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European Integration Process and the Indo-Pacific Region

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***Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to present and discuss the European integration process as an example of a value-based solution seeking process and compare it with the Indo-Pacific region as a recent object of a systematic EU's policy attention. The author proposes that the intensity and complexity of regional multilateral networking should be advanced to reach a firm level of complementarity. The European experience should be taken into account within the specifics of the Indo-Pacific region.²*

***Key words:** EU, European integration process, Indo-Pacific, regional integration, conflict, cooperation*

Introduction

The Indo-Pacific Region has become recently a highly frequent object of political, diplomatic and policy attention.³ During the Slovene and French Presidencies of the European Council, respectively, it remains high on the agenda. Hence also our reason to discuss this topic. We take a comparative approach and present first both the European integration process and the Indo-Pacific region, and later on dwell on their synergies and potentials. Here we have in mind possible use of experiences and lessons learned from the former for the latter. Apart historical

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² Views and opinions of the author of this paper do not necessarily correspond to views of the Euro-Atlantic Council of Slovenia. They also do not represent views of the author's employer.

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method we use primarily methods of analysis, comparison, comment and since the topic is a highly complex one, the necessary generalization of comparison and findings.

European integration process is the result of centuries long development in the context of dynamic, complex and turbulent European history that accelerated after the end of the Cold War. Its current picture shows many useful achievements that could be, having in mind given regional specifics, useful in other parts of the globe.

European Integration Process

Political, integration and structural history

The main breakeven historical event that influenced most significantly modern European history and its development is the Peace of Westphalia from 1648 that marked the end of the Thirty Years War in Europe. With its political and diplomatic achievements (the emergence of a nation state, division between secular and religious power, the overseas expansion etc.), it showed the ambition and the will of the then European powers to overcome atrocities and a vast destruction of Europe. This is its most important lesson, useful also for today's state of global affairs.

Within almost next three centuries, Europe witnessed straightforward development that enabled its most outstanding and significant influence on world affairs. That included series of congresses of rulers, establishment of the first foreign ministry in France, industrial revolutions, the advancement of science, technology and media, the unifications of both Italy and later on also of Germany, the spread of liberal values of the French Revolution, the parallel advancement of globalization with the colonialism, and the origins of multilateral diplomacy.

The turn of the century presented also the turn to cataclysm: the demise of the old regimes (the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman Empires), with parallel emergence of the communist Soviet Union were in the focus of changes that led to the First World War and the unseen renewed destruction of the old continent. The consequent peace treaties after the end of the war and the establishment of the League of Nations did not bring permanent solution of open structural conflicts. Therefore, the outbreak of a new war, impossible to prevent, only added to the magnitude of the unforeseen devastation of Europe. Three hundred years later, the continent witnessed the new Thirty Years War that brought it on knees as never before in its history.

The immediate post WWII period revived from one point of view with the establishment of the United Nations Organization (the UN), the heritage of the League as well as the spirit of the Atlantic Charta from 1941, and from the another one, the idea of Victor Hugo of a united Europe, through the proposal of the French Foreign Minister Schumann. After centuries of long and structural demanding political history, the seeds of the next historical phase, i.e., the integrative European history, were planted. A decade of the integration outburst followed, with the establishment of the Council of Europe (CoE) and the NATO, both in 1949, as well as of the European Communities with the signature of the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Twenty years later the adoption of the Helsinki Final act marked the European integrative rise, which was going on in the midst of the Cold War. A process, not seen so far and nowhere in the world history. This is a firm political ground, on which the European integration process rests and has evolved from.

From the territorial point of view, the discussed process spans across the territory of states, members in those international organizations (the CoE, NATO, the EU and the OSCE).⁴ This would initially mean countries from Vancouver to Vladivostok, however, the core area would be better defined by space from the UK and Ireland to the western frontiers of the Russian Federation. Still, we speak about the European integration process, meaning we don't have in mind primarily its territorial component, but social space that spans across it and is able, for its complementarity, to produce values. This meta-territorial aspect of defining the discussed process is also crucial for its possible implementation elsewhere. So, it is not bigger or smaller geographical area that defines the notion, it is the ability of pursuing those values. And this comes from social complexity and complementarity.

