

# 2022

## A WORLD RULED BY GEOPOLITICS



GEOPOLITICAL RESEARCH GROUP

EURASIA CENTER, JOHN VON NEUMANN UNIVERSITY

Ágnes Bernek, Gábor Andrékó, Anita Faust, László Simon



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**2022**  
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*Ágnes Bernek, Gábor Andr  k , Anita Faust, L szl  Simon*

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## A WORLD RULED BY GEOPOLITICS

**Facts, Doubts and Trends  
in an Uncertain World**



*This volume of studies was prepared by:* the Geopolitical Research Group  
of the Eurasia Center at John von Neumann University

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A World Ruled by Geopolitics  
Facts, Doubts and Trends in an Uncertain World

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“I guess both optimists and pessimists can be vindicated by history if you wait long enough.”

Quote from Gideon Rose, former editor of Foreign Affairs in 2021.<sup>1</sup>

“A new world (not a new “normal”) is now emerging, the contours of which will largely be defined by the narratives that evolve to inform and construct the way forward.”

Klaus Schwab & Thierry Malleret (2022) *The Great Narrative – For a Better Future*.<sup>2</sup>

“When the passions of war are aroused, it becomes almost fatally easy to attribute the catastrophe solely to the ambitions and the arrogance of a small group of men, and to seek no further explanation. Yet even while the war is raging, there may be some practical importance in an attempt to analyse the underlying and significant, rather than the immediate and personal, cause of the disaster.”

Edward Hallett Carr (1946) *The Twenty Years’ Crisis 1919–1939*.<sup>3</sup>

“I have always believed and believe in common sense, so I am convinced that sooner or later the new centres of the multipolar world order and the West will have to start an equal conversation about the future we share – and the earlier the better.”

Vladimir Putin, 27 October 2022, Valdai Discussion Club.<sup>4</sup>

- <sup>1</sup> Excerpt from an email sent by Gideon Rose, former editor of Foreign Affairs, to online subscribers on 26 January 2021.
- <sup>2</sup> Schwab, K. & Malleret, T. (2022). *The Great Narrative – For a Better Future*. Forum Publishing. p. 10
- <sup>3</sup> Carr, E. H. (1946). *The Twenty Years’ Crisis 1919–1939. An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*. (2nd edition). London: Macmillan. P. IX
- <sup>4</sup> Excerpt from Vladimir Putin’s speech at the plenary session of the 19th Annual Meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club, on 27 October 2022. <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/events/posts/articles/vladimir-putin-prinyal-uchastie-v-xix-zasedanii-kluba-valdai/?ysclid=lb651fnpui530416832>

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## FOREWORD

*“We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors...and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do”* This is what a US official told journalists back in 2004, according to an article by Ron Suskind published in The New York Times on 17 October 2004. Although citizen of the superpower, the journalist was taken aback by these words. What the official in question was saying was that the world’s leading power, at the height of its global position, does not adapt to others, but can, and does, take the initiative.

Less than two decades later, in 2021, the US renounced the world order that it had built after the end of the Cold War and called for the creation of a new one, again under its own leadership. Unlike at the end of the Cold War, seizing the leadership position and building a new order was promising to be a heavily contested process, with emerging rivals also calling for a new order, but one based on different principles, and under a governance format that would include them as equals. The shape the new order may take is unclear at the time of the closure of our manuscript. What is definitive is that there is no going back to the order that prevailed in the three decades after the Cold War, and that the process by which the new one takes shape will be tense, riddled with multiple, closely, or loosely interrelated conflicts.

For lesser states, it is crucial to understand the logic of great powers, and of the great game, in which they may not be more than unwitting tools, or collateral damage. To be able to navigate the ever-choppier seas of change and conflict, the first step is to understand the mindset of the great powers of the day, and to distinguish the broader processes of power and legitimation from the accessible but superficial and often misleading realm of narratives.

The post-Cold War world order was based on world trade and resulted in a web of strategic interdependencies. Today’s fragmentation of an interdependent world, and the return of the competition of industrial powers, but one reinterpreted by modern technology, requires an extraordinary degree of adaptability, and agility on behalf of states, communities, and individuals. While there is no indication of when and in

what form a new system of relations will stabilise, what is certain is that there is no recourse to the past world order. The distribution of power, the norms and economic patterns to emerge will be different than what the world has known.

The great power struggle for world order redefines opportunities, priorities, and the global use of space for everyone. Historically, lesser states have seldom been in the position to conjure up and successfully promote visions of a new world order. Yet in times of instability, all influences are magnified, especially in an interconnected and interdependent world. By understanding the great power mindset, the true costs and benefits of actions may be assessed, to hopefully enable responsible statecraft.

Connectivity also empowers the individual, to the extent where the notion of power itself needs adjustment. From activism through hacktivism to terrorism, individuals have become non-state actors with the capability to effectively shape or disrupt events and perceptions both locally and globally. Understanding the phenomenon of the digital partisan is indispensable in the age of info-communications technology.

This volume of studies analyses the American and Russian perspectives on power and world order, the global economic processes of the changing world order and the potential role and specific activities of individuals in today’s information society. The Geopolitical Research Group examines the intentions and strategies of great powers from these four perspectives and uses them to outline the changes and trends that result from the new realities they create.

*Dear Readers!* We trust that our analyses and forecasts will help to provide the necessary insight to help avoid the pitfalls of this difficult period, and to find the opportunities that emerge.

Budapest, 2 December 2022

*The authors*

John von Neumann University,  
Eurasia Center  
Geopolitical Research Group

## FOREWORD TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

The Hungarian edition of our volume of studies “2022 – A World Ruled by Geopolitics: Facts, Doubts and Trends in an Uncertain World” was published in the first half of 2023. The original manuscript was completed in December 2022, and since then numerous geopolitical events have occurred that are only partially or not at all included in this new English edition. The reason being that events have accelerated, and even daily media reports cannot keep up with the pace of history. Rather than seeking to chronicle events, the purpose of our book was, and remains, to present the geopolitical currents that underlie daily events and their narratives. With hindsight, daily political events by and large confirm the theoretical reasoning presented in our volume and the conclusions drawn from practical examples.

Its studies written by four Hungarian geopolitical researchers, the book does not represent the viewpoint of any one of the great powers, but carries the vantage point of states caught in between. Seeking to understand the principles and processes that drive the transition of the world order and shape the contours of a new one, it is dedicated to states and geopolitical actors who, like Hungary, do not set the global geopolitical agenda but wish to navigate the seas of change with insight.

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict in itself and, more broadly, the embeddedness of the problem in the process of transformation of the political and economic world order, underpin the findings of our studies. 24 February 2022 marked the beginning of a new world in the sense that the changes irreversibly altered the status quo in various parts of the world. It is indisputable that Europe is suffering its most violent conflict since World War II, with the greatest suffering and loss of life, in an apparent conflict that should never have happened, on the basis of Huntington’s general theory of brotherly nations, for example. The primary aim of the research questions is to understand the reasons for the internecine war in Hungary’s neighbourhood.

The scenarios outlined in the last third of the volume were established by our research team at the end of 2022, and some minor adjustments were made to the manuscripts in early 2023. Our conclusions made then are still valid, even in light of the events that have occurred in the past (almost) 12 months. In addition, a new global economic scenario, entitled “A New Era of Geo-Economic Warfare – The Contours of an Emerging Multipolar Global Economy”, was prepared for the English-language volume in October 2023.

In many parts of the world, the geopolitical situation, thought to be controllable, has been shaken. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict is not over; it could not be over because no progress has been made on any of the main issues that have triggered Russian military action. However, our predictions proved correct in that in 2023, in the background, the major powers have already started “messaging” each other on the peace terms for ending the war. In fact, lower-level talks have been reported in several media outlets, although they are still only “unofficial” expert and secret service talks.

This collapse of the “geopolitical house of cards” is also inextricably linked to the conflicts that have flared up in the Balkans, the Trans-Caucasus region and the Middle East in 2023. In the Balkans, tensions between Serbia and Kosovo have not have been eased by October 2023, and the concentration of Serbian forces on the Kosovo border threatens to trigger an armed conflict. In the Trans-Caucasus region, the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh has led to clashes, and from 1 January 2024, Nagorno-Karabakh will be part of Azerbaijan. At the time the Geopolitical Research Group is writing this foreword, Israel has begun its ground operations in the Gaza Strip in response to the Hamas terrorist attack on Israeli territory on 7 October 2023. The depth of the problem is illustrated by the fact that some senators in the US are even calling for a joint US-Israeli attack on Iran. This, combined with the expected reactions, of the Arab states and the two other major powers that have gained influence in the region in recent decades, Russia and China, could elevate what appears to be a regional conflict to the level of a global crisis.

In addition, the tensions over Taiwan and the South China Sea, the ongoing hostilities between South Korea and North Korea, the coups in North Africa and the Sahel region in the summer and autumn of 2023 are still dormant crises.

At a time when cornerstones of a world order once believed to be solid and eternal dissolve and new ones emerge, it is the underlying principles of power and fundamental interests that can help interpret events. The Geopolitical Research Group aims to show these underlying correlations and interests. The re-interpretation of the international system is inconclusive at the time of writing. If one or the other chapter inspires informed debate, one of our intentions will have been achieved... We wish you further reflection and pleasant reading.

Budapest, October 2023

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John von Neumann University,  
Eurasia Center  
Geopolitical Research Group

## INTRODUCTION: KEY OBJECTIVES AND MAIN CONCLUSIONS OF THE VOLUME

*Gábor Andrékó – Ágnes Bernek – Anita Faust – László Simon*

24 February 2022 is undoubtedly one of the most important dates of the 21st century and will remain so for the foreseeable future. Although international analysts have already called the date of 18 March 2014 – when the Russian Parliament formally ratified the annexation of Crimea to Russia – one of the turning points of the century, even rational and peace-oriented experts did not think that the conflict, which had been frozen for eight years, would end with Russia launching a military attack against Ukraine. Although the military offensive is labelled differently in the West (war) and in Russia (special military operation), 24 February clearly marks the beginning of a new era for the world economy and politics.

*The global economic system of this geopolitically dominated era is undergoing fundamental transformation, a dramatic and profound structural change not seen since the 1990s. The chapter “World Economic Overview in the Shadow of War” by Ágnes Bernek seeks to answer the question of what the main doubts and expected trends of a wholly uncertain world economy in 2022 are.* The start of a new era in the global economy began on 12 March 2022, when Russia’s seven largest banks (and later the entire Russian banking system) was disconnected from SWIFT, the world’s largest global payment system. Clearly, the largest country in the world by area had been cut off from the global economy. In the wake of unprecedented Western economic sanctions on Russia, Western policymakers and academic experts predicted a complete collapse of the Russian economy. The West effectively set an expectation for countries outside the Anglo-Saxon world to also impose full economic sanctions on Russia themselves. The predictions of Western policymakers and experts were not confirmed, the Russian economy did not collapse and most of the non-NATO/EU countries (except for the key US allies in developed Asia-Pacific: Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand) did not participate in the economic sanctions imposed by the West. This is in part due to the structural transformation of the world economy – mainly on account of the clear economic rise of China – that has been underway since the beginning of the 21st century.

After the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019/2020, the global economy partially recovered in 2021, with total world GDP growing by 6.0% in 2021 (5.2% for developed countries and 6.6% for emerging and developing countries), according to the IMF’s World Economic Outlook Update 2022, published in October 2022. At the same time, energy and food prices started to increase significantly from 2020, with the latter rising by 33% since 2020. In the wake of the Russia/Ukraine war, the global economy entered a general recession in 2022, and the IMF estimates that global GDP will grow by only 3.2% in 2022, and by only 2.7% in 2023. This is accompanied by a massive increase in energy prices, with oil prices rising by 20% and natural gas by 182% between January and September 2022.

The fact that the decline in GDP growth is expected to be much larger in developed countries than in the rest of the world is a sign of the revaluation of the situation in developed and emerging markets. This will lead to a dramatic economic slowdown, especially in the world’s largest developed countries: the IMF estimates that GDP growth in the US is expected to be only 1.0% in 2023 (compared to 5.7% in 2021), and only 0.5% in the euro area. Within the group of developed and emerging countries, the IMF anticipates the greatest economic growth in 2023 in East and South Asia, with GDP growth of 4.9%.

This data also confirms the trend in the spatial structure of the world economy, namely, that the centre of gravity of production and growth is increasingly shifting towards East, South-East and South Asia and the wider Pacific. It is likely that a new international Asian economic system will emerge alongside the Anglo-Saxon global world market system, which, because of differences of interest with the Anglo-Saxon global world economic system, will be more limited to its own megaregion and, in particular, to the corporate value chains within it, and the associated financial system organised according to the cultural/social characteristics of Asian countries. This is fully in line with the theoretical conclusion that emerging markets do not yet organise their economic/political spheres of interest at the global level, but “only” at mega-regional and macro-regional levels. A prominent element of this “imperial thinking” in the geopolitical sense is the presence of a regional great power, or in the terms of regional science, a regional pole, which already has an economically and politically dominant power in its own immediate metropolitan environment. Another fundamental question is the extent to which the economic sphere of interest of emerging markets in a given geographical area also implies political power, namely the extent to which the geopolitical and geoeconomic strategies of regional powers are directly linked.

It is an indisputable fact that the global economic system will effectively become multipolar when the international financial system itself becomes multipolar. Although international trade and capital flows are organised as much at the regional level as at the global level, currently it is the international financial markets that are most closely linked to the global world market. Today, the USD-based international money market is still exclusive, even though the role of the USD in international payments is declining and the role of the yuan in international reserves is gradually increasing. Even though cooperation between Russia and China to develop alternatives to the SWIFT system is growing and said systems are already operational in various countries, these do not have an international role as yet. At present, a realistic alternative seems to be the emergence of a new Asian financial system (most likely) based on the CNY (Chinese yuan, renminbi) alongside the USD/EUR Anglo-Saxon financial system, but this is still highly dependent on China's role in the Asian region. There is also the question of how the strong economic powers in the East Asian region, which are considered allies of the US, will relate to China and the new Asian financial system that is taking shape. As confidence is one of the most important foundations of the international financial market, it is very difficult to predict the extent to which the international financial world will trust this new Asian financial system.

In the wake of the current Russia/Ukraine war, the Atlantic alliance, military cooperation within NATO and, in particular, economic relations between the US and the USMCA (*USA-Mexico-Canada*) regional integration – which came into force at the beginning of July 2020 and is a successor to NAFTA – and the EU, which almost reached rock bottom under Donald Trump's presidency, have regained strength. Since the emerging markets did not participate in the economic sanctions against Russia, Western sanctions aimed at isolating Russia from the world economy have resulted/may result in the creation of a new “economic iron curtain” not only between the West and Russia, but also between the West and the non-Western world – in international diplomatic terms, the Global South.

*Anita Faust's paper “Power and Legitimacy in the American World Order” offers an interpretative framework for the dynamic, even turbulent developments in the world economy and world politics. Its focus is on the nature and legitimacy aspects of the power deemed necessary for shaping world order from an American strategic perspective. It is in knowing the practical factors of the US superpower status that the actual distribution of power in the world, which is the basis of the world order, can be meaningfully examined.*

World order assessed as US-led by the United States encompassed the period between the declaration of the end of the Cold War in 1990 and the call for the es-

tablishment of a new US-led world order in 2021. According to the 16 US national security strategies published during this period, the primary question is not what the world order should be, but who should shape it, and who benefits from it. Hence, one of the main goals of the US strategy: to ensure that the US remains the actor that can initiate processes shaping the world order, set its norms and judge whether these norms are being appropriately met. The other main goal is to ensure that the world order is organised to increase US global superiority: to favour US specificities, to consolidate US systemic insight into world processes and to expand the order that the US can enforce.

The US power required for this can be understood as the capacity to act, and stems from the combination of specific positions and processes. At its foundation lies a system of interlocking power factors, namely economic, military, intelligence, technological and diplomatic superiority. Their territorial distribution is appropriate if the US is dominant in each fundamental constituent of power both globally and in all strategically defined regions. Capacity to act requires an absence of strategic dependencies – such as energy dependency, military, industrial and food vulnerabilities – but power over the strategic dependencies of others provides enforceable dominance. The geographical access needed for the global capacity to act is provided by the domination of the global commons. No one can presumably build up sufficient power to shape the world order on their own, but with the availability of power multipliers, i.e. partners offering additional strategic opportunities of systemic relevance, the necessary superiority can be developed. According to US strategies, a power multiplier can be an international organisation, a partner country with a special role, a transnational corporation, or a transnational NGO.

Operation Desert Storm consolidated the special powers of the US instantaneously and holistically. Both the US and the world were able to witness how the world largely accepted the redefined global leadership role of the former. The operation allowed the US military to establish its presence in the Persian (Arab) Gulf region, granting it a prominent role in securing the oil supply of the world and the – then still import-dependent – US. Broadcasting the war against Iraq live, from the US perspective, CNN news channel became a global reference overnight. The rapid success of the war spoke for itself. The power potential of the US was translated into a position of actual power.

The US used its position of power to transform the processes underlying the world order. The former competition between industrial powers was replaced by free trade, entailing the outsourcing of US industry abroad, especially to China. The American

example rapidly gained traction, and the world became interdependent at a staggering pace.

Changes to the world order undermined the US' own position. Domestically, the middle class, formerly employed in well-paid manufacturing jobs, was weakened, the indebtedness of society increased, and inequality grew. Even before the financial crisis of 2008, American society was in a negative spiral, with a persistent and growing loss of social cohesion. It is difficult to tell the extent to which the US itself was able to keep sufficient insight into the web of dependencies weaved by its power multipliers, given that, by 2017, it had fallen into strategic industrial dependency due to the outsourcing of US industry. This broke the system of US complex power that had been organised into positive feedback loops for sustainability. Ultimately, outsourcing strengthened the Chinese economy, and the surplus revenues were partly used by the rising Eastern power to arm itself in ways that were not transparent to the US.

For the US, which has a deep understanding of strategic interdependencies, energy security has always been a priority. Initially, it relied on securing its main source of imports using the military, a stratagem that soon gave way to the diversification of its supplies. However, when Nord Stream AG was created in 2005, the US was faced with the prospect that its adversary – a serious one on account of its nuclear arsenal – could be building up strategic energy dominance that the US was unable to control. The US adopted a strategy of energy self-sufficiency, then energy dominance under the Trump administration. This creates a context for understanding the importance of the sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines in September 2022, and of the rise of new patterns of strategic energy dependencies in its wake.

In 2021, the realisation was born that if the US does not want to relinquish its leadership position and allow itself to be shaped by others, it has to renounce the world order it had led and build a new one. *Complementing the insight into the US notion of power, and its diffusion to China and Russia leading the multipolarist powers on the one hand and transnational corporations on the other, as indicated in US national security strategies, the chapter titled "Proposals for a New World Order and the Competition for Building It" describes the contest to establish a new world order, and its ramifications.* The paper seeks to present the drivers and the logic of this process based on the visions and strategies published by the contestants in the years 2021 and 2022, respectively.

2021 was the year when the new world order proposals were presented. The US outlined a unipolar world order, the BRICS a multipolar one while the Klaus Schwab and Thierry Malleret of the World Economic Forum, representing transnational corporate interests, presented a post-polar vision. The visions for a new world order

being irreconcilable regarding the structure and processes of global governance – i.e., who should have the power to lead, how decisions should be made and enforced, whose power position the order should privilege and reinforce – the open struggle between the powers began.

The chapter examines two strategies published in 2022: one issued by the group of multipolarist countries, the other by the US. The transnational corporations did not publish a strategy. It is against their interests to be seen to participate in the contest for the new order, as undermining their legitimacy, should they prevail and be able to found the new world order. They do, nevertheless, have deep seated interests in how the contest unfolds between the unipolarists (the US and its like-minded strategic partners), and the multipolarists (the BRICS, and SCO countries, and their supporters). Not only the outcome of the contest between the traditional great powers is key to their vision, but also the very events of the process and how they are perceived. For an untraditional – post polar – world order led by transnational corporations to emerge, a global disillusionment with traditional power is an important condition.

Among the traditional powers, the multipolarists published their strategy first. This is the Samarkand Declaration of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, issued at its September 2022 summit. The document is a demonstration of the regional functioning of a multipolar order, – and it sets out the criteria for a more just world order: inclusive processes, equal standards, the universal right to development and that the transparency of international organisations to restore trust needed for stability. The declaration calls for, and demonstrates the use of, these criteria. It provides a strategy and a model of the acceptance of cultural diversity as much as local conflict resolution based on the reconciliation of interests, involving neighbours. While SCO has made a point of expanding its membership in a very deliberate manner, the number of candidates for membership in the organisation has soared. Prospective members even include some strategic partners of strategic of the US.

The National Security Strategy of the United States, released in October 2022, lays out how the US should engage in the competition to renew its global leadership role. In direct competition with its multipolarist rivals, it promises inclusiveness to those who support it in the contest against Russia and China. It would also fundamentally alter the economic world order by restoring its industrial might. Competition among great powers would be industrial and technological, while dependencies would be rearranged to cement US superiority. To this end, not only would US companies relocate their manufacturing capacities (which would otherwise become intolerably precarious and vulnerable in wartime conditions) back to the US, but the US would

also move its strategic suppliers to its own territory or to its immediate neighbourhood. Re-industrialisation is expected to bring about a renewal of American society. The competitiveness of the US would be boosted by increased brain drain and the large scale inflow of cheap labour through mass immigration.

There are multiple scenarios for the evolution of the world order. The time various players need to implement their strategies, and the sequence in which tendencies culminate will be pivotal. The combination of the interests of the unipolarists, multipolarists and of privately owned transnational is highly likely to drive the geographical spread of conflict as well as their escalation. Much depends on lesser states, if they can make informed choices and set aside their internal divisions so they are not pulled into armed conflict. If they succeed, they may contribute with their principled behaviour to the formation of a new world order that is built onto dialogue, dignity, responsibility and foresight.

Economic changes in the world fundamentally affect the political balance of power, and thus geopolitical relations as a whole are constantly evolving. The analyses in this volume examine how geopolitical correlations affect the regional world order in 2022. Will the hitherto rather stable unipolar “Pax Americana” shift from its Anglo-Saxon equilibrium position, maintained and supervised primarily by the US? Or will the successful management of the international economic, financial and political crises, which intensified by 2022, maintain the – economic and global policy – dominance of the US-led Western world virtually unchanged?

In the turbulent changes of an era dominated by geopolitics, we are witnessing not only a transformation of the global economic system, but also equally far-reaching changes in the political architecture of the international system. *The chapter “Russia’s Great Power Status and its Perception of World Order (2008–2022)” by Gábor Andrékó seeks to answer the question of whether the Russian-Ukrainian kinetic military power projection in 2022 is really ‘merely’ a violent outbreak of conflict between the two countries, or ‘only’ a proxy war between the Russian Federation and NATO/USA. Or is it the dawn of the transformation of the international world order, in which the antagonisms have culminated in the use of military force, and therefore the Russian-Ukrainian kinetic military power projection is in fact a front in the war of the struggle for the New World Order?*

The chapter analysing Russia’s development and aspirations is also closely related to the topic of the doctoral research on “The theory and practice of the buffer state and the bridge state in Ukraine”. The analysis examines the situation of buffer zones on the semi-peripheries of the borders of the spheres of influence of the great powers, including the laws on the formation of buffer states and bridge states, and the

possibilities and conditions of interoperability between the roles. In studying the research topic, it is inevitable that the interests and advocacy actions of the great powers and international organisations that determine the cohesion of the Central and Eastern European region, including Ukraine, are subjected to a deeper analysis, at which point the subject of the doctoral research – the Central and Eastern European region as a buffer zone under study – and the research area of the Geopolitical Research Group of the Eurasia Center – an arena of regional world order – become intertwined. Geographically, the major power closest to the Central and Eastern European region is the Russian Federation, which became a significant player in the first decades of the 2000s. As its military and economic power grows, it increasingly engages in open confrontation in the post-Soviet unipolar world order, and any success in asserting Russian goals and interests by force could be a litmus test for geopolitical change.

The paper “*Russia’s Great Power Status and its Perception of World Order (2008–2022)*” seeks to show that the global change in world order is more than likely not a quick event, but a process that will take a longer period of time. Virtual networks, one of the results of globalisation, alongside real economic, commercial and financial links, are increasingly challenging emerging power groups interested in changing the unipolar world order. The economic and military strength of BRICS, or the economically strengthening member states of the SCO, especially China, Brazil, India and Russia, individually and collectively, still falls short of the comparable parameters of the US. At the same time, the dramatic increase in conflicts of interest that are already becoming apparent in some regions shows that the regional division of power can be challenged. This is what happened in Syria in 2015 (and is still partly underway in early 2022), where Russian kinetic military power and Russian economic interest emerged in the face of US and NATO action. A similar threat to the balance of power in the Far East is China’s decisive economic and military build-up, which already lead to a series of conflicts between Chinese and US naval forces in the South China Sea and Taiwan in the 2020s. The large amount of energy resources lying under the ice fields of the Arctic Ocean, whose ownership is already being discussed in today’s political debates, is a major source of conflict of interest in the new era. The Russia-Ukraine war that has been fought since 24 February 2022 certainly goes beyond an acrimonious dispute between two neighbouring states, and rather suggests a proxy war between the US (and NATO) and Russia, leading to a power realignment in Central and Eastern Europe, i.e. the creation and consolidation of zones dominated and led by each of the great powers. At the end of the process (regardless of how the open war develops), there will be no non-aligned states

in the region, but a pure balance of power. The trend towards such a pure balance of power can be predicted in other regions, especially in semi-peripheral regions where the emergence of new centres of economic strength is observed. Thus, especially in the South American region, with Brazil at the centre, in the Middle East with Saudi Arabia expected to play a leading role, in South Asia with India at the centre and in the Far East (and partly in South and Central Asia) with China at the centre, while in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia with Russia, there is a perceptible resistance to the unipolar world order. Instead of the current hegemonic role of the US, a fragmented world is now outlined, or in other words a system of regions/megaregions. Each regional power bloc is dominated by a power with a different culture and state apparatus, the economic, political and military weight of regional blocs is constantly increasing and globalisation is creating an inevitable interdependence between them. In this paper, this system is understood as regional world order. In this regional world order, Russia’s attempt to establish regional leadership is only one of the regional blocs, but the laws and mechanisms specific to the bloc can be generalised to the functioning of any newly emerging regional bloc.

Russia is the leading power and the centre of a bloc that includes Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia and which has been taking shape in recent decades. The chapter on the theoretical background and the practical development of the Russian world order concept tries to illustrate the emergence of the new regional power bloc and Russia’s aspiration to become the leading power in the region, for which it has a chance as a great power, through three main indicators.

The first indicator is an examination of the main features of Russian foreign policy as a result of changes in the post-Soviet period. The individual attributes are sometimes clear, sometimes intermingled, during the period of assertion of Russian influence, but can be seen in the use of all of the main soft or hard power tools. The characteristics have developed and built on each other according to the strength of current Russian politics and in line with geopolitical changes. The most fundamental feature is the “near abroad”, considered as a legitimate zone of Russian political influence, where any political and economic change, even today, motivated independently of Russia, can trigger immediate reactions.

The second indicator is the emphasis on the primacy of international law, which is also identified as a key feature of Russian foreign policy. At the same time, the consistent advocacy of international law goes beyond Russian “self-interest”, because all of the power centres interested in replacing the unipolar world order prioritise the primacy of international law over the primacy of the US legal order, dictated

and supervised by the United States. The question gains particular importance in international relations because it is the reference to international law and its often divergent interpretation that provides the justification for the replacement of the existing order of power.

The third indicator monitors how the image of the new world order envisioned and promoted by Moscow is reflected in Russian official documents and modern Russian geopolitical studies. The official strategic orientations of geopolitical thinking are defined by the triad of foreign policy concepts, military doctrines and national security strategies. During the post-Soviet period, at least four periods of these triple units can be identified. The first period can be seen as the beginning of the “Putin course”, which includes the foreign policy concept of 1993 and the updated 2000 concept, the military doctrine of 1993 and the national security strategy of 1997. The 1st phase of the period marked by Putin’s name includes the 2008 foreign policy concept, the 2010 military doctrine and the 2009 national security strategy, which did not yet represent a change of era compared to the key statements of the 2000 foreign policy concept, but sought to highlight the change in the person of the president. This was the aim of the 2013 foreign policy concept, when President Dmitry Medvedev was replaced by Vladimir Putin. The second phase was complemented by a military doctrine published in 2014 and a national security strategy published in 2015. The specificity of this phase was that the new strategy – the foreign policy concept was updated in 2016 – was born in a qualitatively new situation for Moscow, as it was preceded by successful Russian military engagement in Syria. Thanks to effective kinetic military power projection, Russia returned to the Arabian Peninsula, and thus Moscow believed it had begun the practical restoration of its status as a great power. The latest phase is expected to start in 2023, as the official forecast is for the new foreign policy concept to be published in 2023.

The stages of the process towards the emergence of the Russian regional power system can be traced in the key concepts of official documents. The 2009 National Security Strategy was published after the successful Russian kinetic military power projection against Georgia, and the term “qualitatively new geopolitical situation” was formulated for the first time. The 2013 foreign policy concept had already drawn attention to the emergence of a new world order, while the current 2016 concept – after the successful involvement in Syria, as mentioned above – now explicitly focused on the emergence of a multipolar world order. According to the concept, the new multipolar regional world order should be run under the “collective leadership of authoritative states”, relying on the G20, BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Both in official documents and in Russian geopolitical thinking, an important role

is given to the development of the economic, financial and political network of the Primakov strategic triangle and its interconnection with international organisations (e.g. G20, BRICS, SCO) that strategically support the new governance and are not under the exclusive control of the US. Once this network is in place, the unipolar world order will also be abolished as a result, regardless of the stage of development of other regional power structures.

*L szl  Simon's paper "The Impact of an Individual Threat on the Multipolar Power Structure – Definition of the Digital Partisan" deals with the following topics, seeking answers to the following questions.* After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the hostile, mutually destructive concept of the previously divisive hypothetical and political ideology seemed to disappear at state level in the changing power structure. The expression of the victorious power dominance of the US, the economic model of globalisation that ensured growth, the information and shared knowledge provided by the expanding logical and physical segments through the information links of the Internet not only provided a model of a prosperous society to follow, but also the peaceful development of the world. At least for those who joined modern Western democracies. The US and its allies may have appeared to the world as invincible, the most formidable representatives of the state's privilege of force and violence. The hierarchical system of power, driven by modern Western democracies, seemed to be the only dominant one. According to the world power concept of the time, with the defeat of the Soviet Union, the Euro-Atlantic area became able to influence all other local and regional powers. At the same time, we observed the activities of global economic enterprises, large multinational corporations, international banks and even transnational NGOs, non-state actors, which, although indirectly, influenced the policies at the centre. In the more than two decades since the terrorist attacks on the United States of America on 11 September 2001, this community has faced immense violence that has highlighted the unique power of the individual. Through a unique hybrid form of transmission and sharing of information and other resources, organised and published through the network connections provided by cyberspace, a cognitive and physical spiral of terror has emerged, with direct and indirect control of terrorist organisations. While the world's leading powers have spent billions of dollars, euros, roubles and yuan on weapons in Eurasia, Afghanistan and countless other hot spots around the world, in Germany, a lone terrorist killed twelve people in a hijacked truck at a Christmas market in Berlin on 19 December 2016, with a minimal "investment" that cannot be expressed in monetary terms. No less aggressive and tragic in its impact was the global attack in 2017 by the "WannaCry" or "Petya" ransomware virus, which temporarily or permanently disabled companies, business-

es and government agencies. Although this is not considered an act of terrorism in modern legal terms, it had the potential to alter the functioning of states and made citizens vulnerable. We could go on listing hackers or hacker groups who, through their direct cyber attacks, have caused serious damage not only to individual users, but also to countries (the 2007 Russian hacker attack against Estonia) and global companies and brands (the 2014 North Korean hacker attack against Sony Pictures), influencing the security of a given state or economy, and indirectly affecting its internal power structures. To date, the perpetrators have not been clearly identified or punished.

To this day, the protracted Russian-Ukrainian conflict between 2014 and 2022 has posed a number of traditional and new hybrid threats to the world, the European region and Hungary. In the era of the information society and globalisation, both the direct effects of armed violence and the indirect effects of infocommunications have, separately but also in combination, increased frustration among individuals. The solutions to successive crises have, in more than one case, led to new tensions. Maintaining security, creating well-being, restoring and preserving the balance of life has become a fundamental issue for individuals, communities and societies.

Threats not only negatively affect the way we think about power, but also reduce our sense of security, forcing individuals and their communities and societies to respond actively, both verbally and physically. Physical violence, combined with the social and legal sanctions that it is subjected to, whether economically or even socially extreme, can change the individual and, through them, the community and its power relations. We now also know that the main objective of unpredictable and unimaginable destruction is achieved through the main enemies of our time and power: the media and cyberspace. The aggressive effect of the information weapon can be reduced or eliminated by cooperation and communication, i.e. the credible and well-timed sharing of information. As crises escalate, including during the Russian-Ukrainian war, the development of security tools, the use of defence software and smart applications is expanding. The quality of the information provided in military and non-military domains is a key factor in achieving victory, in imposing political will on the opposing side. The cognitive segment of the information environment is at the heart of the application of power, including cybersecurity. For networked parties, the role of infocommunication systems and infrastructures, their vulnerability or even their increased kinetic military protection, is appreciating. In order to understand, map and, not least, detect the individual players (actors) or their relationships, information and actions in a multipolar space of power, decision-makers are increasingly turning to the results of natural and technical sciences.

On the current borderlines of globalisation and modernisation (in cyberspace, the areas of the spread of artificial intelligence, the conquest of space around the Earth, or the use and sharing of international and fresh water, the use of nanotechnology or genetic interventions, etc.), and in the case of current crises or those that unfold later, in times of protracted state responses or apparent political and diplomatic inertia, the individual rightly takes over from the state the management of problems that threaten their security. In a self-generating spiral of violence, they actively participate, even independently, in their own defence or that of their community. In cyberspace, they can organise their activities by connecting to vital infocommunication networks, and by joining military actions, they can create a digital partisan struggle that knows no geographical boundaries.



# WORLD ECONOMIC OVERVIEW IN THE SHADOW OF WAR

*Ágnes Bernek*

“When I spoke at the Davos Forum a year and a half ago, I also stressed that the era of a unipolar world order has come to an end. I want to start with this, as there is no way around it. This era has ended despite all the attempts to maintain and preserve it at all costs. Change is a natural process of history, as it is difficult to reconcile the diversity of civilisations and the richness of cultures on the planet with political, economic or other stereotypes. [...] Changes in the global economy, finances and international relations are unfolding at an ever-growing pace and scale. There is an increasingly pronounced trend in favour of a multipolar growth model in lieu of globalisation. Of course, building and shaping a new world order is no easy task. We will have to confront many challenges, risks and factors that we can hardly predict or anticipate today.”<sup>1</sup>

## 1. 24 February 2022 – The start of a new era in world politics and the global economy

The Russia-Ukraine war/special military operation entered its 17th month in July 2023. The sober-minded experts and citizens of the world had every confidence that the war would end relatively quickly, that peace could be reached in the spring of 2022 and that the world economy/politics could return to their pre-war “normal operating order”. Unfortunately, the war has gone on for far too long, the confrontation between Ukraine/the West and Russia is becoming increasingly acute, there is mounting evidence of brutal atrocities against both soldiers and civilians on both sides, and the picture of Ukrainian cities and towns being destroyed and the number of Ukrainian war refugees, estimated at more than 15 million, all suggest a totally hopeless future, with no prospect of peace being even theoretically possible. In other

<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from a speech delivered by Vladimir Putin on 17 June 2022 at the 25th St Petersburg International Economic Forum. <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68669>

words, our world has entered an era of total uncertainty, and this total uncertainty means a total recession for the world economy, rising energy and food prices, rising inflation and the rejection of previous world economic forecasts.

The war resurrected and maximised the centuries-old antagonism that had always existed between the Anglo-Saxon world and Russia. Thus, the gap between the two different great power narratives has significantly grown, and ultimately, *on 24 February 2022, the world finally crossed the “red line”, the point of no return, i.e. the political and economic order of our world has fundamentally changed. The global status quo has been lost forever*, and huge “fault lines” have emerged in the functioning of the hitherto Western-dominated world order, based on international institutions established mainly after the end of World War II. States’ trust in each other has weakened, resulting in a precarious “world chaos”, which in global economic terms is clearly leading to a multi-year recession. The Anglo-Saxon dominated, unipolar world economy, thus far organised at the global level, will in the near future be transformed into a multipolar world economy organised at the level of megaregions. But it will be a very long process, spanning several decades. In the short term (the next 10 years), the Anglo-Saxon global world economic system and the various international economic systems organised at the level of megaregions will coexist. When will the emerging multipolar world economy force the creation of a new multipolar world political order? This question cannot be answered by experts as yet. However, it is almost certain that in the short term, we will be living in an extremely unstable and risky transitional world order.

*Although there is no hope for peace in the summer of 2023, I believe that by 2024, this standstill war will be over* and all parties to the war will have an invested interest in peace. But not because the interests of the two sides have converged, but mainly because the Anglo-Saxon world will no longer be willing (or able) to finance Ukraine’s war against Russia, either in terms of military or through financial aid/loans. In fact, it will be in the West’s interest to make peace because a prolonged war will lead to instability throughout the world and economic recession, especially in the developed countries, and further war would cause economic damage in the developed countries to the extent that it would lead to a social and political crisis. At the same time, Russia will have an interest in peace because Russia cannot win or lose this war, and would probably not be able to finance a war that might last for several years. In the language of chess, this zero-sum game (one side’s victory means the other side’s total defeat) results in a stalemate, which means a draw. But as neither side can leave this game without “losing face”, it is expected that very lengthy preparatory diplomatic negotiations on the terms on which the parties would accept a peace deal will begin

in the second half of 2023. The big question is what concessions the Russian and Ukrainian sides will make to the other side. In my opinion, it is likely that Ukraine will have to make territorial concessions to Russia. At the same time, the Russian side will also have to promise concessions or at least agree to international control over the newly annexed territories. In summary, I foresee a “bad peace” that will be made with concessions from both sides, but with no convergence of interests, it will be a sham “diplomatic” peace, with the potential for further ongoing conflict. The fundamental question of the current global economy is whether the West’s sanctions against Russia will succeed. There are two different answers to this question, according to the two great power narratives:

- the West, the Anglo-Saxon world, believes that the sanctions against Russia will be successful, that Russia’s economy will be significantly weakened, and the Anglo-Saxon global world economic and political system will be strengthened again after the peace treaty ending the war;
- the Russian world, and to some extent the world outside the West, believes that the sanctions against Russia are not having the expected effect, that although the Russian economy is weakening, it will survive the economic sanctions, and that in the near future Russia will turn away from the West altogether and, together with the leading countries of Asia and the Middle East, will create a new international economic system alongside the Anglo-Saxon world economic system, which will thus gradually be pushed back into the Atlantic arena. A multipolar world is beginning to emerge at a spectacular and accelerating pace.

Even beyond the horrors of war, divergent opinions and different narratives of the world economy make economic processes unpredictable, whereas the most important precondition for a renewed global economic cycle would be political stability and predictability for the near future.

In this transforming, completely uncertain and unpredictable world, *this paper aims to provide a snapshot of the world economy, to present some of the key factors of its transformation*, and to answer the most important question: how the world economy will be transformed and structurally changed in the near future. The paper first analyses the main features of the global economic recession of 2022–2023 and its consequences, and then attempts to show how the war situation has changed economic relations between Europe and Asia. It goes on to explore Russia’s geostrategies ‘beyond the West’, and finally attempts to outline the likely trends and growing uncertainties of the multipolar world economy that is currently taking shape.

## 2. Global economic recession and structural transformation

In the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war, the world’s hopes that the global economic recovery that started in 2021 after the COVID pandemic of 2019/2020 would be sustainable have been dashed. As shown in the following table (Table 1) from the IMF’s World Economic Outlook Update from October 2022, we can establish that total world GDP grew by 6.0% in 2021, while this value was 5.2% for developed countries and 6.6% for emerging and developing countries. According to this IMF publication, the global economy entered a general recession in 2022, and the IMF estimates that global GDP will grow by only 3.2% in 2022, and by only 2.7% in 2023.

The different economic situations of developed and emerging markets are reflected in the fact that while GDP growth in developed countries is expected to reach 2.4% by 2022, emerging and developing markets are expected to grow by 3.7%. However, the IMF expects a dramatic economic recession in developed markets in 2023, with GDP growth in the US expected to be only 1.0% in 2023 (compared to 5.7% in 2021), GDP in Germany expected to fall by 0.3% (!) and the UK’s GDP growth is expected to be only 0.3% in 2023.

As the table shows, the global economic recession will have less impact in emerging and developing countries. According to this IMF projection, China, India, and the ASEAN countries will have the highest GDP growth rates in 2023, at around 4.5–6.0%. Although the economic impact of the war is expected to be felt in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa, the IMF estimates that the rate of economic growth in these major regions will be between 3.5% and 4% in 2023. This IMF publication, released in October 2022, expects by far the worst economic recession in Russia, with a 2.3% fall in GDP by 2023. However, the IMF’s World Economic Outlook from April 2023 has already changed its forecast for Russia’s GDP growth rate, projecting GDP growth of 0.7% in 2023 and 1.3% in 2024. Obviously, this prediction reflects the fact that the massive sanctions against Russia have not led to the decline in the Russian economy that the West had expected.

**TABLE 1: EXPECTED WORLD GDP VALUES**

Projection by the International Monetary Fund for average real GDP growth			
	2021	2022	2023
<b>World output</b>	6.0	3.2	2.7
<b>Advanced economies</b>	5.2	2.4	1.1
USA	5.7	1.6	1.0
Euro Area	5.2	3.1	0.5
Germany	2.6	1.5	-0.3
France	6.8	2.5	0.7
Italy	6.7	3.2	-0.2
Spain	5.1	4.3	1.2
Japan	1.7	1.7	1.6
United Kingdom	7.4	3.6	0.3
Canada	4.5	3.3	1.5
Other advanced economies	5.3	2.8	2.3
<b>Emerging market and developing economies</b>	6.6	3.7	3.7
<b>Emerging and developing Asia</b>	7.2	4.4	4.9
China	8.1	3.2	4.4
India	8.7	6.8	6.1
ASEAN-5	3.4	5.3	4.9
<b>Emerging and developing Europe</b>	6.8	0.0	0.6
Russia	4.7	-3.4	-2.3
<b>Latin America and the Caribbean</b>	6.9	3.5	1.7
Brazil	4.6	2.8	1.0
Mexico	4.8	2.1	1.2
<b>Middle East and Central Asia</b>	4.5	5.0	3.6
Saudi Arabia	3.2	7.6	3.7
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>	4.7	3.6	3.7
Nigeria	3.6	3.2	3.0
South Africa	4.9	2.1	1.1
<b>Emerging market and middle-income economies</b>	6.8	3.6	3.6
<b>Low-income developing countries</b>	4.1	4.8	4.9

Source: World Economic Outlook, October 2022: Countering the Cost-of-Living Crisis <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2022/10/11/world-economic-outlook-october-2022>

Table prepared by the author based on the IMF publication.

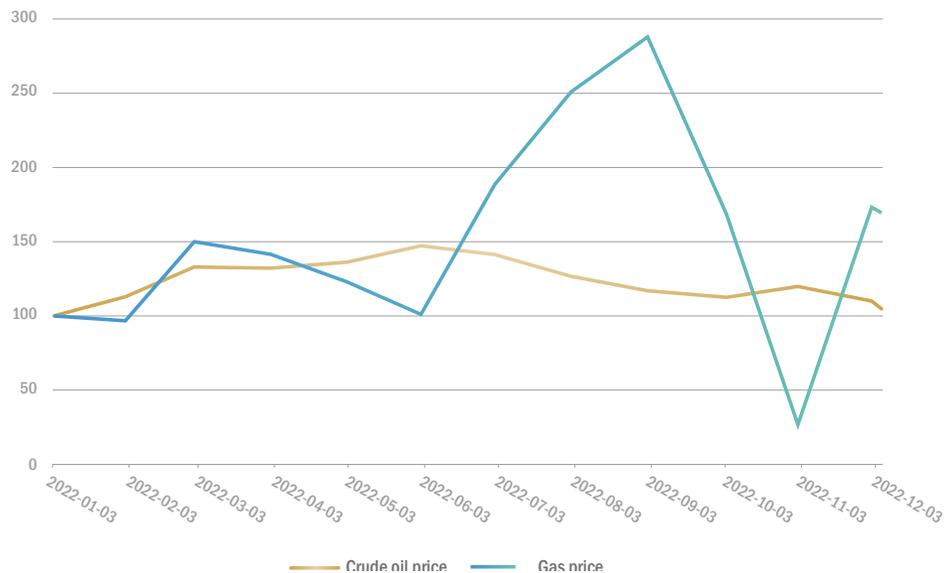
Global economic stagflation (high inflation associated with slow economic growth or economic recession) will also be less noticeable in emerging and developing markets. According to calculations by UNCTAD’s Global Crisis Response Group (<https://unctad.org/global-crisis>), the general consumer price level increased most in Europe and Central Asia. These regions being the most exposed to war due to their geographical proximity, their inflation rate increased from around 10% in February 2022 to almost 20% in October 2022. In regions geographically distant from the war, inflation rates rose only slightly, by only 2% in East Asia (and the Pacific). Indeed, the fact that the inflation rate in the Middle East region fell by 5% between May and July 2022 (!) is an indication of the restructuring of the relative position of megaregions. In particular, the sanctions imposed on Russian energy products have increased the value of Middle Eastern oil and LNG. This is also reflected in the fact that both the US and the EU are engaged in very serious diplomatic negotiations with countries in the region to secure alternative sources of energy.

