance the same connectivity role with Central Asia, via the Caspian Sea and also overland to Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. All of this should be conducted in strictly pragmatic terms, which implies toning down what remains of Islamic revolutionary rhetoric.

Largely self-sufficient, even under harsh sanctions, with a well-educated young population and profiting from excellent technical knowledge, Iran is ideally positioned to revive the role it played along the Silk Road in ancient times. A political, economic, diplomatic, military, and connectivity alliance of the Three Sovereigns is the essential building block of Eurasia integration. Build it, and they will come.

Asia is now one step beyond conceptualizing and embarking on a full-on implementation of economic uplift for the whole of Eurasia, with an African extension.

As the Silk Road region, in particular, invests in its integration, the EU fragments. Germany, even if not a Sovereign but a de facto NATO vassal, may eventually assert its regional hegemony by crushing even more the illusions of the mini-sovereigns—as in the eurozone, where the minis are absolutely impotent to determine economic policies in accordance with their national interest.

In the event that Europe, crippled by north-south and east-west internal corrosion, is prevented from profiting from its status as the largest economic block in the world, it will be inexorably reduced to no more than an inconsequential Far Western Asia. Revenge of History redux, one could say.

As it stands, the mostly American playbook has featured sanctions and trade wars—especially against the Three Sovereigns. It is misguided to qualify it as the advent of a new illiberal order. Russia and China—and to a certain extent Iran—were asking for a rethink of the post-1945 (and post-1989) international system, alongside others like Turkey. They were flatly rebuked. That only

served to accelerate the logical flow of history—which is the progressive integration of the “heartland,” in H.J. Mackinder’s formulation.

It was the Hegemon that in fact acted as an illiberal power—when we observe how trade wars and sanctions are now configured as the new normal, directed at entire populations of nations arbitrarily deemed as enemies (e.g. Iran, Syria, Venezuela, Yemen). Necropower is inbuilt in the era of Total Economic War.

A not entirely unimportant corollary to this is the fact that there is no evidence that UN Security Council reform will be allowed by the five permanent members. Yet the real gap is not between the UN nuclear club and the rest, considering the nuclear capabilities of India, Pakistan, North Korea, and Israel. The real gap is between the Three Sovereigns—Russia, China, and Iran—and a Hegemon still conditioned by the logic of perpetual war and the refusal to admit the

“unipolar moment” has come and gone. In this lies the heart of Cold War 2.0.

Mbembe concisely encapsulated the drama of the young twenty-first century as the “extreme fragility of

all. And of the All.”

With necropower and data-as-sovereign tightening its grip, what passes now for “democracy” in the West is being reduced to a hollowed out shell, unpredictable, paranoid, corroded

by the marriage of manufactured consent and political correctness, devoid of substantive meaning and increasingly lacking in justification: a mere (and increasingly outdated) ornament. As the countries of the Silk Road region continue to invest in various integration strategies to ensure the heartland become a geopolitical player in its own right, they would be wise to keep in mind the rebalancing taking place between the Hegemon and the Three Sovereigns in the context of the construction of our ultra-postmodern world. **BD**

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