With the end of the Cold War an avalanche of changes followed, though marked by a peaceful revolution of the Annus Mirabilis of the 1989. The Charter of Paris for New Europe in late 1990, paved the way, fifty years after the Atlantic one, for the integrative advancement of Europe. Enlargements of the EU, NATO, the OSCE and the CoE that followed, brought the old continent to its structural historical phase. The European integration process, embarked by those changes within the frame of the intensified globalization process, witnessed its evolutionary peak.

Production of values as differentia specifica

Hence, we understand today the European integration process as the structural output of complementary activities of major international governmental organizations on the broader European territory, pursued along the article VII of the UN's Charta.⁵ It is one of the major policy achievements in the European history since the Peace of Westphalia, with major structural push during the three decades after the end of the Cold War. Its main ability is to produce and pursue values. It is the whole set of values that results from this synergetic integration effort, with the rule of law as the most significant, universal and all encompassing, with democracy, human rights, market economy, free and fair elections, and freedom of media at its core.

The European integration process is characterized primarily by complementarity and complexity as well as rests on synergy between hard power approach: collective defense (NATO), and the soft power one: welfare state and crisis management (the EU), comprehensive security (the OSCE) and human rights (CoE), all within the collective security of the UN. This unique combination of soft power backed up with the strong support of hard power is the backbone of the whole process and its efficiency. Additionally, it all counts as a set of parameters that enabled its crystallization (expanded, strengthened and synergized) during the last three decades. Furthermore, during this period also relations within the triangle the EU – the US – the Russian Federation received crucial geopolitical importance for the European integration process and its efficiency, while since recently, relations with China are advancing with progressive tempo.⁶

All in all, this differentia specifica is exactly what transformed Europe into the continent with the highest living standard, an outstanding system of values, and other achievements. From this point of view, the European integration process presents European diplomatic, political, and historical innovation. It is a unique product of specific European history, having strong

⁴ In the case of the OSCE we speak about participating (and not member) states.

⁵ For more on the European integration process see Jazbec, 2019.

⁶ In this paper, we do not deal with consequences of war in Ukraine on the discussed topic since it is too early to take valid conclusions.

implementation potential and policy attractiveness. Having in mind the structural complexity and policy advancement of the whole process, we could say that it is the EU that lays in the very center of the European integration process. It is the most advanced integrated and all-encompassing political entity, because of its internal structure, balanced relations among main institutions as well as because of having the capability to reproduce these circumstances.

From the above presented stems also our belief that the European integration process could be taken as an approach to similar progress in any other region of the world, having in mind also given local circumstances and approximately same amount of political will, belief and structural effort. The Indo-Pacific region could be one of such cases, what we try to present and argue in this paper.

Indo-Pacific Region in Brief

Definition and basic figures

For the purpose of this paper, a useful policy definition of the Indo-Pacific region says that it “is a geopolitical area that spans two regions of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Stretching from the west coast of the United States to the west coast of India, the Indo-Pacific is a 24 nations regional framework comprising the tropical waters of the Indian Ocean, the western and central Pacific Ocean, and the seas connecting the two in the general area of Indonesia.”⁷ Hence, it is obvious that we deal with the region that is so far the biggest territorial area, being discussed as a single political unit within current geopolitical terms. From this point of view, it could be compared with the concept of transatlantic relations, composed of Europe and North America, and the extremely high, condensed and dynamic interactions between them. With the same level of relevance, we could also claim that the latter shares much higher level of social closeness and structural complexity and intensity as the former.