The war has fundamentally reshuffled the world energy market, but it is also a fact that there is an oversupply of oil and gas in the world, which is probably the reason why, as shown in the following figure (Figure 1), the world oil price has increased by only 5% in 2022.

The world price of natural gas reflects the impact of the war in a much more hectic way, thanks to Russia’s dominance in the world market for natural gas (Russia is the world’s second largest natural gas producer after the US and was the world’s largest exporter of natural gas before the war). Although the world price of natural gas has increased by 61% since January 2022, this is essentially due to a two-month price explosion. The graph shows that from June 2022 to September 2022, the price almost tripled, but at the same time, from September 2022 to November 2022, the price of natural gas fell dramatically. However, in 2023, world gas prices have already started to stabilise as new routes for Russian gas exports to Asia begin to emerge. The EU is moving away from Russian gas, with 41% of EU gas supplies coming from Russia in 2021, compared to just 9% in autumn 2022.

The global economic recession is closely linked to changes in the structure of the world economy, especially its spatial structure. With the clear economic rise of China in particular, the centre of gravity of production and growth is increasingly shifting towards East, South-East and South Asia and the wider Pacific. The following graph (Figure 2) shows the change in the relative weight of the US, the euro area and China in the world economy from 1991 to 2027, based on IMF data and projections, and as a percentage of total world GDP at current prices. The shocking shift

**FIGURE 1: WORLD OIL AND GAS PRICE CHANGES FROM JANUARY TO DECEMBER 2022**

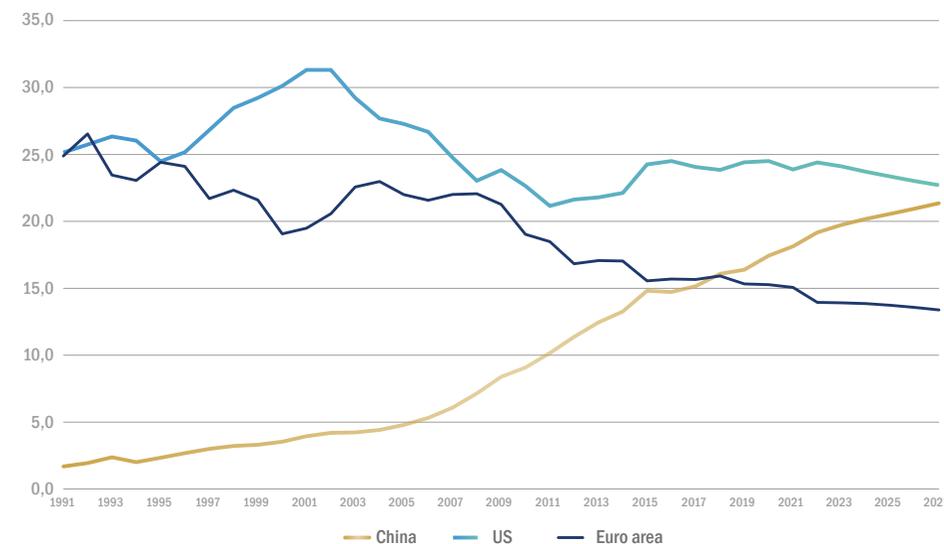


Source: Graph by the author based on data from the UNCTAD Global Crisis Response Group. <https://unctad.org/global-crisis>

shown in the graph is that while in 1991, the US accounted for 25% of the world’s GDP and China for around 2%, the IMF forecasts that by 2027 the relative share of the two major powers is expected to be similar to one another, at around 22–24%. In other words, China is the only real challenger to the hegemonic global economic leadership of the US, and thus only China will/would be able to organise a new China-centred Asian international system in the near future.

What is also striking from the graph is that the relative weight of the euro area in the world economy has declined steadily from around 25% in 1991 (when it was similar to the US) to around 13% in 2027. The fundamental question of the current great power competition is how the EU’s foreign economic relations and foreign policy will change in the near future, and whether the EU’s primary orientation will be the Atlantic or the Asian continent. Since the war will clearly strengthen relations with the US, the EU’s orientation towards Asia, especially China, will certainly weaken, and a new Eurasian power arena is not expected to emerge in the near future. The situation that has arisen in the wake of the Russian-Ukrainian war can be interpreted geopolitically as an attempt by the US/Anglo Saxon-Western power to prevent the emergence of a new Eurasian power in both economic and political terms. This is also

**FIGURE 2: PERCENTAGE SHARES OF THE US, THE EURO AREA AND CHINA OF TOTAL WORLD GDP FROM 2021 TO 2027**



Source: author’s own editing based on IMF data series and forecasts

what the famous words of Henry Kissinger in his book *Diplomacy* refer to, “Geopolitically, America is an island off the shores of the large landmass of Eurasia, whose resources and population far exceed those of the United States. The domination by a single power of either of Eurasia’s two principal spheres – Europe or Asia – remains a good definition of strategic danger for America, Cold War or no Cold War. For such a grouping would have the capacity to outstrip America economically and, in the end, militarily. That danger would have to be resisted.” (Kissinger, 2008, p. 814) The same holds true for the thoughts of Brzezinski, namely: “For America, the chief geopolitical prize is Eurasia. [...] Now a non-Eurasian power is pre-eminent in Eurasia – and America’s global primacy is directly dependent on how long and how effectively its preponderance on the Eurasian continent is sustained. Obviously, that condition is temporary.” (Brzezinski, 1999, p. 44) The growing isolation of the West and Russia is fundamentally calling into question the emergence of a new Eurasian sphere of power. Rising tensions between the US and China, particularly over Taiwan, are also calling into question China’s economic relations with the Anglo-Saxon world. As a result, the global economy is beginning to transform, and a new multipolar world economic system is taking shape. *But the crucial question is no longer whether the EU needs China, but the other way round: does China still need the European continent at all?*

In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis and China's clear economic rise, there has been a lively academic and expert debate in international literature on the extent to which the global economic recession marks the beginning of a new world economic era. The debate also touches on what to call it: deglobalisation, slow-globalisation, or the era following the unipolar hegemonic leadership of the US (Post-American World). Another major issue in academic theoretical debates is the question of what kind of multipolar world economic and political order will replace the US-led Anglo-Saxon world order. Will it be a multipolar world or a regio-polar world based on megaregions and transnational regions? And what new regional world order will this create? The main difference in these two definitions is that while the former focuses on the world's major regions (continents and their regions), the latter approaches the issue from the poles, i.e. the national economies with the largest regional induction effects (developed countries and emerging markets). But today, this debate about a new multipolar world, a new regional world order, has gone beyond the realm of academic research and has become one of the most important practical issues for all actors shaping and participating in economic, political, and social life.

In the wake of the war, the Atlantic alliance, military cooperation within NATO, and in particular economic relations between the US (and the USMCA<sup>2</sup> (USA-Mexico-Canada) regional integration) and the EU, which reached near-rock-bottom under Donald Trump's presidency, have been strengthened again. Since the emerging markets did not join the economic sanctions against Russia, Western sanctions aimed at isolating Russia from the world economy have resulted in the creation of a new "economic iron curtain" not only between the West and Russia, but also between the West and the non-Western world, in international diplomatic terms the Global South. Rising tensions between the US and China, particularly over Taiwan, are also calling into question China's economic relations with the Anglo-Saxon world. As a result, the structural transformation of the world economy has been underway, albeit slowly, since the beginning of the 21st century, and accelerating in 2022 and 2023 in the wake of the war.

### 3. The restructuring of foreign trade relations between Europe and Asia, with particular focus on changes in rail freight routes

In the wake of the 2019/2020 COVID crisis, the costs of freight transport have risen significantly, especially for maritime freight. According to a RailFreight.com survey conducted for the European Silk Road Summit of December 2021, while in June 2020 it cost USD 2,000 to transport a 40-foot container by sea from China to Europe, in July 2021 it cost USD 15,000, meaning that the cost of transporting goods by sea increased by 750% (!) over that period. According to the other freight indices, between September 2020 and September 2021, the cost of sea freight increased by 305% (WCI Drewry – Deep-Sea Freight Index) and the cost of air freight increased by 65% (TAC Index – Air Freight Index). In contrast, the cost of rail freight (ERAI – Eurasian Rail Index) increased by only 2% over the same period, meaning that in the year after COVID, rail freight was significantly cheaper than air freight and much faster and increasingly more cost competitive than maritime freight. In other words, the COVID crisis has not had a negative impact on rail freight, with rail freight traffic between Europe and China, via Russia and Belarus, increasing by 47% between January and September 2021 compared to the same period last year. Even more striking is the data that between 2016 and 2020, rail freight traffic between China and Europe increased nearly eightfold.

*The war between Russia and Ukraine has dramatically curbed the growth of rail freight between China and Europe.* Compared to previous years, rail freight traffic between China and Europe grew by only 2% in the first half of 2022, according to the Rail-Freight.com survey for the European Silk Road Summit of September 2022. This is mainly because Western sanctions prevent rail transit through Russia and Belarus. Until the beginning of the war, 95% (!) of rail freight traffic between Europe and China was conducted along the northern Eurasian Northern Corridor (China-Kazakhstan-Russia-Belarus-Poland-Germany-France-Spain). The key advantage of this main transport route is that within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union, there is a customs union and a single economic zone (in terms of freight transport) between Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus, which means that container trains from China can pass through the Chinese/Kazakh customs clearance (Dostyk/Alashankou transshipment station), and after border control to the Belarusian/Polish border (Brest/Małaszewicze transshipment station) without any administrative border control. This is precisely why *Russia, as the leading Eurasian transit state, is, or rather was,*

<sup>2</sup> The agreement establishing the USMCA (USA-MEXICO-CANADA) regional integration, the successor to NAFTA, was signed by the Presidents of the three countries on 30 November 2018. The free trade area was implemented on 1 July 2020, dissolving NAFTA.

of particular importance. As a result of the war, Poland’s rail transit role, and thus the traffic at the Brest/Małaszewicze transshipment station, was significantly reduced at the first half of 2022. This is also reflected in RailFreight.com’s data that in the first half of 2022, rail freight traffic from China to Poland (Europe) fell by 10% compared to the same period last year, while traffic from Poland (Europe) to China fell by 50% (!). And with no hope of ending the war just yet, forecasts for the near future predict a further dramatic reduction in traffic on the main northern rail line. Carriers are already starting to switch to maritime transport, even though the price level has increased enormously.

**FIGURE 3: THE TRANS-CASPIAN INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT ROUTE, I.E. THE ROUTE OF THE MIDDLE TRANSPORT CORRIDOR**



Source: <https://middlecorridor.com/en/route>

With the prolonged war, it is likely that an increasing share of rail freight traffic will shift from the main northern corridor through Russia and Belarus to the emerging Eurasian Middle Corridor. Its route enters the European continent from China, via Kazakhstan, through the Caspian Sea and the South Caucasus, Turkey or the Black Sea. This transport corridor is also known as the Trans-Caspian route because of the section crossing the Caspian Sea. The route of this transport corridor is illustrated in Figure 3 above.

Significant development of the Eurasian Middle Corridor began even before the Russo-Ukrainian war, particularly to allow the Central Asian countries, the South Caucasus states and Turkey to participate more fully in the huge growth in Eurasian rail freight traffic. At present, one of the main stakeholders in the development of the corridor is the European Union, which clearly wants to ensure the continuity of goods transport between China and the EU. This is closely linked to the TRACE-CA programme initiated by the EU. TRACECA is a multilateral transport infrastructure development programme, the agreement on which was signed in Baku in 1998 by representatives of 12 countries (Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan), who were later joined by Iran. The main objective of the programme is to develop transport infrastructure links between Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia and to further develop existing transport routes. The other stakeholder is China, as currently this is the only land route for China to reach the European market. It remains to be seen what new transport and logistics investments China will launch in the near future in the countries along the route.

At present, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, and thus the freight transport running through it, are not yet competitive with the Northern transport route, as the route’s freight transport capacity is only 5% of the Northern Corridor. The two main geographical barriers, or “chokepoints”, are the transit of goods through the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea. The *trans-Caspian section of the route* runs from the Kazakh port of Aktau to Baku in Azerbaijan and the new Azeri cargo port of Alat to the south. To develop the transit transport of goods across the Caspian Sea, the countries around the sea have made very significant investments in infrastructure. Kazakhstan has implemented extensive developments in the port of Aktau, Turkmenistan has built an almost entirely new port in Türkmenbasy (formerly known as Krasnodsk in the Soviet Union), and Astara, Iran’s new port, was built on the border of Iran and Azerbaijan. Given that the largest port on the Caspian Sea, Baku in Azerbaijan, is essentially in the city itself and there was no more space for further port expansion, Azerbaijan built a new port south of Baku, in Alyat. At the same time, the biggest barrier to cargo traffic through the Caspian Sea is that only one shipping company, Azerbaijan’s ASCO, carries freight (including train wagons), and only at relatively high cost, the trip takes relatively long, is not on a regular schedule, and the ferries carrying wagons are 25-30 years old. Further developments in the near future are indicated by the agreement between the Azeri and Turkmen governments in January 2022 to establish a regular ferry service between Türkmenbasy and Baku, with 2 ferries scheduled to operate weekly. This is also im-

portant because it is the shortest route across the Caspian Sea, but at the same time, it is dependent on the construction of rail connection in Turkmenistan.

The most important eastern country for freight transport on the Black Sea is Georgia, which has 310 km of Black Sea coastline. In addition to Batumi, Georgia's largest port, the port of Poti has also been significantly developed in recent years. Regular weekly ferry service between Georgia's two largest ports of Batumi/Poti and the Romanian port of Constanta started in the summer months of 2022. As shown in Figure 3 illustrating the Trans-Caspian Route, there are three main transport directions from Georgian ports: to the Turkish port of Istanbul, the Romanian port of Constanta mentioned above, and the Ukrainian ports of Odessa and Chornomorsk to the south. Since the outbreak of the war, the transport of goods across the Black Sea has increased significantly, with the Romanian port of Constanta, for example, seeing an 8% increase in traffic.

Although freight transport via these two seas is still a fraction of what it used to be via Russia and Belarus traffic on the route has grown to nearly 3.2 million tonnes in 2022, a six-fold increase compared to 2021. This is also due to the launch in May 2022 of the first full-length container train from Chungking in China to Central Europe via Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Romania, by Finnish company Nurminen Logistics in cooperation with the Chinese and Kazakh railways. As this rail route is three times faster than sea transport, and there are a lot of products that have not been shipped since the war began, the company plans to run weekly containerised rail services. Another step forward is the massive development of Kazakhstan's rail and logistics infrastructure to better connect the country's Caspian coastline with its inland rail network.

At the same time, further massive infrastructure development of the middle corridor will take at least a decade (but probably several decades) and *rail freight between China and Europe is likely to decline dramatically in the years ahead (at least until the war is over), as there is simply no land transport route through which Chinese goods can reach the European market relatively quickly and at reasonable cost.* Thus, China is likely to choose new export markets for rail transport instead of Europe, and the traffic on the 21st century New Maritime Silk Road, and in particular its main European entry point, the port of Piraeus, will increase significantly.

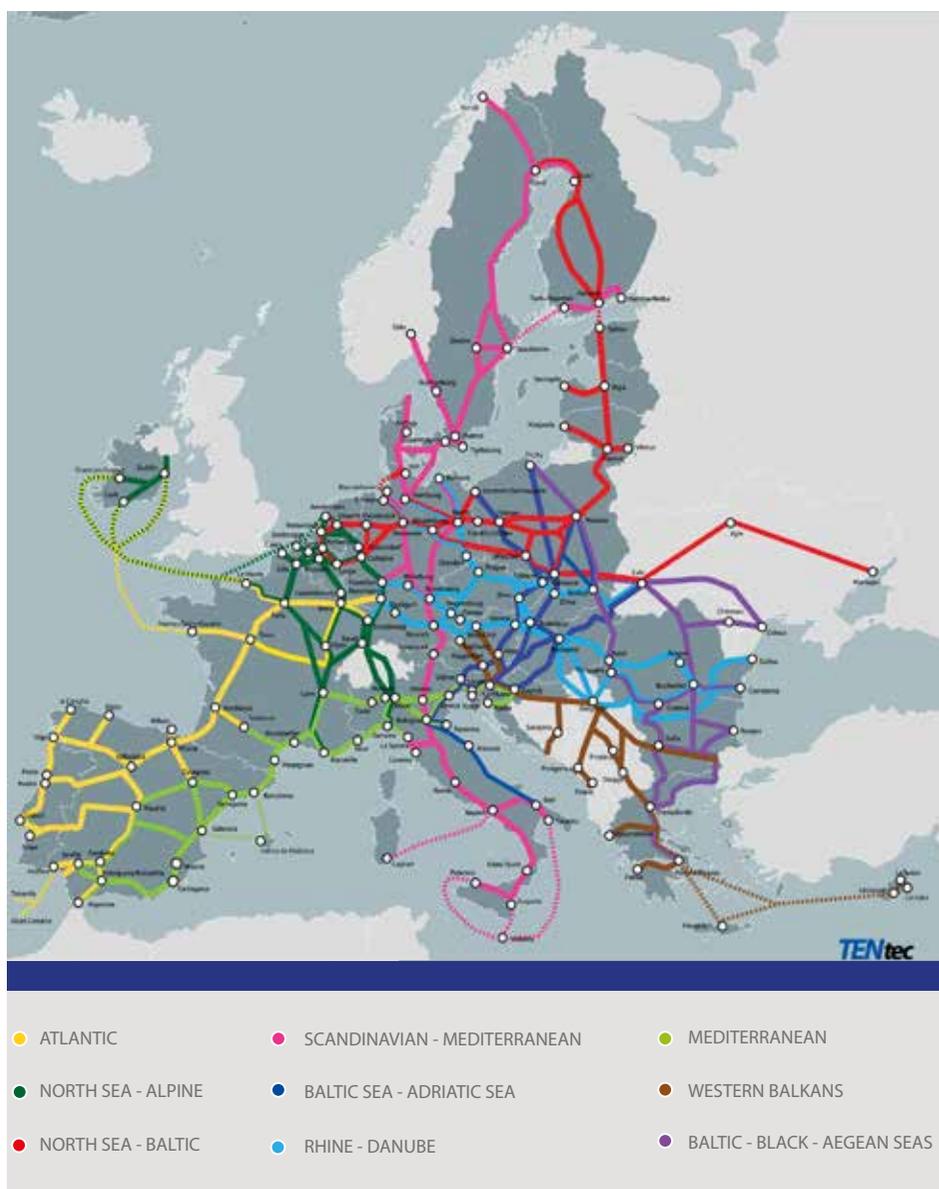
In July 2022, the European Commission revised its guidelines on TEN-T routes and made substantial changes to the route network with the aim of better integrating the transport network of Ukraine and part of Moldova into the EU transport network. Belarus and Russia have thus been removed from the map of the EU's TEN-T

routes, as have the border stations and rail terminals that connect them. This is very unfavourable for Poland, as the main European entry point for the northern transport corridor, Małaszewicze, has lost its significance as well as further EU financial support. For Ukraine and Moldova, however, this is of huge importance, as their transport networks will be connected to the EU transport system for the first time. These core network transport lines are given priority in EU renewal and upgrading, and the EU provides around 50% of the funding for these overhauls. The European Commission has also confirmed that Ukraine will receive substantial financial support in the future to rebuild its war-damaged transport routes and terminals. The Commission has also published what major transport development projects will be launched in Ukraine in the near future. At the same time, logistics experts have expressed very serious concerns about the EU's transport development projects prioritising Ukraine. They stressed the importance of security and the current lack of it, and that Ukraine needs very serious governance coordination and legislative measures to ensure that transport and logistics companies will also view Ukraine as an ideal logistics location in the near future.

To improve the logistical situation in Ukraine and (partly Moldova), the European Commission has extended four core network corridors to Ukraine and partly Moldova (Figure 4):

- the North Sea-Baltic Corridor has been extended via Lviv and Kiev to the port of Mariupol;
- the Baltic-Black-Aegean Seas Corridor was extended to Odessa, via Lviv and Chisinau;
- the Baltic Sea-Adriatic Sea Corridor was extended to the city of Lviv; and
- the Rhine-Danube Corridor was also extended to the city of Lviv.

**FIGURE 4: MAP OF EU TEN-T ROUTES ACCORDING TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S JULY 2022 GUIDELINES**



Source: [https://transport.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-amends-ten-t-proposal-reflect-impacts-infrastructure-russias-war-aggression-against-2022-07-27\\_en](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-amends-ten-t-proposal-reflect-impacts-infrastructure-russias-war-aggression-against-2022-07-27_en)

Ukraine’s logistics position is also significantly strengthened by the opening in April 2022 of a new rail transshipment terminal in Mostyska, a few kilometres from the Ukrainian/Polish border in the Lviv region. The strategic importance of the Mostyska rail terminal is essentially based on the Trans-Caspian rail freight line, as rail freight from the port of Poti in Georgia reaches the mainland via the Black Sea at the Ukrainian port of Odessa, and then the shortest land route (Vinnytsya, Ternopil, Lviv) would take it to the Ukrainian/Polish border at Mostyska. Thus, at the new Mostyska terminal, railway wagons would be transferred from broad gauge to European standard gauge tracks. Concurrently, the most important gateway for Chinese goods to Europe, the Belarusian/Polish rail transshipment and logistics hub Brest/ Małaszewicze, is losing its importance.

The Mostyska terminal is owned by N’UNIT, a company founded only about a year ago, and information on its ownership background is not available from open public sources. The terminal was built jointly by N’UNIT and Lemtrans. Lemtrans is Ukraine’s largest privately-owned company operating railway rolling stock, which has been in operation for almost 20 years. Lemtrans is wholly owned by the SCM (System Capital Management). Founded in 2000 in Donetsk, the financial and industrial holding company currently has nearly 500 companies, employs more than 200,000 people and is present in more than 30 countries. SCM is the largest group of companies in Ukraine ([www.scm.com.cy](http://www.scm.com.cy)) and the most important corporate holding defining the foundation of the Ukrainian economy. As of 2014, it is based in Kiev. *By far the most valuable and largest company in the SCM holding is Metinvest, a coal mining and metal industry company that owns one of Europe’s largest steel factories, Azovstal in Mariupol.* The steel plant was almost completely destroyed by the Russian forces (especially for the two reasons Russia has given, namely, that it was home to the soldiers and military leaders of the ultra far-right Azov Brigade, and on the grounds that the largest US-operated biological laboratories were located in the underground multi-storey bunker system of the steel plant). Metinvest also has a branch in the US and is believed to be one of the Pentagon’s key steel suppliers. Other members of the holding include DTEK, which supplies 30% of Ukraine’s electricity, Media Group Ukraine, UMG Investments, ESTA Holding, a real estate construction and distribution company, Lemtrans, the logistics company mentioned above in connection with the Mostyska terminal, and HarEast Holding, which is active in the agricultural sector. SCM Holding is wholly owned by Rinat Akhmetov, by far the richest man in Ukraine. Although the war has significantly reduced the size of his fortune since the 1990s, his current wealth is still estimated at USD 4.3 billion, according to Forbes magazine in September 2022.

The Mostyska terminal is the biggest competitor to the East-West Gate rail terminal (EWG – East-West Intermodális Logisztikai Szolgáltató Zrt. – <https://eastwestil.com>) in Fényeslitke, Hungary, located 18 km from Záhony, and which was delivered in October 2022. The East-West terminal was built as a private investment, with a maximum capacity to transship and handle one million TEUs per year, and which – based on its capacity – could be the largest intermodal terminal in Europe. What makes the terminal really special is that it is the first terminal in continental Europe to use 5G networks for internal communication and to operate technological devices. The logistics centre in Fényeslitke was important to the main Eurasian Northern Railway line, as it was planned that railway wagons would arrive to Hungary from Moscow via Kiev and Lviv, making the East-West Gate the second most important European entry point for freight traffic between China and Europe, after the railway terminal in Małaszewicze. However, the war also completely changed the relative position of the Fényeslitke terminal.

#### **4. Will Russia survive Western economic sanctions? – The new geostrategic directions of the Russian economy towards the East, North and South and their impact on the restructuring of the world economy**

The unprecedented Western economic sanctions against Russia, and in particular the disconnection of the Russian banking system from the SWIFT system in March 2022, effectively represent Russia's total exclusion from the global Anglo-Saxon economy. One of the fundamental questions of the current global economy is whether the Russian economy will survive Western sanctions. How can the Russian economy be repositioned on the world economic map? In any case, the Russian geopolitical strategies launched from 2000 (the beginning of Vladimir Putin's first presidency) were already aimed at creating a new multipolar world, and Russia was the country that clearly declared its opposition to the West. After March 2014 (the annexation of Crimea), the world's largest self-sufficient country commenced the actual practical implementation of the new geostrategic directions East, North and South. Its key word is *the "Greater Eurasia" concept, whose declared main goal is to become independent from the Anglo-Saxon region and to build a new Asian-dominated Eurasian power space*, where, in addition to the priority shift towards the East, the importance of geostrategies towards the North and South is becoming increasingly important.

Russia's non-Western, or "Greater Eurasia" geostrategic orientation is one of the main pillars of the new foreign policy concept approved by Vladimir Putin on 31 March 2023.<sup>3</sup> This document from the Russian Federation is of particular importance, as the economic and political sanctions against the country have fundamentally changed the international situation of Russia to an unprecedented extent and have essentially started to isolate Russia completely from Western countries. The 2023 foreign policy concept defines Russia as a great power with a historic sense of mission, at the forefront of the development of a new regional world order, defined by more than a thousand years of independent statehood, a unique civilisational heritage, and deep historical ties with the traditional European culture and other Eurasian cultures. Thus, Russia is "one of the sovereign centres of global development performing a historically unique mission aimed at maintaining global balance of power and building a multipolar international system." A fundamental change from previous foreign policy concepts is that while Russia used to define itself geopolitically as a Eurasian country, it now also refers to itself as a Euro-Pacific power.

This foreign policy concept declares radically reoriented geostrategic directions, with a focus on foreign policy priorities on how to create a more just, equitable and sustainable world order. The foreign policy concept lists – in order of importance – the priority destinations of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation. In line with all previous Russian foreign policy concepts, the Middle East remains the most important sphere of Russian interest. But while the 2016 foreign policy concept specifically dealt with Ukraine, the country's name is not even mentioned in the Middle East chapter of the 2023 concept. At the same time, Belarus is highlighted, and the document states that strategic cooperation with the Republic of Belarus should be further deepened but does not mention the creation of the Union State of Russia and Belarus. Like Ukraine, Georgia is not mentioned in the document either. However, support for the disputed territories between Russia and Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, is a priority Russian interest. It also differs from the previous similar document in that it does not mention cooperation issues in the Black Sea region, but does mention the Caspian Sea region, stating that "the solution of all issues relating to this region falls within the exclusive competence of the five Caspian states". This is also a reference to the fact that, according to the international agreement on the Caspian Sea area (between Russia and the Caspian Sea states), no foreign military bases or installations are allowed in the area. Related

<sup>3</sup> The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, 31 March 2023. [https://mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/fundamental\\_documents/1860586/?lang=ru](https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/?lang=ru)

to this is the fact that, according to this document, a foreign policy priority for Russia is to prevent and deter “unfriendly” states from installing military infrastructure in the Middle East.

Unlike previous foreign policy doctrines, in which NATO and the EU were the second priority foreign policy direction, the 2023 document names the Arctic as its second priority. This includes the peaceful resolution of international issues related to the Arctic, and the Russian priority of creating year-round navigation conditions for the Northern Sea Route, and thus developing it into a competitive international transport corridor.

The foreign policy strategy identifies China and India as the most important Russian foreign policy directions in Eurasia. The development of Eurasian transport links and the strengthening of Eurasian economic ties are highlighted as the most important Russian foreign policy goals. In the case of Eurasian economic and political integrations, the document mentions the Eurasian Economic Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and the ASEAN. For the Asia-Pacific region, it does not list any priority partner states. In the case of the Islamic sphere of power, Russia cites Iran, Syria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt as its key allies. With the exception of Saudi Arabia, the other countries listed are traditionally (albeit to a degree depending on world political events) considered allies of Russia. At the same time, the growing alliance with Saudi Arabia is part of the new Russian collective security strategy for the Persian Gulf region. The African region also features prominently in the document, as the main focus is now on building a new Russian power space in Africa by strengthening economic ties. The document refrains from naming Russia’s growing political engagement in Africa, but rather proclaims the principle of “African problems-African solution” for political relations. From the Latin American region, the foreign policy concept also mentions the traditional Russian allies – Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela – and BRICS member Brazil.

*The fact that the European region is at the bottom of the list of priorities, together with the United States and other Anglo-Saxon countries (without naming the individual countries), is a clear indication of the radically shifting Russian foreign policy directions.* The importance of the EU and NATO to Russia’s foreign policy is second to last only to the Antarctic region in the ranking of Russian foreign policy directions. It is also noteworthy that the collective West is not included in the same category, with European countries separated from the US. As far as the European countries are concerned, the document takes the position that there is no alternative to peaceful coexistence and mutually beneficial equal cooperation with Russia, and that a new model of

cooperation between European states and Russia must be developed. As I pointed out at the beginning of my analysis, this document defines the US as a major threat to Russia’s security, and indeed as the main instigator, organiser and executor of the collective West’s aggressive anti-Russian policy. At the same time, it does not name the US as an enemy, but emphasises that Russia seeks peaceful coexistence with the US, but that this is conditional on the US abandoning its anti-Russian policy.

The main element of the current Russian geostrategic direction of the “Greater Eurasia” is the Russian “opening to the East” economic policy, which has already received very substantial development support from the national economy side since Putin’s third presidency starting in 2012. In December 2013, the President announced as the main objective that “*the development of the Russian Far East is Russia’s national priority for the 21st century*”. Applying H. Mackinder’s term “pivot” area, the Russian Far East is called Russia’s “pivot” area, or in other words the key area of Russia’s Eastern/Pacific opening. The development of this key area in the Far East has been strengthened at several institutional levels: In 2011, the Far East and Arctic Development Fund<sup>4</sup> ([www.fondvostok.ru](http://www.fondvostok.ru)) was established, in 2012 the Ministry for Development of the Russian Far East and Arctic ([www.minvr.gov.ru](http://www.minvr.gov.ru)) was created, and since September 2015, the Eastern Economic Forum ([www.forumvostok.ru](http://www.forumvostok.ru)) has been held annually in Vladivostok.

To develop the economy of Russia’s eastern “pivot” area, 20 Advanced Special Economic Zones have been designated in the Far East. These zones are shown in Figure 5 below. The Advanced Special Economic Zones offer both domestic and foreign investors quite extraordinary economic and financial benefits, such as: 0% income tax for the first 5 years and 12% income tax for the next 5 years, 0% land tax for the first 5 years, 0% real estate tax for the first 5 years, simplified administrative procedures, referred to as a “one-stop shop”, customs free zone status. In addition to these special economic zones, in October 2015, the Port of Vladivostok and the 22 municipalities of Primorsky and neighbouring administrative districts jointly created the Free Port of Vladivostok, a special area, which is also a customs free zone, offering preferential tax and investment benefits to domestic and foreign investors.

Vladivostok had already had free port status under Tsarist Russia from 1861 to 1909. In 2015, it essentially regained this status, adapted to the challenges of the 21st century. The port is the most important eastern city on Russia’s West-East transport axis, the eastern terminus of the Trans-Siberian railway, the gateway to Russia’s economic

<sup>4</sup> The Development Fund is wholly owned by Russia’s largest investment bank, Vnesheconombank, also 100% state-owned (WEB – [www.web.ru](http://www.web.ru)).

relations with China, Japan, South Korea and essentially the Pacific power arena, and, in Russian terms, “Russia’s primary eastern gateway”. It is also the flagship city of the China–Mongolia–Russia economic corridor of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative’s land route. From a geopolitical point of view, it is clear that Vladivostok is the key strategic geographic location in the Russian geostrategic direction of “Greater Eurasia”.

**FIGURE 5: ADVANCED SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES IN THE RUSSIAN FAR EAST AND ARCTIC**



Source: <https://forumvostok.ru/en/about/asez/>

At the same time, Russia’s turn to the East also raises the need to enhance and strengthen the links within the country between the European territories and the Siberian and Far Eastern regions. Gazprom, by far Russia’s largest company, is pursuing the “Eastern Gas Programme” in line with this directive. Of the two main parts of Gazprom’s “Eastern Gas Programme” completed so far, the Western “wing” natural gas pipeline system connects the European parts of the country to the Kuznetsk Basin along the lower Ob River and provides piped gas supplies to the population of the southern West Siberian regions. The eastern “wing” provides natural gas supplies to the Far Eastern areas. The Sakhalin gas fields, from which Gazprom supplies natural gas to Japan and China in the form of LNG, play a key role in these eastern regions.

The supply of natural gas to Central Siberia and southern Far Eastern areas is already partially ensured by the Power of Siberia pipeline, which transports gas from the Chayandinskoye gas field in Yakutia through the Amur region to the Russian–Chinese border town of Blagoveshchensk. The primary purpose of this pipeline is to supply natural gas to China, under a contract signed in May 2014 between Gazprom and the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC). Under this contract, Gazprom commits to supply China with 38 billion cubic metres of natural gas per year for 30 years. Gazprom started construction of the 3,000 km-long Power of Siberia pipeline in September 2014 and the pipeline was inaugurated on 2 December 2019, marking the start of Russian gas supplies to China. The Power of Siberia is the first natural gas pipeline between Russia and China. The increasing importance of the Chinese market is reflected in the fact that it is a vital issue for Gazprom to increase its supply to China and other Eastern markets in addition to the European market. Looking realistically at future trends, it is clear that China will be the largest market for Gazprom’s natural gas in the coming years.

Russia may become the leading land power in Eurasia, but its establishment as a maritime power, “Sea Power”, is highly doubtful both geographically and geopolitically. Although Russia’s maritime coastline is 37,653 km long (its land borders are 22,407 km long), most of it is the coastline of the cold seas, with the Arctic Ocean to the north and the Pacific Ocean to the east. With one exception – the port of Murmansk never freezes over due to the Gulf Stream – the ports on the north and east coasts are under ice for most of the year. *However, Russia’s role as a maritime power could be significantly strengthened in the near future, thanks to the country’s new northern geostrategic direction, namely the state priority of creating a new northern shipping route.* While the Russian north and east coasts used to be under ice for most of the year, global warming has made the northern part of the Russian Pacific coast and the Russian Arctic coast navigable in summer. This creates a new Russian transpolar maritime transport route, linking Europe, Asia and North America. But this is not exclusively a Russian route, as back in 2017 Russia and China agreed to jointly develop the new North Sea Route. Subsequently, in January 2018, China announced the new Polar Silk Road initiative, which aims to create a new maritime transport route from China’s eastern ports across the Pacific Ocean via the Northeast Passage, Russia’s sovereign territory, bypassing the Scandinavian Peninsula and reaching the major ports of Western Europe, through massive infrastructure development. With the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, it is highly uncertain whether the Russian North Sea Route will be able to reach Western Europe. The Russian North Sea Route and its ports are shown in Figure 6.

**FIGURE 6: THE RUSSIAN NORTH SEA ROUTE AND ITS PORTS**



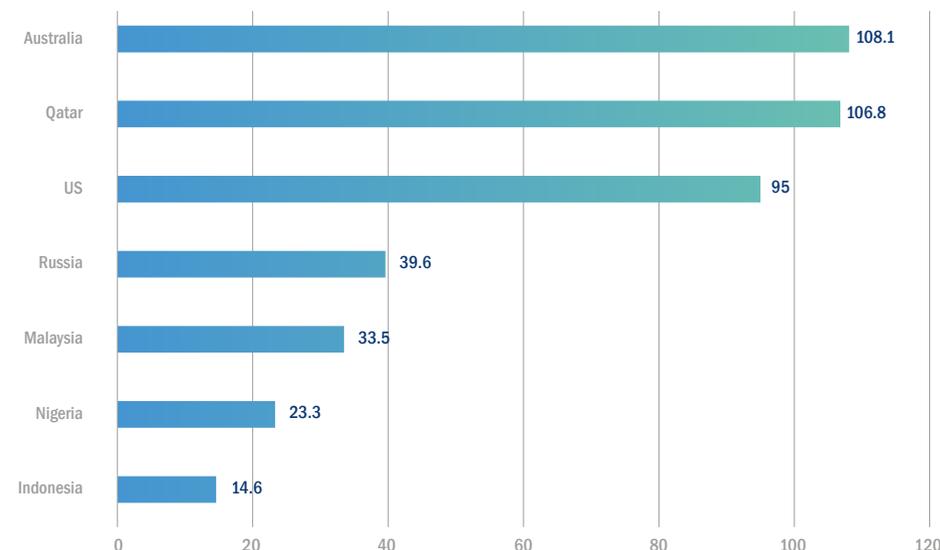
Source: <https://arctic-russia.ru/en/northsearoute/>

Russia is scheduled to start major developments to improve the Northeast Passage by 2030, notably the construction and upgrading of ports, specialised vessels, and various navigation equipment. One of the first results of this was the start of LNG shipments from the Yamal Peninsula to major Chinese ports via the Northeast Passage in December 2017, as part of the Russian-Chinese-French Yamal LNG project. The project is majority owned by the Russian company Novatek, Russia’s second largest natural gas producer after Gazprom. The main owner (28%) and CEO of Novatek is Leonid Mikhelson, considered one of the richest men in Russia. Gazprom is one of the minority shareholders in Novatek, with a 9.4% stake.

The cost of shipping LNG from the newly built port of Sabetta at the mouth of the River Ob, beyond the Arctic Circle on the Yamal Peninsula, to Asia, bypassing Europe in the westbound direction, is USD 2.49 per million BTU (British thermal units), while the cost of shipping eastbound, via the Arctic Ocean, is only USD 1.84. But for now, the Northeast Passage is only available in summer for just 8 weeks. To make this northern transport route available for as long as possible throughout the year, and not only in summer, Russia has created a special department within Rosatom to develop the infrastructure of this shipping route, which is also responsible for building nuclear icebreakers to accompany commercial transport vessels. The aim of Russia and Novatek is to make the northern transport route usable all

year round in the near future. With a complete shutdown of the Western shipping route to Asia, on which shipping takes 36 days, the Eastern shipping route requires only 15-19 days, at a cost of USD 1.65 per million BTU. To create this year-round northern transport route, Novatek will soon build a new LNG transfer station on the Kamchatka Peninsula. In addition to the existing Yamal Peninsula LNG project, starting in 2023, Novatek will launch a new LNG project on the neighbouring Gyda Peninsula called “Arctic LNG 2”. All of this means that in the future, Russia is predicted to become the world leader in LNG exports in addition to normal gas-state natural gas exports. As illustrated in Figure 7 below, in 2021 Russia was the world’s 4th largest LNG exporter, although at that time Russian LNG exports were only about 40% of US exports.

**FIGURE 7: THE WORLD’S LARGEST LNG EXPORTING COUNTRIES IN 2021, BILLION CUBIC METRES**



Source: graph prepared by the author  
 Source of data: <https://www.statista.com/chart/27839/biggest-liquefied-natural-gas-exporters/>

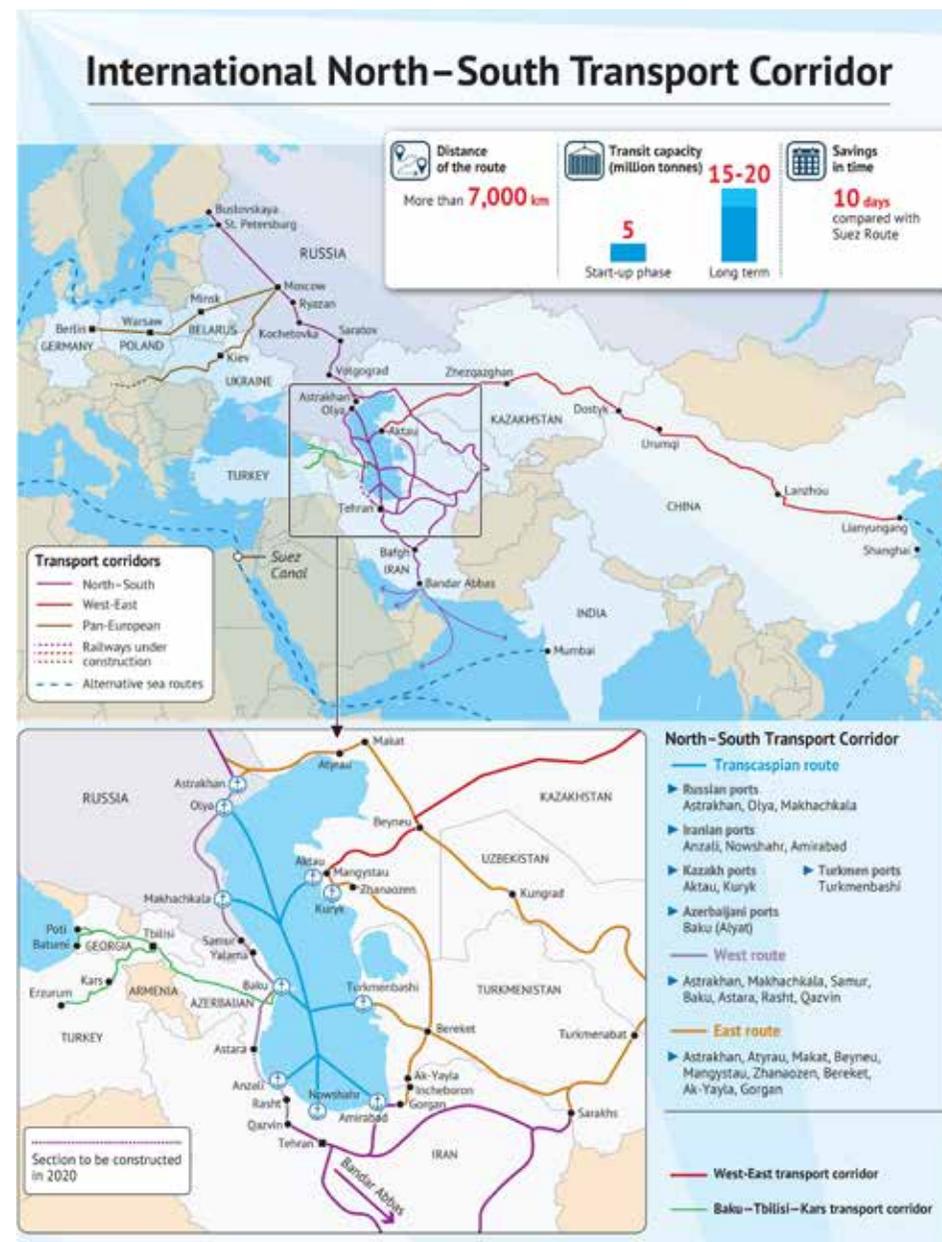
Russia’s new southern infrastructure strategy is based on the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC), the agreement on which was signed at the Second International Euro-Asian Conference on Transport in St Petersburg in 2000. The agreement was ratified in 2002, and other states joined the initiative, including Turkey and Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan from the Caucasus region, as well as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan from Central Asia, and Oman and Syria.

Until 2022, no significant progress had been made in the development of the INSTC, with individual nation states developing their own transport infrastructure networks, but the corridor itself was essentially inoperable along the entire north-south line. One of the reasons for this, is that the construction of the various sections of the corridor is based on bilateral agreements between the states concerned, and the financial resources are insufficient. In addition to their own resources, individual nation states can usually apply for funding from the Asian Development Bank and the Eurasian Development Bank. But the real reason why this transport corridor has not been built for 20 years is that it has not been in the interests of individual countries, especially Russia. Indeed, the freight transport links between the western and eastern parts of the Eurasian sphere of power were provided by the land and sea routes of the Chinese Belt and Road initiative. However, following the start of the Russian-Ukrainian war in February 2022, economic sanctions against Russia were imposed on a scale that drastically reduced economic ties between the West and Russia, and made it vital for Russia to organise non-Western value production and logistics chains. Figure 8 below shows the route of the INSTC.

The figure shows that the 7,200 km long multimodal corridor runs from Mumbai, India, across the Arabian Sea, enters Iran at the port of Bandar Abbas, Iran, follows the main north-south Iranian road and rail route through Tehran, crosses the Caspian Sea into Russia, then from Astrakhan, the largest port on the Caspian Sea, follows the River Volga, and finally passes through Moscow to St Petersburg. In theory, the transport of goods on the INSTC route takes 25-30 days, while the 16,000 km sea route through the Suez Canal takes 40-60 days. In other words, the length and duration of the INSTC is less than half of the traditional sea link between India and Russia. In logistical terms, this also means that the cost of transporting goods between Russia and Iran and India would be halved if this corridor were fully developed.

The main bottleneck in the transport corridor is the transport route across the Caspian Sea, as the containers, or the rail wagons carrying the containers themselves, have to be loaded and unloaded from the ship, which is an extremely expensive and time-consuming operation. In other words, the competitiveness of the INSTC in relation to other trans-Eurasian transport corridors is fundamentally determined by how the trans-Caspian freight route can be properly developed and improved, both in terms of ports, the appropriate shipping fleet, and the road and rail lines around the Caspian Sea. This is why INSTC has three main routes to the Caspian Sea, the Trans-Caspian Route through the Caspian Sea, the Western Route around the Caspian Sea from the west, through Russia, Azerbaijan and Iran, and the Eastern Route

FIGURE 8: ROUTE OF THE INTERNATIONAL NORTH-SOUTH TRANSPORT CORRIDOR



Source: <https://valdaiclub.com/multimedia/infographics/international-transport-corridor/>

through Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Iran. As the Caspian Sea is the real key area for the strengthening of Russian-Iranian-Indian economic cooperation through the INSTC, the Caspian Sea region is of growing importance for the five countries bordering the Caspian Sea (Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan) and, by extension, for India. The First Caspian Economic Forum was held in Turkmenistan's Türkmenbasy in 2019, and the second in October 2022 in Moscow, where it was confirmed that all infrastructure investments will be implemented to develop Caspian Sea shipping and land transport around the sea. By 2030, the route is projected to carry 25 billion tonnes of freight, more than five times the volume of freight in 2020.

