

# The World Aflame

by George Friedman - November 8, 2023

A few weeks ago, I wrote a piece titled **“The World Begins to Reorder Itself.”** There is certainly a new order coming, but unlike the reordering that took place after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, this reordering will emerge from wars and potential wars. The Ukraine war has been raging for nearly two years. There are hints that a peace agreement might be reached, but the conflict continues. The war between Hamas and Israel has been underway for about a month, and it is perhaps the most bitter and unrelenting war seen in a place where unrelenting warfare has become an art.

It goes on. I have heard from two people I trust highly that Serbia is preparing for war. Serbia and Kosovo fought a bloody war in 1998-99 in which the U.S. and NATO sided with Kosovo and conducted a bombing campaign against Serbia. I hope these sources are wrong, but I think this will happen and spread beyond the Balkans.

The Chinese have been intruding on the margins of the Philippines. The Japanese have publicly stated that they will work to strengthen Philippine defenses and help by sending warships in the event China attacks. Japan has also announced that it is increasing cooperation with Malaysia. In addition, China and India have been fighting an off-and-on border war. Japan told India that it was prepared to offer unspecified support.

China has been under substantial economic stress. I do not think it has the naval strength that others believe it does, but it is still a major power. Thus, the Japanese decision to challenge China, even given U.S. support, represents a new role for Japan in the Western Pacific, and one China might be unable to live with. China’s slowing economy is also weakening its government.

Tukey seems to be intruding politically throughout Central Asia, which is an area of extreme importance to Russia. This creates a potentially explosive situation.

The tensions in Southeast Asia, the Balkans and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia are not connected in any significant way. This is not like World War II, where nations were linked to each other, like Germany and Italy or the U.S. and Britain. In that case, the spreading of war was supported by common interests. In the current global system, there seems to be no connection between the various ongoing and potential wars.

That seems to indicate that a wildfire of global war will not occur. But it is hard to understand why there seems to be a proliferation of ongoing and potential conflicts without a common foundation. It may mean that nothing major is really happening, and the idea of disagreements escalating into wars is unfounded. But as always, there are questions that I can't answer. Why are the Japanese rattling a saber at the same time Palestinians and Israelis are at war and the Balkan states are shuddering? It is not only that there is a set of war realities and possibilities but that they are happening at the same time.

The question may not be answerable, but the U.S. is likely part of the mosaic. Many reasonably feel that the U.S. should get more involved in wars, even if they are not directly of interest to us. But the U.S. is the global hegemon, the world's largest economy and the greatest military power. These factors entangle the U.S. with the majority of the countries in the world, whether through economic linkages or military alliances. The advantage is that the U.S. has choices. But like Britain and Rome before it, the U.S. must be involved selectively. The U.S. crushed Japan in World War II, won a war in the Balkans, helped create Israel and helped mold Ukraine. As we look at this list of wars and possible wars, the U.S. is deeply involved in many ways. Thus, the country I have left out of the list is the United States, which tragically may be drawn into wars with little time to think. That is a topic for historians to consider. Now, we must be concerned with whether my trusted friends have any idea what they are talking about. Most rumored wars never happen.

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