This region's geographical vastness is spread between East Africa and Pacific Islands, what makes it one of the most important economic areas as well, not to speak that it presents a theater of global rivalry.⁸ The whole area is also rich with resources, what makes it additional attractive and raises the level of global competitiveness that has been moving towards the Asia-Pacific direction during at least the previous decade and a half. For example, Australia possesses 50% of world lithium resources and Chile additional 22%; Indonesia and Philippines hold 33% of nickel (30 and 13 respectively); Peru and Chile obtain 21% of copper (11 plus 10), etc.⁹

Stemming from the quoted definition, we initially agree, at least for the purpose of this paper, that the region consists of the following 24 states (alphabetically):¹⁰ Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Timor Leste, United States and Vietnam.¹¹ Anyway, the question of China remains open, what we touch upon later on.

These countries comprise approximately 2,3 billion people and around 5,000,000 sq. km. Only these two figures show huge potential of the region, also if we would not count the US

⁷ <https://ceoworld.biz/indo-pacific/>

⁸ Comp. Kullik, 2021.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ <https://ceoworld.biz/indo-pacific/> Comp. also <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/sep/16/what-is-the-aukus-alliance-and-what-are-its-implications>

¹¹ Obviously, small Pacific Island states are not listed; however, it would be difficult not to include them.

contribution, since we also do not include it in the core part of the discussed European integration process. The issue of the US is important from various points of view. Not only purely methodologically, it points out also the role of China in the region, which should be taken as a part of the region, not only for its huge coastal area and mineral resources.

Some policy specifics

Next, we will have a look at the most important international governmental organizations and forums in the discussed region, to get an impression of this potential structural output, comparable with the European integration process.

As far as the international governmental organizations in the discussed region are concerned, the Association of South-East Asian States (ASEAN), established in 1967, with its current 10 members, clearly stands out. It is the main and the oldest multilateral driver in the region.¹² Next, the Asia-Pacific Economic Council (APEC), initiated in 1989, comprising now 21 member states, is of primary importance on trade, cooperation, investment and economic growth (hence, the term "member economies" is in operational use).¹³ In 1985, with an aim to enhance regional cooperation in economic and political terms as well as to promote social progress and cultural development, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established, with eight current members.¹⁴ Also, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) plays an important role in the regional multilateral dynamic. Its main purpose, while established as a dialogue between the EU and ASEAN, in 1994 (including also Norway, Switzerland and the UK), has been to foster dialogue and cooperation on political, economic and cultural areas.¹⁵

Additionally, two informal alliances of recent origin should be mentioned that focus their activities on primarily security cooperation in the region. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is composed of the US, Australia, India and Japan, focusing on security, economic and health issues.¹⁶ The so-called trilateral security pact between Australia, the UK and the US (AUKUS) "signals a paradigm shift in strategy and policy across the region".¹⁷ In both cases, we speak about informal strategic forums for security dialogue. Additionally, the role of the US as the main driver is obvious. Consequently, there is an impression that the aim of these two forums is to counter growing activities of China in the region.¹⁸

This brief selective overview points out at least three characteristics. Firstly, there is a web of international governmental organizations in the region, primarily of rather recent origin, stemming, apart ASEAN, from the period around the end of the Cold War. They focus on the classic repertoire of politics, security, economy and culture. Secondly, informal strategic forums play important role. They are of very recent origin and seem to be target oriented on the strategic rivalry in the region, with the US and China as two opposing protagonists. Thirdly, apart membership in APEC, China is out of this formal and informal networking. Next to this, the Russian Federation is not present here as a part of any structures. However, both of them,

¹² For more comp. <https://asean.org/>

¹³ For more comp. <https://www.apec.org/faq>

¹⁴ For more comp. https://mfasia.org/mfa_programs/advocacy/south-asian-association-for-regional-cooperation/

¹⁵ For more comp. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/regional-architecture/Pages/asia-europe-meeting-asem>

¹⁶ For more comp. <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/quad-indo-pacific-what-know>

¹⁷ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58540808>

¹⁸ Comp. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/sep/16/what-is-the-aucus-alliance-and-what-are-its-implications>

the Russian Federation and China, are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).¹⁹

The Approach of the European Union to the Indo-Pacific Region

Policy, political, diplomatic and other aspects of the importance of the Indo-Pacific region for the EU have come to full visibility during the previous troika Presidency (Germany, Portugal, Slovenia) as one of its priorities and continue to remain as such during the current and the next Presidency of the EU Council (also the Czech Republic confirmed it). Therefore, a series of documents were adopted and a variety of meetings organized with this topic on the agenda.²⁰ Since we contemplate a general, though structural policy comparison between the European integration process and the Indo-Pacific region, we discuss in this part only the EU's Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific from 2021 as well as the recent Ministerial Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (2022).