In June 2022, the very first full-length test shipment was launched from St Petersburg via Iran to Mumbai. The shipment, organised by the Iran Shipping Lines Group, consisted of containers of laminated wood panels and took 25 days to arrive. From St Petersburg, the containers were transported by rail to Astrakhan and then by ship to the Iranian port of Anzali, from where they were transported by road (as continuous rail lines are not yet available) to Iran's largest port, Bandar Abbas, and from there by ship to Mumbai in India. For the time being, there are no regular scheduled freight trains, mainly due to the need for further very significant infrastructure developments in the strategic geographical locations of the line.

In geostrategic terms, the INSTC is of paramount importance for Russia, as it will for the first time provide it with maritime exits to the Persian Gulf (creating a new Russian engagement in the Middle East) and the Indian Ocean, and thus enable Russia to develop vastly increased economic ties with India.

The Russian-Ukrainian war has changed Russia's sphere of interest in the Black Sea, namely the Sea of Azov coastline is under Russian control, which means that the Sea of Azov is (currently) essentially a Russian inland sea. In order to increase the flow of goods to the Sea of Azov and between the Caspian and Black Seas, it is in Russia's interest to develop transport on the Volga and Don rivers in order to increase the volume of inland waterway freight transported through these rivers. The Volga and Don rivers are connected by the 101 km long Volga-Don Canal, which was opened in 1952 and has 13 locks, essentially linking the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea and giving Iran access from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea. However, the Volga-Don Canal's capacity is currently insufficient, and the canal is usually frozen over in winter. Although hundreds of ships pass through the canal every day, the demand would be much higher, especially from Iranian ships. As such, Russia is planning to build a new Volga-Don canal alongside the existing one, and there are already several

plans for the possible route of the planned canal. Closely linked to this is the major expansion of the port of Astrakhan. The Iranian shipping company IRISL plans to invest USD 10 million in the development of the port's terminals. In fact, the port of Solyanka in Astrakhan Oblast is already 53% owned by the Islamic Republic of Iran, and as a result of increasing Russian-Iranian military cooperation, this Russian port is likely to become a base for the Iranian navy.

As Russia can only get a warm sea access to the Arabian Sea through Iran, Iran is the real key state of the INSTC from a Russian geostrategic point of view. The country's strategic geographical location is due to its position as a link between the Caspian Sea and the Arabian Sea, and the longest – almost 800 km long – coastal coastline on the Persian Gulf. Also of particular importance is the fact that Iran is a neighbour of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Iran has been regularly sanctioned by the UN Security Council since 2008 over its nuclear programme. One of the biggest foreign policy successes of Barack Obama's presidency was the signing of the nuclear deal between Iran and the five permanent members of the Security Council and Germany in July 2015, which led to the lifting of sanctions from 2016. However, Donald Trump has reimposed sanctions against Iran from 6 August 2018, which strengthens the alliance between Russia and Iran, and from 2022, sanctions against Russia have further increased foreign economic relations between the two states. For Iran, the INSTC offers a unique logistical opportunity, particularly as it will make Tehran, relatively close to the Caspian Sea, a key logistics hub. Moreover, also because the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas is the southern terminus of the INSTC, essentially the sea exit of the transport corridor. The port of Bandar Abbas is strategically located on the northern shore of the Strait of Hormuz, directly opposite Oman. The port is Iran's sea gateway, handling 85% of the country's port freight traffic, the largest and best equipped container port in Iran and also the main base of the Iranian Navy. The biggest limitation to further development of the port is that Bandar Abbas is not a deep-sea port, and therefore the largest ships cannot dock here. Ships usually anchor in Oman's port of Muscat, where containers are transferred to smaller ships that deliver the goods to the port of Bandar Abbas, creating a dependency relationship between Iran and Oman. This is precisely why Iran's priority plan is to develop the port closest to the Arabian Sea, the port of Chabahar, especially as it is a natural deep-sea port. But it remains to be seen to what extent the three founding countries of the INSTC will aim to turn Chabahar into a seaport. Considering also that the port of Chabahar is only 72 km away from the port of Gwadar. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the port of Chabahar has no rail link to Tehran, although India has plans to develop this, as will be discussed below.

A strategic issue for Iran's transport infrastructure is the construction of the entire section of the Astará–Rasht–Qazvin railway line, which will connect the existing railway lines of Russia, Azerbaijan and Iran. The section of the railway line is shown in Figure 1 above. The bridge and short railway line between the cities of Astará in Azerbaijan and Astará in Iran were inaugurated in 2019. The Rasht–Qazvin rail service has also been operational from 2019. The missing section of the railway is the Astará–Rasht railway line, for which construction has not yet started. However, it is likely to start soon, as Russia and Iran signed a contract in April 2022 to jointly finance the construction of this railway line.

## 5. The emerging multipolar world economy: facts, trends and uncertainties

At this point in time (July 2023), after 17 months of war and unprecedented economic sanctions against Russia, it is increasingly clear that the world can no longer return to the pre-war world economic and political order. Whereas before the war, it was only a theoretical question of how a new multipolar world would emerge, 2022 has turned this theoretical question into a practical one, and the emergence of a multipolar world has actually begun.

From the 1990s onwards, in the unipolar world political order dominated by the US/Anglo-Saxon world and in a period of accelerating globalisation of the world economy, geoeconomics prevailed over geopolitics, with great power interests being primarily pursued through economic means. At the same time, since the 1990s, there has been a debate about how global the world economy really is, and how dominant the global world market is at the regional level. In fact, after the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID crisis of recent years, the global market has become increasingly organised at the level of megaregions/regional spheres of power, mainly because in a period of general uncertainty, global value chains have been replaced by value chains within smaller geographical distances, and regional corporate organisation has become more important. Thus, even before the war of 2022, the world economy was organised as a multipolar system in which the global and megaregional spatial levels were simultaneously and concurrently present.

The response of the Anglo-Saxon world to the Russo-Ukrainian war can also be interpreted as an economic response of the unipolar world political system, aimed

at isolating Russia from the world economy. However, the economic sanctions of the Western world only isolate Russia from the Anglo-Saxon world economic system, and the unipolar world political order contributes to a more multipolar world economic system, which also calls into question the very essence and survival of the global world market. The general opinion and expectation in the West has been that the Russian economy would not survive the sanctions. However, in the world of the 21st century, the total economic isolation of Russia is a totally absurd goal for the West. Being the largest country in the world, with vast natural resources, it is capable of self-sufficiency in terms of both raw materials and food. In my view, from the expected end of the war in 2023–2024, the only conceivable timeframe for complete Russian economic isolation is about 1–2 years, after which the global market will force the easing of Western sanctions. My forecast is that the Russian economy will remain in a state of isolation from the Anglo-Saxon world economy for the next 1–2 years at least. But it is also a fact that Russia's dependence on Western technologies is very strong, and the most important question for the survival of the Russian economy will be whether Russia can source advanced technology from East Asia and the Middle East, and whether it can shift the Russian economy to an R&D-intensive development path. This is less and less an economic issue, it is more a question of how far Russian society has confidence in the current political leadership and how far it is prepared to make further and further sacrifices, for instance, in the wake of the law on military mobilisation.

It is an indisputable fact that the world economic system will effectively become multipolar when the international financial system itself becomes multipolar. Although international trade and capital flows are organised at the regional level as much as at the global level, it is currently international financial markets that are most closely linked to the global world market. Today, the USD-based international money market is still exclusive, even though the role of the USD in international payments is declining and the role of the yuan in international reserves is gradually increasing. Although cooperation between Russia and China to develop new alternative SWIFT systems is growing and is already operational in various countries, these do not have an international role as yet. At present, a realistic alternative seems to be the emergence of a new Asian financial system (most likely) based on the Chinese yuan alongside the USD/EUR Anglo-Saxon financial system, but this is still highly dependent on China's role in the Asian region. There is also the question of how the strong economic powers in the East Asian region (Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand), which are considered allies of the US, will relate to China and the new Asian financial system that is taking shape. As confidence

is one of the most important foundations of the international financial market, it is very difficult to predict how the international financial world will trust this new Asian financial system.

In the territorial organisation of the multipolar world economic system, the emergence of two poles and their associated economic forces is predicted. The Anglo-Saxon world economic megaregion is based on regional integration between the US and the USMCA (the successor to NAFTA), and the European Union. The Asian world economic megaregion is likely to be organised on the basis of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which entered into force on 1 January 2022. The 15 countries that make up the RCEP together account for 30% of the world's total GDP and currently constitute the world's largest economic integration, both in terms of GDP and foreign trade. Another issue is the how the relationship between these two megaregions will evolve, as the US and China are the two largest economies in the world and are also each other's largest markets, meaning that they are economically interdependent.

The fundamental question of the structural transformation of the world economy is whether the areas between the world economic megaregions led by the two dominant world economic poles (the US and China), i.e. the new world economic vacuum areas, will be oriented towards one of the poles or whether they will create an economic territorial organisation on their own. Will Russia be able to become a new world economic pole in the near future? If Russia is to remain a great power in the near future, it is essential that it develops its own regional spatial organisation in this global economic vacuum. Considering that India is expected to become a world economic pole, thus integrating the South Asian region, and that Southeast and East Asia are China's economic interest area, *a new Russia-led and organised territorial integration towards the South, Central Asia and the Middle East, and through them towards Africa, can be envisaged.*

One of the fundamental dilemmas of our near future is whether the multipolar world economy currently taking shape will force the emergence of a multipolar world political order. As security is a prerequisite for global economic processes, a new regional security system is a basic requirement for a multipolar world economy. Theoretically, there is also the question of whether regional security systems can coexist horizontally and how they are likely to be organised in a hierarchical way. At the same time, adjacent regional security systems will need to work together, especially to jointly address global, not just pole-specific, processes (e.g. climate change, COVID and other pandemics, terrorism). In my view, the multipolar world economic system that

is currently taking shape will force the emergence of a new world political system, but this is a very long-term process. In the short term, the Anglo-Saxon unipolar world political system, the multipolar world economic system, and the pole-less processes affecting the whole of the Earth will coexist. The result in the short term will be a highly unstable and risky transitional world order.

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# POWER AND LEGITIMACY IN THE AMERICAN WORLD ORDER

Anita Faust

## 1. Introduction

Long before Ukraine war broke out in February 2022, before the COVID-19 pandemic, even before the US trade war was launched against China, there was a broad consensus that the world order was in a state of transition (Flint, 2017). For years, debate among analysts has revolved around the nature and structure of the new world order that is emerging. Is the world going post-polar (Serfaty, 2022)? Are we inevitably on the verge of a new American century (Kagan, 2021)? Or is multipolarity emerging (O’Sullivan, 2021; Siddiqui, 2020), possibly structured by civilisations (Petito, 2016)? Or are we witnessing the formation of a multiplex order, as Acharya (2017) suggests, one in which multiple modernities coexist? Perhaps bipolarity will return (Fullilove & Lemahieu, 2021)? In the United States, strategists have been faced with the dilemma whether the US should accommodate emerging rivals, as Wertheim (2021) proposed or if it should instead try to strengthen its position as the world leader (McFaul, 2021).

According to Henry Kissinger’s definition, “*world order describes the concept held by a region or civilization about the nature of just arrangements and the distribution of power thought to be applicable to the entire world*” (Kissinger, 2015, p. 9). The definition raises multiple questions. One of the problematic questions the US has had to grapple with has been determining how the burdens and systemic benefits of world order are to be shared. Who is to be recognised as key in the drive to maintain and to expand the world order? Is it a state that accepts being integrated into the world order? Or would it be a partner who is instrumental in the integration of others? Or is it the leading power’s own society, which certainly bears a significant part of the burden of building a world order? The expansion of a world order likely has its natural limits, whether for reasons of history and identity, or for geography and security, or due to

economic limitations. While in any attempt to build a global order will encounter societies that are for some reason reluctant to participate, even some key partners will inevitably feel wronged at least some of the time. As Kissinger puts it, the sustainability of the world order is based on maintaining a balance between power and legitimacy. This is, in his understanding, the exercise of justice (Kissinger, 2015, p. 367). The evolution of the world order may follow the fluctuations of this delicate balance.

To be able to make our own informed judgement about the dynamic processes of the world order, we need to start from the very foundations and examine what power is required to shape the world order in the first place. What does this power consist of? What are its indicators? How does it work? How sustainable is it? From where does it derive its sustainability? Once these questions are clarified, we can examine shifts in the global distribution of power and consider what might follow on from this. The present chapter presents the notion of power the US has deemed necessary for shaping the world order. As will be shown, US power has been as much dependent on structural factors as on quantitative aspects. The chapter presents the model of US power.

Leadership takes more than material power, as both the possession and use of power requires justification – legitimacy – to obtain and to keep followship. It is in this light that the paper presents the foundations of the legitimacy of the US-led world order. Legitimation is as complex as power is, manifested in narratives as much as in processes within a power relationship. The chapter offers a perspective on the ideological foundations on which the US has built its role as a world power, and identifies the processes of legitimation incorporated into the US edifice of power.

After discussing the foundations of the legitimacy of US as the leader of the unipolar world order, and establishing the US notion of power, the chapter examines the evolution of the international distribution of power between 1990 and 2021, from the perspective of the US. Shaping the world order is a historic opportunity, but it is also laden with risk, as the US strategies themselves often point out. Building a world order requires the visible use of power and poses questions to which there are no easy answers. As the political sociology of power has long postulated, the open use of power tends to weaken its acceptance and undermine the all-important power of attraction, i.e. soft power (Nye, 1990; 2004) which in turn requires perceptions of legitimacy (Beetham, 2013; Weber, 2009).

Using the criteria of the US notion of power to examine changes in its international distribution, a diffusion of power resulting from the way the US built the unipolar

world order is shown to have occurred. Not China, alone, but a group of countries are shown to have gained multiple components of the power the US deems adequate for shaping the world order. Simultaneously, transnational corporations have also gained most components of the same power, which is as relevant to how the world order may evolve as the appearance of traditional rivals. The challenges in maintaining the legitimacy aspect of the world order both domestically and internationally have weakened the cohesion of American society and evoked emerging cooperation among a dissatisfied Global South.

The US concept of power, its legitimation and the evolution of the US-led world order are examined primarily through the findings of the longitudinal qualitative content analysis of the US national security strategies issued between 1990 and 2021, a total of 16 documents published over the 31-year period. Its beginning, 1990, marks the announcement of the end of the Cold War in the National Security Strategy published by the US that year, while 2021 was the year when the Interim National Security Guidance – issued in March – renounced the post-Cold War world order, and called for the founding of a new, US-led world order.

The American experience of building a world order is hardly replicable, but it certainly offers lessons to be learned. One way or another, the next era will inevitably emerge from, and be a response to, the 1990-2021 US-led world order. By studying the notions and the evolution of the legitimacy and power underlying it we can obtain crucial insights into the quest for a new world order that was openly launched in 2022.

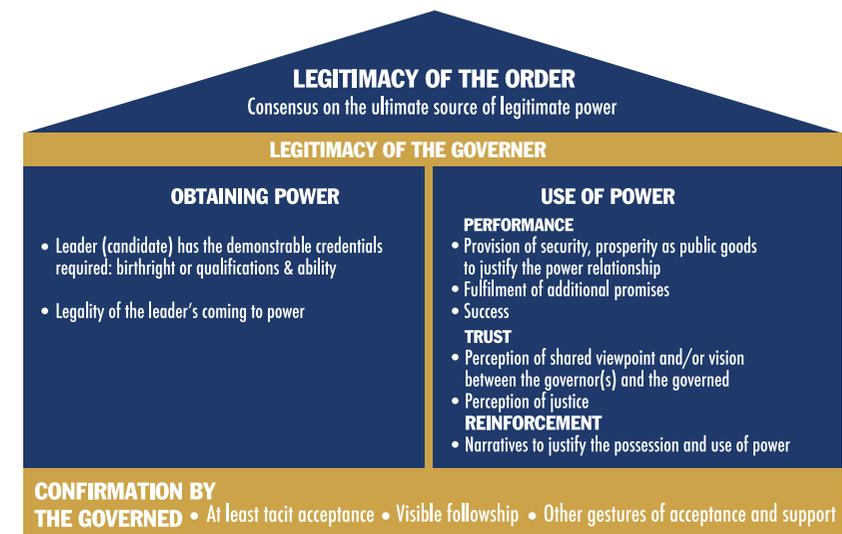
## 2. The ideological foundations of the American world order

Every leadership role requires justification – legitimacy – as to what gives the wielder of power the right to its unique position<sup>1</sup> i.e. why subordinates should comply. Based on the comprehensive study of the legitimation of power by David Beetham (2013), and the geopolitical work by Colin Flint (2017) which includes legitimacy as relevant to global leadership, the following overall criteria need consideration, whether they can be satisfied, or not: 1.) a consensus on the ultimate source of legitimate

<sup>1</sup> In addition to the possession of power, its use, too, requires legitimation (Beetham, 2013). Engagement in actions that entail sacrifice, war in particular, requires specific justification, through narratives (Flint, 2017), whose target audiences include the domestic public as well as international partners, and populations.

authority that defines the entire political system, which may, for instance, be God, or the expressed will of the electorate, 2.) how a person or a body of persons comes to power 3.) once obtained, how the power is used 4.) at least the tacit acceptance by the subordinates. Although the international system is by academic consensus described as anarchic in the sense that there is no law or body above it to govern it, these three aspects are nevertheless relevant to world order, simply because it involves power and seeks to build acceptance. Legitimation applies to it not in the legal, or philosophical, but in the sociological sense, in generating followship and compliance. Figure X presents an overview of the components of legitimacy that apply to an order.

FIGURE 1: THE COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF THE CRITERIA OF LEGITIMATION



Source: The author's own editing based on Beetham (2013) and Flint (2017).

For lack of a superior authority, legitimacy in the world order is more obviously subject to interpretation than in the case of the state. In the post-Cold War world order, we may observe how the United States has, in response to this need, declared what destines it to be the global leader, what special qualities set it apart that should, in its view, earn it global recognition and followship. These narratives may be endorsed, or disputed by experts, politicians or public opinion around the world. Opinions will, in part, depend on the field of study from which we approach it, indicating the complexity of the issue of legitimacy. They will also vary depending on the vantage point

of the beholder, defined by their identity, their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the US-led world order, and by their relative power position.

Among the authors who study the relationship between economy and power, some argue that we need to go back to World War I to find the roots of the American world order. According to economic historian Michael Hudson, that was the first time in history that war debt was not cancelled at the end of a war. The US was the creditor to European powers, who accepted this decision (Hudson, 2021).

Most western scholars of international relations, as well as the pre-2021 US national security strategies, derive the rightful and inevitable leadership role of the US in shaping the world order partly from its role in defeating Nazi Germany and Japan in World War II, and partly from prevailing in the Cold War<sup>2</sup>. This is reflected by references to Harry Truman, who was in office from 1945 to 1953, and played a decisive role in the creation of the American world order upon the conclusion of World War II. Truman is cited in multiple strategies with the purpose to establish the legitimacy of US leadership. These references contribute to the legitimising narrative that having rid the world of evil the US is unquestionably a force for the good. Implicit in this justification is the invincibility of the US. Upon both historically proven moral merit and superior power, it is uniquely suited to be the global leader.

Simultaneously, the US strategies also derive the necessity of America's global leadership role from the 1789 US Constitution, which establishes the US as a model society. The Constitution, which is also a source of American identity, is interpreted as prescribing for the US an international leading role, for the benefit of the world on the grounds that it embodies enlightenment, freedom, and the ideals of humanity.

While ideological foundations are required for a power to gain the leadership role, these alone do not suffice for the leader to earn followship and for the order to be sustainable. Being based on exclusion from resources and rights (Beetham, 2013; Weber, 2009), all power relationships need to produce some existentially relevant benefits to subordinates to justify the very existence of the power relationship (Beetham, 2013). Subordinate societies universally expect some degree of physical security and the preconditions of material well-being to be produced by the relationship in exchange for their subordination. Security and the conditions of prosperity are recognised in the literature of power and legitimation as the most fundamental public

goods. Key differences between social contracts of different societies mostly lie with their interpretations of security and the conditions of prosperity deemed adequate in a given situation, and the degree or nature of subordination demanded in exchange.

The relationship between subordinates and the wielder(s) of power, of which public good provision is an important component, is enshrined in the constitution or more or less equivalent agreements or traditions, if unwritten, in practically all societies, including in the US. Given the international role of the US, its Constitution needs to be examined in the domestic and international contexts, for prescriptions regarding the basic processes of power and legitimation.

The US Constitution in its contemporaneous form and interpretation, contains two peculiarities that are not at all common in other societies. One has to do with the nature of the political rights of subordinates, the other has to do with who gets to possess political rights. Firstly, unique in the relationship between the political leadership of the United States and the subordinate society is the right of the population to keep and bear arms, referred to as second amendment rights. While allowing for violent self-defence in certain conditions, this entails a limited interpretation of the state's role in the provision of security compared to social contracts in states where bearing arms is not permitted or is more limited. While weakening the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force, according to Alystine (1993), this also places the state under a considerable degree of social control that can be enforced by violence, although the conditions for this are very difficult to define. Maintaining social cohesion and the prevention of organised social unrest is important in any society. In the US, it is accentuated by the right to keep and bear arms.

Second, a recent re-interpretation of the US constitution has significantly altered the relationship between the state and its citizens by changing the scope of those endowed with rights of political advocacy. In 2010, a Supreme Court decision extended the constitutionally guaranteed political rights of citizens to privately owned corporations. These rights include the freedom of political speech and the right to influence elections through financing (Garrett, 2014; Winkler, 2018). Inevitably, this reduces the influence of subordinate society over government and policies and leads to policies that favour the owners of corporations.

Can an order in which privately owned corporations have personhood, hence, an increasing influence over government and policies, as well as over public discourse through the media they own, secure the conditions of material well-being and democratic rights for society? Is it in any way incentivised to do so? Does the imbalance created by corporate personhood alter the identity-complex, the stability and the

<sup>2</sup> There is disagreement in academic circles whether it is conducive to sound strategic thinking for the United States to look upon the end of the Cold War as its own victory. While Fukuyama (1989) spoke of the end of history, others, like Simon Sinek (2020) see the struggle to shape world order as an infinite game: one in which rules and participants keep changing, but which perpetuates itself.

international pursuits of the US? The introduction of corporate personhood in the leading power of the post-Cold War period clearly has far reaching consequences not only domestically, within the US, but also internationally, throughout the US-led world order.

How public goods produced domestically can be distinguished from those produced internationally, in the world order is unclear. What arrangements are applied in the distribution of public goods among domestic and international stakeholders is a key dilemma in the conjoint governance of the Federation and world order. The issue is exacerbated by an increasing awareness of inequalities within and between societies that comes with globalisation and the ever-wider access to modern communications technologies (Leonard, 2021).

The national security strategies of the US published before 2021 draw upon the Constitution to communicate that the US is the ideal society for all to emulate. Being an “effective democracy”, pursuing “enlightened self-interest”, the strategies say, the US is morally the best placed country to lead the world. The interim strategy for 2021 states that US democracy is no longer adequate, that it must be placed on a new footing, to benefit formerly disadvantaged segments of society (not restoring the pre-2010 distribution of political rights). The new political model announced in the strategy is pronounced to be the righteous and progressive example for the world to follow. It is upon this renewed foundation that a new US-led world order is to be built.

### 3. The US concept of power in light of the post-Cold War US national security strategies

#### 3.1. US national security strategies

Becoming the sole world power at the end of the Cold War produced a new situation, which necessitated a new vision, a new strategy, and a new concept of power. This was recognised in the national security strategy (NSS) published in 1990. The document declared that henceforth, the US as world leader would use its power differently than before. The main objective of the superpower would be to prevent any hostile power or group of powers from dominating the Eurasian land mass (NSS, 1990, p. 1), with the overarching goal to preserve the global superiority and global leadership role the US had acquired. How the US pursued this goal is laid out in its national security strategies.

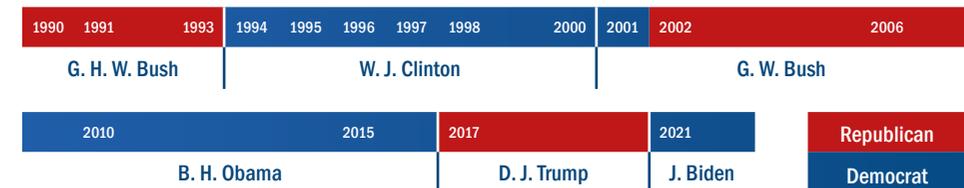
The issuing of national security strategies is prescribed by the Goldwater-Nichols Act, signed into law by Ronald Reagan in 1986. It required the National Security Council to publish the strategy annually, in order to integrate the activities of intelligence services and branches of the military (Snider, 1995). As the Cold War ended, the strategies surpassed the statutory requirement in terms of content and approach: by 1990 they embraced a comprehensive policy content, merging domestic and foreign policy to serve the objective of establishing the US as the global leader.

The strategies are based on a geopolitical situation analysis that determines the relative strength of the US across the globe in all relevant domains. It also identifies threats and opportunities, defines the immediate objectives and prescribes the strategies to meet them. Each NSS also provides the justifying narratives relevant to the overall geopolitical role and the given endeavours of the US.

Contrary to the legal requirement, strategies have not been published every year. From the 1990 strategy that announced the end of the Cold War to the interim strategy of 2021 that called for a new world order 16 strategies were published altogether. Each administration published at least one strategy, so the documents provide an insight into the entire 31-year period, despite the irregular frequency of their publication.

The timeline in Figure 2 shows the 16 US strategies by year of publication, indicating the name and party affiliation of the signatory president.

FIGURE 2: US NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGIES PUBLISHED BETWEEN 1990 AND 2021, BY YEAR OF PUBLICATION AND PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION



Source: author's own editing

### 3.2. The components of the power prescribed by US national security strategies

The 16 US national security strategies published since 1990 are premised in the conviction that a world order – particularly a desirable one – does not emerge organically, by itself and winning the Cold War does not in itself produce a world order. The order needs to be built, then continuously nurtured and shaped to meet strategic interests. Thus, at the end of the Cold War, the first goal was for the US to consolidate its historically outstanding position. Then it needed to transform the nature of international cooperation and competition to integrate the states under its influence and to extend its order globally. Throughout this process, it needed to ensure that its superiority in the global distribution of power would not be compromised.

The strategies define the sources and features of the power needed to achieve this ambitious goal. US strategists view the concept of power as *the ability to act* in flexible, scalable and versatile fashion, with a global reach. This capacity to act is defined as a set of particular *positions and processes*, rather than in terms of selected quantitative indicators, such as GDP or military expenditure<sup>3</sup>. A geopolitical actor that begins to acquire one or more of the components of power that the US deems necessary for shaping the world order is viewed as a rival. An actor that voluntarily or involuntarily acquires the capability to limit US action within a key region<sup>4</sup> is deemed a threat.

#### The US concept of power suited to shape the world order in unipolarity

US power is deemed adequate for shaping the world order if it allows the US to undertake unilateral action and achieve its political objectives, i.e. be able to act and prevail without the practical or moral support of allies and partners, even in remote parts of the world.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Theorists have developed many ways of measuring power (Höhn, 2011). Being based on comprehensive indicators, these tend to be ill-suited to take into account the nature of power: that it is relational and situational, furthermore, that it is produced by a complex system whose structure and processes are paramount. In his discussion of the rivalry between the US and China, Allison (2017), for example, ponders whether overall or per capita GDP growth is a better measure for comparing the two powers. This approach fails to capture the dependencies that can be leveraged by either power. As for Russia's ability to withstand conflict, there was a consensus among US and European experts that Russia's low GDP means that it would swiftly succumb to sanctions. Had they relied on the concept of power used in the US strategies, they might have come to different hypotheses.

<sup>4</sup> Regions are defined in multiple ways, pending strategic relevance, but also based on coherence of policy for the US Department of State, and based on logistical and military strategic coherence for the Department of Defence.

<sup>5</sup> From 1994 onwards, the strategies require that the US military be designed to fight two major wars successfully at the same time. Some have argued that this may not be sufficient: Binnendijk and Kugler (2001), for instance argued that the US needs to be able to fight and win three major wars in remote places.

Shaping the world order takes flexibility, versatility, sustainability and global reach. This requires the simultaneous and deeply integrated interplay of the following factors:

1. Complexity of power;
2. Superiority in all components of complex power, both globally and within each key region;
3. The domination of the global commons, i.e. of the seas, airspace, outer space and cyberspace;
4. Having power multipliers who enhance in systemically relevant ways the complexity of power and/or its global reach;
5. A lack of strategic dependencies while, preferably, dominating the dependencies of others.

- 
1. **US power is sufficiently complex if** it is simultaneously superior to all other actors in the domains of intelligence, military, economy, technology and diplomacy and, importantly, these strengths are organised into a positive feedback loop, to feed each other. This organisation of strengths into processes also allow for versatile and scalable action, while contributing significantly to the sustainability of US power. To illustrate how the components of complex power enhance one another, we may consider superiority in intelligence, regarding which NSS 1991 provides an explanation: “*The global reach of American intelligence capabilities is a unique national asset, crucial not only to our own security, but also to our leadership role in responding to international challenges*” (NSS, 1991, p. 16). It informs military action and defence as well as all forms of diplomacy. Superiority in intelligence itself is produced through the combined input from the economic, technological and diplomatic realms, whether directly or indirectly. This includes the enforcement and certification of compliance through multilateral institutions of the world order such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations, and the leading international auditing firms. This provides global, systemic insight, going far beyond the traditional notion of intelligence, allowing the US to apply its force at the right time and at the right points, maximising its effectiveness and efficiency.
  2. **The requirement for the geographical distribution of complex power** is that it must be superior not only globally, but also regionally. This requirement stems

from the history of the rise of the US itself. The US first became dominant on its own continent, in its own hemisphere, and from this position, it was able to displace more significant powers at the global level (Magyarics, 2000). According to strategies published since 1990, the US needs to ensure that no key region is dominated by another power. Regions are defined in multiple ways, depending partly on coherence from a policy point of view, partly on logistics, and prioritised based on strategic relevance.

3. **The dominance of the global commons** enables the appropriate global and regional distribution, as well as the reach, of complex power. According to the strategies, the same principle applies to all global commons, namely, to the seas, outer space and cyberspace<sup>6</sup>. Dominating them is necessary in order to maintain their unimpeded use in peacetime, as well as to ensure that in time of conflict, the US cannot be denied their use, rather, that the US be able to deny their use to adversaries. To this end, it is necessary to control the strategic choke points, whether straits for maritime control, high-priority orbits in outer space, or technological platforms and key infrastructure for strategic leverage in the flows of data.

Cyberspace is made up of a global interconnection of nationally owned digital infrastructures, and its governance requires the cooperation of many actors. Here, the US aims to push for the recognition of norms of behaviour (NSS, 2010, p. 50)<sup>7</sup>, to ensure that the internet as a US invention reflects US values and is not put to hostile uses (NSS, 2017, p. 13).

4. **Power multipliers** constitute a highly diverse component of US power. In addition to expanding the territorial reach of the US, they also greatly increase its toolkit. As per the wording of the strategies, they can be partner countries, privately owned corporations, international organisations, non-governmental organisations, and other advocacy groups, or even individuals. What makes them special is that they add some systemically relevant feature to enhance the ability of the US to act. Saudi Arabia was a power multiplier by, among other things,

<sup>6</sup> Airspace is also a global public space but is not prominent in the strategies examined.  
<sup>7</sup> NSS 2010 offers a detailed insight into the US strategic approach to global commons: “We must also safeguard the sea, air, and space domains from those who would deny access or use them for hostile purposes. This includes keeping strategic straits and vital sea lanes open, improving the early detection of emerging maritime threats, denying adversaries hostile use of the air domain, and ensuring the responsible use of space. Many of these goals are equally applicable to cyberspace. While cyberspace relies on the digital infrastructure of individual countries, such infrastructure is globally connected, and securing it requires global cooperation. We will push for the recognition of norms of behavior in cyberspace, and otherwise work with global partners to ensure the protection of the free flow of information and our continued access. At all times, we will continue to defend our digital networks from intrusion and harmful disruption.” (NSS, 2010, p. 50).

enabling the creation of the petrodollar (Spiro, 1999). The UN, the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank are listed by the strategies among US power multipliers because they help enforce the norms of global governance. For example, the US successfully incorporated the requirement of climate action into the conditions applied by international organisations (NSS, 2015). Transnational private companies are also power multipliers. Their multifaceted contributions serve as the foundation for enlarging, integrating and maintaining the American world order.

5. **Strategic dependencies** are a high priority theme throughout the 16 US strategies, despite the fact that the US – particularly if combined with Canada – is rich in resources, including farmland, water, energy and industrial raw materials. These resources might satisfy the needs under hypothetical self-sufficiency. For global superiority, and for the purposes of global governance, however, these resources are neither sufficient, nor exclusive. Furthermore, for the unipole to prevail, it needs to ensure that its allies are not dependent on powers that are not sufficiently integrated into the US-led world order or may evolve to become adversaries (NSS, 2006). Possessing the power to shape the world order is inseparable from the ability to control the key strategic dependencies of others. This dual relevance of strategic dependencies is featured in Figure 3.

**FIGURE 3: COMPONENTS OF POWER REQUIRED FOR SHAPING THE WORLD ORDER IN UNIPOLARITY**



Source: author’s own editing.

Before 2021, energy security for the US and its allies was a constant priority in US national security strategies. Initially, this meant securing the source of supply by military means, namely the Persian Gulf region (NSS, 1990–1996). This strategy was replaced by the diversification of sources of supply (NSS, 1997–2006), in addition to increasing energy efficiency and research into alternative energy sources. Under the Obama administration, energy self-sufficiency became the goal (NSS, 2010, 2015), followed by a strategy of “energy dominance” (NSS, 2017) under the Trump administration. Unlike any previous NSS, the 2021 interim strategy does not address the issue of energy security.

Potential dependencies are not limited to raw materials or energy resources. Hardly had the US overcome its strategic energy dependency than a new one emerged: strategic industrial dependence, a vulnerability that undermined the complexity of US power and became the central security issue in the 2017 and 2021 strategies.<sup>8</sup>

### 3.3. Conditions for the sustainability of power according to the American experience

American power is extraordinary not only because it provides a wide range of scalable capabilities and global reach. Its uniqueness also stems from the positive feedback loops that underlie it, ensuring its sustainability. Their significance to the relative power position of the US and the evolution of the world order can hardly be overestimated.

In international relations theory, the idea of positive feedback loops is relatively new. A study published in 2020 presents the international system as a partially complex system in which positive feedback loops can be identified (Orsini et al., 2020). Within the social sciences, the theory of complexity, originally adopted from the natural sciences, has gained more acceptance in economics. The economy being highly relevant to both power and its legitimation, examining its interpretation in terms of complexity has much to contribute to international relations theory.

The Cold War had not yet ended, and the global interdependence that has emerged with the trade based world order that entailed to outsourcing of industry, giving rise to global supply chains was not yet on the horizon, when Professor of Economics W. Brian Arthur and his Stanford colleagues began to interpret competitive market phenomena on a non-linear basis, embracing the insights of complexity theory. What prompted them to seek new avenues was a number of otherwise inexplicable

<sup>8</sup> The issue of strategic industrial dependence has persisted beyond the period examined in this analysis.

phenomena, including why the best does not necessarily win out, or why the theory of diminishing returns does not universally apply.

They came up with a theory that allows for the organic diversity of actors, and the economic theory of cumulative effects contrary to the widely accepted principle of diminishing returns (Arthur, 1990). They found that the phenomenon of the amplification of small competitive advantages plays a crucial role in economic processes that are organised in positive feedback loops. In their approach, identifying and seizing opportunities in a complex economy is the driver of a growth strategy. Following Arthur (1990), Ayres and colleagues (2003) came to similar conclusions about the role of positive feedback. The processes they identified are directly applicable to the processes of international power as assiduously built by the United States.

The world order can hardly be theorised as more readily reducible to simplistic indicators and linear processes than its complex subsystem, the world economy. Instead of linear cause-and-effect relationships, there are multiple – but not unlimited – possible outcomes to geopolitical situations. In hindsight, of course, it is possible to pinpoint which one of several possible processes took place and produced the outcome that now seems obvious and inevitable. It is also a feature of the complex system that whoever gains a small advantage and can capitalise on it will gain a significant advantage. The US itself has, in a long historical process, increased its initially small-scale advantages in positioning to eventually forge a confident superiority. In its system of power driven by positive feedback loops, not only do the resources of the power thus built up not dry up, but it can also behave as a self-organising system: its complexity endows it with outstanding adaptability, enabling it even to regenerate itself – to eventually turn unplanned developments to its own advantage – as long as its positive feedback loops remain intact and sustain their purpose.

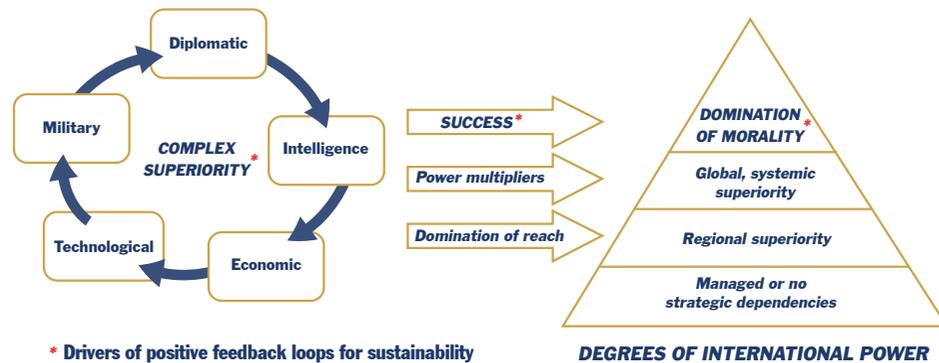
In this light, the shaping of the world order is an effort to create and benefit from advantage, to create and increase superiority. The US national security strategies provide the coherence necessary for this collective effort by political establishment, power multipliers. The establishment of positive feedback loops is a conscious effort in US strategies, and one that is explicitly described in the national security strategies themselves. For example, “[*The strategy*] is premised on a belief that the line between our domestic and foreign policies is disappearing -- that we must revitalize our economy if we are to sustain our military forces, foreign initiatives and global influence, and that we must engage actively abroad if we are to open foreign markets and create jobs for our people” (NSS, 1996, p. i.)

In addition to the organisation of the material elements of power, the factors that play a role in legitimacy can also provide positive feedback. Of key importance

among these is success, which is fundamental to justifying the order, the leadership and the strategy that has been put in place. Another is the domination of morality. In a geopolitical context, an actor dominates morality<sup>9</sup> if they define and enforce the norms within an order – regional or global. In a functionalist approach, “good” is the behaviour that serves to maintain the system and “bad” is one that weakens it.<sup>10</sup>

The edifice of US power, which includes the relevant processes of legitimacy is shown in Figure 4. The positive feedbacks that emerge here – the interlocking system of complex material power, success, and the domination of morality – are at the macro level. There are also positive feedback loops in the subsystems of US power, along the entire hierarchy of interests based on the principle of utility.

FIGURE 4: THE EDIFICE OF US POWER SUITABLE TO SHAPE WORLD ORDER



Source: author's own editing

An important aspect of the sustainability of American power is the underlying return-on-investment approach that does not allow resources to be wasted in the expansion of the world order. Gestures and actions, including aid, lending, investment and trade are all designed to or at least leveraged to contribute toward strategic goals. The practice of lending in preparation of the expansion of the US-led world

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Haidt (2008, p. 70) offers a socio-psychological definition of morality that is well suited to the geopolitical context: “moral systems are interlocking sets of values, virtues, norms, practices, identities, institutions, technologies and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate selfishness and make cooperative social life possible.” The advantage of this definition is that it focuses on the role of morality, not its manifestations.

<sup>10</sup> This brings us to what is known as structural power (Simai, 2012; Strange, 1988). Whoever possesses it not only has power within particular relations but also sets the norms and frameworks for the functioning of the regional or international system.

order is a case in point (see e.g. Hare & Révész, 1992, in respect of Hungary). The same was true of the outsourcing of production overseas, which was instrumental to the expansion of the world order while providing access to cheap foreign labour for US-affiliated transnational corporations (NSS, 1995, in the context of opening up to China). As their profits increased, their influence grew as power multipliers within the edifice of US power, and so did their influence over US policies.

### 3.3.1. Soft power as a positive feedback-driven subsystem of US power

Although unmentioned in US national security strategies, the often-misunderstood soft power played a key role in the expansion of the US-led world order (Nye, 1990). Misinterpretations arise because it is often overlooked that soft power – as used by the US – refers to a particular mechanism, not a toolkit. In the context of building and enlarging a world order, soft power means *offering an attractive alternative*<sup>11</sup> to the subordinate society of another state. This creates the social openness and receptiveness that facilitates the expansion of the world order.

With regard to Hungary, for example, a 1958 CIA report<sup>12</sup> said that the Hungarian society would have sided with a potentially interventionist US force against the Soviet Union and party leadership because, as the report put it, it saw itself as belonging to the West. Indeed, the success of soft power is shown by the fact that a few decades later, with the end of the Cold War, the expansion of the American world order could be immediately launched. Under the heading “international assistance”, NSS 1991 called for the US, with the help of wealthy allies, to provide various forms of aid to Eastern Europe, newly liberated from Soviet rule, as well as to Central America and South Africa (NSS, 1991, p. 16). The assistance envisaged was to facilitate integration into, and cooperation with, the US world order, including activities to consolidate democracy, to help the enforcement of free market principles and the

<sup>11</sup> Deconstructing the state into governors and governed serves analytical purposes because the various power mechanisms, whether coercion, economic motivation or soft power, act upon them differently. Regarding soft power, the phenomenon of attraction, of voluntary compliance, is hardly compatible with the conscious strategic thinking of governors. As Mattern (2005) points out: the idea of following, while going against self-interests, is illogical in the world of international relations. A society, however, may well be attracted to another society’s way of life. Soft power as the ability to attract works in a world of public perceptions rather than government advocacy based on intelligence and analysis. Society’s attraction to a particular way of life can help legitimise the interest-based decision of governors to submit to and integrate into that order. Should a government refuse to submit and integrate into a regional or world order, then the dominant power will seek to offer an attractive alternative through the domestic political opposition of the reluctant government. Particularly in shatter belts – strategically important zones of small states wedged between great powers (Cohen, 2015, p. 48) – such use of soft power will exacerbate already existing divisions in society.

<sup>12</sup> For historical context: the CIA report referenced came two years after the 1956 uprising that was swiftly put down by Soviet forces.

local involvement of international financial institutions – the IMF, World Bank and GATT – to ensure military interoperability, to promote measures against international crime and to cooperate in disaster management (NSS, 1991, p. 17).

Enlarging a world order takes more than attraction. In Hungary's case, hard arguments for integration into the US-led world order can at least in part be attributed to the accumulation of dollar debt in the 1970s. Although little known or understood by Hungarian society in the undemocratic context, Hare and Révész (1992) show that this indebtedness to the West, combined with a Hungarian identity that was pulling the country westwards, made the country's integration into the West *inevitable* at a time when the power base of opposing regional geopolitical interests had imploded.

American soft power as a subsystem of power is itself an ecosystem of positive feedback, in which the US government and the US-affiliated transnational corporations in the role of power multipliers act in support of each other. What qualifies as diplomacy and investment from the perspective of inter-state relationships creates a market for highly profitable businesses that establish America as an ideal and promote the US-led world order.

Payoff need not be immediate, or even direct. One example is the iconic Marshall Plan, which played an important role in the founding of the American world order after World War II. Aid was extended to war-ravaged erstwhile allies and adversaries on condition of major structural reforms that integrated them into the American world order (DeLong & Eichengreen, 1991). With the quick post-war recovery of recipient states the Marshall Plan became a symbol and proof of the far-reaching benefits of partnering with the US. Its contribution to US soft power prevailed long after its implementation.<sup>13</sup>

Systemic reliance on positive feedback comes with the risk of overdrive. On the one hand, it may entail shifts in the distribution of power, which is most readily noticeable between transnational corporations and the US. On the other hand, it increases inequality between and within societies. Inequalities are hard to conceal in the age of the internet and globalisation and they can all too easily undermine the perception of the US-led world order as resting on just arrangements (i.e., the just sharing of benefits, opportunities, and burdens), a key requirement of a stable world order in Kissinger's (2009, p. 9) definition.

<sup>13</sup> Given this historical precedent in the US, it is understandable that from a US perspective it is hard to believe that China would lend to anyone without political conditions. In his book, Graham Allison (2017), who objectively analyses the competition between the US and China, leaves open the question of whether it is even conceivable to provide world order-building credit without political conditions, as China promises.

Visible inequality among societies undermines the acceptance of the world order by countries that feel exploited, the global South in particular. Within societies, growing inequalities lead to diverging social interests and therefore weaken democracy (Gedeon, 2009, pp. 29–30).

Having built its legitimacy as a global leader partly on its status as a model democracy, the US is particularly vulnerable to a crisis in its political establishment. Upon the US' visible success as a society hinges its power of attraction, as does its domination of morality. The existence of visible followship, too, is a source of legitimation for the US. This, too may weaken if societies rebel. Any such movement may gain traction if dissatisfied societies perceive that they are not alone with their views.

To match theory with practice, the next section presents the evolution of the US-led world order, as reflected in the 1990–2021 national security strategies.

