

American Mainstream Expert Calls for Global War in Three Continents

By [Uriel Araujo](#)

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Is a "Three-Theater" war scenario both feasible and desirable for the US? Some think so. American analysts within the Establishment are in fact calling for war "in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East." This is what Thomas G. Mahnken (both a Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies professor and the CEO of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments) is urging Washington to do, in his most recent [piece](#).

For Mahnken, Washington is "currently involved in two wars—Ukraine's in Europe and Israel's in the Middle East", while also "facing the prospect of a third over Taiwan or South Korea in East Asia." Moreover, "all three theaters are vital to US interests, and they are all intertwined." Deprioritizing Europe and disengaging from the Middle East can only weaken American security, he argues: "The U.S. military drawdown in the Middle East, for instance, has created a vacuum that Tehran has filled eagerly." Of course, such reasoning can only make sense if American "security" is equated with Washington's unipolarity.

A Three-Theater Defense Strategy

How America Can Prepare for War in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East

By [Thomas G. Mahnken](#) June 5, 2024



U.S. soldiers participating in a joint exercise with South Korean soldiers, Yeoncheon, South Korea, March 2024
Jeon Heon-Kyun / Reuters

[Source](#)

US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, during his recent speech at Shangri-la Dialogue (in Singapore), made it a point to stress that “despite historic clashes in Europe and the Middle East... the [Indo-Pacific](#) has remained our priority theater of operations.” According to Austin, the US is a Pacific nation (with a capital P, and with no pun intended, presumably), and added that “the US can be secure only if Asia is secure. That’s why... [we have] long maintained our presence in this region. And that’s why we continue to make the investments necessary to meet our commitments to our allies and partners.” As for the relationship with China, the Secretary was more ambiguous, claiming that “a fight with China is neither imminent nor unavoidable.”

While Lloyd Austin seems to differ from Mahnken (on emphasis), there is not necessarily a dilemma there. I’ve often [described](#) Washington’s ambitions as being all about having the cake and eating it too. Jerry Hendrix (retired Navy captain, formerly an adviser to Pentagon senior officials, and currently a senior fellow with the Sagamore Institute) has [written](#) that, in Mackinder terms (classic Geopolitics), the US has embarked on a quest for the “[Heartland](#)”, and this contradicts its true “sea power” nature. This is so because Washington, in recent times, has been “burdened” by mostly “land-based actions in Iraq and Afghanistan fought primarily by a large standing army operating far from home”.

Rather than doing that, Hendrix urges the Atlantic superpower to, once again, “think and act like a seapower state”, that is, with a focus on deriving its might from “seaborne trade”, employing “instruments of sea power” to advance its interests. The expert describes the post-World War II period as an exceptional “free sea” period, marked by a “secure environment” which has supposedly allowed free trade to flourish in a globalized planet – this being the rather gleeful manner in which he describes the US-led world order, in spite of the fact that Washington has always [weaponized protectionism](#).

In any case, as Hendrix notes, the American superpower acts both as a “continental power” and as a “sea power”. I’ve [described](#) its foreign policy as resembling the swing of a pendulum. Give or take, all Great Powers engage to some extent in proxy conflicts amid their geoeconomic and geopolitical disputes with other powers. In terms of regional disputes, whether one likes or not Moscow’s foreign policy today, one can at least concede that historically Russia and neighboring Ukraine have an intertwined and [complicated shared history](#), and the same applies to China-Taiwan relations. But America is something quite different. To keep things in perspective, one should keep in mind, for example, that, amazingly, the only place in the entire world China has an overseas military base is [Djibouti](#), in the Horn of Africa. In contrast, depending on how one counts it, Washington, in 2015, had about [800 military bases](#) in over 70 countries.

Moreover, the US has in fact invaded 84 out of the 194 nation-states recognized by the United Nations, and has been militarily involved with no less than 191 of those, according to Christopher Kelly and Stuart Laycock, the authors of “America Invades: How We’ve Invaded or Been Militarily Involved with Almost Every Country on Earth”. The hard truth is that the United States of America is the only nation today (and arguably ever) to potentially engage in warfare across three continents – a scenario, keep in mind, that is cheered by prominent mainstream American commentators and scholars.

Other analysts, such as Andrea Rizzi, writing for El Pais, have described the possibility of war fronts in the Middle East, Europe and the Asia-Pacific becoming connected as a “nightmare” scenario – although not so convincingly, in Rizzi’s case, who seems to believe the political West has necessarily something to do with “democracy”, a historically [controversial](#) premise to say the least. Rizzi, however, makes the very valid point that “in geopolitics — and in life — high-stress situations lead to a greater margin for unforeseen events, errors in calculation and communication, uncontrolled actions by minority factions and escalations that are unintended, at least by the key players.” Even the main actors have an interest in keeping stability, at some point someone (or one’s proxies) may indeed make “a daring movie”, in Rizzi’s words, and thus bring about an escalation and unpredictable outcomes.

A series of Ukrainian and Western actions arguably represented precisely such a red-line crossing, in Moscow’s perspective. While some worry about the same thing happening in the Pacific, thus inadvertently igniting yet another war, others call for and crave for precisely such a war – not just in the Indo-Pacific region, but also in Europe and the Middle East, simultaneously. It is hard to describe such a call in any way other than as a will to set the world on fire – after all, one cannot literally desire war between Great Powers in three continents and not expect everything else that often comes with it (call it apocalypse in disguise, if you will).

Unbelievably, such bellicose calls, rather than being confined to the hate speech of extreme and fringe individuals and organizations, pass as reasonable and mainstream discourse, produced as it is, by respectable experts with impeccable credentials. And, mind you,

Foreign Affairs will even [publish](#) it. It is no wonder: Washington foreign policy itself is, after all, largely built on the premise of American unipolarity and global war if need be.

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Uriel Araujo is a researcher with a focus on international and ethnic conflicts. He is a regular contributor to Global Research.

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