The Strategy

The EU released its Strategy for Cooperation with the Indo-Pacific region in April 2021. The document presents the outline, backbone and fundamentals of the EU to approach, cooperate and develop relations with the Indo-Pacific region. This political and policy document defines the area as "a vast region spanning from the east coast of Africa to the Pacific Island States" (Joint Communication: The EU Strategy, 2021: 1). This definition is advanced with heavy weight data: "The region includes seven G20 members²¹ (...) and is home to three-fifths of the world's population, produces 60% global GDP, contributed two-thirds of pre-pandemic global economic growth and is at the forefront of the digital economy" (Ibid.). Furthermore, the region "is home to three of the four largest economies outside the EU (China, India, Japan); is central to global value chains, international trade and investment flows; by 2030, 90% of 2,4 billion new middle-class members will come from the region" (EU Strategy, Factsheet).

The Strategy's aim is defined as follows: "The EU intends to increase its engagement with the region to build partnerships that reinforce the rules-based international order, address global challenges, and lay the foundations for a rapid, just and sustainable economic recovery that creates long-term prosperity" (Ibid.). Furthermore, it points out that "[T]his engagement will be based on promoting democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and universally agreed commitments such as the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change" (Ibid.). Hence, future prospects "of the EU and the Indo-Pacific are inextricably linked given the interdependence of the economies and the common global challenges" (Ibid.).

The document lays down the EU's vision / principles of engagement, presents its seven priority areas as well as key actions for the implementation of the agenda. Priority areas that are discussed in details are: sustainable and inclusive prosperity; green transition; ocean governance; digital governance and partnerships; connectivity; security and defense, and human security (Ibid, p. 5). Among the main policy tools for achieving this are bilateral Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA's) that are already in place with several

¹⁹ Established in 2001, members are: China, India, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Comp. http://eng.sectesco.org/about_sco/

²⁰ Comp. State of the Union 2021: Address by the President von der Leyen.

²¹ Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea and the Republic of South Africa (Ibid.). Contrary to our previous definition of the region, it includes China and excludes the US. Both of definitions show the importance of the point of view.

countries and will be extended, too. Specific address is given to the "centrality of ASEAN (Ibid, p. 5)", with which the EU has developed significant "dynamic, multifaceted partnership over more than 40 years" (Ibid.). Additionally, also cooperation with Pacific is pointed out, with which "the EU maintains close relations and political dialogue with all Pacific Island States" (Ibid.). Main venues for this are the Pacific Islands Forum, the Pacific Community, the Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific as well as the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States.

Along with the importance of the Indian Ocean as a gateway for Europe into the region discussed (Ibid, p. 4), the importance of relations with China are particularly presented.²² The EU is determined to "pursue its multifaceted engagement with China, engaging bilaterally to promote solutions to common challenges, cooperating on issues of common interest and encouraging China to play its part in a peaceful and thriving Indo-Pacific region" (Ibid.).

The Strategy presents the most thoughtful document regarding the EU's relations with the Indo-Pacific region so far. It is ambitious, comprehensive and offers priorities, tools and activities to implement it. Above all, it is inclusive, far-reaching and geopolitical. As Girish (2021:1) claims, it "has signaled a clear intent to reorient the grouping's geopolitical outlook and provide guidance for enhanced engagement with the Indo-Pacific". Hence, "the EU-wide umbrella strategy is a major development" (Ibid.).²³ The EU tries to perform on cooperation and not on confrontation, and is value based, what stems directly from historical lessons of the European integration process. This is particularly reflected in its "intent to cooperate with China in some key areas on mutually acceptable terms" (Ibid, p. 15).