## 4. The evolution of the post-Cold War American world order

### 4.1. The construction of the US-led world order and the evolution of the sustainability of American power

When the Cold War ended and the Soviet Union disintegrated, the post-World War II allies of the US – the industrial democracies, most notably Germany and Japan, that had risen thanks to the US – were inevitably reinterpreted in this new context as potential rivals for the US. As the world emerged from bipolarity, a competition of industrial democracies prevailed. At that time, it was not yet clear who had enforceable claims to shape the international system and how they would do this. It was in this context, and because since military might – which clearly tipped the balance of power in favour of the US – was not relevant that NSS 1990 raised the idea of a multipolar and interdependent world of industrial democracies (NSS, 1990, p. 18). Operation Desert Storm in 1991 produced the breakthrough and lay down the foundations of what was to be the US-led unipolar world order.

The war that the US waged – with great international involvement – against Iraq<sup>14</sup>, which had invaded Kuwait, provided convincing evidence that the world was fol-

<sup>14</sup> Iraq may have mis-read its relations with the US when engaging in its attack on Kuwaiti sovereignty. Iraq had been an ally of the US against revolutionary Islamic Republic of Iran, which pursued an anti-US policy. The formerly cooperative relations between Iraq and the US were still remembered in the region when the 2003 war against Iraq unfolded, as evidenced by by Al Jazeera's report published on 4 September 2003: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2003/9/4/when-rumsfeld-was-chummy-with-saddam>.

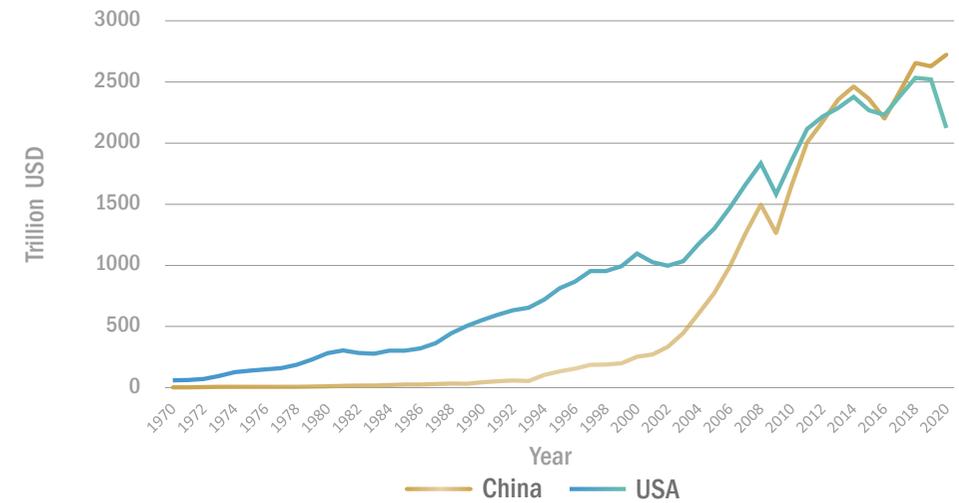
lowing US leadership, and that US military power was, indeed, relevant as well as superior. The US response to the presumptuous Iraqi move made it clear to all that lesser powers cannot initiate changes in the international system, while the US can count on the active support of many countries to enforce this norm. The war, as will be discussed later, was key to the founding of the unipolar world order in multiple ways: it introduced the American vantage point as the norm for news media and international society, it established US control over the energy supplies from the Middle East to the US and other powers, while enabling the US domination of key maritime chokepoints for trade between Asia and Europe.

From 1993 onwards, the substance of international cooperation and competition was transformed, the competition of industrial democracies was replaced with global free trade, on terms that privileged the US. All countries were encouraged to open their markets to US products, capital and services on an equal footing with domestic companies. Marking the significant shift in the underlying processes of the international system, from then on, the US defined itself not as an industrial democracy but as a free market democracy.

From 1993–1994, the declared aim of the strategies was the expansion of the American world order, stated upfront, including in the titles of many of the strategies. The transition to an expanding world order based on free trade required reforms to the norms and institutions of world trade. In 1995, the post-World War II General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was replaced by the World Trade Organization (WTO), which allowed the free movement of capital and services as well as of goods. The WTO has been instrumental to enforcing the new norms of free trade, by imposing transparency to provide the insight for necessary governance. Critics of the arrangement – powers dissatisfied with unipolarity – would complain that this transparency was asymmetric, as shown in the chapter titled Proposals for a New World Order in the present volume.

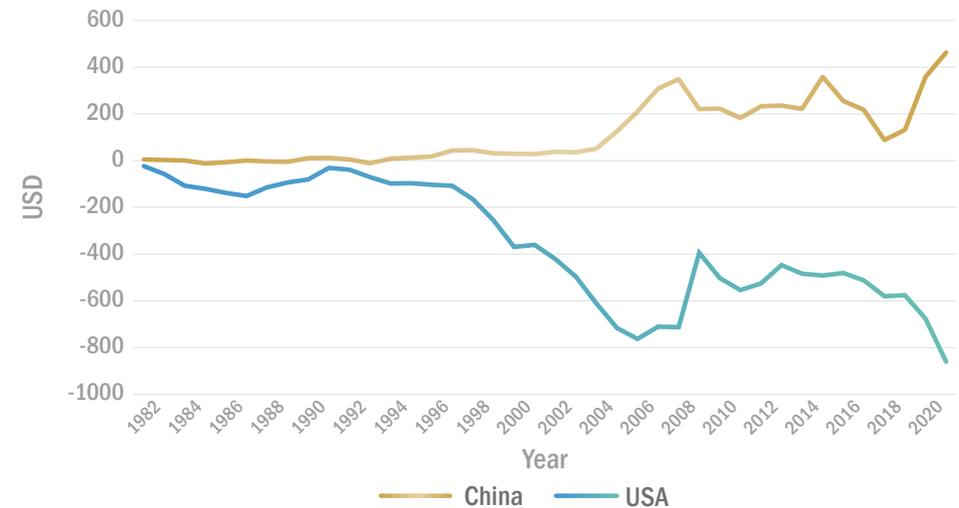
Quite significant to the evolution of the world order increasingly predicated on US-driven globalisation and interdependencies was the release of advanced in-fo-communication technologies once the export restrictions of the Cold War era were eliminated. The development of technical tools facilitating and serving interconnectedness flourished and spread rapidly around the globe, changing the way of life, the way of doing business and the way economies were structured. American technology produced the platforms, the infrastructure, on which the interconnected world – civilian or professional, private or public – operated.

**FIGURE 5: TRENDS IN US AND CHINESE EXPORTS BETWEEN 1970 AND 2020, IN CURRENT (2020) USD**



Source: World Bank

**FIGURE 6: TRENDS IN US AND CHINESE FOREIGN TRADE BALANCES BETWEEN 1982 AND 2021, IN CURRENT (2020) USD**



Source: World Bank

A major feat in the transition to a trade-based world order came with the US delinking the Most Favoured Nation status from human rights concerns and granting it to China in view of its huge economic potential (NSS, 1994, p. 24). NSS 1995 was already reporting a significant increase in trade between the two countries. China's WTO accession in 2001 removed the barriers to outsourcing US manufacturing to China. The dynamic evolution of US and Chinese exports and foreign trade balances based on World Bank data is shown in Figures 5 and 6.

In a world order based on world trade, countries with export-oriented economies depended on the US as the world's main export market, an arrangement made possible by the outsourcing of US industrial production. This arrangement had far-reaching consequences for US society and the US edifice of power, alike.

The strategy published in 2010 (p. 32) explains that in the 2008 financial crisis, "Americans found themselves in debt or out of work, our demand for foreign goods fell sharply". This, in turn, dealt a serious blow to economies dependent the US market. The dent in US imports due to the 2008 crisis is clearly identifiable in Figures 4 and 5.

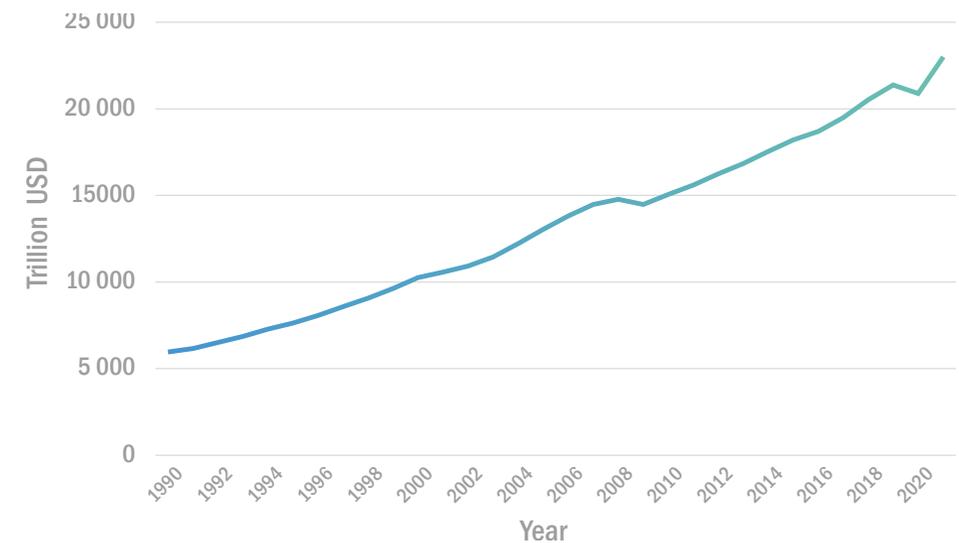
NSS 2010 is the first strategy to signal the breakdown of social cohesion in the US. In his 2012 book, Robert Reich, former Secretary of Labor to President Bill Clinton, concludes that the 2008 crisis would probably not have occurred if the fortunes of the American middle class had not already been going downhill. Back in the days of the competition of industrial powers, including during the Cold War, the single-earner family model of the American dream was replaced by a two-earner model, a prerequisite for increased efficiency in the international competition, but a shock for society, particularly since the purchasing power of wages did not increase, and in many areas actually declined. Stagnating real earnings and stagnating job creation pushed a consumption-driven society into debt. Inequality increased significantly, weakening the consensus of interests necessary for democracy to function smoothly.<sup>15</sup> Social cohesion continued to erode throughout the period examined. Neither the Obama, nor the Trump administration succeeded in finding a solution. As per Joe Biden's interim strategy, issued in March 2021, the lack of cohesion has not only persisted, but has become so serious that it was recognised in the 2021 interim strategy as fostering domestic extremists who posed a threat to national security, a first in the post-Cold War history of the US.

<sup>15</sup> It was in this period, namely, in 2010, that corporations were granted political rights – corporate personhood – under a new interpretation of the US Constitution, as discussed in connection with the ideological foundations of the US-led world order.

The loss of social cohesion domestically was not the only consequence of the overseas outsourcing of US industry. It also undermined the unique US edifice of power. No sooner had the US freed itself from its previous energy dependence than it developed a strategic industrial dependence that, according to NSS 2017 (pp. 29-30), broke an important positive feedback loop that had sustained US power. By 2017, the US defence industry had become dependent on potentially hostile suppliers, which undermined US military power itself, as the ability to surge the defence industrial production was now dependent on foreign interests or on single domestic suppliers. Highlighting the complexity of the problem, NSS 2017 explains that the outsourcing of industry had also eroded the US knowledge base needed to restore industrial self-sufficiency in strategic areas.

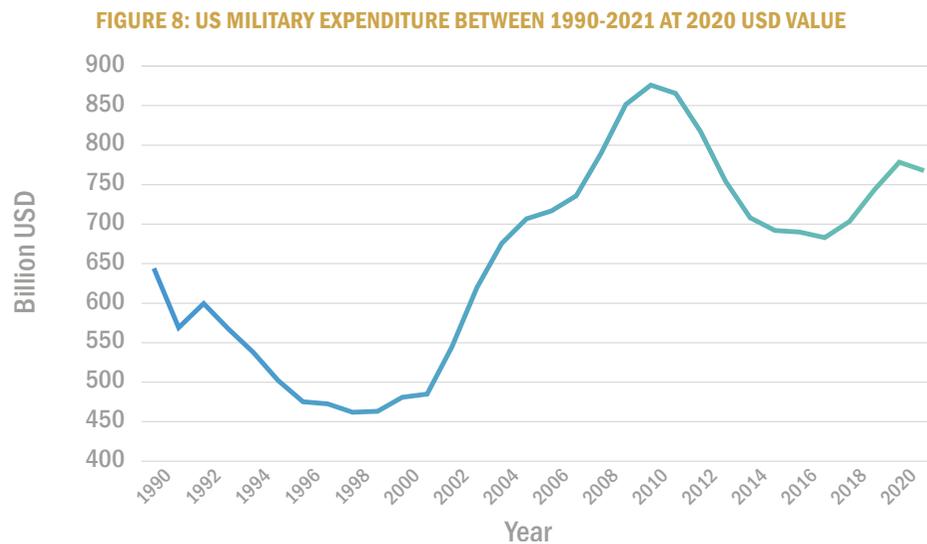
Being structural in nature, these shocks to the edifice of US power are not reflected in the GDP data (Figure 7). The declines visible through the data recorded by the World Bank are linked to the 2008 crisis and COVID-related measures: not to any changes in the relative power position of the United States.

**FIGURE 7: TREND OF US GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT, FROM 1990 TO 2021  
IN CURRENT (2020) USD**



Source: World Bank

The trend in US military spending (Figure 8) does not reflect the state of US power, either. It is more indicative of its military commitments, the types of equipment favoured for procurement, and possibly the pricing policies used by manufacturers.



Source: SIPRI

If the aim of the 2017 strategy was to end US strategic industrial dependence, and repatriate formerly offshored industry, some arrangement would have been required to ensure the profitability for US economic actors – the privately owned corporations that had become transnational, and which have been among the power multipliers – to relocate to the US or to nearby friendly states. It could have done so by imposing significant cost on overseas outsourcing or by making repatriation more lucrative. Either way, a new deal would have been needed. Appealing to patriotism, the 2017 strategy does not include one.

The 2021 interim strategy adopts a different approach. In exchange for the settlement of strategic industrial dependency, it offers companies a new concept of world order, based on the fourth industrial revolution.

## 4.2. The rise of rivals

The international distribution of power to shape the world order underwent significant change after the turn of the millennium. As presented above, the edifice of US power was undermined by the strategic industrial dependence that emerged as a result of outsourcing of industry, breaking a positive feedback loop crucial for the complexity and sustainability of US superiority. While the edifice of US power has been weakened, challengers to US dominance have risen, with the will and the potential of producing a new world order. These challengers are defined using the same criteria of power that the US uses for its own ability to act globally. One set of challenges is produced by states that have relevant gained components of power, the other set of challenges is presented by transnational corporations, which, too, have obtained much of the power required to construct and lead a world order.

As a result of the US construction of a trade-based global world order that required the outsourcing of industry overseas, much of it to China, the eastern country has grown to become more than just an economic powerhouse. According to US situation analyses reflected in the national security strategies, from the very beginning of its economic cooperation with the US, it has used some of its economic gains to increase its military power. Other states are also developing their armed forces, but China has done so in an intransigent way. Indeed, the lack of transparency bemoaned in US strategies highlights an aspect of Chinese power: its ability to deny insight into its capabilities and processes. Furthermore, China has increasingly acquired the technologies needed for a substantial presence in cyberspace and outer space. While in 2015, President Obama maintained a policy of engagement meaning cooperation without political compliance, Donald Trump's 2017 strategy denounced this and called China an adversary. The 2021 interim strategy went further. It spoke of China as the only rival that had already acquired complex power.

Much as China has been touted as the single real rival to the US, it becomes obvious that China does not on its own pose a sustainable challenge to it if we measure China's power position by the criteria the US has been shown to use. It is not free of dependencies, as it is a major importer of energy and food. While it has recently become an important market, it has been largely dependent on US and European markets. It does command the industrial dependencies of multiple powers, the US included, but weaponizing this dominance is a measure of last – or penultimate – resort, as it would hardly allow a return to the status quo ante. Having realised the existence of strategic industrial dependence from China, the US and its allies are already working to eliminate this dependence. Doing so is easier said than done, not

only due to the complexity, but also because some dependencies may not be spotted in anything less than an all-out conflict. Nevertheless, steps are being taken by the US to eliminate this dependency.

China does not dominate any of the global commons despite having acquired ports of strategic significance to boost its vast international trade. Indeed, the Belt and Road Initiative, China's global trade and infrastructure platform enables it to make worthwhile offers as part of its economic diplomacy and may become an important factor in shaping the world order. While it does not dominate any multilateral organisations or other institutions of the world order, China is a founding member of BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and the New Development Bank, which are the key multilateral institutions of the proponents of a multipolar world order.

Overall, despite its systemic importance, China, is not, on its own, a challenge to the US nor is it positioned to singlehandedly shape the world order. The challenge to the US is presented by a *group* of cooperating powers, of which China is an indispensable member. Another key member is Russia. Often and widely belittled for its relatively low GDP, and relatively underwhelming military expenditure (at least in comparison to the US) under Vladimir Putin's presidency, Russia has gained formidable power if measured by the criteria of the US edifice of power, and is a crucial complement to China.

Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, US strategies have constantly anticipated the theoretical possibility of Russia's rise and have taken significant steps to prevent it. In the early stage of the post-Cold War world order, these measures included a push for disarmament, a policy of engagement, and the promotion of the presence in Russia of NGOs listed among US power multipliers. The first sign of a possible return of Russia as a great power rival appears in NSS 2002, the first strategy after the attack on the Twin Towers in 2001. The strategy notes that although the US has the support of the major powers in the global war against terrorism, including of Russia, there is lingering distrust by key Russian elites of US motives and policies (NSS 2002, p. 27). The first, not yet explicit, sign of the Russian comeback appears in NSS 2006, which was published after the creation of Nord Stream AG in 2005, but which has no explicit reference to it. The 2006 strategy identifies the strategic energy dependence of *other* countries on “*unstable*” energy exporting powers as a problem (NSS, 2006, p. 27). According to a strategy issued under President Obama in 2010, Russia had reemerged in the international arena as a “strong voice” (NSS, 2010, p. 8). The mention of Russia's strengthened

voice may be a reference to the founding in 2005 of Russia's state-owned international news channel, Russia Today (later RT). It may also be a reference to Russian President Vladimir Putin's 2007 speech at the Munich Security Conference, in which he challenged, among other things, growing inequality produced by the US-led world order. The next US strategy was published in early 2015, after the overthrow in 2014 of Ukrainian President Yanukovich, who had refused Ukraine's accession to the West in 2013, and the Russian annexation of Crimea, but before Russia's military involvement in Syria. NSS 2015 clearly identifies Russia as an adversary, as have all subsequent strategies.

What makes Russia an important member of the multi-power push for a new world order is its lack of strategic dependencies. This is not only due to the richness of its natural resources, but also to its strategy to establish self-sufficiency in response to sanctions it was subjected to from 2014 onwards. Russia has become a significant exporter not only of energy, but also of agricultural products. It has a largely self-sufficient industry base, including cyber and space technologies. Russia also has significant diplomatic potential with its Cold War era partners, and a public diplomacy capability due to its internationally operating media organisations, which have built an ecosystem with opinion leaders and media outlets that are critical of the unipolar world order.

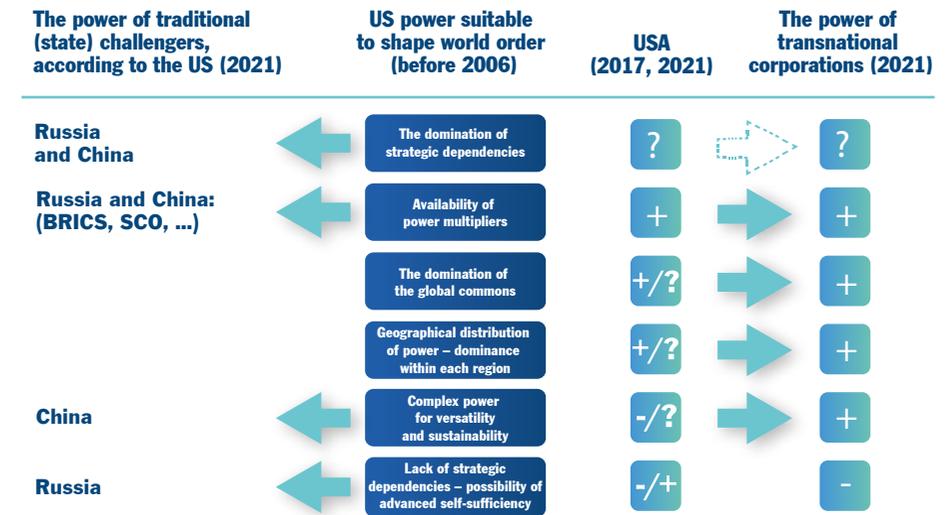
As a member of BRICS and SCO, in cooperation with China, India, South Africa and Brazil, (and the member candidates of these organisations), Russia is a formidable power. Indeed, it is not China or Russia that may challenge the unipolar world order, but the cooperating group of dissatisfied powers and their international networks. This cooperation, if expanded, may eventually shift the balance of power at maritime chokepoints, and produce a hold on resources that the US and its allies will not be able to leave unanswered. It is in this context that Iran's membership in the SCO, and its invitation to join BRICS, along with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Egypt and Argentina announced at the August 2023 Johannesburg summit is particularly important. It suggests a potential shift in the domination of the Strait of Hormuz, the Bab El Mandeb, and the Suez Canal, key strategic maritime chokepoints, from the unipolar order to the multipolar group of countries.

Constituting a separate category of powers that may rival the US are privately owned transnational corporations. The global economic new deal offered to them in 1993 transformed the US from an industrial democracy into a free market democracy. Corporations have always been among the power multipliers of the US, as they play a pivotal role in almost every segment of the US formula of global power. In the

post-Cold War period, however, the role of power multipliers increased, with corporations playing a decisive role in enlarging the US world order and becoming transnational in the process. They own and control the technology that defines the social, economic, and military domains within the US and in much of the world. Their intelligence capability comes from the systems, the infrastructure, and the platforms they own<sup>16</sup>. Their possession of cyber and space technology gives them state-of-the-art means of warfare. Their power is, therefore, complex; they hold dominant – technology-intensive – forms of geographical reach and they also have power multipliers. These include their various representative organisations, such as the World Economic Forum, as well as influential foundations that have worked with governments and multilateral organisations, such as the UN, the World Health Organisation to set agendas and provide solutions that simultaneously help construct a world order that is advantageous for, and is led by, privately owned transnational corporations. With the introduction of corporate personhood in the US, and with the hold corporations gained on complex power, the formerly balanced relationship between the US political leadership and the corporations has progressively become asymmetric, in favour of the corporations. US national security strategies do not yet suggest that transnational corporations could be anything other than power multipliers of the US. Indeed, the first mention of privately owned transnational corporations as a distinct power whose cooperation needs to be sought by the US appears in the document titled America’s Strategic Posture – The Final Report of the Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States, published in October 2023.

The components of power that the US deems necessary for shaping the world order, and the shift in their international distribution between 2006–2021, that is *before* the 2022 sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines and the 2023 invitation of new members to joint BRICS, are reviewed in Figure 9.

**FIGURE 9: SHIFTS IN THE COMPONENTS OF POWER DEEMED NECESSARY TO SHAPE WORLD ORDER, BASED ON US NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGIES**



Source: author’s own editing. Graphic design: Alexandra Érsek-Csanádi

### 4.3. Trends in support for the US-led world order according to the US National Security Council

It is a commonplace in the sociology of power that the use of power requires successful justification to gain at least tacit acceptance by subordinates (Beetham, 2013; Flint, 2017). This necessarily applies to the use of power by the US as the leader of the unipolar world order. Indeed, one of the declared aims of publishing the strategies is to build domestic and international acceptance for US global action. Examining the trends as assessed by the US in the domestic and international support for its foreign policy is a key aspect of the evolution of world order.

The first milestone in building the world order was Operation Desert Storm, the first US-led military operation in the post-Cold War era, conducted against Iraq after it invaded Kuwait. NSS 1991, published after the operation, describes the US as having very strong domestic social cohesion and international support. The success of the US in 1991 was overwhelming in multiple ways. On the one hand, the US gained international support for the intervention, many states participated in the operation itself, demonstrating the followship the it enjoyed as a leader. The military

<sup>16</sup> In her 2019 book, social psychologist and philosopher Shoshana Zuboff, Professor Emerita at Harvard Business School, writes about “surveillance capitalism”, a new kind of capitalism based on monitoring the behaviour of the individual, as well as groups and organisations. In the age of big data, or smart data, this is a new power arena.

success was also spectacular. It was the world's first war televised live, courtesy of the US-based private cable news network CNN. This immediately secured a global leadership role for the US news media outlet and made the American perspective an international standard. Last, but not least, the war allowed the US to build up its military presence in the Persian Gulf. This not only secured its own oil supply in the new global circumstances, but also allowed the US to dominate a very significant part of the world's oil supply available to others. The US military presence established in the region allowed the US to strengthen its hold on strategic maritime chokepoints, the Strait of Hormuz, the Bab El Mandeb, and the Suez Canal. In recognition of the significance of these achievements, US, President George H. W. Bush expressed his hope that the Gulf crisis would prove to be the crucible of the new world order (NSS, 1991, p. v.).

The strategies of the 1990s do not indicate a lack of support or social divisions. The final strategy of Clinton's presidency, issued in 2001, concludes that there are no deep fissures within American society, and having the most sustained economic growth in history and after building interdependence, its alliances in Europe and Asia are stronger than ever because they are *“organized to advance a permanent set of shared interests, rather than to defeat a single threat”* (NSS, 2001, Preface).

In the aftermath of the 2001 attack on the Twin Towers, American social cohesion was strengthened enormously, as both strategies issued by the George W. Bush administration show. Following the attack – upon the launch of the war on terrorism – the US was even supported by its former great power adversaries, although the 2002 strategy notes that there is some suspicion on the part of the Russian political leadership (NSS, 2002, p. 27). This strategy offers key definitions for the US strategic notions of rogue state, tyranny, human dignity, terrorism that set the terms for the legitimization of the use of coercive power by the US, and levels the accusation against Iraq of the possession of biological and nuclear weapons of mass destruction, constructing the justification for the war spearheaded by the US against Iraq in the following year, this time a pre-emptive strike. NSS 2006 indicates a loss of international support, with even close US allies rejecting war against Iraq. It also states that although the accusations against Iraq were unfounded, the war was nevertheless inevitable, because the lack of trust and uncertainty was compounded by the fact that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's communication was not clear enough to remove the ambiguity that he had created (NSS, 2006, p. 24).

The 2003 war against Iraq resulted in a significant loss of international support, as shown by the Obama administration's first strategy, issued in 2010, which explicitly

distanced itself from the Iraq war, describing it as optional, implying that it was incompatible with international law (NSS, 2010, p. 1). The document condemned the American misdeeds that had been exposed during the war, while reaffirming the basic idea that the US is the moral role model for the world (NSS, 2010, p. 10). The document describes how the world is scrutinising the actions of the US as never before (NSS, 2010, p. 2). The strategy goes to great lengths emphasising the principle of mutual respect among cultures. It also promises not to take action against those who exposed US wrongdoing on the grounds of state secrets just to cover up violations of international law or to avoid embarrassment to the government (NSS, 2010, pp. 36–37).<sup>17</sup> The reference to whistleblowers is unprecedented, and indeed unique throughout the national security strategies, indicative of the immense importance of the individuals' actions. Published in the year before the Arab Spring, NSS 2010 reflects that the reputation of the US in the Middle East in particular, had been shaken by the ill-advised war against Iraq and the inhumane practices by US personnel in Abu Ghraib, and Guantanamo Bay prisons. The strategy itself seeks to simultaneously restore the international legitimacy of the US as the moral leader of the world order, and declares the US's determination to stand up for universal human values around the world more firmly than ever before (NSS, 2010, p. 5).

The 2010 strategy also signals a break in American society when it quotes President Obama: *“I refuse to accept the notion that we cannot summon that unity again,”* namely the unity that had characterised American society after the attack on the Twin Towers (NSS, 2010, p. 51). The document does make reference to the 2008 financial crisis that directly affected US society and led to a recession (NSS, 2010, p. 7, 32), but it does so in a global political context, regarding global implications. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the loss of cohesion in American society was the result of the debt crisis and unemployment affecting livelihoods, only to be exacerbated by the continuing costly wars, and news of atrocities that were difficult to reconcile with American moral identity and narratives.

The 2015 strategy indicates an even greater loss of social cohesion in the US. Donald Trump's 2017 strategy expects cohesion to be remedied by a new focus on the

<sup>17</sup> Without naming names, one can only assume that the strategy refers to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and Chelsea Manning, who leaked war crimes footage of the US military. Manning was jailed and pardoned by Obama at the end of his second term. The legal dispute over the activities of Assange, imprisoned in Britain and facing extradition to the US, continues to this day over whether his activities were journalism or violations of state secrets and espionage. On 28 November 2022, five newspapers, including The Guardian, which had published material provided by Assange, issued a joint statement calling upon the US to drop its charges against Assange, as this would violate freedom of the press (Waterson, 2022).

livelihood of American society, in the framework of the effort to get transnational corporations to repatriate their industrial capabilities, with the foreign policy goal to eliminate US strategic dependencies. The interim national security strategy, issued in March 2021, not only indicates that social cohesion had not been mended, but speaks of domestic political extremism, which it sees as a threat on par with the return of great power competition. The interim strategy calls for domestic political extremists to be countered in the same way as terrorism had been. In 2021, more obviously than ever before, reconciling the domestic interests of American society with the undertaking to build and lead a new world order is a major challenge, carrying heightened risks as well as opportunities.

## 5. Summary

The present study has reviewed the evolution of the US-led world order, the American notion of power and the ideological foundations that underpin it, based on the comparative longitudinal content analysis of the 16 US national security strategies published in the 1990–2021 period.

The period examined is demarcated by the declaration of the end of the Cold War in 1990, and the announcement of the need to create a new, US-led world order. In between these two dates, the US significantly altered the nature of, and processes within, the international system. The competition of industrial powers was replaced with an international system organised around open trade. In a short span of time, the US drive for a trade-based world order combined with the rapid development of info-communications technology resulted in a radically new world defined by globalisation and interdependence.

Findings show that in the US experience as the unipole, power to shape and enlarge the world order needs to be versatile, flexible, and endowed with global reach. Such power needs to be complex, integrated under consolidated control, and sustainable. The edifice of US power was built to match these criteria. It can be characterised by its structure, the positions held, and its integrative processes and mechanisms that are organised into positive feedback loops. The features of the US edifice of power can be applied to studying the shifts in the global distribution of power in the unipolar and post-unipolar era.

The sustainability of a political order – national or international – depends not only on the distribution of power, but also on its legitimization. An order is a hierarchical

relationship structured by power and its legitimization. The legitimization requires narratives that appeal to a shared vision or shared identity, as well as the production and just allocation of basic public goods: a degree of security and the conditions of material wellbeing considered acceptable by subordinates. For a state in a global leadership position, how the benefits of the world order are distributed among domestic and foreign societies will inevitably be a source of tension. In the case of the US, the institution of corporate personhood combined with the major role of transnational private corporations in the enlargement and maintenance of the US-led world order complicated the sharing of benefits of world order and affected the course of the diffusion of power. Inequalities made visible by globally available info-communications have led to the weakening of cohesion within and among societies, weakening the legitimacy of the US-led order, and of the US domestic political system.

Simultaneously, the trade-based world order that included the overseas outsourcing of industry undermined the complexity and the sustainability of the edifice of US power. Multiple components of the edifice of US power shifted to a group of traditional rivals, chiefly China and Russia, while some components of US power shifted to the privately owned transnational corporations that had been power multipliers for the US.

By 2021, the post-Cold War world order had become unsustainable in the eyes of the US, so it called for a new world order. So did the US' rivals. The initial proposals for a new world order were produced in 2021 by the contestants for the new world order: the US, its multipolarist rivals, and the transnational corporations. The visions for the power structure and governance model underlying the new world order were irreconcilable, hence, the opportunity for a peaceful transition to the new world order closed. This volume's chapter titled "Proposals for a New World Order, and the Competition for Building It" gives an overview of the competing visions, the strategies of choice unveiled in 2022, and outlines the ramifications for the world.

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# RUSSIA'S GREAT POWER STATUS AND ITS PERCEPTION OF WORLD ORDER (2008-2022)

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## 1. Introduction

The Russian Federation, established after the collapse of the Soviet Union, succeeded the defunct superpower, but its role in the international political arena was sidelined for decades. Its advocacy was limited to a regional level of power, and the Russian leadership's primary objective in the so-called "near abroad"<sup>1</sup>, i.e. the former Soviet member states, was to halt the steady decline of its previously strong influence.

Russia's ambitions to restore its status as a great power were formulated during the periods of Valdimir Putin's presidency, with it initially increasing its territory in post-Soviet times, de facto as a result of the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. Russia took advantage of the controversial circumstances of the 2014 Ukrainian crisis to move its borders outwards by integrating Crimea, and then the radical change in Russia's international role was triggered by successful military intervention in the Syrian war in 2015. The final phase of the restoration of Russia's great power status could be completed in the context of the current crisis in Ukraine.

This paper examines Russia's great power aspirations and the vision of world order between 2008 and 2022, as this period witnessed the spectacular strengthening of neo-Russian foreign policy and the territorial expansion of the Russian state.

According to the first hypothesis of the study, the main characteristics of Russian foreign policy can be identified and used to predict the activity of Russian foreign

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the term "near abroad" refers to the former Soviet republics, excluding the Baltic countries. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are closely linked to Central and Eastern Europe through EU and NATO accession, and their separation from the Russian sphere of interest is taken by this paper as evidence.

policy and the representation of Russian interests in a given problem area, as perceived by the wider public.

Another hypothesis of the study is that the Russian world order concept envisages the emergence of a multipolar regional world order, which is promoted from a theoretical point of view by regularly updated foreign policy and national security concepts, and from a practical perspective by active foreign policy engagement consciously supported by soft power.

This paper draws on literary sources to conduct qualitative research to identify the main features of Russian foreign policy and to define the theoretical and practical background that contributes to the realisation of the Russian concept of world order. In order to support the hypotheses of the analysis, the study also draws on international media reports and studies on related issues.

## 2. Attributes of Russian foreign policy and foreign policy concepts

### 2.1. The main features of Russian foreign policy in the post-Soviet era

With the collapse of the Soviet Union on 8 December 1991<sup>2</sup>, Russia's influence on international politics was significantly weakened. Not only did the former powerful state formation collapse, but a little earlier the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON, CMEA), which guaranteed Russia's political, economic and military assertiveness, was dissolved on 28 June 1991, and the Warsaw Pact (WP) was dissolved on 1 July 1991, with no legal successor. In the early 1990s, the arena for Russian advocacy was therefore pushed back behind the borders of the Commonwealth of Independent States, which was to partially replace the Soviet Union, with its formation on 21 December 1991. Russian leadership, with the sudden historical shift from a superpower to a regional power, was confronted with internal problems<sup>3</sup> and the realisation that Russian interests had been forced out of areas that

<sup>2</sup> On 8 December 1991, the so-called Belovezha Accords on the dissolution of the Soviet Union were signed by Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, after which the parliament of the Soviet Union, at its meeting on 26 December 1991, declared the dissolution of the state formation on 31 December 1991.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the destabilisation of the Caucasus from 1999, with the guerrilla warfare of extremist Islamist terrorist organisations in Dagestan and Chechnya spreading to five North Caucasus republics – Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia and Kabardino-Balkaria – and the terrorist attack in Beslan in 2004.

have traditionally been strong Soviet foreign policy arenas, such as Syria (Andrékó, 2020a) on the Arabian Peninsula or Cuba and Nicaragua in Central America. In the post-Soviet period, reality forced the adaptation of Russian foreign policy to current conditions. In line with the changing geopolitical balance of power, Russian advocacy was confined to the territory of the newly independent Russia and the millions of former citizens of Russian nationality who were expelled beyond the new Russian state borders following the break-up of the Soviet Union. Russian leadership recognised that in this new situation, the loose alliance of the CIS countries – which were members of the former Soviet Union – could easily alienate Moscow, and the attempt to prevent this became the focus of Russian power games, because until 2008, it was in these former member republics that Russian foreign policy saw the remaining opportunity to stop the rapidly eroding Russian authority. The view that the area between the borders of the former Soviet Union and those of the new Russia is a “near abroad”, effectively a “legitimate sphere” of Russian influence, took root early on in Russian political jargon (Matsaberidze, 2015). This is the first major feature of Russian foreign policy, which was a decisive factor in Russian political thinking until 2008 and has had a significant influence on Russian political thinking ever since.

Another key attribute of Russian foreign policy is the creation of buffer zones between the Russian Federation and the EU/NATO zones of influence (Simons, 2021). This was the intention behind the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states in 2008 and the Russian acceptance of the power formations in Eastern Ukraine as independent states in 2022. The Russian leadership has repeatedly, and in several forums, made it clear that its fundamental interest is not the integration of the “people’s republics”, recognised as independent republics, into Russia, but the creation of a flexible confederation of Ukrainian regions (Warner, 2014), in effect the federalisation of Ukraine, in which the Russian-majority oblasts are given broad political, economic and cultural autonomy. The federal state structure would allow Russian interests to be represented in the new composition and structure of the Ukrainian parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, because it would not be possible to pass qualified legislation that could harm the interests of the Russian people at any given time given the over-representation of the large Russian-speaking minority. According to the initial Russian reactions, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, the Luhansk People’s Republic and the Donetsk People’s Republic were not included as subjects of the Russian state, and existed as puppet states dependent on Russia in their role as buffer states. This state of affairs was also presumably in Russia’s longer-term interest because it would have been very difficult to prove that Russia could be held responsible under international law only on the grounds of annexation, and the

original mother states, Ukraine and Georgia, could not realistically expect to gain NATO membership because of their territorial disputes with Russia. From the point of view of Russian ambitions, the close integration of Crimea into Russia has been an exception, both because of its military importance in the Black Sea balance of power and because it is historically seen as a hard-won territory of the Russian Empire. The same does not apply to the breakaway areas of eastern Ukraine, although the shale gas<sup>4</sup> and methane fields discovered there are of economic importance (Savchuk, 2010), but neither Luhansk nor Donetsk were considered special sites from a military point of view. The Russian-Ukrainian war that broke out in February 2022, however, seems to override Russia’s original intentions, as the ethnic fault lines become more sharply defined as the war drags on in Ukraine. It is important to note that Ukraine is what Huntington describes as a typical “rupture state”. Russian policy is slowly drifting away from the plan to create a federal state structure in Ukraine and the Russian measures that were established in earlier conflict zones can also be observed. Russian leadership is no longer rigidly opposed to the inclusion of the breakaway territories of eastern Ukraine into the Russian Federation and supports a possible referendum of the population on unification with Russia. This is a typical Russian foreign policy move (see below, as the third main feature) to create an international legal reference point to legalise any future integration.

The third main feature of Russian foreign policy is that it tries to justify its military conflicts with other states in the post-Soviet period with arguments of international law before kinetic military power projection. Russia started a military operation in Georgia after Georgian troops launched a large-scale offensive against the South Ossetian government-controlled territory on 8 August 2008, killing 12 Russian peacekeepers and wounding almost 150. The international legal basis for Russia’s war against Georgia is linked, from a Russian perspective, to the attack on Russian peacekeepers. The international legal basis for the integration of Crimea into Russia, according to the Russian position, is provided by the fact that, chronologically, the referendum on Crimea’s independence and accession to Russia was held first. On 24 February 2014, Sevastopol, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, unilaterally declared its independence from Ukraine on 11 March; a referendum on 16 March decided on unification with Russia; and only then, on 18 March, did the city

<sup>4</sup> Ukraine has the third largest shale gas reserves in Europe after France and Norway (at least 1.2 trillion cubic metres, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, but at least 2.8-3.5 trillion cubic metres according to the Ukrainian Geological Survey), with an estimated 2 trillion cubic metres of gas in the Yuzivska shale gas field discovered in 2010 in Donetsk and Luhansk. <https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-gas-shale-idUSL5E8GGAJY20120516> and <https://geonews.com.ua/news/detail/ukraina-shahtnyj-metan-mozhno-i-11234>

of Sevastopol and the Republic of Crimea join the Russian Federation (Andrékó, 2022a). It must be noted that Vitaliy Churkin, the former Russian ambassador to the UN presented the official request of the Ukrainian president that was originally sent to the Russian government to the Security Council on 4 March 2014. In this request Victor Yanukovich asked for the “application” of Russian military forces (Andrékó, 2022a) because “... the lives and safety of people, especially of those in the Southwest and the Crimea are at risk ... the people are persecuted on political and language grounds...” (Churkin, 2014). The international legal background for Russia's military intervention in the Syrian war on 30 September 2015 is, in Russia's view, provided by the fact that Russia's intervention was not a unilateral Russian decision but an official Syrian request. Even in Russia's latest military conflict, Russian leadership has been careful to provide an international legal backdrop of sorts to justify Russian action. On 24 February 2022, Russia launched military operations in Ukraine after having previously recognised the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics on 21 February and having received a formal request for military intervention from the two new “states”, which had just signed a cooperation treaty.

The fourth main feature of Russian foreign policy is that it seeks to be recognised and seen as a great power and, therefore, acts as a great power in international forums. A prominent moment in the effectiveness and development of Russian advocacy between the 2008 Georgian war and the 2022 military action against Ukraine is the involvement of Russian forces in Syria, which is seen in Russia as a means for Russia to emerge as a global power and its recognition as a great power in the post-Soviet period (Simons, 2021). If Russia's return to the role of great power in military terms is linked to its participation and effectiveness in the Syrian war, in political terms, the Geneva talks between US President Biden and Russian President Putin in 2021 brought Moscow the same recognition. US foreign policy has elevated Russia to the status of a great power, not only in visual terms, but also politically, after President Biden's statement at a press conference (Nyáry, 2021).

## 2.2. Russian foreign policy concepts

Foreign policy concepts, regularly updated and adapted to current international challenges, provide theoretical background and help to interpret the assertion of Russian interests. Early on, in 1993, after the creation of the Russian Federation, the first official document was published, summarising foreign policy priorities and objectives to be implemented in a unified theory. The years of updated and changing concepts can also be seen as markers of changes in Russian domestic and foreign

policy, because not only do they reflect changes throughout the world, but also events in Russian domestic politics. Between 1993 and 2016, the foreign policy concept was defined on five occasions, and each time either external challenges or changes in the internal political situation, or a combination of both, made it necessary to update the official position. The second foreign policy concept was published in 2000, at the very beginning of Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin's first presidential term, when the domestic (and closely related foreign policy) rationale was clear. The new president also represented a new opportunity to radically change Russia's political course, to break the Yeltsin-era trend towards reconciliation with the West and to demonstrate Russia's then regional power. The third change in foreign policy principles took place in 2008, due to a change in the person of the Russian president. Although the change of president in 2008 did not mark an epochal change in foreign policy strategy (Póti, 2013), the new concept provided an opportunity to provide a tangible signal of the change in Russian leadership and to separate the presidential period of Dmitry Anatolyevich Medvedev from the Putin era. This is also the reason for the publication of the fourth foreign policy concept in 2013 (Nagy, 2017) because in 2012, Putin started his third presidential term and the change in power could be tracked once again. The fifth and final document, which is still in force, was issued in 2016 and was born in a qualitatively new international context for Russia. Russia's military engagement in Syria has been a success, not only because it swiftly carried out its military action and succeeded in keeping President Bashar al-Assad and his regime in power, but also because it secured the long-term deployment of its troops in Syria through the establishment of Russian military bases. It also meant that in the post-Soviet era, Russia returned to the Arabian Peninsula, a key foreign policy priority of the Soviet era, and began the practical restoration of its great power status.

However, the conceptual foundations of Russian foreign policy are not only laid down in foreign policy concepts, but also in the military doctrines and national security strategies issued at the same time, or almost the same time (Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1: FOREIGN POLICY CONCEPTS, MILITARY DOCTRINES AND NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGIES OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION PUBLISHED AND PLANNED IN 1990-2023 BY YEAR OF PUBLICATION**

	Foreign policy concept	Military doctrine	National security strategy
Period before the "Putin course"	1993 and 2000	1993	1997
1st period	2008	2010	2009
2nd period	2013 and 2016	2014	2015
3rd period	2023		

Source: author's own editing

In 1993, the foreign policy concept was published concurrently with the military doctrine, and four years later, in 1997, the national security strategy was also published (P  ti, 2013). The versions of the three documents reflecting Russian perceptions of power and adapted to the current world political situation were published in the same year, in 2000. As this was the year Putin began his first term as head of state, in hindsight it is appropriate to view the three documents as the dawn of the Putin era. For the next two periods (2008-2010 and 2013-2016), an updated document was published annually. Accordingly, the third edition of the aforementioned foreign policy concept was published in 2008, followed by the national security strategy in 2009 and the military doctrine in 2010. We can see the second period as beginning in 2013, as the foreign policy concept issued in February was followed by the military doctrine in 2014 and the national security strategy in 2015. After just three years, the foreign policy concept was revisited in 2016 and has been in force ever since.

Thus, in the period covered by the study, the concepts issued between 2008-2010, between 2013-2016 and the foreign policy concept updated in 2016 have had an impact on the perception of the Russian world order.

The term "qualitatively new geopolitical situation" appears for the first time in the national security strategy of 2009. According to the assessment, globalisation's powerful and dominant impact on international relations has reshaped previous systems and facilitated the emergence of new centres of power by shifting towards a multipo-

lar world order that is in line with Russian interests. The strategy also sets out Russia's behaviour in this new situation. The rational use of resources (oil and gas) can increase the influence of a country with the status of a global middle power, but it also foreshadows the need to develop military potential, because in the long run the demand for and interest in energy resources in the world will inevitably increase, which may ultimately lead to military conflicts (P  ti, 2013).

The foreign policy concept issued in 2013 essentially confirmed the guidelines and statements issued earlier, but also highlighted the development process of a new world order and the principle of the primacy of law in shaping international relations, already identified as a key feature of Russian foreign policy. The international financial and economic crisis is driving the emergence of a new world order, as the US and the leading Western countries are increasingly unable to influence developments, according to the concept's assessment. Russia's response to the problem should be to exploit its advantage in possessing energy resources and to develop a conscious use of soft power. According to the principle, the correct choice and use of soft power creates new opportunities to advance Russian interests in international relations, and was therefore seen as a novel resource in support of traditional foreign policy. The 2013 concept mentions the Eurasian Customs Union, the European Economic Area, the Eurasian Economic Union, the European Union and the Balkans among its regional priorities (P  ti, 2013). The highlighted directions reflect the idea according to which Russian foreign policy envisaged possible nodes of the new world order.

The 2016 foreign policy concept stresses the inevitability of a multipolar world order. The analysis outlines the elements that hold together the new system of relations, which will be governed by international law. In this sense, Russia does not recognise the sovereignty of the US beyond its territory, and it is in Russia's interest to create a democratic trade-economic and financial system, i.e. a new world order, which should be run under the "collective leadership of authoritative states" (Nagy, 2017). The new system plans to rely mainly on the G20, the BRICS<sup>5</sup> and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation<sup>6</sup>. In respect to bilateral cooperation, China and India were given special emphasis in the document, with which states it is advisable to pursue strategic cooperation in partnership. It is worth noting that in 2022, international sanctions against Russia over the war in Ukraine led to a strengthening of Russian-Chinese and Russian-Indian relations.

<sup>5</sup> BRICS countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa

<sup>6</sup> Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) member states: Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan.

### 3. Russia's perception of world order and practical support for the emergence of a new world order

#### 3.1. The theory behind the Russian world order concept

The Russian theory of world order<sup>7</sup> has undergone a continuous transformation, from the Cold War to the present. In a relatively simple model of the world order during the Cold War, the US and the Soviet Union shared the shaping and management of international relations as two superpowers. There were two great powers facing each other, with almost equal military strength. In addition, there was the “developing world” – otherwise known as the “third world” – which had no active influence on the development of conflicts of interest between the superpowers, but which often acted as a tool in these conflicts between the superpowers.

However, the dissolution of the Soviet Union created a new and unique situation in which, from a political point of view, a power vacuum was generated overnight with the disappearance of the Soviet-led socialist bloc, and only one superpower remained, with almost no international political counterweight and control. Such a concentration of power is unprecedented and raises the possibility that a superpower, without constraint and without the inevitable clashes with the interests of other superpowers of equal weight in opposition, can determine the political and economic geography of not just a region or a continent, but virtually the entire world. The unipolar world order also gave way to the unprecedented rapid development of globalisation, which in its early stages contributed to the prosperity of the former great powers and, overall, gave birth to Pax Americana (the “American world”).

According to the Russian interpretation, the US-dominated world order has not become more just than its predecessors, because in the absence of the Soviet Union, which was defined as an enemy and a counterweight, and which had the most influence over the way its interests were pursued, the United States became less tolerant of the interests of those in its alliance system and increasingly turned to hard power.

<sup>7</sup> This paper derives the Russian theory of world order from the theories of a number of Russian thinkers, including: Aleksandr Gelyevich Dugin, political philosopher and analyst; Yevgeny Primakov, former Foreign Minister and Prime Minister; Sergey Alexandrovich Mikhailov, Candidate of Historical Studies, and Senior Lecturer at the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies; Leonid Efimovich Grinin, political anthropologist, economist, Doctor of Futurology, Professor at the National Research University; Ksenia Alexandrovna Efremova, Associate Professor in the Department of Asian and African Studies at MGIMO University; Vladimir Petrovsky, Senior Researcher at the Centre for the Study and Forecasting of Russian-Chinese Relations of the Institute of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Academy of Sciences; Veniamin Popov, Analyst at the Centre for Middle East Studies at MGIMO University, Ambassador and member of the Russian International Affairs Council.

Pax Americana resulted in a blurring of the line between US interests and the interests of the participants in international relations, in the sense that US interests have in fact become internationalised and have taken on a position of world interest. As a result, US interests became a priority and the American order (domestic and foreign policy ideals, social and economic structure, culture, legal structure) became an example to be followed throughout the world. In general, the flaws that ultimately reinforce the need to change the “American world” today are identified as the main features of Pax Americana. First on the list is the increasing use of US hard power, i.e. kinetic military force, at the expense of consistent use of diplomatic solutions. Second, according to the Russian view, the main purpose of the US use of soft power was to intervene in domestic affairs, as a result of which the US imposed its will against the will of a given state, for example, by promoting coups d'état and thus changing internal political relations, such as during the colour revolutions. The Russian theory also includes “dollar diplomacy” in the soft power toolbox, which does not have an immediate effect, but has a longer-term impact within the target country by providing loans and aid, and creates an environment that suits US interests. The negatives of Pax Americana are reinforced by the dominance of vested (i.e. US) business interests and political and legal norms in international relations and international law (Efimovich, 2015).

Thanks to globalisation, the international political and economic situation has undergone profound changes. Alongside the superpower USA, the great powers have grown stronger, and many of the regions and states that were previously part of the developing world have also started to develop. By the 2020s, international relations underwent a process of reordering, fuelled by globalisation processes, because the governance and control of the emerging global order also require the construction and application of new mechanisms. Emerging powers and forms of cooperation (e.g. the BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Brazil, South Africa, India and China, which is considered the most agile) are having an increasing impact on international events, and their need to participate in the governance of international processes is growing. As their interests are increasingly asserted against that of the US and the developed countries, they want to replace the existing economic and financial system with a new mechanism. Emphasising the decline of the unipolar world order and, with it, the end of the US hegemonic role in the world, Russian theorists advocate the development of a multipolar world order under a reformed governance system (Efremova, 2016). The multipolarity of the new world order, the prioritisation of the right of nations to self-determination, international law and the UN Charter in the legal hierarchy, as well as the acceptance of peaceful co-exist-

ence as the norm, are qualified and accepted as the same values by a major group of emerging regions and states, very similar to the Russian world order. Along the same line of thinking, the states on which Russian great power policy can rely are outlined, and thus, from the point of view of Russian interests (as highlighted in the 2016 foreign policy concept), potential partners include China, India, the SCO and the BRICS countries (Petrovsky, 2016). Based on the studies of researchers of the Russian world order theory (see above for some prominent authors of mainstream Russian mentality), an international political world order is again emerging where, for a long time, at least two sharply divergent world views (political, economic and social systems) are forced to coexist, and the Western and Eastern (mainly Chinese) value systems are therefore forced to seek common governance by reconciling with each other. The cooperation between the US and China does not harm Russian interests and, in fact, the US and China, complemented by Russia, could be the pillars of a multipolar world order (Medzhitov, 2022). The Russian position states as fact that Russia's role in the new world order has now become clearer, as its self-identification as a Eurasian power has become clearer (Petrovsky, 2016). However, they also argue that Asian values must be prominent in the new world order because a significant proportion of humanity lives in Eurasia, which includes Asia. Alongside China and Russia, the leading state in the emerging space is India, and the strategic triangle (Russia, China and India) created by the late Foreign Minister and then Prime Minister Yevgeny Maksimovich Primakov (Chandra, 2010) could in fact be an effective engine for a new governance mechanism (Popov, 2021).

The sceptical view of the new world order emphasises that the multipolar (or even bipolar) world order of Russian theory does not seem to have a chance of emerging yet because there is no state, group of states or economic bloc with the influence and economic and political power of the dominant United States or the West led by the United States. The critical argument that casts doubt on the success of Russian-Chinese cooperation as a basis for cooperation against the US superpower position is that Russian-Chinese history is in fact a chain of conflicts, and that even the momentary cooperation was only temporarily forced by the international situation. In the long term, there are no visible safeguards and common principles on the basis of which the Russian-Chinese partnership could be defined as a kind of "anti-Western" alliance (Szunom  r, 2014). At the same time, looking at the countries of Asia – and it is worth highlighting this because the 21st century is predicted to be a period of political and economic rise for Asia – Russia is not only a great power in the region because of its military potential and its permanent membership of the UN Security Council, but also because it can increase its economic and trade influence as a po-

tential exporter of energy carriers and rare earth elements. By May 2022, Russia had become China's largest oil supplier (Hoskins, 2022), but India had also significantly increased its imports of Russian oil (Menon, 2022) and Iran had signed up for cheap Russian energy (Bloomberg News, 2022). Many countries in the region seek good relations with Russia for pragmatic reasons, and this is true even if they are also seeking cooperation with the developed West. In March 2022, 35 Asian states abstained and 12 were absent from the vote on the UN resolution condemning Russia. The reason for this ambivalent political attitude is that globalisation has created a diverse and expanding scale-independent network (Barab  si, 2022) in which it is not easy to dismantle the entire structure. For example, Russia is an important trade or arms market partner for certain states, and special political relations have developed with many states because of the presence of a Russian-speaking minority (Schneider, 2022). Some Western expectations predict the short-lived nature of Russia's great power vision (Yusupov, 2022), the premature collapse of the Russian economy and thus of Russia's leading role in the new multipolar world order, with sanctions imposed as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war that began on 24 February 2022 shaking Russian financial security and the economic and industrial structure to its foundations. The strength of the sanctions is shown by the fact that the world's most advanced and powerful industrialised countries<sup>8</sup>, which account for only 15% of the world's population but 55-60% of global income (GDP) (Zoltai, 2022), have joined and Russia will thus be cut off from international financial markets and trade. On the contrary, it is argued that while the developed West supports US ambitions, nearly 140 of the 190 UN member states oppose or abstain from the anti-Russian embargo policy. Although the US and the West have successfully coordinated punitive measures, the absence of embargoes by other states indicates that, on the one hand, the US alliance is no longer expanding and, on the other, Pax Americana has reached the limits of its capacity. Furthermore, the Russian-Ukrainian war has not only given impetus to the process of breaking the US superpower hegemony, but also initiates a phase of development leading to a multipolar world order (Yu, 2022). This argument seems to be confirmed by the G20 meeting of 5 August 2022, at which almost half of the member states (e.g. China, India, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, etc.) did not support the US and Western anti-Russia sanctions policy (Crawford et al., 2022). The G20 accounts for 85% of global income (GDP), 75% of international trade and two thirds of the world's population (OECD, 2022), so attempts to isolate Russia have failed completely.

<sup>8</sup> The Anglo-Saxon powers (including all but a few European countries), Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore.

Globalisation has not only changed international relations, but has also created new types of threats and challenges (Andrékó, 2021b). Not only have financial markets, economic and trade relations and processes become borderless and unpredictable, but a new type of network (Takács, 2015) of terrorist organisations (such as ISIS) has emerged, which has become international.<sup>9</sup> The new challenges require new responses and new methods from existing international organisations, or the creation of modern organisations or the reorganisation of existing ones to tackle hitherto unknown problems. The 2016 foreign policy concept already cited in the study also states that Russia does not recognise the international “supremacy” of the United States, and underlines the necessity and inevitability of creating a multipolar world order (Nagy, 2017). To this end, it advocates increasing the influence of ASEAN, the SCO and BRICS on international affairs, as it sees them as organisations that can oversee the new global world order and reorient the structure of the UN, the World Bank and the IMF (Popov, 2021) as financial and economic organisations adapted to the current economic and political power relations.

### 3.2. Case studies on the realisation of a Russian-led Eurasian megaregion

#### 3.2.1. The Russian-led megaregion and the restoration of the role of great power

In the new regional world order, several larger entities, megaregions, coexist side by side, inevitably in close contact with one another in a network of real and virtual (financial, cultural, economic, political, personal, etc.) relations in a globalised world (Ferguson, 2019). Megaregions are dominated by a regional power with significant economic and political leverage, and their internal cohesion is determined by the attractiveness of the soft power capabilities developed by Joseph Nye (Miller, 2016). The adoption of the dominant state's culture, political values, general ideological principles and foreign policy during a longer process can become a key feature of a megaregion (Andrékó, 2022b). The Russian-led megaregion is, as described above, a larger entity in which the Russian Federation plays a leading role through the gradual development of a complex and tightly interwoven web of cultural, economic, political and personal relations between the states that are members of the megaregion and Russia (Figure 2).

<sup>9</sup> As Takács (2015) pointed out, the statehood of ISIS, for example, has been disputed by many analysts because, on the one hand, the concepts of terror and statehood are mutually exclusive and, on the other hand, the Islamic State was declared as having continuously acquired territory, but ISIS “did not operate according to the logic of territoriality”.

FIGURE 2: THE RUSSIAN-LED MEGAREGION



Figure created by author using the following source: <https://fr.maps-russia.com/img/O/urss-vs-russie-carte.jpg>. The blue line indicates the “near abroad” belt, the red line the “southern crescent” zones of influence.

The megaregions of the future, such as the formation under Russian leadership, can only be partially physically defined because the boundaries of influence of the megaregion are blurred by virtual networks across state borders (for example, the cultural effect, the financial and tax processes across state borders and continents, the “dispersion” of movable and immovable assets resulting from the free movement and settlement of individuals, etc.). Russian-led megaregion's territorial borders can be demarcated as the borders of the Russian Federation. Its influence extends - with the exception of the Baltic states - to the states of the former Soviet Union (Belarus) or as much of it as possible (Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Kazakhstan etc), and to key states in the geopolitical areas bordering the former Soviet Union (Syria, Afghanistan). The outer edges of the Russian megaregion are blurred, but Russia is actively using hard and soft power to clarify these and to establish and consolidate Russian influence in the geopolitical spaces along its borders.

At the time of writing, an intense kinetic military power projection is taking place on the western border of the Russian megaregion (Ukraine), the outcome of which will fundamentally determine the location and influence of the emerging power structure in the new regional world order. The conclusion of the conflict will also mark the western border of the Russian megaregion in the long term. In the south-west, along the Georgia-Armenia-Azerbaijan-Iran-Syria “southern crescent”, the main concern is to contain Turkish regional ambitions on the one hand, and to promote Russian interests in the Arabian Peninsula on the other. If Russia succeeds in consolidating its influence in the “southern crescent”, it will be able to control the Caucasus and Arab geopolitical regions, thus creating the south-western perimeter of the Russian megaregion. Afghanistan's role in the geopolitical region of Central Asia stands out to the Russian megaregion because of its central location, its geographical position – a trade route (Andrékó, 2020a) – and its mineral reserves (Independent, 2010). On the other hand, it is directly adjacent to the Chinese megaregion of the emerging new regional world order. The withdrawal of US and NATO military forces from Afghanistan and the decline of their influence in Central Asia has resulted in disruption of the geopolitical status quo and a power vacuum. There was an opportunity to extend the southern border of the Russian megaregion, which triggered a swift reaction and activism in Russian foreign policy.

Achieving Russian dominance in the emerging megaregion is closely linked to the need to restore Russia's status as a great power, which has occurred in stages along the lines of the goals set out in Russian foreign policy concepts and national security strategies. The beginning of the rise can be linked to Russia's involvement in the Syrian war, because Russia's participation in the conflict led to the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's retention of power, which clearly demonstrated to the international community a significant strengthening of Russian military capabilities. The international prestige that Russia enjoyed because of the rapid and successful deployment of Russian forces also increased the importance of Russian politics in the developing and emerging world. The importance of Russia's military involvement in Syria in the process of Russia's emergence as a great power and the transformation of the world order is demonstrated by the fact that for the first time since the “Yalta world order” of February 1945, the possibility of a direct war between Russia and the US has arisen (Andrékó, 2020a).

The Russian-Ukrainian war that broke out on 24 February 2022 could also be the final stage in the process of becoming a great power, in the sense that Moscow is trying to impose its interests by using hard power, in which Russian interests openly clash with those of the US, the EU and NATO. The process coincides with the

upheaval of the status quo and the attempt to create a new world order aimed at overthrowing US leadership throughout the world (Kulemyakin, 2022). The gravity of the crisis situation is demonstrated by the fact that, for the second time in the post-Soviet period following the Syrian war, there is a growing possibility of a direct military conflict between Russian military units and US and NATO forces stationed on NATO's north-eastern and eastern borders.

In 2020-2022, Russian foreign policy, and the conscious use of soft power developed to support it, became agile and proactive. By playing an active role in current foreign policy crises, the Kremlin has sought to accelerate the acceptance of Russia's status as a great power, recognition of Russia's dominance in the megaregion and the strengthening of a positive image of Russia in Asia and the developing world. Visible signs of this were the crisis in Afghanistan, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and the Russian “military operation” in Ukraine, which provided an opportunity to promote and propagate Russian ideas in support of the new world order. The role of Russian foreign policy in the power reshuffle in Afghanistan and the conflict in Karabakh has brought successes that have contributed to the acceptance of Russia's consolidation as a great power in the developing world, especially in Asia. This seems to be supported by the fact that most of the Asian countries (especially China) do not agree with the anti-Russian sanctions that the US and the EU intend to impose because of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war.

### 3.2.2. Settlement after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan

Afghanistan's modern-day history is also the story of the evolution of Russian-US great-power ambitions. The last Soviet soldier left Afghanistan on 15 February 1989, after the collapse of a military intervention that lasted nearly 10 years. US and NATO allies intervened in Afghanistan with military force on 7 October 2001, after the al-Qaeda terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001, and “took over” the Soviet Union's position, the former superpower, in the settlement of Afghanistan. Although the US and NATO had an active presence in the region for 20 years, they were ultimately forced to leave the Central Asian country on 30 August 2021, just as the Soviet army did (Gaouette et al., 2021). The rapid withdrawal of military troops in a matter of months created a power vacuum, and the race to fill it began while US troops were still in Kabul. The Taliban forces advanced and occupied Afghan villages and towns with virtually no fighting, continuously and rapidly. Taliban units had already entered the capital on 15 August, before the US military had even left Kabul airport, and the Taliban government was formed after the last

US soldier left. The newly formed Afghan state authorities have not been accepted as official partners by the international community, but both the US and Russia have indicated their willingness to negotiate with the Taliban leadership. The USA has frozen all of the foreign currency reserves - worth USD 9.5 billion - of the Central Bank of Afghanistan, cut off military and civilian aid, and the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have frozen aid to Afghanistan (Detsch, 2022). With the military withdrawal of US forces from the Central Asian region, the geopolitical balance had been upset, and the new balance was occupied by the Taliban, which took power in Afghanistan, on the one hand, and China, Russia, Pakistan and Iran, which are neighbours of Afghanistan, on the other (Békefi, 2021). While all powers sought bilateral talks with Taliban leaders, the Russian diplomatic effort is notable for two reasons.

On the one hand, Russian foreign policy has – from the outset – sought to address the Afghan problem not only through bilateral discussions, but also through international negotiations, while allowing Russian diplomacy to play an active role of influence. The first meeting of foreign ministers of Afghanistan's neighbouring states<sup>10</sup> took place immediately after the US withdrawal on 8 September 2021 in Islamabad, hosted online and without Russia. Moscow, however, reacted quickly to the moves of international diplomacy, and seizing the initiative, revived the so-called “Moscow format” concerning Afghanistan on 20 October 2021, in which, in addition to the participants of the Islamabad online conference, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and India were also represented. The importance of the forum in Moscow is demonstrated by the fact that it brings together all of the major powers in the region that have an interest in a multipolar world order against US dominance. The first negotiation took place in April 2017, the second in November 2018, with the participation of the then Afghan authorities and the US (Strokan, 2021). Maintaining the “Moscow format” is in the interests of both the Russian and the Taliban parties. The Russian objective in the Central Asian region is to weaken US influence and make the Russians dominant against it, while the Taliban interest is in breaking out of international isolation and seizing any opportunity, such as the Moscow talks, that could generate an opportunity to recognise the Taliban government (Telmanov, 2021). Since the Afghan issue involves several regional or emerging powers, with China and Pakistan in particular, Russian foreign policy must always be one step ahead if it wants to emphasise Russia's influence on the Afghan situation. This may be related to the fact that it was at the conference in Moscow that the delegation of the Taliban interim

government was first invited to participate in negotiations regarding them and Afghanistan (Ekberova, 2021), and then Russia was the first to announce that it had accepted the accreditation of the first Taliban diplomat in March 2022 (Reuters, 2022). Both moves were made in anticipation of similar reactions from partners, and both announcements reinforced Moscow's authority in the eyes of its Asian partners. In addition, both decisions brought Afghanistan closer to Moscow, as the Afghan government had increased its room for manoeuvre by allowing its representatives to participate in international forums despite the lack of diplomatic recognition, thanks to Russian support, and by accepting their diplomatic mission, Russia is allowing the Taliban to engage in diplomatic life, albeit in limited fashion.

The second meeting of the foreign ministers of the neighbouring countries and the US Special Envoy was held in Tehran on 27 October 2021, and the third meeting was held in Tunxi, China, on 30 March 2022 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2022). Taliban representatives were even invited to the third conference in this format, just six months after the Moscow format, and significantly behind the Kremlin-dictated schedule. Russian foreign policy has taken advantage of the opportunities offered by the multilateral forum, as it has also engaged in bilateral negotiations with regional powers in the region, notably India and China. Taking advantage of the opportunities presented by the meeting in March, the Russian and Chinese foreign ministers also held bilateral talks, in which they underlined their common position on the global political situation and expressed their common interest in the realisation of a multipolar, progressive and democratic world order.

Another feature of Russia's diplomatic efforts is its firm refusal to allow the US or NATO to build a military structure in Afghanistan or in the states of the region. The security situation in the region is to be settled by the complete and radical exclusion of the US and NATO (Takács, 2022), under the authority of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). Given Russia's leading role in the military alliance, a common response to the security threat posed by the Islamic State, which still has a strong presence in Afghanistan, could primarily mean the recognition of Russia's authority and role as a great power. The CSTO summit on Afghanistan took place on 23 August 2021, before the meeting of the foreign ministers of the neighbouring states, which demonstrates the initiative and effectiveness of Russian diplomacy. CSTO meetings take place independently of the foreign ministers' deliberations, ensuring broad and strong representation of Russian interests in the international political arena. The second meeting of the military bloc on the Afghan issue took place on 16 September 2021, during which the necessary joint responses were defined.

<sup>10</sup> The first meeting was attended by Iran, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and subsequent meetings have also been attended by Russia.

In conclusion, Russian foreign policy is trying to take on an influential and proactive role in the diplomatic solution of the Afghan crisis. The Taliban takeover resulted in the closure of most foreign embassies, leaving only the Russian, Chinese, Qatari and Pakistani embassies in Kabul (D  cza, 2022). Through this, Moscow has left itself an opportunity for direct contact and negotiating opportunities with the Taliban government in Kabul, if necessary. It also made the Russian-Taliban diplomatic channel bilateral by welcoming the first Taliban diplomat accredited to Moscow.

### 3.2.3. Russian foreign policy intervention in Nagorno-Karabakh

The conflict between Armenia, the predominantly Armenian-populated Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan has a long history, with two military conflicts in the post-Soviet period. In 2016, following previous confrontations, deadly clashes between Armenians and Azeris erupted over Nagorno-Karabakh's aspirations to join Armenia. The clash of military interests ended in a ceasefire thanks to Russian peace diplomacy and personal visits by the Russian Prime Minister to Yerevan and Baku. Although Russia's authority has clearly increased due to its effective management of the problem, the real cause of the conflict had not been eliminated, and by July 2020, the conflict between the two peoples had again culminated in violent atrocities. In this study, the event is the focus of analysis because, on the one hand, the conflict actively involved not only the two peoples and Russia, which traditionally played a conciliatory role, but also Turkey, which had declared itself a great power. On the other hand, Turkish support appeared in the "near abroad", the "legitimate sphere of interest" discussed as the first main feature of Russian foreign policy, to which Russian leadership had to respond.

Of the five Turkic<sup>11</sup> republics of the former Soviet Union, Azerbaijan is the closest to Turkey due to similar language, culture and history, as Azerbaijan was the only one briefly under the rule of the Ottoman Empire (TRT Russian, 2020a). Huntington's theory of the link between the two peoples can be traced back to the brotherly bond between the two nations, which explains why Turkey has openly pledged its support to Azerbaijan. During the Armenian-Azeri conflict in 2016, Turkish support was only political, but by the time of the conflict in 2020, Turkey had gone beyond this to provide assistance to the Azeri government by selling weapons, drones and (non-open) support to Turkish forces.

In contrast to the friendly contact between Azerbaijan and Turkey, Armenia's relations with Turkey have always been fraught with grievances. Contemporary bilateral relations are fundamentally overshadowed by Turkey's 1915 act of "Armenian genocide", which the Turkish side does not acknowledge, but Armenians demand historical reparation (TRT Russian, 2020b). In addition, Turkish policy has been to force Armenia to withdraw from the Azerbaijani territories around Nagorno-Karabakh, which it claims were illegally occupied by Armenians. During this conflict, the strong Turkish support for Azerbaijan shows that Turkey's position in the region was strengthened, and its increased influence on the geopolitical situation would, in principle, mean that Russia's influence as the other major power would be reduced.

Armenia's situation up until 2020 was determined by the fact that the US and Iran, along with Russia, pursued pro-Armenian policies, and Armenian power in Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding occupied Azerbaijani territories therefore appeared to be stable. Russian support was also relied upon since there is a Russian military base in Gyumri, Armenia, whose units could have intervened in the conflict if necessary. Russia, however, did not intervene militarily, but did so by diplomatically controlling and dictating the peace talks, meaning that although Azerbaijan won a military victory, clearly strengthening Turkey's influence in Azerbaijan, Russia also managed to assert its foreign and security policy interests in the region.

By the time of the Azerbaijani-Armenian war between 27 September and 10 November 2020, the balance of military power had shifted in Azerbaijan's favour compared to the 2016 war, as the Azerbaijani army had become much more disciplined, trained and, above all, much more modern thanks to Turkish support and improvements. The modernisation of the armed forces and the significant improvement in their combat capabilities were supposedly financed by oil revenues (BBC, 2020). In contrast, the military preparedness and technical level of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh is far below that of the Azeris, supported by Turkey. From a military aspect, the conflict ended with Azerbaijan achieving its objectives by regaining control over most of Nagorno-Karabakh and regaining sovereignty over seven territories adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh (International Crisis Group, 2022).

However, Russia emerged from the conflict with much greater influence within the region than it had previously achieved in the post-Soviet era, as a result of its well-chosen and assertive diplomatic moves. On the one hand, it dictated the peace process as a mediating power from the beginning of the conflict, and on 10 October, it succeeded in getting the warring parties to sign a ceasefire agreement in Moscow. Although this agreement was quickly violated by the parties concerned, and Azer-

<sup>11</sup> Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan

bajjan continued to attempt to seize new territories as Russian military forces were distracted by engaging in the war in Ukraine that broke out in early 2022, Russian diplomacy was eventually able to achieve a general cessation of fighting. On the other hand, the final peace agreement adopted on 10 November provided for the stationing of Russian peacekeeping forces in Nagorno-Karabakh, where there had been no permanent Russian military presence since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The importance of this point of the peace agreement is shown by the fact that Russian peacekeepers entered the designated areas the very next day, and were able to extend Russian military influence in the region without an actual fight. This in itself is an indication of growing Russian influence, which is further increased by the fact that Turkey is not a party to the agreement, so that enforcement of the treaty is overseen solely by Russia, which acts as a mediator between the two hostile nations. Thirdly, the peace treaty provides for the obligation to establish a corridor between Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, which is an Azerbaijani exclave in Armenia. This is not only in the interest of Azerbaijan, but also of Turkey, as the creation of the corridor allows direct links between Turkey and Azerbaijan, which borders the north-western tip of the exclave. Nevertheless, a significant strengthening of Russian influence is ensured by the fact that the corridor is controlled by Russian peacekeeping forces and Russian border guard units under the terms of the treaty (Esilov, 2020). This not only gives Russia control over Nagorno-Karabakh, but also allows it to monitor the Turkish-Azeri corridor.

#### 4. The “targeted military operation” against Ukraine in 2022 in light of the main features of Russian foreign policy

The Russian “targeted military operation” against Ukraine in 2022 bears all the hallmarks of post-Soviet Russian foreign policy, from its beginning (24 February) to the missile attacks launched after the partial mobilisation (10 October).

Ukraine is considered “near abroad” from the perspective of the Russian Federation, both because it is a direct neighbour along Russia’s western borders and because its recent shared history and statehood have resulted in close economic, political and family ties between the officials and peoples of the two states. The majority of the Russian-speaking population (29.59%), (Andrékó, 2020b) and those of Russian nationality (17.28%), (Csernicskó & Melnyk, 2007) living in Ukraine concentrated

in the central and eastern part of Ukraine, close to the Russian border, and are considered by the Russian leadership and the majority of Russian citizens as “close relatives”. The use of Russian as a primary language and sympathy towards the Russian state as a motherland mainly affects the Ukrainian population living east of the Dnieper (Andrékó, 2020b). This latter attitude can be seen in the history of independent Ukraine over the past 30 years, during which presidential and parliamentary elections have always sharply divided Ukrainian society in terms of Russian sympathies. The Russian-speaking Ukrainian population, who consider themselves to be of Russian nationality or merely Russian sympathisers, are seen by Russian foreign policy as part of the “legitimate sphere” of Russian influence.

Based on the results of my research on geopolitical processes in the Central and Eastern European region, it can be concluded that “Ukraine, located in the eastern buffer zone of Central and Eastern Europe, is a buffer state deprived of its transit role, suffering territorial losses and became the focus of the political interests of NATO, the United States and Russia” (Andrékó, 2021a). Furthermore, given that Russia’s official objective in the context of the Ukraine crisis settlement is to create a flexible confederation of Ukrainian regions, and to thus preserve Ukraine’s role as a buffer state, the above findings as a whole support Russia’s desire to create a buffer zone between its own sphere of influence and that of the EU/NATO.

The third main feature of Russian foreign policy, which seeks to justify its military conflicts – even before the kinetic military power projection – with arguments of international law, can also be seen in the case of military engagement in Ukraine. This is supported by the series of events discussed earlier in this paper. On 21 February 2022, the Russian Federation recognised the Luhansk People’s Republic and the Donetsk People’s Republic as independent states, and on the same day signed a treaty on cooperation and mutual assistance with both Luhansk (Pravo.gov.ru, 2022b) and Donetsk (Pravo.gov.ru, 2022a). It was only after the implementation of the “international legal instruments” that the two new allies’ request for military and financial support was granted, and only then was the “targeted military operation” against Ukraine officially launched on 24 February 2022. On the other hand, they sought to strengthen the international legal arguments by holding a referendum on the question of the accession of the four Ukrainian territories to Russia on 23-27 September 2022. Although the majority of the UN General Assembly members condemned the referendum in a resolution (Izvestia, 2022b), Russian arguments will continue to refer to the overwhelming majority of the population’s will to support accession and the participation of international observers (TASS, 2022a). Among the features of Russian foreign policy, the referendum is an international legal instrument whose results can be used

to expand the narrower “targeted military operation” (expected to be expanded to a counter-terrorist operation) and to allow the deployment of large numbers of military troops called up in a partial mobilisation (Vil  gazdas  g, 2022).

The fourth feature of Russian foreign policy, which seeks to recognise and have Russia perceived as a great power, is its call for the involvement of great powers in the settlement of the conflict in Ukraine. The Turkish president's bid for a peace-broker role (Radio Azattyq, 2022) (which also increases Erdogan's political weight beyond his actual influence) and the Russian Foreign Ministry's expectation (TASS, 2022b) of US participation in peace talks should also ensure a declaration of Russian great power status.

## 5. Summary

The main features of Russian foreign policy can be summarised in four areas:

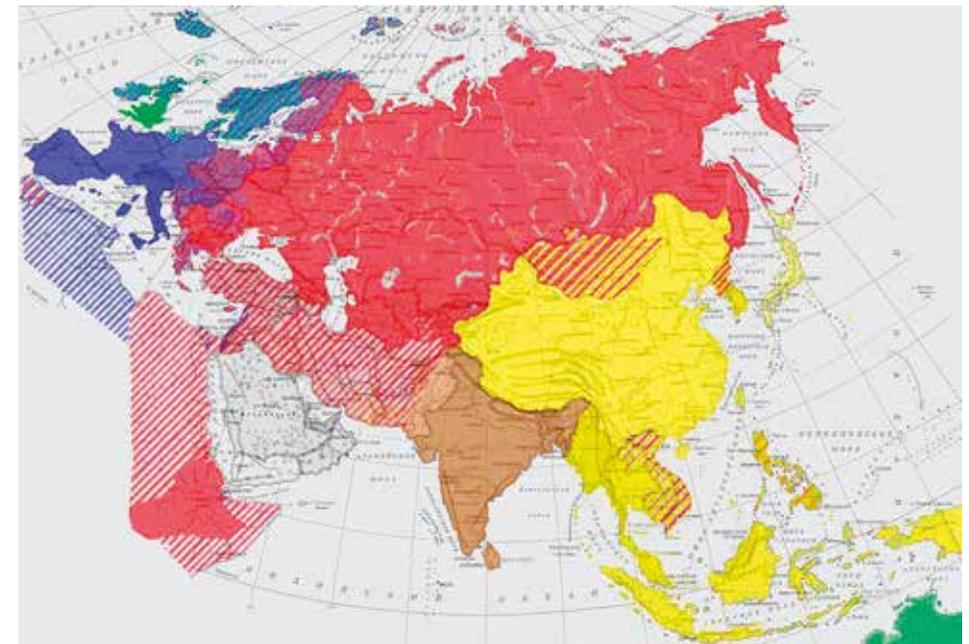
- it considers the territory of the “near abroad” to be a “legitimate sphere” of Russian influence,
- it seeks to establish buffer zones between the Russian Federation and the EU/ NATO spheres of influence,
- it tries to justify its military conflicts with other states with arguments of international law before the kinetic military power projection,
- it seeks to be recognised and have itself seen as a great power, and therefore acts as a great power in international forums.

The first hypothesis of the study was confirmed by the analysis because the main characteristics of Russian foreign policy were identified. The attributes not only help explain recent Russian political actions, but also show, for example, the Russian foreign policy interests that are likely to be involved in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (such as the federalisation of Ukraine and, if this is not possible, the integration of the breakaway territories).

The analysis also confirmed the second hypothesis of the study concerning the Russian concept of a multipolar regional world order. The theoretical background behind the Russian concept of world order is derived from the theories of a number of Russian thinkers and from a summary of foreign policy concepts regularly updated since 1993 and adapted to current international challenges. This paper showed that, on a practical level, Russian foreign policy is actively creating networks of hard and soft

power to promote a multipolar regional world order, with the Russian-dominated megaregion as one pole. By the concept of a multipolar regional world order, we mean the simultaneous existence and cooperation of several new centres of power, in which, in addition to the US, Russia, positioning itself as a major Eurasian power, the Asian regional power China and the megaregion dominated by the South Asian regional power India would certainly participate as equal partners (Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3: A MULTIPOLAR REGIONAL WORLD ORDER – A POSSIBLE DIVISION**



Source: [https://ic.pics.livejournal.com/dor\\_zhur/34177696/1505697/1505697\\_original.jpg](https://ic.pics.livejournal.com/dor_zhur/34177696/1505697/1505697_original.jpg)

The regional world order also foresees the emergence of further centres of power around which other megaregions could be organised, together forming the new world order. In addition to megaregions, there is a need for international organisations to bring together other states of the world and to regulate and organise political and economic relations, a role that could be played by ASEAN, the SCO and the BRICS. According to the Russian interpretation, all three organisations are capable of overseeing the new regional world order and of re-tuning the political, financial and economic structures of the UN, the World Bank and the IMF to current economic and political power relations.

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# THE IMPACT OF INDIVIDUAL THREAT ON THE MULTIPOLAR POWER STRUCTURE – DEFINITION OF THE DIGITAL PARTISAN

*László Simon*

## 1. Introduction

The processes in our natural, technical and social environment that fundamentally define humanity are all interconnected. Our everyday lives are made up of conflicts and agreements that build and destroy relationships, or the actions that result from them, or, to put it simply, that affect social interaction. Among the phenomena and events that determine the security of information societies, the importance and impact of the opinions expressed by individuals and influencing coexistence, the expressed threats on power structures have increased, unlike in previous eras. Prior to the 21st century, the direct and indirect manifestations of individual aggression typically came from those directly exercising power, even if, in democracies, the real power was the representation of the people, and its absence lent legitimacy to actions, sometimes popular uprising or revolution, against the person or group exercising power. The image of the freedom fighter or the partisan who can stand up to illegitimate violence through the impact of their actions alone is conjured up in the minds of many. In order to understand and analyse the social relations of power networks, which are also subject to mathematical study, but also to imagine or even predict the possible trajectories of their development, it is necessary to study individual activity without “empowerment”. In addition to political, legal and other defining characteristics, personal – often faceless – information activity and threat linked to globalisation, digitalisation and infocommunication systems can be seen as a significant force of power in the context of the events and aggressive, manipulative phenomena of the age of the information society.

Transnational terrorism, mass migration, the Arab Spring, the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict, the crisis in Afghanistan or Syria, the pandemic, but also other global and regional challenges and crises that have a profoundly negative impact on our security and fears, are now affecting us directly and indirectly through information links – the internet and the media – before our very eyes. The web of relationships forming them, and the events that are directly or indirectly linked to them, can be analysed by looking at four basic factors. In the system of relations between two human communities, the specific mixture – the harmony or lack thereof – of space, time, power and information can result in peace in the relationship between the aforementioned groups, or in crisis or war in the absence thereof. As with extensive quantities in the case of physical, chemical, biological and technical processes, an intensive quantity causes these changes to be balanced. In the analysis of crises, for the factors present, we can define, in simple terms, an interval of time where force (e.g. power, military force, natural forces, etc.) can create meaningful spatial or informational differences, coexistence or equilibrium between individuals and human groups.

The networks of our time, as a global village conceived as one, are defining the interplay of individual and communal values and interests on an unprecedented scale and at an unprecedented depth. These common (mathematical) belief networks independently form simple groups (graphs) in typical areas of our lives. The characteristics that define the groups form different layers (planes) in society as a whole, which build on each other and are able to relate to each other in their designated elements (e.g. political, cultural, social, ideological, etc.). Social processes (events) are perceived differently at different levels and layers. By breaking down the basic dimension of time into predictable and identifiable periods, the size of groups and the significance of the events associated with them in the total population of people (the degrees of the graph nodes) can show an increase or decrease, but also a regression and a qualitative evolution.

History and culture, as the autonomous artificial processes of this system of dynamically changing networks, shaped by natural and social laws or forced to influence actions and phenomena, prove to be a cognitive and moral melting pot. From time to time, the counter and fusion effects at individual and group levels must lead to dialogues and substantive cooperation on legal, political, social and other focuses to enrich and improve our future and enhance its security. This is true even if these impacts – in a given geographical or virtual space – lead to new conflicts due to political, cultural or mental dialogue that takes time to form because of different individual and community perceptions, or because of information influences.

Our social selves face challenges and risks in the course of coexistence. If we experience this as a threat at any level, it can create fear and culminate in aggression and violence. To put it simply, to use a phrase that is often reflected in the pages of history books, our history and culture are nothing but a series of conflicts and wars. Whatever part of our world we are in, and whatever the segment of society in which we exist, it is the balance of the weak and the strong – the hawks (1/6) and doves (5/6) game theory – that gives us the possibility of cooperation and thus a sense of unified security.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Multipolar power space

Any country and any of its alliances of our time seek to guarantee the security of their constituent individuals and citizens (their people, their nation, their ethnic and other identities) in a sovereign manner, with the legal power granted by their community. The “unipolar moment”<sup>2</sup> pacifist sense of life of the dynamically changing power networks of the 21st century after the fall of the Soviet Union, in spite of all efforts in the past decades of global and local value and interest relations, have not been able to bring us – despite or because of this – to a peaceful period in our world; we are living in an age of fear<sup>3</sup>.

- 1 Hawk-dove is a fundamental game theory principle, which is based on simple outcomes (only one wins or both survive but are injured) of the struggle for resources between hawks and doves. According to the mathematical solution of the problem, three final states are possible. As per the competing or cooperating strategy, only hawks or only doves remain, or an equilibrium is established at a ratio of 1/6 to 5/6 of hawks and doves, respectively. Of the three outcomes, the cooperating model can be sustained for the longest period of time due to the excessive use of resources. The basic problem was addressed by John Maynard Smith and George R. Price between 1968 and 1972, when examining the relationship between game theory and evolution (Bacaër, 2011).
- 2 According to political theory, the period after World War II until the break-up of the Soviet Union had bipolar characteristics. In 1991, the US could have become the sole major power in the transition period, in a unipolar moment, as the sole major power. The period following the terrorist attacks in the US on 11 September 2001 can be characterised as a fragmented world order, with the emergence of several smaller and larger centres of power (Mayer, 2016).
- 3 In 2002, academician Elemér Hankiss put forward a series of visions of our global world, following scientific investigations after the terrorist attacks in the US. Looking back on this now, in 2022 – although I myself do not believe that what we are experiencing here on the geopolitical margins of Europe is an irreversible process – fear is increasingly defining our daily lives. Seeing the devastation of terrorism, he warned us, the citizens of the postmodern age: “...in a world of uncertainty, people cling even more strongly to ‘simple’ truths, to ready-made certainties, to the consciousness and arrogance of the greatness and supreme reality of themselves and their civilisation. They may become indifferent or intolerant of others, other societies, other cultures, fearful of anything different from themselves. And impatience and fear breed impatience and fear, and the outlines of a self-destructive process are already emerging.” His suggestion 20 years ago of the F-age (the age of fear), brought about by the development of information societies, is no longer just a vision: if “we use information technology, at least primarily, to learn more

The various clashes and armed conflicts do not take place in isolation, even if they are linked to a well-defined geographical space given the nature of the emergence of power. To prevent and eliminate conflicts, solutions must be found that, in the age of information societies, are capable of mapping the direct effects in the geophysical space in unlimited infocommunication networks, and, by reverse logic, the indirect effects – the power projections, the real or unfounded rumours, the emotional propaganda – preventing the physical projection of violence in the cognitive space onto our geographical environment. Information has become a weapon.

The results and scientific analyses of the fight against terrorism since the terrorist attacks in the US on 11 September 2001 are a starting point in the search for solutions. The logic of the study traces the ebb and flow of crises, the right to use weapons, the entire toolset of power projection. Thinking not only in the traditional geopolitical sense, but also in the sense of a multipolar, globalised concept, already covered by networks, “well-constructed” through dialogues, with complex interrelationships and different levels of social reflection. In other words, I would identify the other starting point as network-based geopolitical thinking.

The major crises of the 21st century and their consequences regularly escalate into armed conflicts over small and large geographical areas. Through direct and indirect violence, these clashes are linked to terror and fear of losing security. The complex political, theoretical and military science approaches to violence and its prohibition, the individual and social discourse on the law of war and warfare, which over centuries has been renewed time and time again, cannot lead to the establishment of a security system for managing crises in a digital world permeated by artificial intelligence and including virtual spaces. I propose that theories and systems for reducing casualties, for increasing security in our lives and for identifying the resulting targets to be protected or hidden can be supported from both a mathematical and national security perspective.

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about the world and ourselves, and to use that knowledge to build a better and more humane world for all of us, then that’s great. But if the main purpose of this technology is to make missiles and bombs hit targets even more accurately, or that instead of the 10–20 million (or more) security cameras currently in operation around the world, to have 100 or 200 million or many times more omniscient cameras watching where we go and what we do, then our enthusiasm for IT will be severely dampened. I fear that our current scare is just benefiting targeting devices and surveillance cameras” (Hankiss, 2002).

### 3. The specific activity of the individual

Globalisation has transformed relations between individuals, communities, states and NGOs, which are capable of organising themselves at a higher level than states in terms of resources and the various crisis management mechanisms, in such a way that the classic friend-enemy relationship no longer seems to be identifiable. The multipolar international system has created a polarised society whose values and interests are difficult or impossible to represent in traditional ways. Influential critique and modern progressivism are pitted against the cultural notions of acceptance of opinions, persuasion and sustainable traditional growth. The networks and their clashes that have emerged with the development of the information environment in conceptions similar to the war cultures of warfare (Forgács, 2017; Simon, 2016a) can be material-centric, movement-centric and guerrilla warfare<sup>4</sup> in type, i.e. network and information-centric or any combination of these in their mode of implementation.

In the aggression and armed attacks of polarised parties of different qualities, levels and intensities, information becomes a weapon, but in all cases the targets are directly or indirectly ourselves. At the level of individuals organised along divergent poles with common convictions, there can be no overarching goals to be achieved. There can be no compromises and no resolutions to be kept, because the occasional alliances and antagonisms between groups and their poles remain in a state of flux. The system of relations of confrontation and its management remains divergent, even if the conflict is given a space, be it a geographical space or a virtual space that is dependent on or independent of it; the armed conflicts and satellite wars of past eras are chivalric struggles compared to the armed aggressions of the 21st century. In the age of information societies – the traditional interrelations of space, time, power and information<sup>5</sup> – preventing conflicts, eradicating terror and restoring calm, peace and security by reducing the destructive actions of opposing parties seems unattainable. The ratio of soft to hard power has shifted towards soft power, but the basic sense of security has been diminishing. The controversial emergence of the notions of medi-

um or soft power (Resperger, 2016), in turn, has only increased the fear of individuals and the active, combative action of individuals in conflict resolution. To avoid and eliminate aggression, i.e. to enforce and maintain peace, the expression of political will in the classical sense, power projection, cannot be the only solution. Crises require increasingly complex management, stemming from the complex interplay and interconnectedness of problems.

In the fight against terrorism, in the economic crisis of 2008, in the divisive and diverse perceptions that have emerged in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, but also in the escalation of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict since 2014 involving international actors, the traditional approach to crisis management, i.e. changing and reducing the number of polarised parties in the conflict, has resulted and can result in a solution. While bipolar solutions to crisis management can bring valuable results for all, they cannot represent a win-win position in every segment of the crisis. There will be winners who come out of the conflict with losses, and there will be losers who will be the winners of simplistic management, a peaceful settlement.