The Ministerial forum

Less than a year after the adoption of the Strategy, the French Presidency of the EU Council, together with the EU High Representative for CFSP, organized Ministerial forum for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (22 February 2022). The event brought together a number of involved and interested representatives and stakeholders from both regions, from governmental and nongovernmental sectors. The meeting presented a follow up to the adopted Strategy and was also conceptualized in that spirit. For that purpose, three roundtables stood out: security and defense; connectivity and digital issues; and global issues (like climate change, the preservation of biodiversity, and health).²⁴

The main purpose of the gathering was "to identify ideas and avenues for cooperation between the EU and its Indo-Pacific partners in the light of the recently adopted EU Indo-Pacific Strategy and the Global Gateway Strategy" (Ibid.), with reference to also some other main global conventions that deal with maritime law and related issues, like global logistic sea and air routes, in particular transportation ones; then sustainable development, climate change, ocean pollution (plastic), and biodiversity conservation in Pacific. These are all current challenges that the region faces radically. Both sides stressed their joint focus on education and youth (between 2014-2020 more than 50.000 people benefited from the Erasmus + exchange) as well as on research and innovation areas.

²² It stems from the Joint Communication: EU-China, a Strategic Outlook, 2019.

²³ The author makes useful comments on differences among various definitions of the region, which have policy and political consequences, in particular referring to approach and relations with the US and China.

²⁴ In this part of the text, we draw from the official press release of the meeting:

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/ministerial-forum-cooperation-indo-pacific_en Comp. also <https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/media/eeabd4t1/main-announcements-and-areas-of-enhanced-cooperation-en.pdf>

It is obvious how the region is receiving increased systematic, planned and institutionally backed up attention, primarily focusing on issues of global importance. This is being pursued through various programs, initiatives and projects that all have in common the issue of environment in various forms. Risks and challenges, connected to all sorts of environment degradation show from one point of view that they present the most important threat to the survival of the global international community and from the another one that the EU (or the European integration process as a whole) is focusing on values, with clean, safe and preserved environment as the most important one. For this reason, one could easily claim that this topic is the postmodern reflection of the human rights issue.

Overall, this clear focus on soft security issues does not neglect or leave aside threats, deriving from hard security area. They are, however, dealt with as a part of the whole security area and stemming from the value arsenal in managing them. Territorial disputes and other tensions between states, not only in this part of the globe, should be understood as a part of broader context. Solving conflicting hard security bilateral issues is highly relevant and important, but this has to be seen as a part of broader, global and multilateral strive for better living conditions on all areas. This means managing the upgrade of environment and related challenges (green gas effect, i.e., raising of temperature and sea level, decarbonization etc.).

Some Comparative Findings and Lessons Learned

Summing up our elaboration, one issue clearly stands out: the ambition of the EU to engage on a long-term, systematic and value-oriented approach with the Indo-Pacific region has grown up during the last couple of years.

This is a result of a broader, global strategic shift towards that part of the world. However, that shift brings along also strategic rivalry that is currently manifested in the relations between the US and China (comp. Begley, 2020). The nature of this relationship varies from cooperation to confrontation. As it could be noticed, “[O]verall, neither the United States nor China is clearly “winning” the competition for influence in the Indo-Pacific region as whole, and they have varying levels of influence across countries” (RAND, 2020).²⁵ However, the experience of the European integration process shows that zero-sum game is a one-way street.

A policy expectation that something like this is not going to happen, could be backed by observations on strategic opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region: “the absence of deeply adversarial and existential disputes; continuing American strength; the possibility of a more flexible China; the possibility of more cooperation in dealing with North Korea; the imperative to cooperate in dealing with transnational threats” (Swaine et al., 2015:13). On the other side, Raska (2019:83) is of the opinion that "the Indo-Pacific security hinges on the convergence of four major interrelated developments: (1) the adroit management of China's rise, both internal and external; (2) the challenge in reassessing strategic interests in the US-led web of Asian alliances; (3) the regional disparities in addressing endemic global security issues; and (4) the prevalence of traditional security quandaries in flashpoints such as the Taiwan Strait or the Korean Peninsula".