In each case I propose, the value of clearly identifiable information projections, which can be interpreted at state level and are reflections of geopolitical perceptions, is enhanced. In the present era, the commitments of individual and higher-level alliance or non-state actors valorise the active participants associated with networks, the individuals, actors or logical elements identifiable in the military and non-military sense (Simon, 2016). A geopolitical approach to conflict assessment, analysis, prevention, elimination, mitigation and recovery is essential for crisis management in the information environment. In this context, which includes real and virtual parts, it is worth defining and necessary to define geopolitical elements using a network approach. The system of protection of the responses to the actions of individuals in conflicts – the prevention, perpetration and eradication of indirect violence – can be served by the identification and delimitation of the legitimate combatants in direct and indirect information combat, i.e. the development of the concept of the digital partisan.

### 4. Polarised conflicts and the multipolar power system

Human progress in the last 2,000 years has been unbroken, thanks to the accelerating pace of the technological revolution, both today and in the future. Despite, or perhaps even because of, conflicts, clashes and disasters, they provide our communities with the foundations that are essential to our survival. To strengthen their

<sup>4</sup> In their 1990 publication, Applegate and Moore classified the forms of warfare into four groups: positional, manoeuvre, long-range penetration and guerrilla. Jenő Kovács, on the basis of a further academic analysis of Applegate and Moore's study, narrowed down the characteristics of warfare into three categories. In terms of the use of violence, he classified the forms of warfare already mentioned as war cultures as destructive (i.e. movement-centric), exhaustive (i.e. material-centric) and guerrilla-type strategies (Forgács, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> In simple terms, the achievement of dominance and leadership in armed conflicts and military operations is fundamentally determined by the location of the battle, the battlefield, the forces deployed in the conflict (human resources, military equipment, etc.), the duration of the strikes and the indirect and direct information that supports the operations and the combatting sides (Haig, Kovács, Ványa, Vass, 2014).

identity, the peoples of the world are competing to discover ancient sources of current knowledge. Born from a particular compulsion to prove their identity or entity – by demonstrating their physical, geographical attachment to their homeland – they seek to prove the legitimacy of defending their sovereignty, which knows no borders. The basic conditions and basic rules for democratic coexistence of nations and countries, by identifying the fundamental principles of the logic of existence and philosophy – “freed” from historical and cultural “constraints” – have already been formulated by ancient thinkers.

The objective side of the cognition of phenomena and events of our time is increasingly questioned and confronted with a denial that rightly keeps the subjective approach at the surface, emphasising the emotional importance of empiricism. Simply put, we live in an age of “global whys” of rationality, yet we turn to the application of local and mental schemas, and not infrequently to methods<sup>6</sup>, i.e. tools of “training”, in the face of unknown phenomena and events. We do this despite the fact that the creation of a lifestyle based on copying and standardisation is understood in public opinion as one of the foundations of centralising power. The safeguards of domination over the community may include the restriction of free will or the suppression of independent thought. For the individual, the importance of the “local how” is increasingly being pushed into the background, and instead of acquiring knowledge and forming an independent opinion, they choose to copy answers, “banishing” themselves to the browsers of infocommunication systems and the virtual store of downloadable applications with the promise of convenience.<sup>7</sup> From the humanist ideal of the thinking man, the role model of our modern world, we have transitioned to the digital ideal of the faceless and disembodied man (Balsamo, 2000) who “surfs” in virtual space and is “robotised” by their mobile applications, who seeks the expression of their identity, the support of group existence and even a source of security in the social spaces of cyberspace. They can be freed from the physical, biological, etc. determinisms of reality, but the digital copy of man, their avatar, through the indirect influences affecting them, through information becomes the least novel subject of power. Avoiding the consequences of violence and influence in this virtual space has so far remained a promise. Users are learning that once something is on the

internet, it stays there for eternity and is indelible, and those who connect are unwittingly sharing their infocommunication resources, and even their identity and data. Through its electronic interconnectedness, the sphere of privacy becomes even more polarisable for any power aspirations. In the multipolar power relations of our time, belonging to two camps has been replaced by “joining a network”, which, despite the promise of a freer existence and freedom of choice, makes us more vulnerable. In the case of conflicts, effective dialogue can be replaced by the “need” to find common minimum standards for reaching multilateral agreements, i.e. the desired peace can be delayed by the differences of will of many actors. The diverse, often programmed reflections of perception and emotion not only divide communities, but even polarise them, making it difficult to identify with a community, which is necessary for self-actualisation and a sense of security. Our community spaces, which fundamentally define our choices, can make our connections short-term and superficial, or in extreme cases addictive or even unnatural.

In addition to the psychological and sociological constraints that fundamentally determine human relations, decisions are influenced by the place of use, the social role assumed or entrusted, cultural beliefs and even the current physical, geographical, mental, etc. attributes.<sup>8</sup> If we extend the usual local approach to the information environment, the above can be interpreted in a much more nuanced, regional fashion. If we consider digital content and its accessibility as the main sources of our knowledge, we can examine the development of social media and the growth of scientifically valuable online content and digital connections. In terms of the number of internet users and the proportion of internet usage, in the first decades of the 21st century the above statements can generally be applied to citizens of modern democracies<sup>9</sup> (Figures 1 and 2).

The financial crisis of 2007-2009 and the COVID-19 pandemic and its management are a striking example of the challenges of ICT. From the perspective of the activity and social relations of the individual, transnational terrorism caused fears even greater than aggression, as the real and imagined economic consequences affected the whole world, not just the primary target of terrorism – the US and its allies. Tackling the economic crisis has involved bailing out global financial systems at state level. The pandemic, in turn, led to a state-driven global spread of digital con-

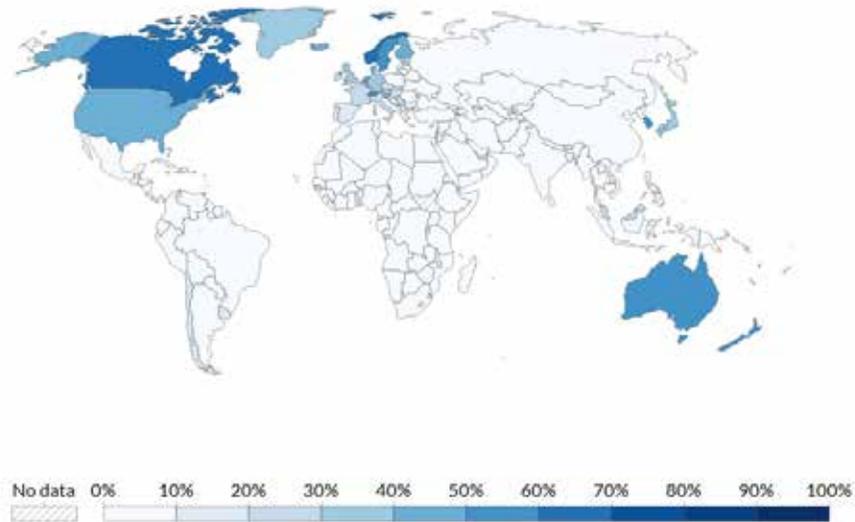
<sup>6</sup> Raimondo Montecucoli, the German-Roman imperial commander and military theorist, was a proponent of the “Methodist” school of warfare. He saw the success of fighting the individual battle in the endless practice of military skills. He advocated the primacy of the practice of reflexes and subconscious skills in the training of military units (Hausner, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> At this point, I would like readers to immerse themselves in their thoughts and not make arguments primarily based on identity or difference of opinion. Let’s rise above the plane of our thoughts and, keeping the focus on globalisation, see how true or false our general statements are. Where do we start? What should we compare them to? Should we remain objective or subjective?

<sup>8</sup> According to behavioural decision theory, individuals generally make decisions rationally, but may take a bounded rationality or incremental (increasing, gradual) approach. (Simon, 1982; Lindblom, 1995; March, 2000; Kerchner, 2018)

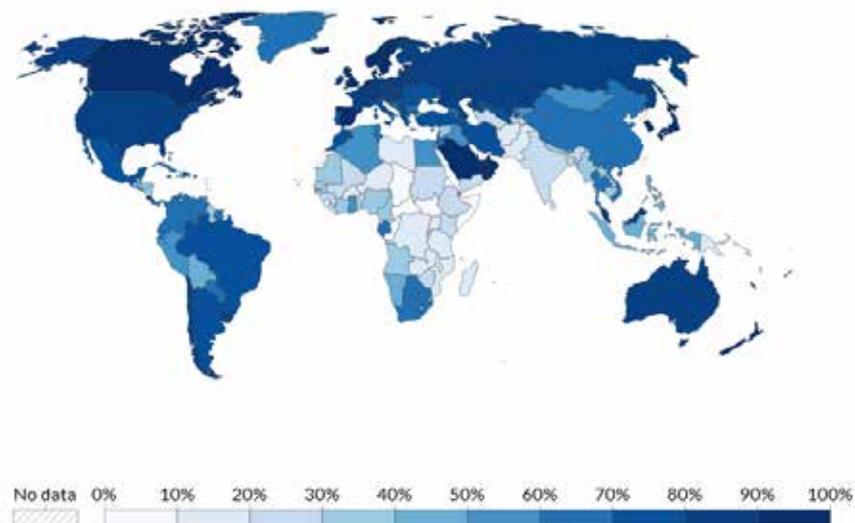
<sup>9</sup> The term used here is commonly understood to be primarily economic or technological. At the same time, in the case of power networks, it also means the modernity of democracies in a political sense (Cs. Kiss, 2003)

**FIGURE 1: PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION USING THE INTERNET  
IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES – AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL POPULATION IN 2001**



Source: *Our World in Data*, 2022

**FIGURE 2: PERCENTAGE OF THE POPULATION USING THE INTERNET  
IN VARIOUS COUNTRIES – AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL POPULATION IN 2019**



Source: *Our World in Data*, 2022

nections and real-time electronic “online” forms of activity, in addition to the protracted psychological and social negative effects of the state’s compulsion to reduce infection rates. In agreement with Attila Ágh, paradoxically, although the globalised market – with its focus on individual freedom<sup>10</sup> – is increasingly controlling states, it points to those states that still wish to organise their own and common markets in a traditional way as adversaries, even enemies. However, in any socio-economic crisis caused by the market economy, globalisation had no other option but to shift to the states the challenges of maintaining order and pacifying the losers. It was the states at the forefront of globalisation and their citizens who bore the burden of defusing the absolutely necessary but painful consequences for the individual, and the local social obligation to bear the global hardship. The over-activity of the individual, their specific role, “has led to an extreme waste of human capital and social capacity, and to the development of social anomie<sup>11</sup>” (Ágh, 2018, p. 15).

When it comes to the verbal representation of solutions observed in conflict management, it is mainly in developed countries that a significant difference can be seen between the language of the power media and public discourse. Thus, this creates in the individual, as intended by the media, a self-exciting “spiral of activity” based on copying. The observer of the news, the user, keeping the principle of freedom of choice and expression in mind, as a subject of power, does not renounce the assertion of their own will, even if they are aware that this will is strongly influenced and, in many cases, only gives a seeming independence, and they formulate an autonomous right to perceive events they consider important. The co-communities offered up by power systems with different conceptions of power can create a polarised system of ideas that are ready at any time to represent the subjects of power, to determine the actions of the community or to direct the activity of its members, even if the underlying assumption is manipulated or perhaps completely untrue, i.e. based on belief rather than on actual facts. The individual unwittingly disregards rational and bounded rational thinking and continues to pursue their activity out of conviction, its integral info-communicative and cognitive activity, and not infrequently their perceived legitimate impact-based struggle.

<sup>10</sup> Although the functional approach of the aggressive dominance of HOMO ECONOMICUS in contrast to the role of the state, which was receding under the impact of globalisation, served to understand market processes, it still took the isolated individual as its starting point. The need for a strong state in crisis management is a confrontation between two realities: neoliberalism and neopopulism. The devaluation of “experts” and the rejection of the facts they produce is a kind of self-defence of society (Ágh, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Anomie in society means the weakening of shared values and norms, a state in which the regulating influence of society is not or not sufficiently effective. If the individual believes that they can only achieve good living conditions and quality of life by inappropriate means (Dictionary of foreign words).

## 5. Information society networks

Behind the events that take place in our world, there are social relationships that shape communities through values and interests. This is also true if we think about the processes (physical, biological, chemical, etc.) and laws of the natural and artificial environment. Questions of human existence in the Maslowian and Aronsonian sense also determine our way of life and our effectiveness.<sup>12</sup> The fundamental principle of all countries, and of any alliance of countries, is to defend sovereignty, to safeguard the human resources that make up our society, the security of their citizens, their people, their nation. Based on the foregoing, we can state that in the age of information societies, the dimension of power and information leads to the emergence, maintenance, control and elimination of changing power systems. Global and local interests appear polarised in the multitude of value systems.

The technological advances of the 21st century, by linking and combining technical achievements, discoveries and tools, have achieved collaborations and integrated and fusion effects, without which the continuous economic growth of globalisation that defines our times would be unimaginable. The interplay of human and technical relationships across the ages and eras has always guided our decisions and set the path for our future. Use of the technologies developed had the potential for both peaceful and violent applications of tools and methods. Power and the method of power projection are determined in a meaningful way by the theoretical and substantive physical commonality of the applicators, i.e. the quality and quantity of their relations. The formal structure of organisations can also be compared using a mathematical, graph-theory approach. The subordinate and equivalent levels within groups, centralised, decentralised hierarchical or cooperative forms of organisation, can be identified by their interconnectedness.<sup>13</sup> The elements that dominate and create the different levels of power in human communities form groups, i.e. individuals form networks of relations through their relationships. The dynamic development of relationships, their growth or decline, the importance of the information managed or stored by groups also characterise the success, vulnerability and innovative activity of a given community.

<sup>12</sup> Two of the greatest figures in the fields of need and social psychology have experimentally demonstrated why and with what motivation individuals and their communities realise themselves, and what the significance of social cognition is in the formation of groups and their relationships with each other.

<sup>13</sup> Graph theory or network theory distinguishes between directed and undirected graphs or loops according to the connections between the elements. For example, networks can be simple or complete graphs, and they can be weighted according to the strength and permeability of the links between the elements (Barabási, 2016, p. 82).

We take knowledge, information power, as a given, but we do not consider that beyond its possession, its sharing or even its protection can be just as important. The mobilising and recruiting role of information, knowledge and activities, research or statements that shape communities and sustain groups has also been observed and identified in other social eras. How, then, is our present-day understanding of information different from that of ancient cave drawings, or the memories of our built or written knowledge carved in stone? It is not just demographic growth and technological progress that we may think of. Let's also turn our attention to the uncontrolled and decentralised growth of communities with and sharing information. Agreeing with one of the most cited scholars of our information age, Albert-László Barabási, we must mark as a substantive difference the complexity of the groups that contain, transmit or express knowledge – thus also implying power – and the interconnection and interdependence of these complex systems: “The perspective offered by networks is essential for those who want to understand today's interconnected world” (Barabási, 2016, p. 9).

The scope of this paper is not sufficient to describe the connections between Euler's basic graph-theory problem and the networks of information societies. In other words, how the Bridges of Königsberg of 1735 have impacted the accurate understanding of the networks and their properties in our present day. But it is also worth a separate study on how the science of mathematics has moved from the issue of relationships posed by Frigyes Karinthy<sup>14</sup> in his 1929 short story “Chain-Links” – which states that in just six steps, we can reach anyone in the world through our relationships – to the understanding of the small-world phenomenon. In the context of the development of network science, it can also be shown that systems with complex connections that are opaque on a human scale and with an ever-changing, increasing number of elements can be described by characteristic, identifiable properties (for example, to examine users of the social networking site Facebook, who are verifiably 4 steps away from one another, or that connections between documents on the internet (WWW) may be 19 steps away). The basis for the objective study of interconnectedness is provided by the graph theory. The scientific definition of basic concepts and tools has served to understand the properties of complex networks and to describe their structure – in other words, network research. This research shows the essence of complex systems. The mathematical properties of random, real or

<sup>14</sup> The small-world phenomenon deals with the mathematical problem of the smallest distance between nodes in a network. The average distance between the nodes of a network depends logarithmically on the ratio of the number of elements in the network to the number of connections from the nodes (Barabási, 2016, pp. 106-111).

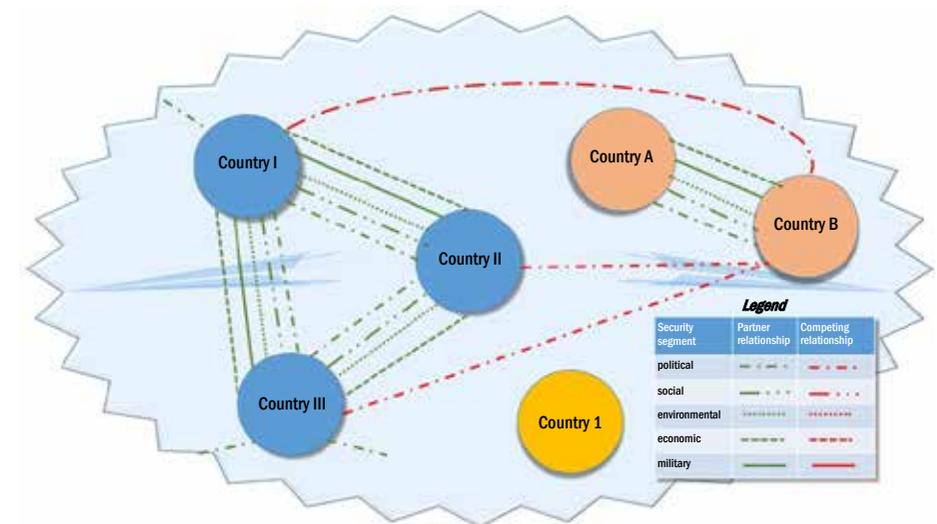
scale-independent networks become distinguishable. They confirm “that the structure and evolution of all the complex networks that surround us are governed by surprisingly simple and far-reaching natural laws” (Barabási, 2013, p. 12), including power networks.

Information society networks are ubiquitous, from local and regional networks of individuals to global connectivity systems. When analysing the properties of groups with a small number of connections, several analytical evaluation models are known, used or applied. In the interest of their communities, states essentially adopt a common understanding of security to achieve and maintain sovereignty and prosperity, or establish a minimum set of security guarantees in state networks, and regulate the right of access of citizens, the smooth functioning of secured networks. These may include financial systems, transport, infocommunication networks, critical public infrastructure or detection systems designed to identify and dismantle threats to these systems, such as terrorist and criminal organisations.<sup>15</sup>

Returning to the multipolar system of power, it can be identified as a scale-independent network because of its complexity and constant change. If we accept that the power of states arises from the derived majority will of the individuals and citizens of which they are comprised, then the freedom of communities and the “applied” rule and violence of power have an impact<sup>16</sup> on threats, and thus the security of societies. In other words, according to the mathematical model thus defined: taking into account the relationships representing the convergence or divergence of the countries recognised by the UN and their values and interests, and based on the segments (political, social, environmental, economic, military) that determine security<sup>17</sup>, a current security network of “friendly” partner countries and “hostile” competitor or neutral countries can be constructed with almost 200 nodes, with a maximum of five relationships between two nodes (Figure 3). According to this simplistic theoretical model, both crises and the network structure preceding and following these can provide information on, for example, the security situation of the multipolar world order, the dominant states that can influence conflicts and the less important states that can play a role in resolving them. Thus, the scale-independent “security system”

can be interpreted as a kind of power network based on the values, defence interests and capabilities of sovereign states to be defended. It must also be acknowledged that the activity of these states determines the sustainability and vulnerability of the network, but global and regional centres of power can also be identified along the highly connected (high number of) nodes. If we add to this the citizen activity of polarised individuals and the network of non-state actors with high economic and financial potential, such as religious organisations (with a much higher node number, but maximised at the time under review), we can see a complex network in respect of interacting threats and security. Non-governmental organisations may be disregarded in the case of further study. In my view, the role and activity of non-state organisations – be it in any of the security segments – can be directly or indirectly associated with state or individual interests or power.

FIGURE 3: THE SECURITY NETWORK OF STATES – POSSIBLE LINKS BETWEEN SEGMENTS



Source: own editing

<sup>15</sup> Cf.: Vida (2007); Kenedli (2012); Budavári, Rajnai (2019); Balogh, Hanka (2013); Hanka (2012); Michelberger, Horváth (2017); Horváth, Kocsis (2017).

<sup>16</sup> The Hobbesian and Weberian concepts of power or domination include the direct and indirect effects of violence. While one concept sees the source of power in the unification of the power of each man, the other concept reflects the way each man accepts the obedient command of the ruler’s power. In: Hobbes (1999); Weber (1987)

<sup>17</sup> Barry Buzan’s model interprets the expanded notion of security in the military, political, economic, social and environmental domains. In: Gazda, Remek (2018)

## 6. The polarised, legitimate, digital warrior – The digital partisan

Traditionally, human communities have sought to resolve the power conflicts and crises of our social existence, i.e. the use of force and power projection (weapons), at the level of the state, which they have formed or organised. In cases of dispute and counter-interests, there is always a crisis of one value or another. Otherwise, discrimination perceived as hostile at the level of disagreement could be resolved by argumentation and become acceptable. By respecting each other's differences, peaceful coexistence could be achieved. According to the political science consequences of World Wars I and II, the “previous legal theoretic delimitation of armed conflicts meant that if conflicts and disputes could not be resolved peacefully, the parties or countries had the right to go to war (*jus ad bellum*). The armed struggle was conducted according to the law of war (*jus in bello*)” (Simon, 2018). If we look at the conflicts of power that threatened our security up to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 (hereafter referred to as 9/11), all confrontations, including in times of armed conflict and other crises, became well-defined. Sooner or later, but even in the case of the war of the satellite states, two poles emerged. In the case of power conflict resolution, looking back to this period in history as an example, the opposition of two parties simplified or accelerated the process of possible settlement.<sup>18</sup>

After 9/11, we had to deal with the eradication, prevention and aftermath of a series of conflicts which, not in the least, meant direct confrontation between states and thus the traditional resolution of conflicts. In power conflicts, we face direct impacts in addition to, before or after armed confrontations. Even when responding to or mitigating natural disasters or pandemics, we are faced with new conflicts and crises.<sup>19</sup> In areas such as cyberspace, outer space or the information environment of the territorial distribution of freshwater resources, novel arenas of war (Babos, 2011; Haiszky, 2021) are already at war (Simon, 2016; Kelemen & Simon, 2020). As I have said before: “Based on the traditional understanding of security in our modern world, these basic tasks should be guaranteed by the states. This cannot be

any different in the age of globalisation either, although the system of individual and group values and the interests that derive from these means that we are confronted with new non-state actors (multinational companies, corporate giants and increasingly vocal, self-organising transnational groups) with a significant dominance in this field” (Simon, 2017, p. 233).

In the age of information societies, it is from infocommunication systems that we can most widely learn about the activities of power networks and their outcomes, namely the effects of applied power and power projection. The different (bi, uni or multipolar) perceptions of world power affect not only the structural properties of networks, but also the information and probability of occurrence of events associated with the links. Despite the unified international understanding and acceptance of the prohibition of violence declared in 1949<sup>20</sup>, open communication without any source analysis, the globalisation of access to information, the sharing of information worldwide, but also its unjustified withholding, may have the opposite result.

In the global, regional or local conflicts we have faced over the past two decades, the importance of information has not diminished. Our actions and decisions essentially continue to be taken at the state levels of the exercise of power and at the individual, emotional and cognitive levels of its effects. The internet<sup>21</sup> and the media have become the main indirect means of the expression of public power and its conflicts, and in a broader sense, cyberspace (Munk, 2018) and its associated cognitive segment are the “new information environment” of our time (Figure 4). Crises (challenges, risks) that do not cross or transcend geographical borders, and their negative effects, can be experienced as a threat by the population of any continent, even far from their actual place of appearance. From the above, it is easy to see that the threats and violence that emerge and are transmitted in cyberspace can no longer be dealt with at state level in the traditional way. At the same time, in the new kind of information environment described by me in a previous study (Simon, 2017), the digital, mapped space, which can be considered virtual, the regulatory processes to be developed are even less understandable and difficult to interpret in terms of the limitation of power. “I took as my starting point the legal theoretical obligation, the democratic transfer of public power, which is contained in the constitutions of the states and which their legal systems have in relation to the sharing of power. Protecting and guaranteeing the safety of citizens is the duty of the state, i.e. of the representative of the public power”, i.e. a state or governmental function capable of meeting reality by any means.

<sup>20</sup> United Nations Charter (1945).

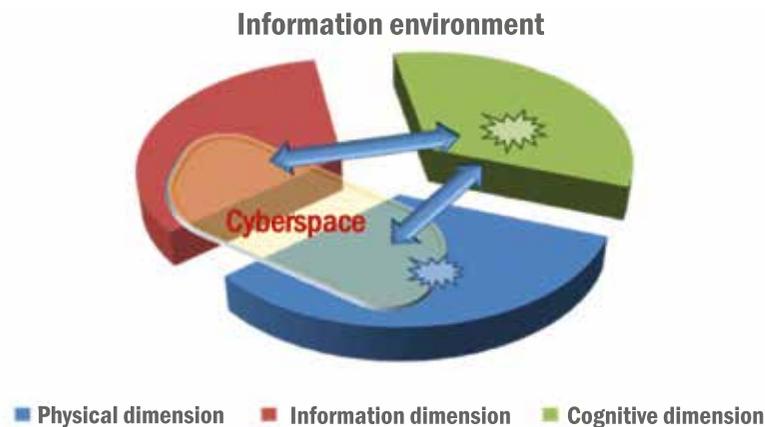
<sup>21</sup> According to Barabási's research, the internet itself can be identified as a complex network, or more precisely, a scale-independent network from a mathematical point of view (Barabási, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> My statement here suggests the applicability of another area of mathematics. The game theory results associated with the work of János Neumann describe the different games (conflicts) of two parties and their possible winning strategies. With his proof of the minimax theorem in 1928, Neumann launched a way of thinking in which simple mathematical rules can be used to show how the decisions of the participants can influence the outcome of a game (Kóczy, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Examples of this are when some states, in pursuit of their interests, cite the functioning of the state or the safety of its citizens as grounds to carry out flood protection works (building a dam or breaching a dam for protection purposes) ahead of or at the expense of other states, or purchase vaccines during a pandemic, causing damage to others.

Despite the fact that you cannot extinguish human lives with programmes and codes, or in the words of German political scientist Thomas Rid: a cyber war – as a violence of political power that extinguishes human lives and threatens the functioning of states, according to the classical concept of war – will not take place (Rid, 2013); in terms of the indirect impact of the information weapon, we tend to agree more with the vision of former CIA Director Panetta, who in 2011 said that “the next Pearl Harbor that we confront could very well be a cyberattack” (Ryan, 2011). In other words, without knowing the real source of the power manifested within the most pervasive information system of our time, we have to endure its aggression and its mediated violence, as well as the often real damage caused by the consequences (Figure 5).

**FIGURE 4: INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT AND VIOLENCE WITHIN IT**



Source: Simon (2017)

**FIGURE 5: REAL-TIME CYBER ATTACKS – SNAPSHOT - 15/05/2022**



Source: Norse – <https://twitter.com/norsecorp> (2022)

When it comes to the problem of violence and the projection of violence (indirect aggression and terror), in respect of the tasks to be solved in terms of the order of effects (administrative, law enforcement, economic protection or national security, etc.), “we are often confronted with cultural and perceptual differences at the level of both the state and the citizen” (Simon, 2017, p. 237). In the aforementioned spaces, in addition to the established legal order of international law and state law, the openness and broad individual accessibility of the information environment means that all participants encounter self-restraint and self-regulation. Alongside existing legal regulation, which requires ongoing social discourse, we have seen moral and cultural differences alongside, or as a consequence of, wise and security-conscious incident management (Simon, 2017). Despite, or because of, similar perceptions of power in different societies, the perception of illegal and mass migration or the handling of refugees has shown substantial differences, where different approaches and perceptions of humanity, demographic challenges or internal security risks have not helped to address the global threat. In the fight against terrorism, until the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan, there seemed to be a one-way concentration of power at all levels of joint action. The efforts to dismantle the ISIS terrorist organisation in Syria foreshadowed the fact that the US would not be able to win over the Eurasian regional powers with its power aspirations as it had done so before.

The effects of the Syrian crisis since 2011 have led to an active social and professional debate in Hungary and in Europe on how and which state organisations are able to eliminate and prevent the effects that have led to the radicalisation of the population and the emergence of terror. The actual ideology of the terrorist organisation, and its military actions which were well linked to geographical locations, were simultaneously associated with law enforcement, military and intelligence tasks. The armed clashes between the forces of the terrorist organisation and the international armed forces organised against them took place far from Europe. Yet terrorist attacks and suicide bombings have been committed in every region of the world. For some members of societies, individual and community communication were both a threat, a “just cause” or a stand for freedom. The sharing of content could be used for recruitment, but also to provide ideas for new terrorist acts or to present precise descriptions of how to organise terrorist acts (Simon & Magyar, 2017). The Russian-Ukrainian conflict and its management, initially limited to the Ukraine on the basis of territorial aspects, led to armed confrontation and hybrid military operations from 2014 onwards (Resperger, 2018). The response to the aggression of the Russian Federation and the sanctions regime designed to preserve Ukraine’s sovereignty, and the unified security effect of NATO/EU enlargement, which could be assessed as a consequence, could turn into

a war between satellite states.<sup>22</sup> “Despite humanitarian aid and ‘gentle messages’, European citizens – including members of state institutions due to their increased responsibilities – have been drawn into physical confrontations [...] and no longer see tenderness as the main antidote to violence, aggression and terror” (Simon, 2017, p. 237). Those who experience violence directly or indirectly are increasingly making their voices heard, formulating their demands in the face of response violence, in line with the findings of Olivier’s psychological research: they are not focusing on tenderness as a counter-pole to aggression, but on communication.<sup>23</sup>

The projection of power in our new information environment is often transmitted to citizens and users through invisible, complex network connections, often from faceless or manipulated sources. The achievements of technological progress and the success of applications are used by both states and other stakeholders to advance their interests. The nature of indirect violence in the context of the expression of power and domination in infocommunication networks has thus, from time to time, resulted in a spiral of violence, also taking into account the experiences of the past. In organising the fight against violence and aggression and in eradicating terror, communication and cooperation could be the most effective response (Bolgár, Szternák N., Szternák Gy., 2005). The individual who opposes political power, whether revolutionary, guerrilla or partisan, will fight against their perceived legitimate struggle against power and its representatives to the very end, and will not refrain from the use of terror. The conviction of the individual, free from influence, is expressed in total destruction or annihilation, as Schmitt’s partisan theory, written in 1963, puts it. Schmitt also describes partisan perspectives, i.e. the aggressive response and terror of the network actors of our time are determined by the spatial point of view, i.e. the geographical mappability of virtual content, the disruption of social structures, the world political context and the technical point of view (Schmitt, 2002).

The person, the actor, who avoids physical publicity, uses the complex network of cyberspace – hiding behind a virtual identity – to commit their acts of violence against the vital systems that determine our lives (for example: points of infocommunication networks with a high number of connections). Through internet connections, they

<sup>22</sup> In addition to direct arms transport, sanctions that have a substantial impact on the war can also be identified as divisive actions by power centres aimed at resolving the conflict. As per the declarations, NATO is not supplying military equipment, but some NATO member states are supporting Ukraine in this manner. Alexander Darchiev himself, the former Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Canada, has said that satellite states that unthinkingly copy US sanctions can expect a similar response (Szabó, 2022; for more on the sanctions: Chandler, 2022).

<sup>23</sup> Christiane Olivier formulated her claim, which she observed as a psychoanalyst in role-playing with children in the course of her impulse control work, in her book “Les Parents face à la violence de l’enfant” (Olivier, 2004).

use computers, i.e. digital tools, to exercise their indirect power. They attack with codes and programmes “by subordinating all of their individual and group actions to the real-time, public delivery and publication of their messages (videos) [...] by displaying them in the media, they multiply and spread our sense of fear worldwide” (Simon, 2017, p. 238). Returning to Rid’s approach quoted earlier, what other effects are needed for the real or perceived content of information or a computer or telephone application to indirectly create a lethal physical threat to the political aims of the power? It is easy to see that it is not the system of tools that evokes fear, since infocommunication devices, and even robots, can be implemented with the aim of serving the well-being of humanity and humans. This is true even if the technology is used to eliminate violence, whether as a weapon or as a means of a logical process to prevent armed confrontation. The power of these aggressive digital acts, the projection of this power, is in my assessment determined by the rapid global spread of the content of information and the malware, computer viruses used and the geographical location of the victim community, the power embodied in the states. In addition to conventional armed actions, which are adjudicated under international law, their hybrid use, intelligence and indirect operations (their virtual representation, projection, visualisation, etc.) and the influence of news on geographical events are all influencing the new information environment. The activity of the cyberspace partisan can theoretically be eliminated by “turning off” virtual space, but if it is linked to real actions, they will seek other forms of communication, such as real networks, to share the content of the information.

With the use of legitimate information as a weapon against power, guerrilla warfare has evolved into an information-centric and network-centric warfare culture (Simon, 2016). “Terrorists can only sustain their attacks in the dimensions of targeted force and information to achieve their objectives in conventional, military-style operations because their material resources are scarce. They can even expand the legitimacy of the violence by supporting the population connected to the virtual space, by attracting lone perpetrators. In the context of attacking civilian and network targets, the traditional space has been complemented by the dimension of cyberspace” (Simon, 2017, p. 239).

As described so far, territorial, geographical, kinetic ties are also necessary to overcome and identify violence and terror. In the multipolar space of power, the partisan can be defined as the legitimate digital warrior of the polarised individual, whose direct and indirect acts of violence can reinforce each other to maintain the spiral of terror, thus fundamentally influencing multipolar power with its complex networked image and the enforcement of the laws of the politics of rationality that result from its geographic boundedness.

## 7. Summary, conclusions

The multipolar system of power that defines our present and our future is, by the very nature of the connections to our security described above, a mathematically complex set, much like a scale-independent network. Although the nature of power means that some components, such as economic and military subsystems, may traditionally be hierarchically linked, the sovereign community of democratic and other states is a multipolar system of power. As a subset, the social and cyber space (infocommunication system) of society is a proven scale-independent network, defined within the basic dimensions of time, power and information. The individual actors of the multipolar space of power, the citizens of states, are able to connect to events of power and political actions anywhere in the world through digital tools and applications in the information environment (cyberspace and its associated cognitive space). Through the information conveyed, they can influence conflicts or even armed confrontations. The individual seeks a community of value and interest as a polarised party, and usually allows virtual space for the indirect effects of their aggression. Power projection and its spatial manifestation, stepping out of the virtual medium, create real fears. This expression of power, linked to physical violence in the geographical space, induces a daily spiral of aggression and terror. The past 20 years in the fight against terrorism have seen action against both hierarchical and scale-independent network groups. Even the fullest cooperation between states and communication between state organisations and citizens has not brought complete peace.

Polarisation in the space of power through the relations of individuals can – at a given space and time interval – show a dynamically changing pattern of relations, unlike the relatively stable relations of subordinate and superior actors in a classical hierarchical power system (see the participants and the power network of the 2014 Syrian crisis). In the case of dynamically changing polarised networks, we can traditionally no longer clearly identify the friend-enemy opposition pair. The physical clashes of political, economic or information power systems, which are well defined in space and time, can bear the outcome of conflict resolution. In all other cases, prolonged, anomic crisis management, i.e. specific crisis management that deviates from the previously accepted, declared set of rules, may develop, even if one of the power players is in a dominant position. Without physical reconciliation or a mutually acceptable agreement, confronting parties and social communities linked in the geopolitical space between states will only achieve a shorter or longer-term ceasefire, not peace. When satellite states are involved in tensions of varying qual-

ity and intensity, upon leaving the infocommunication space there is also physical damage incurred, be it a loss of healthcare, economic or even social balance. In the information societies of the 21st century, the settlement of differences of opinion and social processes that are unacceptable to the other side and require retaliation is no longer seen only as a hierarchical armed confrontation between mass armies of state and allies, but as a polarised power structure where the role and digital activity of individuals will be valorised. The direct and indirect effects build a complex power network of fear and aggression, in which the use and projection of force (disinformation, subversion, infiltration, influence) play a fundamental role. Citizens, military and non-military actors, the ancient source of power, no longer demand political intervention in a structure of subordinate and superior power, but in the networked way familiar from the internet. The kinetic and digital struggle of the legitimate individual warrior is organised into scale-independent networks. This is a vulnerable relationship system, but one that is highly flexible, broadly collaborative and, not least, renewable.

In this space of power, the behaviour of individuals and the groups they create (NGOs, non-state actors, business corporations, multinational financial or religious organisations) in the information society environment of our globalised world now exhibit – even in a mathematical sense – regular organisations and networks. If we consider the exercise, sharing and transfer of power as the representation or transfer of public power, the most dominant site of power and power projection is the set of infocommunication systems owned and organised by different communities. In the future, the role of geographic locations that coincide, in whole or in part, with the cyberspace being built by the internet will be appreciated. Additionally, in cyberspace, boundedness and cultural determinacy will be balanced against a multicultural perception that is growing faster with globalisation, as we make our individual and collective choices based upon it. All codes and programmes are based on typing, which we do ourselves using a real application on an IT device.

I have based the global power subsystem presented in this paper on the prohibition of violence, as defined and declared by states, which applies to their relations with each other, as well as to citizens in general. I supplemented this system of relations with an analysis of the individual's activity, their aggression and legalised terror against power. The key to this study was the past two decades of the fight against terrorism. As described above and based on natural science approaches, the multipolar state power system will, at this stage of research, be confronted by polarised individuals, as distinguishable from non-state actors organised on economic, financial or humanitarian principles through their complex political and

social relations. In establishing the rules for peaceful or less peaceful coexistence, network geopolitics (a renewed geopolitics that incorporates the mathematical laws and descriptive processes of network science) will, in my assessment, provide suitable and novel solution strategies to existing crisis management procedures. A network-based geopolitical interpretation of conflicts could also provide the basis for a more coherent and more widely tolerated global political approach for individuals in the future.

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**FORECASTS, EXPECTED  
TRENDS FOR THE NEAR  
FUTURE**

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# PROPOSALS FOR A NEW WORLD ORDER, AND THE COMPETITION FOR BUILDING IT

*Anita Faust*

## 1. Introduction

Despite being largely determined by an underlying global distribution of power, a world order is not only about power relations. It also means an accepted pattern of sharing systemic advantages, the accepted approach to conflict resolution, as well as the patterns of permitted flows of ideas, people, and material goods. These arrangements will be accepted as ‘just’ if they are aligned with the distribution of power while exercising a degree of restraint by the powerful. As the chapter titled “Power and Legitimacy in the American World Order” shows, the distribution of the components of power that underpinned the unipolar, US-led world order have shifted, and satisfaction with the distribution of the systemic benefits has faltered. In 2021, all major powers – the US, as well as Russia and China – called for a new world order and each laid out their visions. In the consecutive year, open competition for a new world order was launched. Strategies of choice were laid out in 2022 in great power strategic narratives. This chapter presents and analyses the proposals for a new world order put forward by great powers in 2021, and two major strategic documents published in 2022, the SCO’s Samarkand Declaration and the US national security strategy.

Parties to the competition have different reasons for wanting to change the world order. The US is fighting to renew its former supremacy and role as the main – occasionally unilateral – shaper of world order. Russia, China and the proponents of multipolarity seek to eliminate the hierarchy centred around the US and aim for their inclusion as equals in global governance. The narratives of the two sides are irreconcilable in their goals, and clash sharply in their competition for allies.

The competition between the great powers also means a clash between their economic systems – liberal capitalism based on private ownership versus state/mixed capital-

ism (Milanovic, 2020). The transnational corporations that rose with the expansion of the trade-based unipolar world order, and have themselves acquired unprecedented systemic power, are parties to the great power competition on their own right.

While predictions of the outcome of the competition for the new world order are premature, understanding the motivations of the various powers may give a grasp on contemporary processes, be they the dismantling or re-arranging of interdependencies, coercive efforts to reveal or alter the distribution of power, feats of diplomacy to re-wire allegiances, or indeed, narratives by the competitors. Through the examination of the 2021 proposals for a new world order and the 2022 strategies, the study outlines key processes that have been set in motion, reviewing some of their implications.

## 2. Thucydides’s Trap, with some modifications

As the chapter titled “Power and Legitimacy in the American World Order” in the present volume shows, multiple components in the edifice of American power have shifted to transnational corporations on the one hand, and to a group of countries on the other. The diffusion of power to corporations certainly has significant impact on the US leadership position but is not viewed as hostile. Accommodation and negotiated adjustments dominate the relationship. Emerging – or re-emerging – rivals who demand inclusion in the way the international system is governed, have, in turn, triggered the re-opening Thucydides’s Trap. Named for the historian who documented the Peloponnesian War between ancient Athens and Sparta, Thucydides’s Trap has been observed many times in history, when a dominant power came to be challenged by a rising one, evoking fear in the dominant power. Such situations have for the most part concluded in major war, as Graham Allison (2017) shows in his book dedicated to the question whether the US and a rising China can avoid war<sup>1</sup>.

Assessing power using simple (non-structural) indicators such as GDP (per capita or other), Allison identifies China as the challenger to the US. However, if we use the criteria in the US concept of power to assess the changes in the global distribution of power<sup>2</sup>, then we find that relevant power has shifted not between the US and China, but between the US and *a group of countries*.

<sup>1</sup> According to research by the Belfer Center at Harvard, 12 out of 16 similar situations led to war.

<sup>2</sup> See the chapter of our volume entitled “Power and Legitimacy in the American World Order”

Two conclusions follow from this. First, if we are to identify rival assessments of the world order, or visions for a new one, we need to examine the strategic narratives of multiple rising powers. Second, it is the relationship between the rising powers, and trends in their collective potential relative to the US and its closest allies that will be indicative of the status in the competition for a new world order.

In the meanwhile, the stance of transnational corporations that have obtained multiple components of US geopolitical power also needs to be considered. They, too, seek, and have the means to potentially attain, an order that they can control, and which privileges them. They have become competitors of their own right for the new world order, and have strategic interest in how the contest among great powers is eventually perceived – from which the legitimacy of their envisioned order may be derived.

### 3. 2021: Competing proposals for a new world order

Major proposals for a new world order were presented in a string of various types of strategic narratives by the players involved. Chronologically, the first proposals were issued by Russia, China in the form of speeches by their premiers at the online Davos conference hosted by the World Economic Forum, in January 2021. This was followed by the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance published by the US National Security Council in March 2021. Next came the declaration issued by the BRICS summit held in September 2021. Finally, in early January 2022, Klaus Schwab and Thierry Malleret published their book presenting the World Economic Forum's vision, entitled "The Great Narrative"<sup>3</sup>. On its official website, the World Economic Forum defines itself as the International Organization for Public-Private Cooperation. Partnering with the leading global companies who drive the Forum's programmes, it engages leaders to shape global, regional and industry agendas. As such, the Forum and its leaders can be assumed to speak for transnational corporations, and their narratives are relevant to the present analysis.<sup>4</sup>

The closure of the time frame available for making proposals on the new world order is shown by the fact that the Russian president was not invited to the Davos meeting

in January 2022. The war in Ukraine broke out in February 2022, entailing a series of measures by the US and its allies, which, combined, set the world on a course of dramatic change and open conflict.

As the series of proposals can be viewed as a conversation between the rival powers, they are discussed in chronological order.

In January 2021, just days after US President Joe Biden took office, the World Economic Forum held its annual meeting not in Davos, but online, focusing on the transformation of the world order. On the agenda was the reorganisation of capitalism, the transformation of social policy, the new basis for energy and food supply in the face of climate change, the rise of artificial intelligence and placing geopolitics on a new foundation. Speakers included statesmen, leaders of corporations, and multilateral organisations. Klaus Schwab, founding chairman of the World Economic Forum and host of the event, described the beginning of 2021 as a special moment in history. Setting the tone for the occasion, he introduced the speech by Russian President Vladimir Putin saying that "the world has a unique and short window of opportunity to move from an age of confrontation to an age of cooperation".

#### 3.1. Russia

In his speech, the Russian President agreed that the world had, indeed, arrived at a crossroads. A world order that puts corporate interests first and pursues credit-driven growth following the unwritten rules of the Washington Consensus had resulted in inequality within and between societies, in terms of both wealth and opportunity. He argued that the world had become so credit-saturated that credit-led growth had reached a dead end.

Calling for the reform of multilateral institutions, and rejecting the centralised world order, President Putin argued that regional self-governance rather than global governance can and should serve as the foundation for greater stability.

Regarding the fourth industrial revolution and the role of corporations in global governance, the Russian president opposed the position taken by the WEF. To reduce inequalities within and between societies, he called for a world order of states, and an order where societies are based on labour. He considered it important to curb technology companies that compete with states not only in material terms, but also in terms of actual power. He expressed his belief that if the world continued on the path it was on, the opportunities offered by new technology would amplify existing and already serious imbalances, exacerbating tensions.

<sup>3</sup> The book is a sequel to "The Great Reset", published by the authors in the summer of 2020 in response to the COVID pandemic. The reason why the book titled The Great Reset is excluded from the present analysis is that it came before the world order was renounced by the US.

<sup>4</sup> For more information, see <https://www.weforum.org/>.

### 3.2. China

At the same virtual meeting in Davos, Chinese premier Xi Jinping stressed the importance of the acceptance of civilisational and political differences and called for a system that would reduce inequalities between countries. Underlining the importance of equality before international law, he condemned selective multilateralism, the abuse of dominance and the centralised control of the world. According to the Chinese leader, it was a mistake to ignore the changes in the world, and world governance needed to be renewed on a consensual basis.

He announced that having emerged from poverty, China had come to a new stage in its development: a new economic policy was in need, one which prioritised domestic demand, and offering foreign partners a role in supplying the domestic market. He also indicated that China would expand its cooperation with the Global South<sup>5</sup>.

### 3.3. United States

The speeches delivered at the virtual Davos meeting were followed in chronological order by the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance of the US published on 3 March 2021. This strategic guidance calls for the establishment of a new, US-led, unipolar world order. It proclaims a new system of wealth distribution and a renewal of democracy.

It identifies and seeks to enlist previously disadvantaged groups as supporters of renewal. People who identify as LGBTQ+ had already been mentioned in President Obama's 2015 national security strategy, and were explicitly included in the 2021 interim strategy as well, but this was the first US strategy to make reference to native Americans. The interim strategy referred to them as a disadvantaged group that should be empowered. As such, it can be interpreted as a tentative to right a past wrong, seeking to appeal to the identities of indigenous peoples around the world, including the countries of the Global South. The stated goal is the redistribution of systemic benefits with disadvantaged groups in mind, to be first implemented by the US in its own society and then adopted, as a model, globally.

<sup>5</sup> There is statistics to show that the US-led world order that has accelerated globalisation has benefited everyone (Rosling et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the Global South – or the ‘periphery’ as it is called in world systems theory (Wallerstein, 2011) – sees itself as the victim of global inequality. As Mark Leonard (2021, p. 65) points out, in the age of connectivity, poor people in poor countries compare themselves with the rich in rich countries, leading to severely falling levels of satisfaction in the Global South.

Internationally, the strategy maintains confrontation with China and Russia. For the first time in the history of National Security Strategies, it identifies domestic political extremists as a threat to national security, and on par with great power rivals, requiring countermeasures used against terrorism. This indicates a persistent lack of domestic cohesion, probably expected by strategists to be aggravated by potential resistance to the intended changes to the US social contract.

The 2021 interim US strategy is also unique in another respect: it does not mention energy security, although energy security has been a central issue in all previous strategies. In fact, in a remark uncharacteristic of the US to be used for important strategic partners, including indispensable sources of energy, the document goes on to state that it will no longer allow its partners in the Middle East to pursue policies at odds with American interests and values<sup>6</sup> (INSSG, 2021, p. 11). The unnamed country (if the reference is made to only one and not more) could be Saudi Arabia, which allowed China to acquire a stake in Saudi Arabian Oil Group Aramco and sold oil to China for yuan. Moreover, the US holds Saudi royalty responsible for the murder in Turkey of Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist who had worked in the US. Saudi Arabia had been a key partner and even an outstanding power multiplier for the US, not only in the creation of the petrodollar, but also in enabling Operation Desert Storm in 1991, the “crucible” of the unipolar US world order. Indeed, the only non-US person ever quoted in a US strategy is King Fahd of Saudi Arabia (NSS, 1991, p. 2)<sup>7</sup>. The criticism formulated in the 2021 strategy most likely signals that Saudi Arabia is no longer indispensable to the US. How fossil fuels would be replaced by the US and around the world is not revealed in the interim strategy. It is worth noting that although energy security and oil imports make a comeback to US national security strategy in 2022, at the time of the closing of the present manuscript, US-Saudi Arabia relations were still rife with unresolved issues, including Saudi policies of oil production cuts in coordination with Russia, raising prices in conflict with US interests, the Gulf kingdom's application for membership in SCO and BRICS, its participation in the Chinese-led diplomatic initiative to pacify the it with its Shia arch rival, Iran, and its invitation to become a BRICS member.

<sup>6</sup> „we will not give our partners in the Middle East a blank check to pursue policies at odds with American interests and values.” – INSS, 2021, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> The quote from Saudi Arabia's King Fahd, as used in the 1991 strategy is as follows: „America's role is rooted not only in power, but also in trust. When, in the aftermath of the invasion of Kuwait, the Saudis invited foreign forces onto their soil, King Fahd observed: „I trust the United States of America. I know that when you say you will be committed, you are, in fact, committed. I know that you will stay as long as necessary to do what has to be done, and I know you will leave when you are asked to leave at the end, and that you have no ulterior motives.” We cannot be the world's policeman with responsibility for solving all the world's security problems. But we remain the country to whom others turn when in distress.”- NSS, 1991, p. 2.

Further context to the interpretation of the interim strategy can be found in President Joe Biden's first executive orders issued in January 2021, which halted multiple energy projects, appearing as an about-turn in US energy policy that had pursued energy independence and energy dominance under presidents Obama and Trump, respectively. The unique reference in the 2021 interim strategy to native American peoples may also be invoked in connection with the strategic absence of energy security in the document. Pipeline construction and energy projects in North America infringed upon the rights of native American communities and were in violation of treaties signed with them.<sup>8</sup> However, when matters of world order are at stake, treaties with particular communities may be referenced, but will be overridden, as dictated by strategic interests.

### 3.4. BRICS

In the string of proposals for a new world order, the US Interim National Security Strategic Guidance was followed by the 13th Declaration of the BRICS, issued in September 2021. Addressing the changes required for a multipolar world order with inclusive governance, the document offers a comprehensive approach, consisting of political, security, economic, financial and cultural chapters.

The goals identified therein overwhelmingly correspond to global issues featured in US national security strategies: tackling climate change and environmental pollution, terrorism, crime, drug trafficking, cybercrime, building financial and security stability and transparency, and protecting human rights. Where it differs markedly from US strategies is in the international governance<sup>9</sup> model it proposes. It calls for the replacement of the centralised governance pursued in the hierarchical organisation of unipolarity, it advocates for inclusiveness based on the cooperation between equals.

It also calls for equality in front of international law and respect for cultural diversity, which can only be guaranteed in a world order built on respect for national sovereignty and local government. The benefits would be shared rather than channelled to the privileged, and the system would be transparent for all. The document highlights the issue of human rights, but not in the usual manner: it states that a world order is

only adequate if *all* fundamental human rights are globally enforced, including the right to development.

These objectives would be achieved by means of coordinated governance through the existing international organisations, which first need to be reformed. Unlike in the unipolar order, when reforming multilateral organisations was the unilateral privilege of the US, the organisations would be reformed with the inclusion of emerging powers. The UN, and in particular the UN Security Council the WTO and the IMF, are singled out as organisations with central significance, but in need of reform, to ensure equal rights and transparency for all.

### 3.5. World Economic Forum

The string of proposals on how the world order should be altered was launched with the opening remarks of the World Economic Forum's founding chairman, who pointed out in January 2021 that there was a very narrow window of opportunity to transform the world order without war. The series of proposals for the transformation of the world order was concluded with the publication on January 7, 2022 of the book titled *The Great Narrative* by Klaus Schwab and Thierry Malleret on behalf of the World Economic Forum. The authors describe the genre of their book as being halfway between an essay and a manifesto that references scientific foundations.

Schwab and Malleret base their analysis and recommendations on a clear distinction between objective facts and matters of interpretation. They pinpoint the advanced state of technology today as the undisputable, objective fact, on which solutions can be based. In their view, the world today is defined by three major issues: 1.) interdependence that arises from modern technology and globalisation, 2.) the difficulty of managing complexity and 3.) the decline in the willingness to cooperate internationally. It is with respect to these phenomena that global governance needs to be placed on new foundations. The same phenomena also necessitate the transformation of the way societies are organised as well as the way of life humanity pursues.

In Schwab and Malleret's view, in an interdependent, i.e. systemically interconnected world, problems are no longer meaningful if tackled locally. Instead, claim the authors, problems today tend to appear simultaneously worldwide or to spread epidemically, faster than ever before. This, they argue, is what necessitates global, rather than local, governance. It is also why solving specific problems requires a radical change in the way we live and operate socio-economically and politically. Further-

<sup>8</sup> The Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian provides a well-documented example for a pipeline project violating treaties with native American communities: <https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/plains-treaties/dapl>.

<sup>9</sup> International governance is distinguished from global governance. While the former assumes coordination between localities and regions, the latter is centralised and extended to the world in its entirety.

more, in their view, in an increasingly complex world<sup>10</sup>, problems cannot be reduced to policy level. If we look at an epidemic or the climate crisis, their resolution not only has the desired health or environmental consequences, but also has significant economic, social, and political impacts. For successful holistic solutions to complex problems the authors propose world governance by artificial intelligence, with privately owned transnational corporations playing a significant role.

According to the World Economic Forum's proposal for a new world order, cooperation essential to stability globally and within societies has been weakened by divisions within societies as well as due to rivalries between the major powers. This, they say, can be remedied in a three-pronged approach, with education systems teaching young people to be good global citizens, with the restoration of public trust that has been lost<sup>11</sup>, and with a narrative that promotes a willingness to cooperate.

A key challenge is the limited time available combined with certain elements of the cultural and geopolitical heritage. These include the fact that the necessary imagination is constrained by a reverence for canonised thinkers of the Enlightenment, and inhibited by Western arrogance that is disturbing to the Global South. At least as serious and morally almost unmanageable is the question of who can decide on global intervention and how it can be transparently monitored. Who can take risks at whose expense? According to Schwab and Malleret's book, the solution is to simultaneously ensure environmental and social sustainability by making individuals global citizens and corporations taking charge, globally, relying on artificial intelligence for monitoring, analysis and decision making, the only way human fallacy can be overcome.

### 3.6. Analysis

The five proposals can be compared based on what issues they believe the world is facing, how they prioritize these issues to solve them, and what form of governance they propose for steering the world.

<sup>10</sup> Complexity does not simply mean intricacy, or that something is complicated, but that the system of correlations is such that nothing can be traced back to one simple cause, and each step has multiple consequences. As the book itself puts it: today's world is no longer linear (Schwab & Malleret, 2022). The long-accepted basic approach of complexity theory in natural sciences was rejected by social science for a long time, as it was considered incompatible with the (conventional) scientific approach where one input effect should lead to one, predictable outcome, as Arthur (1990) explains in the introduction to his application of complexity theory to the economy. Arthur and his team's work has only recently gained the attention it deserves.

<sup>11</sup> In this, the World Economic Forum builds on the findings of the global Edelman Trust Barometer, a 22-year longitudinal trust survey (see Whiting, 2022). Gallup's survey, also longitudinal but limited to the US, shows a loss of trust in the media and a sharp division in society (Brenan, 2022).

Built around the notions of inclusivity, equal right to development, equality in front of the law, transparency, and respect for cultural and socio-political diversity the 2021 BRICS declaration is in line with the January 2021 statements of the Russian and Chinese Presidents. They endorse global collective action on threats to stability such as climate change, terrorism, international crime, or risk of financial instability. On these issues they share a consensus with the US strategies and the stance of transnational corporations. It is their views on who should govern, and based on what principles that are irreconcilable with the centralised US global governance model and the vision proposed by transnational corporations, which also calls for the elimination of national and civilisational identities.

The US vision is for founding a new unipolar world order, but this time better structured for sustainability. The continued non-accommodation of emerging powers is an indication that the US seeks to reserve for itself a position at the top of the international hierarchy, a solution fully rejected in the strategic narratives of Russia, China, and BRICS.

The US and the emerging powers alike are subject to condemnation by transnational corporations for their rivalry – although the transnational corporations are no mere bystanders: they, too have entered the competition for the new world order. They condemn the US for identifying as a disciple to Enlightenment, viewed as a supreme ideal in the advancement of humanity as much as emerging powers are condemned for their pride in their civilisational or national identities.

Schwab and Malleret's proposal recognises the misgivings by the Global South about the arrogance of US narratives but disregards their aspirations for development and inclusion in governance. While it is true that complex problems call for holistic solutions, the paradigm shift and the governance model proposed by transnational corporations may prove simplistic for its view of humanity. It proposes the elimination of divisions that can be leveraged in narratives of war. Specifically, they see the economic, social and political uniformization of humanity as the solution. Whether humanity would willingly consent to the changes proposed by transnational corporations is uncertain. Nor are there guarantees that the holistic paradigm shift would bring the desired result of simultaneously and successfully tackling tribalism, the restoration of public trust, the depletion of natural resources, and climate change.

Given the incompatibility of the proposals for a new world order presented in the course of 2021 it was quite clear by early January 2022 that great powers were on a collision course, with transnational corporations also actively participating in the contest for a new world order.

## 4. 2022: Competing strategies to establish a new world order

Since great powers failed to reach a compromise on a new world order in 2021, open competition erupted between them in 2022. This overt competition was manifested in multiple forms, including gestures (such as not inviting the Russian President to the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos in January 2022), the coercive use of power (the war in Ukraine and the mass of sanctions imposed by the US and its allies upon Russia in response), the changes in public narratives (discourse and journalism characteristic of accommodation<sup>12</sup> was replaced by those of war).

The strategic narratives issued in 2022 by great powers were no longer mere proposals for a new order but prescribed their preferred means of achieving it. In the following, two significant strategic narratives, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's declaration issued in Samarkand on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 2022 and the US national security strategy published in October 2022, are examined, in chronological order.

The privately owned transnational corporations have not issued a grand strategy since presenting their vision. This public reticence may be part of a strategy that calls for corporations, led by think tanks, to pursue dialogue, and practice listening rather than advocacy and telling. In a 2023 video titled “Why globalization needs a revamp”<sup>13</sup> featured on the home page of the World Economic Forum, former Chatham House director, Robin Niblett recommends such a low-key approach specifically for think tanks. This soft approach may well prove more effective in building influence globally than entering the fray would, and help transnational corporations avoid some adverse effects of the turmoil nation states are entering.

### 4.1. The Samarkand Declaration

The Samarkand declaration of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) was issued at the organisation's 13<sup>th</sup> annual summit meeting, held on 15–16 September 2022, in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. The document calls for putting international relations on a new footing. Its central idea is that no actor in the world is entitled to the role of norm-giver per se, that no one is above the others, that the law applies equally to all and that rights cannot be arbitrarily applied. The document, like the

BRICS Declaration of 2021, states that it does not seek to replace the institutions of the world order or its rules, but to achieve their transparent, fair, and equitable application to all.

The declaration calls for respect for the internal affairs of states, equal treatment for all, and the transparency of international governance. Inclusive global governance can only fulfil its promises if it is based on the transparency of the institutions that play a role in overseeing the world order. The declaration specifically mentions the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the organisations responsible for the monitoring of biological and chemical weapons. Ensuring that these organisations operate transparently would allow everyone to be sure that the rules are being applied fairly.

The regional and global security threats identified in the declaration overlap with those listed in US national security strategies. They coincide in areas such as climate change and environmental degradation, pandemics, terrorism, transnational crime, and corruption. At the same time, the declaration mirrors US strategies that view Russia and China as a threat to US interests, with the Samarkand Declaration stating that US missile bases already deployed or planned against SCO member states constitute an unacceptable strategic threat.

The text of the declaration positions the SCO as a global role model in conflict resolution, as well as in the recognition and promotion of cultural and civilisational diversity. The cultural-civilisational richness of the regions encompassed by the SCO is unique. Trust-building through fostering relationships and multifaceted cooperation between societies is given strategic importance.

The SCO declaration prioritizes the settlement of strategic disputes between member states through diplomacy, and the building of compromises that seek to recognise the vital interests of each member. Local conflict resolution, with the participation of regional powers is viewed as the only approach that can bring about stability. While the SCO does not promise a world without strife or conflict, all of its member states can expect their existential grievances to be addressed under the auspices of the organisation, as demonstrated by the document.

Importantly, SCO membership is expanding dynamically. New members and member candidates include a number of Middle Eastern states, some of which used to be partners to the US. Furthermore, it is worth noting that member candidate countries include some that are on adversarial terms with each other. Examples include Iran, which became a fully-fledged member in spring 2023, and Saudi Arabia, which is a

<sup>12</sup> For the principles of accommodation or peace building versus confrontation in journalism, see Galtung & Fischer, 2013, p. 98.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/videos/why-globalization-needs-a-revamp/>.

candidate country. Reconciliation between the two countries creates a new situation in the Middle East, with global implications.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4.1.1. Analysis

The Samarkand declaration is consistent with the 2021 narratives of the Russian and Chinese premiers, and with the declaration issued at the 2021 BRICS summit. Overall, it reflects a strategic stance by the SCO as an unapologetic multilateral regional institution of the multipolar world order. It hopes to produce facts on the ground by bringing multipolarity into existence through peaceful means, namely, through the statement and practice of its norms, and the dynamic expansion of its membership.

A working model of inclusive governance that prioritizes diplomacy is produced as an alternative to unipolarity. It views the US as a threat to its security, but it does so from a defensive posture. It is not proactively belligerent but builds the case for self-defence.

If processes continue without any active measures by the US to thwart the expansion of the SCO (and other institutions of multipolarity, particularly BRICS), then a split world order may emerge, where the US-led bloc is hierarchically structured, while the other bloc pursues the SCO model or governance.

If history is by any means our guide, then much more likely is the scenario where the US takes active measures to deny the emerging powers the creation of a multipolar world order or impose as high a cost on its emerging rivals as possible. The Samarkand declaration indicates, that this will be met with resistance on behalf of most SCO – and by extension, BRICS – members. Backing down is not part of the thinking reflected in the Samarkand declaration.

It remains to be seen how the acceptance of former adversaries as members or member candidates in the organisation will shape the organisation and the world order. On the one hand, the members of the international system have always had conflicting interests that needed to be reconciled. Finding the consensually acceptable norms and procedures of non-violent conflict resolution should be a more than welcome development in an interdependent and globalised world where hi-tech weapons – traditional and of mass destruction – abound. At the same time, an expanding

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, such reconciliation was brought about through Chinese diplomacy in spring, 2023, built onto the results of the First China-Arab States Summit and the China-Gulf Cooperation Summit held on 7-10 December 2022, in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

regional order that absorbs members that are at strife with each other, or which have historical grievances toward one another may prove to be a vulnerability that can easily be exploited by opponents of the multipolar order.

The war – or in Russian terms, the special military operation – in Ukraine that started in February 2022 is addressed in the document in terms of equality under international law. It is condemned, but not more so than any other armed conflict in the world, including ones to which the US is party. The threat of US missile bases located at or very close to the border of the emerging powers / SCO members, which is condemned by the SCO, is not explicitly cited as the interpretive context for the war, but is presented as unacceptable.

A very strong preference for non-violent conflict resolution is a quintessential promise of multipolarity. This, too, may be exploited by adversarial players, if the multipolar bloc can be shown to be unable to bring about peace and stability: it tends to be easier to disrupt, than to build, stability. For the multipolar world to be able to attain stability, it needs to be strategically structured to disincentivise conflict seeking by its constituents.

#### 4.2. The national security strategy of the US, released in October 2022

The US National Security Strategy published in October 2022 (henceforth: NSS 2022) was a response to the visions and strategies of powers seeking to build a multipolar world order, and the revised and completed sequel to the interim national security strategic guidance issued by the Biden administration in March 2021.

NSS 2022 states in its preamble that at stake in the great power competition is who can establish the new world order. To be able to lead the world once more, the US needs to restore its own power, make a credible offer for a new and improved world order to those who may have been disenchanted by the post-Cold War world order, and apply strategies tailored to its adversaries to restore its own global superiority. To attain these goals NSS 2022 lays out the following strategies:

1. *The post-Cold War world order based on global free trade, which inevitably meant the overseas outsourcing of US industry, is replaced with the technological competition between industrial powers.* The aim is to relocate US-owned industries or foreign industries of strategic importance to the US to the United States. Since industry needs energy security, after the hiatus in 2021, energy security is part of the strategy again. Contrary to the 2010, 2015 and 2017 strategies, energy security is import-based, while progress toward climate protection by the US is to rely primarily on innovation.

Innovation is central not only to climate action, but also to restoring US superiority. Multi-pronged action is launched to stimulate innovation, which includes: the role of the state in the economy; the introduction of the global minimum tax; the strengthening of US education in STEM subjects, and support for selective immigration (brain drain). Suppliers are to be chosen based on geopolitical criteria, with the most important expected to be located on US territory<sup>15</sup>.

This also means that the narratives focus on the sovereign American national interest and, as NSS 2022 promises, the American middle class will be strengthened by the relocation of industry to the US. Given the equally great emphasis on open borders and mass immigration, this may mean the creation of a new middle class, with competitiveness being secured through a downward pressure on wages.

In the face of technological competition, the importance of trade restriction and screening increases.

2. *An alliance is built against China, Russia, and Iran and will compete against the visions for a multipolar world order proposed by BRICS and SCO.* This requires the US to make a credible and attractive offer for a new world order under its own leadership. The US 2022 strategy, which not only outlines the course of action but also serves as a master narrative for public diplomacy, makes a point of stating that the US has made mistakes in its policy, including failing to listen to lesser powers, but is now ready to change<sup>16</sup>. Instead of the globally applied, uniform approach of previous strategies, it is now formulating its own regional ambitions, tailored to regional sensitivities. This indicates a strong preference for the indirect use of power, i.e. exerting pressure through its regional partners. Also, to compete with the advocates of a multipolar world order, it would mirror their proposals and engage in regional conflict resolution rather than direct, centralised conflict management.

It proposes an inclusive world order, of which those can be a part who side with the US in the competition against Russia and China. To incentivise action against China and Russia, requirements are encoded in the rules of international

<sup>15</sup> A concrete example is the multi-billion dollar investment by Taiwan and the world's leading chipmaker, TSMC, to expand its chipmaking capacity in Arizona, which it committed to in 2020 (Fitch & Jie, 2022).

<sup>16</sup> This is a significant promise, since one of the founding narratives of the post-Cold War world order was that being the heir to the Enlightenment, the US alone was capable and called upon to lead the way. In his paper proclaiming the end of history, Fukuyama emblematically states: *"It matters very little what strange thoughts occur to people in Albania or Burkina Faso, for we are interested in what one could in some sense call the common ideological heritage of mankind"* (Fukuyama, 1989: p. 9).

organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank and into the terms of its own trade agreements.<sup>17</sup>

3. *Instead of global interdependence, it promotes a new interconnectedness with a regional structure.* The US would organise its partners region by region into greater economic-technological-infrastructure-military integration. Cooperation between regional integrations would be fostered to counter Russia and China. It would also create ad hoc coalitions around specific issues. With an eye to recruiting more and more followers, the strategy repeatedly stresses that the opportunity to join remains open to all. While demanding that allies and partners sever all strategically relevant forms of cooperation with Russia and China, the strategy reserves for the US the possibility of cooperating with the two rival powers on issues other than global governance, as its interests may dictate.

The strategy of great power competition is based on the narrative that Russia's 2022 attack on Ukraine was "unprovoked", i.e. no behaviour or narrative on behalf of Ukraine, the US or NATO could legitimately be interpreted by Russia as reasonably requiring a coercive response. In the US narrative, the armed conflict in Ukraine has a history only on the Russian side: the invasion of Crimea in 2014, the military intervention in Syria in 2015, (alleged) interference in the US elections<sup>18</sup>, along with all other interventions that may have occurred. According to the strategy, *"Over the past decade, the Russian government has chosen to pursue an imperialist foreign policy with the goal of overturning key elements of the international order"* (NSS, 2022, p. 25). The strategy says this happened despite persistent US efforts to the contrary. It is up to the Russian people whether they will tolerate this policy or overthrow the government, says the strategy, which simultaneously expresses its recognition of the excellence of Russian culture. In light of the content and tone of the document with respect to everything Russian, the marked expression of admiration may be seen as part of the strategy to weaken the resolve of those behind the Russian president.

Overall, the strategy is necessitated by the change in the global distribution of power

<sup>17</sup> An example is the Joint US-EU Statement on Trade in Steel and Aluminium, which was announced on 31 October 2021 and which came into force in January 2022. The document includes a requirement for the EU to "screen" investment from China, as highlighted in the summary prepared for the House of Representatives, which reads as follows: *"The participants would be required to have domestic policies that support lowering carbon intensity and to ensure market-oriented conditions, including screening investment from nonmarket-oriented actors like China"* (Fefer, 2021, p. 2).

<sup>18</sup> Russian interference in the 2016 US elections has been subject to multiple investigations and remains a contentious issue in the United States. Most recently, in 2023, special counsel John Durham found that the FBI investigation codenamed Crossfire Hurricane into Donald Trump and Russia relied on "raw, unanalyzed and uncorroborated intelligence", as reported by CNN: <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/05/15/politics/john-durham-report-fbi-trump-released/index.html>.

in the very terms of the notion of power employed by the US<sup>19</sup>. The document states, “*The PRC is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it. [...] it seeks to make the world more dependent on the PRC while reducing its own dependence on the world*” (NSS, 2022, p. 23).

## 5. Conclusions: emerging features of potential new world orders and the path ahead

As has been shown in the above, all major powers – the US, the group of countries that seek a multipolar world, and the privately owned transnational corporations – have renounced the US-led post-Cold War unipolar world order, and in 2021 each presented their visions for a new world order.

All recognise that their contest for the role of world leader comes in an unprecedented context simultaneously determined by:

- interdependence and competition,
- globalisation and visible inequality,
- an unsustainable way of life and economic model in much of the world amid globally recognised environmental degradation,
- complexity.

The visions presented offer solutions to the challenges that all parties recognise, but are irreconcilable regarding the structure of global governance prescribed and coded into their solutions:

- The US seeks to lead a centralised and globally interdependent world on new terms. It would have a new approach to regions in the realm of security, and with strategic dependencies rearranged to enable global control by the US. A three-tier hierarchy would be produced on the basis of security provision geared to keep any potential (re-)emerging power in check, with the US leading the global order, and co-led by junior regional security partners.

This pattern is resisted by emerging powers who are unwilling to subordinate themselves. They are seeking to build their own dialogues with all regional

<sup>19</sup> See the chapter titled Power and Legitimacy in the American World Order in the present volume for an overview of the US notion of power.

powers, including those who are, or may become, security partners to the US. The credibility or soft power the US can muster and the incentives it can give may not necessarily be sufficient to neutralise the dissatisfaction of the Global South.

Domestic incohesion and political crisis within the US, as indicated by the threat of domestic extremists may undermine US ambitions.

- The multipolarist group seeks a multicentric order of relatively sovereign states, with inclusive global governance. Promising to enable the development of the Global South by sharing modern technology and by providing stability can, if fulfilled, help address inequality. A potential revolution in sovereignty of former colonies may be generated by the acknowledgement and promotion of cultural and social diversity, and by incentivising tangible local or regional solutions to environmental degradation.

The key vulnerability of this vision is its need for a large degree of stability, which may be exploited by opponents of multipolarity. For sustainability, guarantees for stability need to be coded into its structure.

Not only the US and former colonial powers, but transnational corporations, too, may be opposed to the multipolar world, as it does not grant them corporate personhood, or leverage over governments.

- Privately owned transnational corporations seek a world of city-states governed by globally present corporations, relying on technology, which they own, for global control: artificial intelligence would enable global governance while local communities would subsist on hi-tech, industrial solutions provided by transnational corporations. Globally implemented standard solutions would be used to eliminate differences within and between societies that transnational corporations view as the source of tribalism and conflict. Inequality would be concentrated between owners of transnational corporations and the rest of humanity, with a layer of apparatus in between, making the inequality invisible and unbridgeable.

Global standardisation involves a loss of quality of life for the people of currently rich nations, and non-organic improvement for the poor. It is questionable if former colonies would willingly transition to a world order where their desire for the recognition of their identity is not fulfilled, and if rich nations would willingly submit to lower standards of life. The simultaneous occurrence of 1.) mass

migration driven by the visibility of inequality within and between societies altering attitudes to “the other”, 2.) the recognition of the need for climate action by rich societies producing an acceptance of lower quality of life and 3.) the effects of pandemic measures that simultaneously bring about standardisation, control measures, and fatally weaken local corporations may be conducive to the fulfilment of the world order envisioned by transnational corporations. Armed conflict between great powers, whether direct or by proxy, would also contribute to the viability of the transnational corporations’ world order, as the tragedies of war can be leveraged to drive a rejection of nationhood.

As the statement by the Russian president at the January 2021 online Davos forum indicates, emerging powers are opposed to, and will resist, the realisation of the world order proposed by transnational corporations.

Each of the three contestants seek to re-structure global relations in such a way that the global distribution of power reaches stability in the sense that it cannot be dislodged. Once this state is reached, the construction of the new world order can commence. The state of the world in which stability is reached will depend on the degree of global devastation the conflict for the new order may bring about, and on any changes in the distribution of power among the key players. Three distinct scenarios need to be considered:

- The global contest for the new world order becomes so calamitous that interdependence, globalisation, and modern technology collapse. In this case, visions will need to be totally revised, in the new context, by remaining powers.
- There is a straightforward winner in the contest among the three powers. The vision of the winner is implemented, addressing the issues that they all recognise. Patterns of inclusion and exclusion will be key to the sustainability and legitimacy of the new order.
- Global devastation is avoided, but the competing powers realize that they cannot overcome one another to the extent where a clear winner can be declared. In this scenario, competing powers need to accommodate their coexistence. A new cold war may ensue.

The contest for the new world order carries the very real risk of extensive – horizontal and vertical – escalation:

- In light of their 2021 and 2022 strategic narratives, the attempt to realize a multipolar world order will be resisted.
- Proxy wars between great powers can be expected to multiply. Lesser states that cannot overcome their internal divisions will not be able to resist being pulled into conflict and will be devastated. For great powers, the goal of such wars will be to force the opponent to overextend itself, and to dominate strategic chokepoints and infrastructure along trade routes.
- With the breakdown of global trade as a result of policies, sanctions and armed conflict, access to strategic minerals and energy may ignite additional conflicts, whether in the form of coups or in the form of war.
- Pre-existing adversities revolving around vital issues (right to water and statehood in particular) can be expected to erupt into open war, as parties to such conflicts hope to attract global supporters for their cause in the context of the competition for a new world order.

Overall, multiple interests point toward the multiplication as well as escalation of conflict. While global nuclear war is not in the interest of any one of the powers, escalation to the brink of global meltdown may be. In a highly unstable world, lesser powers, too, have influence, which they may be able to use to facilitate a transition of world order that minimizes catastrophe by pushing great powers toward diplomatic solutions. Visibly but peacefully unfollowing war may be an option.

Amid the competition for a new world order, the importance of the informed decisions and responsible behaviour of lesser powers, local communities, and even individuals to resist conflict and to steer the world toward de-escalation can hardly be overestimated. Should they succeed, not only will they help to avoid at least some of the bloodshed, material ruin and a very significantly increased degradation of the environment, but they may help bring about a world order that is truly inclusive, cultivates long-term thinking and rests on the mutual respect for human dignity.

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# A NEW ERA OF GEO-ECONOMIC WARFARE – THE CONTOURS OF AN EMERGING MULTIPOLAR GLOBAL ECONOMY<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Geo-economic confrontations and increasing risk in the global economy

One of the key findings of the World Economic Forum's extensive public opinion survey for its Global Risks Report 2023 was that more than 60% of respondents believe that the performance of the global economy will weaken in the coming year and that there will be recurrent periods of economic recession at regional and global level. In fact, 90% of respondents agreed that the uncertain and unfavourable global economic outlook is due to geopolitical conflicts. This report ranked the cost-of-living crisis in terms of global risk severity first, environmental disasters (and related extreme weather events) second and geo-economic confrontations third. In other words, in a world driven by geopolitics, the fundamental differences of opinion between the great powers, and the perpetuation and intensification of great power rivalries, will make economic, geo-economic "warfare" permanent, and as a result geopolitical goals will override economic interests. Thus, the practice of economic efficiency or cost minimisation will not be the primary concern and, consequently, a general increase in world market prices may occur. In the Anglo-Saxon world, the economic policy of the "invisible hand of the market" may be replaced by the practice of state regulation and state intervention. Confrontations between states are expected to remain mostly economic in nature, and conflict resolution may also focus on economic sanctions, restrictive economic measures and export controls. The rapid development of new technologies, despite their fundamental transformative effect on

the structure of the economy, also poses additional risks and could further sharpen the competition between the major powers, which essentially precludes cooperation between them in R&D activities. Economic and technological crises can lead to those of a social nature due to the energy supply crisis, the food supply crisis, the general rise in the cost of living and inflation and, above all, a combination of them all. This could lead to political instability in the various states, which could, in turn, again increase geopolitical tension. The Global Risks Report 2023 calls a polycrisis the situation where crises in different areas and sectors converge, and their combined impact exceeds the sum of the effects of the individual crises. Lastly, the report stresses the need for cooperation and joint action. At the same time, the fundamental question is whether, in the emerging new world order, new forms of cooperation can exist at all in the face of growing rivalry between the great powers, or whether crisis solutions at nation-state level will prevail.

## 2. Geo-economic strategies of the 1990s – The creation of a global world market

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the disintegration of the Soviet bloc and the end of the Cold War, the increasing globalisation of the world, rather than the military rivalry between the great powers, came to the forefront of world politics, and this led to a new geopolitical approach. Whereas before geopolitics served as a political justification for the armed territorial expansion of the great powers, since the 1990s, so-called critical geopolitics has gained traction, with increasingly social (cultural) and economic content. This critical geopolitics with an economic perspective is what Edward Luttwak called geo-economics in 1990. In his interpretation, geo-economics is essentially the continuation of the ancient armed rivalry between nations by new economic means, whereby economic conquest and economic competition are replacing war. In other words, the classical geopolitical approach is being replaced by a new geo-economic approach. The title of his most cited work also reflects this: "From Geopolitics to Geo-economics: Logic of Conflict, Grammar of Commerce" (Luttwak, 1990). According to Luttwak, the war of nations is nothing more than a world market struggle, a rivalry for a larger share of the global market. After the end of wars and armed conflicts between nations, the exercise of power by economic means, the assertion of great power interests by economic means, comes to the fore. "The methods of commerce are displacing military methods – with dispos-

<sup>1</sup> This chapter was written for the English edition of the book and was completed in October 2023.

able capital in lieu of firepower, civilian innovation in lieu of military-technical advancement and market penetration in lieu of garrisons and bases” (Luttwak, 1990). Worthy of a military strategist, he analyses the world market as a theatre of war, where states compete to best assert their national economic interests. In this new situation, the role of soldiers is assumed by state bureaucrats, whose expertise and dedication can decide the outcome of this global market battle. Luttwak stresses that high-level state bureaucratic apparatus is a key element of the economic strength of a nation-state (Luttwak, 1999).

Beyond academic thinking, the rise to prominence of the geo-economic trend is closely linked to the theoretical underpinning of the US hegemonic leadership in global economics and politics, and more broadly to the justification of the US as an unquestioned global economic leader. This new US geo-economic approach was formally articulated in the so-called Clinton Doctrine, i.e. the 1995 National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement, whose basic tenets are that:

- the foundation of the new international order is the primacy of the economy;
- the easiest way to achieve any political goal is by economic means;
- the US objective is to extend the market economy and democracy worldwide;
- the US aims to strengthen its national economy and increase its market share abroad;
- US foreign policy aims to promote the global expansion of US transnational corporations;
- the main target areas for US foreign direct investment are those termed emerging markets;
- the US has a sense of mission to maintain peace and security throughout the world;
- the main objective is to create and maintain a unipolar world political system, controlled from the Atlantic sphere of power. As such, the essential orientation of world politics is what is known as Atlanticism.

The basic elements of the Clinton Doctrine essentially provided the framework, the “rules of operation” for the functioning of the global world market. It was in this doctrine that the concept of emerging markets first appeared. One of the most criticised elements of the doctrine was the US objective of “expanding the market economy and democracy worldwide”, as the general view of analysts was that the “US is doing nothing but spreading the market economy under the banner of democracy.” However, even then, the question of whether power could be exercised solely through

economic means was disputed. What American great power strategies are possible in countries where the American market economy principles do not “work” and the American “democracy model” is not applicable due to differences in civilisation? In fact, in the late 1990s a wide range of international experts had already pointed out that the neoliberal market economy model and its “laissez-faire” ideology, i.e. “the invisible hand of the market solves everything”, was only being expanded or intended to be expanded worldwide, but that the US did not consider it to be applicable to itself. After all, the US state has never “pulled out” of the US economy, and in fact, the government has always helped US companies. At the same time, in the rest of the world, the US is promoting an economic policy of “withdrawal” of the state from the market economy, with an increasing number of states worldwide becoming “night-watchman” states in terms of economic engagement, in line with the “officially proclaimed” US model. When George W. Bush, the next President of the United States, was inaugurated in January 2001, everyone clearly and surely believed that Bush would take over an American economy whose absolute dominance in world economics and politics and whose global imperial existence could not be called into question.

Since the 1990s to this day, the early 21st century, geo-economics has become a widely used term, generally referring to national economic strategies and the assertion of great power interests by economic means. But, in fact, there is still no single definition of geo-economics, and it is questionable whether geo-economics can be considered a discipline separate to geopolitics.

In my opinion, geo-economics is not a separate discipline, but a part of geopolitics – the economic analysis of the relationship between politics and space. Although geo-economics undoubtedly synthesises the results of co-disciplines (especially economics and political science, and, within these, primarily research on international processes), what defines its specificity is its territorial approach. And beyond that, the main element of geo-economics – referring to the work of H. Mackinder – is the geostrategic way of thinking, the geostrategic approach. Based on the above, my formulation of geo-economics is: the implementation of geostrategies through economic means and the research and forecasting of the possibilities of this implementation. If we adapt Luttwak’s famous phrase “the logic of conflict and the grammar of commerce” to the functioning of the global economy, then I think that the phrase “the logic of conflict and the instruments of the world market” is perhaps more indicative of the great global economic “game”.

What kind of geo-economic strategies are there? Taking military science – since the word strategy itself was originally a military term and meant the science of supreme

warfare – and the Luttwakian approach (the current theatre of war is nothing but an economic rivalry between states) as a starting point, I believe that there are two basic geo-economic strategies, the offensive (advancing) geo-economic strategy and the defensive geo-economic strategy.

### 3. Questions of the offensive geo-economic strategies of the US – from 11 September 2001 to 24 February 2022

The success of the US offensive geo-economic strategy was first called into question with the terrorist attack of 11 September 2001. It was at this point that American geopolitics took a new direction and the global fight against terrorism began. Its theoretical foundation is that known as the Bush Doctrine (or, in other words, the principle of pre-emptive strike), which stated that even if the US has no evidence that terrorists or individuals or groups supporting terrorists are present on the territory of a given state, it still reserves the right to intervene in order to preserve peace, order and security in the world. Incidentally, this US geopolitical position, the Bush Doctrine, is officially the US National Security Strategy of 2002. This national security strategy (September 2002), in addition to the principle of pre-emptive strike, also includes geo-economic elements, such as US support for the spread of democracy and free markets and free trade.

But what economic consequences has this fight against terrorism had for the US? Namely that as of 2001, the US became the world's largest military power by far. According to the data of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, in 2008 the US accounted for nearly half of the total global military spending – more than USD 700 billion (!). It is also very thought-provoking to note that in 2008, the US spent 18.4% (!) of the central government budget on military expenditure. One can only assume that such immense military spending could not be financed even by the world's largest economy. Thus, several experts have identified this massive military expenditure as a direct trigger for the US economic crisis that began in 2007.

Alarming financial news from the US in the summer of 2007 showed that an increasing number of US residents who had taken out mortgages on their property were unable to pay the instalments on the loans they had taken out. The US mortgage crisis continued to worsen. As the price of real estate was steadily rising at the time, commercial banks were lending to customers who were already unreliable

borrowers or simply had no other property or regular source of income apart from the property on which the bank had registered a mortgage. These debtors were called subprime borrowers, and thus the resulting crisis was called the subprime mortgage crisis. Banks justified the granting of these subprime loans on economic grounds, in light of rising property prices. The severity of the situation was also indicated by the fact that it was estimated that by 2006, 40% of new loans in the US were subprime loans. Then, in September 2008, what no one had expected in 2007 began – a global financial crisis followed by a global economic crisis. On 15 September 2008, one of Wall Street's most famous financial institutions, Lehman Brothers, an investment bank with a 150-year history, filed for bankruptcy. This bankruptcy triggered a domino-effect of a crisis for financial institutions, and October–November 2008 were the “black months” for stock exchanges, investment funds and banks alike. However, a complete financial and economic catastrophe such as the Great Depression of 1929 was avoided, as the US government provided US banks with a mammoth bailout in October 2008.

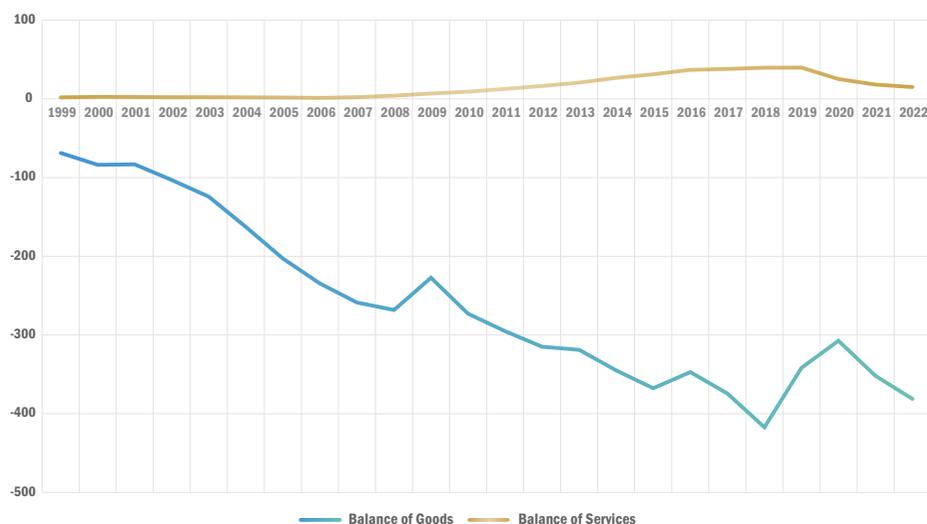
It is likely that the US paid a very high price for the global fight against terrorism and the economic and financial crisis of 2008. Namely, that it had to give up its role as the sole global economic and political leader. Since 2008, China's economic growth has been staggering. Today, China is the world's second largest economy in terms of GNI at the current exchange rate and the world's largest exporter of goods, and the country once called the “world's factory” has become one of the world's largest exporters of working capital and has even engaged in R&D on a scale that challenges US dominance in several sectors. As already pointed out in the World Economy chapter of this volume, while in 1999 the US and China accounted for 25% and 2% of the global GDP, respectively, by 2018 China's share had reached 15%, and the IMF forecasts that by 2027 the two powers will have a similar share of the global GDP.

This strong economic growth in China, and, in particular, the growing role of China in the global economy, has made the US and the EU increasingly strategically dependent on China. Thus, instead of offensive geo-economic strategies building a global free trade system, the Anglo-Saxon world has been forced to become increasingly defensive and has started to use a toolbox of defensive geo-economic strategies, in the form of sanctions, export restrictions and controls, setting new R&D standards, import restrictions, limiting and controlling working capital investment, exerting economic pressure. From 2018, the beginning of the trade war between the US and China, new economic/geo-economic warfare was openly launched.

Then, the COVID pandemic of 2019/2020 brought with it the inward shift of national economies, the forced closure of borders and the shutdown and forced restructuring of global corporate value chains. While the global economic recovery of 2021 gave rise to some positive economic prospects, the Russian-Ukrainian war of 2022 and the massive economic sanctions imposed on Russia have brought about a world economy in which defensive geo-economic strategies have become dominant. Security has become the key word, rather than a free-trade global economic system, and geopolitical interests more often than not override economic considerations. But can security aspects always override the interests of transnational corporations operating on a global scale?

The facts and trends identified above are illustrated in the following figure (Figure 1), which shows the annual change in the US trade balance in goods and services with China from 1999 to 2022. It can be seen that in 1999, the annual US trade deficit in goods with China was only USD 70 billion, and by 2008, the year of the financial crisis, it had reached USD 270 billion. Following a transitional period of several years, the deficit steadily increased, with the 2018 figure being the low point, with the annual deficit already reaching USD 420 billion. The US trade restrictions against China reduced the deficit somewhat, but by 2022 it was back to around USD 400 billion.

**FIGURE 1: US TRADE BALANCE IN GOODS AND SERVICES WITH CHINA FROM 1999 TO 2022, USD BILLION**



Source: graph prepared by the author based on the BEA dataset, [www.bea.gov/data/intl-trade-investment/international-trade-goods-and-services](http://www.bea.gov/data/intl-trade-investment/international-trade-goods-and-services)

The graph shows the US services trade balance with China separately for a reason, as it is generally assumed that the US, as the world’s largest exporter of services, offsets its large goods trade deficit with China with a services trade surplus. However, as the figure shows, this is not the case: the minimal trade surplus in services of the 2020s increased from 2011 to 2018 to only USD 40 billion (the deficit in goods trade was ten times this), and the trade war that started in 2018 even reduced this surplus value to USD 15 billion in 2022. In other words, the US defensive geo-economic strategy has resulted in losses not only for China but also for the US.

#### 4. The new defensive geo-economic strategy of the Anglo-Saxon sphere of power – de-risking

On 13 April 2022, US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen, in a speech at the Atlantic Council meeting, said: “We cannot allow countries to use their market position in key raw materials, technologies, or products to have the power to disrupt our economy or exercise unwanted geopolitical leverage. Let’s build on and deepen economic integration and the efficiencies it brings—on terms that work better for American workers. And let’s do it with the countries we know we can count on. Favoring the “friend-shoring” of supply chains to a large number of trusted countries, so we can continue to securely extend market access, will lower the risks to our economy, as well as to our trusted trade partners.”<sup>2</sup> As these sentences reflect, one of the main objectives of the current US administration is to eliminate strategic economic dependencies on so-called unreliable countries and the dangerous geopolitical pressures they exert. US leaders plan to achieve this by demanding that US transnational corporations reorganise their corporate value chains so that they are oriented towards reliable, friendly countries. The latter is what Janet Yellen called “friend-shoring” in her speech.