At the same time, the experience of the European integration process points to different nature of approach: from conflict to cooperation and hence to complementarity, where the concept of rivalry is not the defining point. The aim is not only to solve open issues, but to advance the

²⁵ Comp. also Sheller and Fuhrmann, 2021, as well as Badenheim, 2021.

state of affairs with enhanced value approach. Value based approach is a comprehensive solution, clearly backed up by the European historical experience. Territorial conflicts, which are always limited and only exceptionally global (though often with global consequences), should be solved by the value approach. This is a unique European experience that says only integration and complementarity provide values, what further on lessens conflicts. The shift from purely territorial cooperation and development to producing values is achievable by networks of international organizations that share complementarity on the long run and involve players for this purpose.

Structural level of complementarity and complexity of these networks in the Indo-Pacific region is much lower and not so topic diverse as at the European integration process. From the experience of the latter, we could claim that higher level of complexity and compatibility leads to a faster value-oriented approach (and not only solving single interstate disputes as such).

Next, conflicting sides have to be capable of overcoming bilateral historical tensions and to move forward within regionally established multilateral frame. The example of bridging the historical Franco-German confrontation that led to the establishment of the EU, is a major example of this approach. Also, the case of German re-unification that was possible only with the end of the global bipolar divide, offers another example within the same context. In spite of some demanding conflicts/tensions in the Indo-Pacific region, we still do not see examples of such encouraging integrative intensions or behavior.

Subsequently, the role of world's major powers in these processes should be taken into account. Both the US and the Russian Federation are part of multilateral structures that enabled the European integration process to emerge and advance. In the case of the Indo-Pacific, the US is partially present in the regional multilateral arrangements, while China is practically absent. But both powers are increasing their influence bilaterally and informally, the US in some recently established initiatives. This practice is, according to the European integration process and its experience, a sideway. Also, the European integration process rests on activities of four (the US, the UK, France and the Russian Federation) out of five permanent members of the UN Security Council, while in the case of the Indo-Pacific region we speak only of the two of them (the US and China). Additionally, none of these two is an inherent part of the overall regional architecture (which is still weaker than in the case of the European integration process).

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to present and discuss the European integration process as an example of a value-based solution seeking process and compare it with the Indo-Pacific region as a recent object of a systematic EU's policy attention. We understand the European integration process as a structural output of complementary activities of major international governmental organizations on the broader European territory, pursued along the article VII of the UN's Charta. Its production of values is the main driver of development and is an approach that could be used also in other parts of the world (having in mind their local regional specifics).

Hence, the Indo-Pacific region could be such an example. We found out that for this purpose the intensity and complexity of regional multilateral networking should be advanced to reach a firm level of complementarity. This would enhance the integrative strength that stems from the synergy of various, complementary international organizations and their output. The experience of the European integration process goes from conflicts and destruction to bilaterally based multilateral effort to overcome, develop and advance to the level of production of values. These

values form a cluster with the rule of law and human rights at its core that is in the current stage of the development of the international community presented in dealing with the environmental crisis. The Indo-Pacific region is highly endangered with this global threat hence the experience of the European integration process could be appreciated.

It seeks clear awareness of history (failures and mistakes) and conceptualized political and diplomatic effort to deal with traditional challenges, including interstate tensions and conflicts, as only a part of broader challenge paradigm. Bilateral efforts (the role of world powers, although partially still antagonistic) should be placed within firm and flexible regional multilateral frame that rests on complementarity (what is currently still not the dominant trend).

Three hundred years of European history (political, integrative, structural) present the case how to succeed it. Value based solution seeking drives such efforts from purely territorial to being part of broader efforts addressing global challenges that humankind is facing three decades after the end of the Cold War.

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