The scope of “trusted” countries obviously primarily refers to those in the transatlantic region. The EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC) was established in June 2021 to promote trade and technology cooperation between the US and the EU, with its inaugural meeting held in September 2021. One of the priority areas within the 10 TTC working groups is the regulation of digital markets, where there is still a difference of opinion between the two sides. Another fundamental issue is

<sup>2</sup> <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0714#:~:text=We%20cannot%20allow%20countries%20to,work%20better%20for%20American%20workers>

the coordination of US and EU industrial policy. The statement of the May 2022 TTC meeting highlighted the need to reduce strategic dependencies on China, to build more geographically diversified supply chains and specifically identified the new corporate practice of “friend-shoring”. Another priority of the TTC meetings is the coordination of economic policy towards “hostile” countries, with a particular focus on the development of an effective sanctions and export control regime. In fact, the current US administration has already envisaged that US companies’ working capital investments abroad will also be reviewed to prevent US companies from using their working capital to promote technological development in “unreliable” countries. The key issue of the European Commission’s 2022 strategic report was “secure” trade, which has also been heavily criticised by the WTO, which considers it to be a new form of protectionism, completely at odds with the world trade system based on multilateral cooperation.

But is “friend-shoring” even a realistic concept? Can geopolitics and security override corporate cost efficiency considerations? Is political rhetoric even valid in everyday business practice? It is no coincidence that many experts see this as a complete break from the open market economy in the US, and that this new state-driven US market economy principle represents the “very visible hand” of the market. And which countries does the US consider “friendly”? Moreover, for countries outside the Atlantic sphere of power, this “friend-shoring” policy is very dangerous, because if these countries do not accept the sanctions policy of the countries of the Anglo-Saxon sphere of power against Russia and China, they will be considered “unreliable” countries and will not receive investment from the US or the EU. Since the “friend-shoring” policy expects a clear commitment from the countries of the Global South, this essentially makes it impossible to diversify the foreign economic and foreign policy relations of the economies outside the Anglo-Saxon sphere of power, especially medium-sized and small national economies.

This geopolitically driven US vision of the world economy breaks completely with the offensive geo-economic strategy of the 1990s, which was based on international trade, and promotes a new closed, defensive geo-economic strategy, with the obvious aim of preventing global market penetration by China and, to some extent, other emerging markets, to the detriment of the US and, in part, the EU. At the same time, this defensive de-risking economic strategy is essentially based on the organisation of a global economic model based on geopolitical alliances of interest at macro-regional level, rather than a global market organised at global level. It would be in China’s interest to have an open global economy for its further penetration of the global market, but fear in the Anglo-Saxon world has grown in the 15 years since

the 2008 financial crisis – as China’s global economic role has grown – that a new China-led global economic system could emerge, in which the “West” could become dependent on China and, more broadly, on the “East”.

At the moment, in the autumn of 2023, there is no clear answer as to whether the geopolitical rhetoric of “friend-shoring” will actually work in the near future or merely remain a political objective. Policymakers expect rapid responses, but global corporate value chains are very long and very complex, and the challenge at corporate level is to now manage the geopolitical risks of value chains as effectively as possible. But at the same time, there is also the question of whether political factors can be priced in at all. Is the corporate objective of economic efficiency at all compatible with political security? In fact, de-risking corporate supply chains requires massive investments, but the extent to which these new investments will be supported by public funds, or the amounts for which companies can apply from public or EU sources, is still questionable.

One famous saying in international management is that a supply chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Taking this into account, companies need to develop a new risk management approach, which should first map the company’s dependencies, identifying the political disturbances that increase the company’s vulnerability the most. Companies, like states, then have to develop a new geostrategic toolkit, or rather a geopolitical risk management profile, whereby the company’s board of directors takes geopolitical aspects in its business strategy into account on a regular basis. To establish the foundations for the development of these new corporate strategies, the World Economic Forum, in partnership with consulting firm Kearney, has been publishing the Global Value Chain Barometer<sup>3</sup>, a quarterly tool to map the vulnerability of companies’ global supply chains, based on data from Everstream Analytics, since the start of 2023. Moreover, with the increasing risks, not only do corporate leaders need to make geopolitical assessments, but geopolitical analysts also need to learn to think like investors, as not all geopolitical risks affect investors, but it is also possible that geopolitical risks that are considered less important by political leaders are “priced in” by investors as very serious.

Since the vulnerability of globally organised, geographically very extensive corporate value chains spanning the globe was already highlighted during the COVID crisis, one of the tools for de-risking was that known as “near-shoring”, i.e. reducing the geographical span of supply chains and thus building regional value chains in more concentrated geographical areas. Indeed, to overcome strategic manufacturing

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/01/davos23-global-value-chain-barometer/>

dependencies on China, both the US and the EU expect companies to engage in “re-shoring”, which is the repatriation of their subsidiaries abroad to the home country, essentially the opposite of “offshoring”.

The reorganisation of corporate value chains in the context of the Anglo-Saxon world’s de-risking objective – with its practices of “re-shoring”, “near-shoring” and “friend-shoring” – is essentially challenging the very foundations of the global market, of international trade. Concurrently, with the establishment of geopolitical spheres of interest, global corporate value chains are being replaced by multilocal value chains organised at the level of what are known as megaregions. The productivity and efficiency of business processes based on local suppliers and local markets, covering smaller geographical distances, is still questionable. It is difficult to imagine that in our digitally interconnected world, it is possible to create geopolitical blocs of economic interests that are completely isolated from one another. Thus, the economic feasibility of the geopolitical objective of de-risking cannot yet be assessed.

## 5. A global economy of geopolitical spheres of interest?

As the title of this publication suggests, 2022 was clearly a year of a global economy dominated by geopolitics. The trade war between the US and China that started in January 2018 followed by the new world order proposals declared by both the US and emerging markets in 2021 have already hinted at a change in the global economy. The start of the Russian-Ukrainian war on 24 February 2022 and the economic sanctions imposed on Russia have opened up a new era of economic/geo-economic warfare. With the geopolitical spheres of interest being re-drawn, it became clear that a new multipolar global economic era had begun, organised at megaregional level.

One of the fundamental questions concerning the global economy in the near future is precisely what this multipolar global economy is likely to look like. However, the importance of the global market, and the extent to which regional power spheres at megaregional level are dominant, has been a contentious issue in the past. Obviously, the global economy has always been organised simultaneously at global and regional level, mainly because it is easier for low- and middle-income countries to sell export products in neighbouring countries, but also because the extent to which an export product can be sold on the global or regional market depends on its nature. However, all of these factors combine to make the world economy a multipolar system in which the global and megaregional levels are simultaneously and concurrently present.

Contrary to the expectations of the Anglo-Saxon world, the economic sanctions against Russia have not had the desired effect, and these sanctions only isolated Russia from the Anglo-Saxon global economic system, to which Russia’s obvious response was to turn economically away from the countries of the West, i.e. to seek new foreign markets by taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the multipolar global economic system. Paradoxically, these sanctions have further contributed to the multipolarisation of the global economic system and have called into question the very essence and survival of the global market. In fact, even theoretically, the fundamental question has become whether economic sanctions can produce results at all, or whether they are more likely to promote the economic self-sufficiency of the sanctioned country as its new economic policy and the diversification of its foreign economic relations.

In contrast to the “de-risking” strategy of the US and the EU, the new slogan of countries beyond the Anglo-Saxon world has become “de-dollarisation”. The role of the USD-based international money market is still exclusive for the time being, even though the role of the USD in international payments is declining and the role of the yuan in international reserves is increasing. Although international trade and capital flows are organised at the regional level at least as much as at the global level, it is the international financial markets that are currently organised at the global-market level, meaning we cannot talk about a multipolar global economic system until a new multipolar financial system is created. While new international financial clearing systems have been established – most notably in Russia and China – it is still quite doubtful whether a new China-centred, yuan-based financial system will emerge in the near future.

Another fundamental question concerning the near future of the global economy is whether the great technological/digital shift will take place, whether the so-called “green transition” will be achieved and how digital technologies will evolve. But there is also the question of whether the current crisis in raw materials and food may change the interdependence of countries and whether the Western countries will embark on a programme of re-industrialisation. Will global oil and gas markets change in the future? Can we expect the strengthening of new organisations of raw material-exporting countries (e.g. OPEC+, Gas Exporting Countries Forum)? And the fundamental question is primarily whether the era of the petrodollar will end, especially now that the oil-exporting countries of the Middle East are selling oil to China in yuan.

As we have already discussed in the global economy chapter of our publication, the only realistic prognosis for the global economy organised at megaregional level is

that, in addition to the Anglo-Saxon global economic sphere of power of the US and the EU, a China-centred Asian global economic pole, primarily covering East Asia, is likely to emerge. But will the BRICS states be regional poles in their own right? Will Russia be able to develop its own future economic sphere of interest? There is also the question of whether Turkey, Iran or Saudi Arabia, for example, will become independent regional poles in the future.

Finally, it is important to underline that we live in a world of real and virtual networks. The West's practice of "de-risking" to create geopolitical and economic spheres of interest that are insulated from one another seems a wholly absurd objective. This is also because the emerging megaregions of the 21st century are no longer simply aggregations of contiguous territories, but involve the emergence of new territorial networks. Today's new economic spheres of power are organised both at the territorial level of states and at the level of networks between strategic geographical locations. The latter is of particular importance, as the new multi-centred global economic system will lead to the emergence of new strategic geographical locations. The most important question for Hungary and national economies like ours will be whether they will be able to act as gateways between different geopolitical and economic spheres of interest. At the same time, it is also undeniable that a prerequisite for the development of a gateway role is to be able to provide at least high-probability responses to the nature of the emerging megaregions. Perhaps global economic trends in the coming years will provide these answers.

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# THE IMPACT OF POSSIBLE OUTCOMES OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR ON THE NEW WORLD ORDER

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## 1. The “bad peace” scenario

There could be a possibility of “bad peace” if the Russian-Ukrainian war does not fully achieve the results expected by NATO/US/Ukraine, nor the war objectives set by Russia, but the opposing sides no longer want to continue the military conflict. Under this scenario, the West, which contributes 55–60% of the global economy’s GDP, is able to stop Russian military and political expansion in the Central and Eastern European region before 31 December 2023, with the help of sanctions against Russia and military and financial support for Ukraine. At the same time, it significantly slows down the emergence of international coordination that threatens the unipolar political world order and protects the dollar’s leading role in the international financial and trading system. In accordance with the theory of Kissinger, Brzezinski and Huntington Ukraine breaks into three parts. Crimea will remain part of the Russian Federation, Russian rule will be extended to or consolidated in Eastern and Southern Ukraine (and Transnistria), but “Torn Ukraine” will become a full member of the Western alliance system, economically and politically integrated into Central and Eastern Europe. Russian expansion westwards fades, Russian military capabilities weaken and the US and NATO confrontation with Russia escalates. A Cold War-like equilibrium is re-established, with a clear political and military separation between the Russian-influenced structure and the US-led West. After the end of the war in Ukraine, Russia’s priority will be to speed up the unification process of the Union State of Russia and Belarus, while Serbia, under pressure from the EU and the US, will break its pro-Russian policy and commit to EU membership. Russia’s economic and trade relations with the West will slowly improve as a new military equilibrium emerges, but the EU will continue to seek to reduce its dependence on Russian oil and gas for energy.

A shift in the international political sphere is also forecast, during which the US and the West will turn their attention to China as relations in the European arena settle down. The US sees China as the most dangerous challenger to the unipolar political world order and will therefore step up its military presence in the South China Sea and in the territorial waters of its Asian allies (Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia). The economic war that started under President Trump could gain new momentum and escalate into a trade war between the US and China in the medium term. Bilateral relations between Russia and China will continue to deepen, and in addition to economic cooperation, Russia will be ready to share its military equipment and advanced missile technology with China.

The deepening of political and economic cooperation between BRICS and the SCO is slowing, but will not come to an end. Although Russian forces did not occupy the eastern and southern territories of Ukraine in a blitzkrieg, the Russian military performance, which is mostly based on conventional weapons, is seen by the BRICS and the SCO member states as significant and capable of asserting Russian interests. At the same time, Russian military superiority over the combined forces of the US and NATO member states is not convincing, and so they will prefer to adopt a wait-and-see policy before deciding to deepen their cooperation, especially financially.

In the above scenario, Hungary’s international room for manoeuvre will be narrowed politically. The tensions in the European geopolitical situation have led the Western alliance system to force an open and firm stand for EU values and NATO interests, abandoning the direction towards Russian and Chinese foreign policy and foreign economic policies, by invoking the obligations of NATO and EU membership and the solidarity that this implies. With the establishment of the political and military status quo, the political interests of the great powers in the Central and Eastern European region are gradually being overridden in the medium term by their own economic needs and interests. The change in economic policy will also become more permissive towards Hungary, so that it can cautiously return to independent trade deals with Russia without the threat of EU sanctions. “Torn Ukraine’s” pre-war policy on national and minority language use could put a strain on bilateral relations once again, as NATO and EU membership could be granted to Kiev in a politically facilitated process to counter Russian geopolitical predominance. Repairing war damage in Transcarpathia and other provinces of “Torn Ukraine” will be a major undertaking, with Hungarian firms facing strong competition from construction companies in the EU’s most powerful member states. As the US and the West wage economic war with China, and as its political and

possibly military conflict with China deepens, the principle of solidarity will be demanded of Hungary, and Hungary’s economic interests in relation to China could be significantly damaged.

*The impact of the scenario on the overall trend of geopolitical change:* The unipolar political world order as a whole is based on a global economic system, whose transformation is only possible with the close and extensive cooperation of the emerging powers interested in changing it, often pushing self-interest to the background. In contrast to the US-led Western world, however, emerging economic powers can only cooperate along the lines of their momentary interests, and on account of historical grievances against each other, such as the ambivalent Russia-China relationship (Mitter, 2022), sharply divergent worldviews (Chinese universalism, Islam and Hinduism are complete systems in themselves), divergent cultures (with the resulting misunderstandings) and the deep mistrust that these create, bilateral and multilateral treaties are likely to achieve comprehensive cooperation with the US only in the long term.

Russia plays an active role in the regional world order, and its military and economic activities and achievements are closely monitored. As a result of the long-term consequences of the financial and trade restrictions imposed on Russia, a significant drop is predicted in the quality of Russian high-tech industry. Russian arms factories have converted and incorporated civilian-use chips from the US and EU into modern Russian weapons, but as a result of the sanctions, the Russian military industry no longer has access to modern chips, or only to a limited extent. In a few years, the lack of chips and the unavailability of the associated technology is expected to leave Russia lagging far behind in both civilian and military devices (Whalen, 2022). The prospect of falling behind the global technological revolution also increases uncertainty among states that play an important role in Russia’s world order vision because sanctions could be extended to states that help Russia evade sanctions. The damage caused by a decline in living standards and a fall in industrial production can generate a wave of discontent among their own citizens, which the emerging but still weak power centres cannot take on board. As a result, BRICS, the modernisation of the SCO and trade, monetary and political cooperation between member states may, in the short term, remain at the level of superficial relations. As the emerging powers are afraid to openly circumvent the US and EU sanctions against Russia, their dependence and Western pressure may lead them to loosen their ties with Russia.

The first manifestations of the emergence of a new political world order can be seen in Russia’s kinetic military power projections. Although the wars in Georgia and Syria and the integration of Crimea showed the spectacular success of Russia’s mili-

tary power, the protracted action in Ukraine and the limited use of high-tech weapons led to the disappearance of the myth of the invincibility of Russian military power, according to NATO’s assessment (Pszczel, 2022). Russian military engagement in Ukraine did not live up to the expectations of a blitzkrieg, and the Russian goal of invading Ukraine, as assumed by the West, failed due to the perceived poor performance of the Russian military (Kirby, 2022). Power centres opposed to the US would prefer to avoid open conflict with the US and NATO, given the achievements of Russian military capabilities so far.

## 2. Scenario of a total victory for the Russian side

As a result of Russia’s military action, Ukraine, supported by the West and belonging to Central and Eastern Europe, is abolished. The provinces of eastern and southern Ukraine declare their independence on the basis of the referendum results, which Russia immediately recognises, and ask for reunification with the Russian motherland. The international legal instruments will precede the integration into Russia of territories recognised as independent states, because reference to international law – as was shown in the chapter on the Russian concept of the world order in the study – is a key feature of Russian foreign policy. With the accession of the territories, the contiguous Russian territory will extend to Transnistria, which also holds a referendum to request its unification with the Russian Federation. However, “Torn Ukraine” in the Kissingerian sense remains under Russian control, with state leadership and an internal power structure filled with individuals and legal instruments that suit Russian interests. In the event of an outright Russian military victory, the most likely scenario is the organisation of parliamentary and local governmental elections, during which the parties and politicians who have been in power since 2014 will be excluded. Political and legal continuity may be represented by either former President Yanukovich (RBC, 2022), by a politician who previously represented the Party of Regions in parliament in 2014, or by a minister in government under the former Yanukovich presidency. The person ensuring continuity will announce the general elections.

The implementation of the Treaty of 1999 on the Union State of Russia and Belarus accelerates and the real unification of the two states is achieved. By fulfilling Russian national security demands, the western borders of the Russian-led Eurasian megaregion, which is one of the poles of the new regional world order, are established.

As the geopolitical situation in Europe settles, the attention of the US and the West turns to China. China's confidence in the Russian military will continue to grow, and in the medium term, Russian-Chinese military cooperation could grow closer. The US may see the possibility of a merger of Russian and Chinese economic and military power as a threat to its leadership, and therefore the chances of a direct military confrontation between the US and China may increase, especially in the short term.

The success of Russia's advocacy in Ukraine also leads organisations and states opposed to the US-led political global system to have greater confidence in Russia as a force. The integration processes of BRICS and the CEC could gain momentum, and attempts to challenge the dollar's leading role in international trade and financial settlements could be strengthened by the emerging new organisations adopting a new trading currency calculated by the currency index of member states, or by holding their foreign exchange reserves in the new currency instead of the dollar, euro and yen.

As a member state of the EU and NATO, Hungary may be under an increased obligation to abide by EU policy decisions in the event of a Russian victory. Further sanctions on political, economic relations and trade are likely to be introduced, which in extreme situations could mean the obligation to sever bilateral relations completely. As a last resort, the EU can oblige its Member States to suspend diplomatic relations and terminate trade and financial cooperation. In this case, Hungary will be forced to abandon the good bilateral relations it has built up with Russia with great diplomatic effort, and due to the instability of the international security situation, it will have no chance to settle its economic relations with Russia or with states or territories allied with Russia in the short and medium term. An outright Russian victory could create two further sensitive national security problems for Hungary. On the one hand, the isolation of the Transcarpathian region could negatively change the relationship with "Torn Ukraine". The closure of the border may occur not primarily due to the actions of the Ukrainian authorities under the control of the Russian power, but as a result of the "iron curtain" created as part of the united Western action dictated by the EU and the US. The main means of reducing economic and trade relations could be to build up border protection and border controls, which the EU can impose on Member States to protect its eastern borders. Because of the restrictions, Hungarian national policy will be fundamentally damaged, and Hungarian families are highly likely to be separated from each other.

On the other hand, the process of Serbia's accession to the EU and NATO could be stalled. The existing differences between Serbia and Kosovo could be artificially intensified by a strengthened Russian great power policy, with military (mainly

through advisors and volunteers) and financial support for the Serbian side, similar to that provided by the US and NATO member states in the case of Ukraine. Serbia's attempt to distance itself from the EU and to strengthen its ties with Russia could change the balance of power in the Balkans, and Serbia could easily find itself in a military conflict with Kosovo (B92, 2022) and ultimately with the US and NATO's KFOR peacekeeping mission. From Hungary's point of view, this option also poses a risk to national security and national policy. The good neighbourly relations between Hungary and Serbia, which have developed over the past decade and a half, may quickly move in opposite directions due to geopolitical changes, as the interests of the US, the EU and Serbia will diverge radically over Kosovo. In this changing environment, the beneficiary role – oversized relative to its size and real weight – of the Hungarians of Vojvodina in Serbian domestic politics will cease, and a new conflict zone will emerge along Hungary's southern border, which will pose a new challenge for national security.

*The impact of the scenario on the overall trend of geopolitical change:* Since the beginning of the "military operation", the Russian government's official goal has been the demilitarisation and denazification of Ukraine, and the liberation of the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics (Andrékó, 2022). During the war, NATO member states – especially the US – provided Ukraine with modern equipment that could hit and destroy targets, even in Russia, with great precision. The Russian side's communication has also been constantly changing, with the goals being modified to extend the sphere of influence of Russian power to essentially the western border of Ukraine, citing the improvement of the technical capabilities and the range of the Ukrainian forces. In fact, by providing arms aid to Ukraine, the West has only provided a justification for declaring the extension of Russian objectives, since the Russian side would have to verify Ukraine's post-war neutrality and compliance with the arms embargo in the event of a treaty. Although there are several technical solutions (e.g. international peacekeeping forces), the most feasible solution would be the temporary stationing of Russian military forces in "Torn Ukraine". The Russian government has never made any reference to a blitzkrieg: "This hypothesis has been put forward by many despite there being limited evidence that Putin wanted to achieve a fast and decisive victory" (Carvalho & Leoni, 2022)<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, in several cases, the marginal role of time in relation to war has been declared (Komarova, 2022)

<sup>1</sup> Carvalho, A., Leoni, Z. (2022): Has Russia emulated Nazi "blitzkrieg" in its invasion of Ukraine? King's College London, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/has-russia-emulated-nazi-blitzkrieg-in-its-invasion-of-ukraine> „This hypothesis has been put forward by many despite there being limited evidence that Putin wanted to achieve a fast and decisive victory.”

(Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2022) (Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 2022), and therefore the maximum fulfilment of Russian objectives increases the prestige of Russian military power in the eyes of organisations and states that attack the unipolar world order.

The most important consequence of the scenario of a complete victory of the Russian “military operation” could be that Saudi Arabia and Turkey could be irrevocably cut out of the traditional US alliance system by the Russian results, and a transforming global economic system could even be bold enough to exclude the US dollar from its trade transactions.

### 3. Scenario of a defeat of the Russian side

Thanks to the effective military and financial support of the developed West and the USA, as well as the substantial training of military manpower, the Ukrainian forces are able to launch a large-scale and powerful offensive against Russian units with the help of modern American equipment. Russian forces, using mainly conventional weapons, will be completely displaced from the territories occupied since 24 February 2022, over which Ukrainian rule will be restored. Inflation accelerates in Russia, and the Russian economy collapses under the impact of EU and US sanctions. The defeat will remove the Russian military deterrent built up since the end of World War II, and the Collective Security Treaty Organization will be reduced to a low combat value due to the loss of prestige of the Russian forces as the main force. In some CIS member countries (Kazakhstan, Belarus, etc.), political ferment may begin, internal discontent may grow, government and regime-changing NGOs, organisations and movements may emerge.

Once the European crisis is resolved, the US and its allies will be able to concentrate larger forces in key areas such as the Arctic, where there are significant hydrocarbon fields and a significant Russian build-up of forces (Shiryaeva, Kretzul, 2022). Troop reinforcements could extend to Southeast Asia, where the presence of Chinese naval power grows, and to Taiwan, whose de facto independent statehood could be threatened by Chinese expansionist ambitions (Portyakova, 2022).

With Russia weakened, China may try to overrepresent Chinese interests within the SCO and BRICS. However, China’s relative military weakness compared to the US does not allow for a bipolar political world order.

Hungary’s options and national security risks in relation to Ukraine will be affected by the fact that the Ukrainian government is developing close ties with Poland from the Central and Eastern European region. Ukrainian-Polish cooperation reached a high level during the war, joint operations were carried out and Ukraine received 90% of its military aid facilitated by Poland (Izvestia, 2022). Ukrainian foreign policy towards Hungary could return to the confrontational attitude of the pre-war period because, in the event of a Russian defeat, Ukraine’s influence in the Central and Eastern European region would be strengthened by the support of the US, Great Britain and Poland. Hungarian firms could also be squeezed out of business opportunities such as the post-war reconstruction of Transcarpathia, where competition could also come from Polish firms in addition to that from the US, the UK and Germany.

*The impact of the scenario on the overall trend of geopolitical change:* Although the Russian economy could finance the war against Ukraine for some time to come, the losses in manpower and high-precision missiles cannot be replaced by the Russian armed forces. War casualties are leading to apathy and a decline in combat readiness among the military, with Ukrainian military equipment increasingly consisting of US and Western-made high-tech equipment that outclasses Russian combat equipment in quality and effectiveness. During the war, the modern equipment of the Russian armed forces containing Western chips will wear out, and the embargo will prevent Russia from obtaining the necessary supplies of spare parts. The sanctions imposed by the US and the EU will already be effective in the medium term, thus Russia will have to rely on self-sufficiency and domestic production. The quality of Russian industrial and agricultural goods is significantly below that of international products to which the population is accustomed, and the quality of living standards is steadily deteriorating.

While efforts to change the unipolar world order will continue, China’s aspirations for leadership among SCO and BRICS countries will slow down the coordination of action against “Pax Americana”.

China’s situation may be made more difficult by the fact that, with Russia weakened, the US and the West, led by the US, can focus their attention on the Asia-Pacific region. US naval power is concentrated in the territorial waters of Taiwan and Japan to deter China and Russia. The possible strengthening of Taiwan in international politics could provoke an extreme, aggressive response from China, which would also make open military action against the US likely. China’s ultimate goal of a “military operation” to forcibly integrate Taiwan could be geopolitically similar to Russia’s war in Ukraine. China may attempt to establish a centre for a Chinese-led megaregion in South Asia, one of the poles of the new regional world order.

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## EXPECTED FORECASTS FOR EXPECTED REFLECTIONS ON AN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

*László Simon*

The likely outcome of the Russia-Ukraine conflict can be assessed from many aspects. While the conflict patterns of confrontation and military clashes bear more similarities to the high-intensity armed clashes that emerged after World War II, the state, non-state (NGO) and individual interventions and indirect actions associated with the operations differ significantly. The infocommunication environment specific to information societies and sanctions based on the specificities of the globalised economy have different and broader consequences, in terms of both effects and retaliation, and in many cases are less predictable. Both opposing sides and the powers that support them, or those who strengthen the camp of those who want to be independent and are able to remain so, must take this into account. Following the 2001 terrorist attacks in the US, the social solutions previously used by international organisations and those based on non-violence proved cumbersome and less effective. In the bipolar system of power, warfare of varying degrees of intensity have been waged in times of local and regional crises through clashes between the Warsaw Pact, led by the Soviet Union, and the US-dominated NATO satellite states. The greatest representation of soft power, the framework for bilateral and multilateral diplomacy issues, was provided by the UN and OSCE forums. The fulfilment of the political will of the period before the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, as formulated by Clausewitz<sup>1</sup>, is more evident near the escalation phase of conflicts and crises, when weapons are used. In the meantime, the willingness and ability to engage in diplomacy and cooperation is primarily a matter of verbal manifestations, not always within the hierarchical framework provided by international security organisations, such as the UN Security Council. Other power players, global economic enterprises and corporations, international banks, but also NGOs, non-state actors, which can influence the hierarchical power structure of states, can also demonstrate political activity. The complexity of power relations in the post-bipolar world order

<sup>1</sup> According to Clausewitz's ideas of the early nineteenth century, war is "an application of limitless violence to compel our enemy to do our will". It is violence in which there are no limits, but there is passion and hatred" (Clausewitz, 2013, p. 16).

period – the ever-changing relationship between friends and enemies – complicates the process of Clausewitzian political power projection and the deepening of the crisis to such an extent that there is no way to resolve it or to enforce peace, balance or maintain peace even after the traditional, legitimate use of force. The polarised actors of our global world naturally create regional or local interest groups. We have witnessed a steady increase in frustration with globalisation and the activity to do away with it in the first decades of the millennium. The challenges, risks and conflicts of coexistence of human communities pose threats that can lead to a full repertoire of violence and aggression at all levels of power, both before and during crisis management (Simon, 2018). The establishment of armed conflicts between states – the right to start and fight wars – that is, the legitimisation of violence against each other, can be the basis of any political and power vision at any level other than state level. Traditional military means of implementation are supplemented or, in some cases, replaced. The hybrid, mixed, planned, but in many cases spontaneous use of elements of soft and hard power is specifically inspired and supported by the information (logical) and physical (technological) interconnections that pervade the globalised world and all of its segments, i.e. cyberspace.

### 1st moderate (intermediate) scenario

Looking at the aggression in Hungary's geographical neighbourhood from the perspective of individual activity, it is clear that by the end of 2023 at the earliest, the effects of the trench warfare will shock those individual actors who wished to influence, directly and indirectly, Ukraine's territorial integrity and other sovereignty aspirations. Given the international support for the armed struggle and its current intensity, although the borders will not change substantially, in the second year of the conflict, there will not be a single Ukrainian or Russian family that has not made a personal, human or other sacrifice to win the war by the end of 2023.

Ukraine had not experienced a civil war before the 2022 crisis. The events that unfolded in 2014 could not be clearly assessed as a confrontation between two states either, as the Ukrainian government at the time was faced with hybrid military operations (Holecz, 2018) without a declaration of war. The proclamation of the Republic of Crimea did not mean the birth of an independent state, but rather an annexation, although a special solution to the earlier "Ukrainian-Russian dispute" could not be

found in the UN<sup>2</sup> Security Council's resolution intervention.<sup>3</sup> Describing the causes and aims of armed conflicts, defining the concept of war from the point of view of the average person living today, is almost impossible. The system of influencing human activity in our social, economic or natural-technical environment – a system called peaceful – has a direct impact on the post-settlement period, despite the analysis and evaluation of past conflicts. The resolution of a conflict cannot be successful if the consequences of the solutions generate new tensions.<sup>4</sup> The complexity of power relations, the ever-changing conflicts and clashes of friendly and hostile states, which replaced the bipolar power order from 1991 onwards, were transformed into networks with multipolar characteristics. The organised aggression of the individual growing through globalisation is not without the empowerment and support of the individual and the community of individuals, the sharing of power and the question of personal self-sacrifice.

In the wake of prolonged destruction, opposing and increasingly polarised proponents, both in hierarchical and other impact-based networks of information societies, find points behind which they can line up as allies, friends or enemies. The community of individuals with independent views will join one camp or the other, not only regionally but also globally, because of the direct and indirect effects of war. International individual pledges are increasingly moving away from armed participation in combat and into the digital infocommunication space. Internet media users with the unique and diversified activity of sharing varied information and influencing armed events can create smaller, larger digital groups with the legitimacy that comes from a culture of guerrilla warfare. With the increase in recruitment and popular media content inciting terrorist acts in the post-9/11 period, the effectiveness of currently active cyber actions (Nichols, 2022) will cause more damage in the conflict hinterland. Based on the above, by the end of 2023, the physical and logical resources of cyber attacks on Ukrainian and Russian critical state facilities will no longer necessarily show a multipolar network (Kelemen & Simon, 2020). Internet actors will coordinate

their activities as digital partisans. Information and network-centric warfare will have a meaningful impact on the initiation and conduct of peace negotiations in conflict resolution (Simon, 2017). Any territorial division, but also the restoration of the old borders, will justify the individual activism that the Russian and Ukrainian minorities will pursue and start. As a consequence of the peace negotiations, an anomic social situation will persist, in which neither globalisation nor traditional state reactions will be able to provide an adequate response to curb the aggression and violence linked to the internet and other infocommunication networks.

## 2. Scenario of a total victory for the Russian side

*The divergence between the globalist and populist views preferred on an individual level will, at the height of the conflict and in the immediate period that follows, again lead to the emergence of non-hierarchical, multipolar power structures. In the current information environment, the peace agreement will be more akin to the political impact of the NATO and US withdrawal from Afghanistan. The creation of a peaceful coexistence between the two countries in conflict will threaten to suppress countless frustrations and aggressions, and create new ones. The idea of a pacifist community based on friendship and cooperation, or on a culture of pan-Slavism, is completely eroded over time. The fraternity is replaced by a modern, European-minded Ukraine and an even more isolationist Russian Federation, divided by the new Iron Curtain.*

In my assessment, only bilateral and multilateral communication can achieve the emotional resolution of the power-consequential decisions of opposing individual actors, i.e. the partisan-type resistance of dissenters trapped in the divided territories. As a consequence, the only way to restore the former peaceful coexistence between Russia and Ukraine is to restore a win-win situation based on essentially economic and cultural relations. Fragile social security can be based on the individual and small-community will of political balancing, as in the case of the Vietnam War. In other words, the ability of a regional power structure to overcome escalation, to build a functioning Ukrainian state, with supportive community societies on both sides. Otherwise, regions like either Kosovo or Transnistria could emerge, where peace could be enforced through the mentoring of donor states and the presence of peacekeeping military forces. Whatever power ambition is gained, the power potential, network and capacity to project the power of non-state actors must already be taken into account. In the centre of Europe, the creation of division and isola-

<sup>2</sup> The role of the United Nations, the prohibition of violence and the principles for the peaceful settlement of conflicts between states are set out in the founding document (United Nations Charter).

<sup>3</sup> International organisations can be called upon to handle crises, either to settle disputes between states or in the event of an armed conflict within a state. The UN General Assembly and the Security Council can adopt resolutions and impose sanctions on member states (Hárs, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> For example, in condemning Russian special military operations ongoing in Ukraine since 2022, the European Union has taken the clear position that the Russian Federation is an aggressor threatening the territorial integrity of Ukraine. At the same time, despite the agreed and planned Russian sanctions, it is no longer clear that Russia is clearly the EU's enemy. There is still no single EU agreement to break trade agreements on both gas and oil, and nuclear energy. Owing to economic (energy) dependence on Russia, the behaviour of some EU countries is nuancing the meaning of the concept of enemy. Countries that do not join the sanctions and protect their energy security are declared pro-Russian (McHugh, 2022).

tion similar to that of the Korean peninsula cannot be sustained in the case of the annexation of any part of Ukraine. Therefore, if we consider the earliest possible peace negotiations in 2023, not only must the Ukrainian and Russian sides but all of the power poles already have medium- and long-term economic plans. Even while maintaining sanctions against the Russian Federation, governments must be able to operate within the Russian-Ukrainian relationship already indicated. If the citizens and inhabitants living together in the geographical areas concerned – deprived, even if temporarily, of their democracy of power – will not be able to see even a Hobbesian or Weberian representation of public power, then there will not even be an artificially functioning state that can provide the broadest possible answers to any real governmental tasks (Farkas, 2018). The importance of global and regional aid for governance and the wisdom of self-restraint on the part of non-state actors will rise. We may find ourselves faced with the paradox that in this geopolitically troubled European region, the world will not become a more liveable place by developing a social model of Western democracies.

The multipolar perceptions of power in information societies and the change in values and interests that were thought to be relatively stable in the post-World War II period paint a much bleaker picture in the post-escalation crisis management period. At the height of the conflict, the prevailing political views and ideologies were essentially clustered around two centres of power. On the physical and ideological frontiers of power structures, the classical and conceptual Iron Curtain divided the Earth's population primarily based on territorial aspects until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. The bipolar conception of power has been mastered by both states and their citizens, whose economic, financial, cultural, business, tourism, etc. plans, ideas – i.e. their community conception and their attitude towards each other – have been determined by the two patterns of the dominant systems. The challenges and risks of the world in this period were resolved or preserved by their territorial distribution, their distance or the scale of their threat, whether ideological, political, economic or even violent in nature and intensity. The social cohesion, economic or even military strength of the opposing communities determined the highest intensity of “soft” or “hard” activity of the two centres of power. As the main reason for avoiding independent, impartial passivity and for mandatory interventions, the prevention of the emergence and spread of legitimate violence which would guarantee the security of both sides, and the prevention of a worldwide armed conflict were cited. This world order, the balance between the destructive nuclear forces of the powers and the communication of the distinct philosophical difference between the communal, democratic mindset (the concept of state-level hostility between republics and peo-

ple's democracies) culminated in the Cold War, and the spiral of violence threatened the total destruction of the population. This aggressive expansion of the expression of power and the subordination of essential economic, social and societal processes to the use of force, influence, and even the marginalisation, banning and censorship of information segments that demand publicity and create a basis for dialogue and solutions, have strengthened the doomsday mood in everyday life. The citizens of the two parts of the world, the most basic resources of public power, were accumulated in this hierarchical social “edifice” of the two societies. The quasi “unlimited” spread of information<sup>5</sup> and its content expansion, critique, discourse, exchange of opinions and the relationship between values and logically derived interests embedded in ideologies cannot be the basis for a bipolar division of coexistence: “value is not existent, not real, but valid” (Cs. Kiss, 2017, p. 11). In the periods preceding military operations, regional or local groups (political, military or even terrorist organisations) that do not have governmental power, despite dialogues and state or higher-level alliance agreements, do not give up their independence aspirations and continue their morally divisive but legitimate “freedom struggle” from the point of view of the belligerent. The modern Western global technical-economic approach of multipolar power seeking to eradicate and defuse Russian and Ukrainian aggression has become, as Rostoványi warned, self-exciting in the fight against terrorism, in the organisation of the response (Rostoványi, 2002). In addition to the material factors that maintain the hierarchy of power, it is precisely the ideological and therefore cultural elements based on the sharing of information that will be decisive. In what Rostoványi calls an interdependent international system, the contrasts between individuals and smaller communities – which are essentially local and regional in scope and intensity – must also be taken into account (Rostoványi, 2002). Today, the justified and rational expectations of the citizens at the “centre of modernisation”, which could lead to the elimination of hostile armed activities, have become the starting point for new violence. The right to violence that emerges and subsequently unfolds

<sup>5</sup> In this approach, the discourse between social relations must be taken into account, since the expression of power can be based on this communal belief. The technical requirements of information dissemination, i.e. the physical and mathematical determinants of transmitter-channel-receiver and distortion, in this case of democracy as a declared social determinant, were only meaningful on the boundaries of the two centres of power. History, however, has shown that the lives of divided communities are not separated forever by an artificial wall, but in fact the sociology of knowing the other and affirming self-knowledge, of defining a separate identity (i.e. the effect of the two opposing sides on each other), the need to maintain power, has become the main reason for unification, why we should be different on either side of the fence. To put it simply, one of the ways of dissolving and preventing individual aggression and radicalisation in the family and small-community frustrations of the artificially divided German society from 1945 onwards was the joint holiday of eastern and western Germans on Lake Balaton in Hungary. The Pan-European Picnic, which marked the first imaginary bricks being removed from the Berlin Wall, was one of the outcomes of the strengthening and development of these community ties (Tarján, 1989).

on the current borderlines of globalisation and modernisation (in cyberspace, the areas of the spread of artificial intelligence, the conquest of space around the Earth, or the use and sharing of international and fresh water, the use of nanotechnology or genetic interventions, etc.) can thus lead to a self-propagating spiral of terror in the event of crises” (Simon, 2018, p. 250). Modern democracies are filled with fear that the world order, previously determined by the classical power centres of the US and Russia, is no longer capable of maintaining contemporary security, and in addition to the belief in hierarchical power structures determined by the victorious Western democracies and the great power efforts to preserve peace, newer and newer actors are emerging with the conviction of establishing local and regional power roles.

### 3. Scenario of a defeat of the Russian side

*As in other hotspot regions, Ukraine is likely to experience a high level of individual activity that will have an indirect but significant impact on the meaningful influence of great power relations. Traditional state issues in the use of force in power conflicts and crises generate the same communal demands for the suspension of war, not only in the management of risks, but also in the field of peacebuilding and reconstruction, in Russian and Ukrainian societies separately or simultaneously, because of the direct and indirect role of individual information. The absence of compromise does not necessarily result in victory for one side or the other, the realisation of its political goals, the fulfilment of its will.*

On an individual level, structures other than hierarchical power relations, even if they appear more fragile, can lead to faster results, even success. Situations and phenomena that could be interpreted as aggression at individual, family and small-community level can be organised into a sustainable, constructive but non-subordinated network through the power of information – the peaceful use of the “information weapon” of digital partisans (Simon, 2016). These – let’s call them dynastic, cultural, elemental – communities can carry the network power and effectiveness, drawn from individual resources, that Albert-László Barabási and his fellow researchers have described as the formula for success<sup>6</sup>. In other words, the Russian aspiration to create

<sup>6</sup> According to Barabási and his fellow researchers, performance attracts success. If performance cannot be measured, success is achieved through network connections. Performance is limited; success is unlimited. A comparison of an individual’s aptitude and past success is an indicator of future success. However, the success of a team lies in its diversity and the balance of community relations. In other words, the credit always goes to the same person. Individual success can occur at any time if the person does not act as a member of the group, but sticks to their resolve alone (Barabási, 2018).

“self-segregating”, politically artificially separate centres of power without broader cooperation, which, alongside their economic relations, cannot create sustainable regions that use resources “well” without the social and cultural ties of individuals.<sup>7</sup>

Technical progress has had a continuous impact on the tools of violence and the use of force (Simon, 2021). In this case, I would like to draw attention again not only to the discoveries and innovations that have been made in the use of gunpowder or the explosive engine, the aircraft or the submarine, or even the use of rocket and nuclear energy technologies, or the application and deployment of weapons systems, but also to the success of ideas and means for peaceful purposes that have had an indirect impact on power tensions on a historical scale. Not neglecting the achievements of the military industry in developing modern household appliances and even the internet – that is, its peaceful uses – we can consider here intellectual greats and inventors who, by creating and disseminating philosophical and political theories or information, and by defining the rules of coexistence free from physical violence, have made us aware of the real rationale of life and the inevitable consequences of our actions, in order to enrich the human community. Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, Proclus, Machiavelli, Cicero, John Calvin, Thomas More and many others have dealt with power or the relationship between power and philosophy through hermeneutical, phenomenological approaches (Magyar Filozófiai Szemle, 1997; Schwendtner, 2017). However, we would now still like to draw attention to thinkers such as Euler, Gutenberg, Neumann, Turing, Barabási, without whom the “fourth revolution in the means of knowledge production” might not have started, but they have certainly determined the access of citizens of today’s societies and influenced the development of public interest, public perception and public opinion, etc., i.e. the infocommunication possibilities of public power and thus its medium (Harnad, 1991).

Among the phenomena and events that determine the peaceful coexistence and sustainable prosperity of information societies, the importance of the opinions expressed by individuals and influencing coexistence is increasing, unlike in previous eras. The impact of explicit and perceived individual threats, of indirect aggression, has become an increasingly dominant force in our globalising world as internet connectivity has grown. The individual, small-community power, the “legal practice” of fighting a popular uprising or revolution also takes place in cyberspace. Regional processes that influence and shape the world order, such as terrorism, mass migra-

<sup>7</sup> The post-World War II bipolar power order showed this power network, typically with two megaregions. The participants in the establishment of the new power structure are no longer just states, and the last thing the individual, community participants want to do is relive the horrors of the Cold War and its politics of delaying, waiting and starving, as we have come to know from the media.

tion, the Arab Spring, the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict, the crisis in Afghanistan and Syria, and even the US credit crisis, the endlessly complex and random nature of our information and social relations, which know no borders, make the unfolding local and regional crises a global problem at the same time. Ignoring the traditions and culture of a given geographical area often results in a spiral of violence and terror that is difficult to eliminate. At the same time, on the information side of crisis management, a settlement of sorts can be initiated, specifically according to the global values “declared” to be real. Resolutions to increasingly numerous conflicts show the importance of a regional power structure. The role of power-sharing and the strategic thinking of consolidating a multipolar order that is less dismantled in terms of the interconnectedness of states in the region.

The various regional conflicts and armed clashes regularly escalate. Beyond the use of weapons, the indirect effects of aggression are becoming global. At the same time, the very nature of the manifestation of power means that they are bound to a well-defined geographical space. The resolution of the conflict is unthinkable without the expression of public power. The policy-shaping power of civil society activists after World War II was also evident in the armed conflicts in Vietnam, Korea, the Middle East and elsewhere. In other words, for the prevention and eradication of direct and indirect violence, the information effect also seems indispensable, which, although determined by the geophysical space through the media, has become a weapon of power for those who exercise power and those who give it to them, primarily because of its cognitive effects. *One of the most interesting questions of our time is how the individual can use their activity to change the power structure of the world, how information can become a weapon.*

Different actors (individuals, groups, companies and NGOs) and different qualities and quantities of actions and reactions from different designated governmental or substitute social organisations can result in the outcome of the events of our time that need to be resolved. To assume that rationality and culture can be kept at a distance from progressive task performance can, in many cases, be damaging; in many cases, progression itself can provoke an aversion that increases tension between participants. Where direct and indirect aggression is present, the reflections of the participants are fundamentally determined by the assumption that the bipolar power hierarchical structure is not extended as a safety net behind the resolution of conflicts. The legitimacy of violence and terror is also influenced by the perception of power that only states are obliged to exercise restraint among these actors, and not others. Only the consideration of moral consequences, which are easy to ideologise, and the fear of such consequences can deter actors from acting. In the interaction

of those involved, a system of relations is formed which is specifically based on the absence of the favoured, the protected and protectionism as the growth and multiplication of the power of the community, i.e. the Hobbesian organisation of community power. The objective and subjective elements of struggle and competition imply the domination of the strongest community as a kind of evolution of aggression.

In light of the above, it will not be difficult to accept that efforts to reduce, and possibly dissolve, state power inevitably reinforce individual perceptions that increase fear, since these individuals perceive this process as a weakening of the power that has been guaranteeing their existence and security. In these conflicts, state-level discourse should be given a prominent role and appropriate reflections and counterbalances should be developed at regional and global level. This social process should be seen in the same way as, for example, the emergence and development of the current world economic order, or even the current form of transport. Both interaction-based systems include hierarchical and partnership elements, with security guarantees and accountability acceptable to all participants with “power” (both rights and obligations), and mutual trust and respect. Presumed and “unavoidable” conflicts cannot become self-exacerbating, as the system identifies and corrects mistakes, while at the same time clearly delineating the areas of equal treatment and diverging perception.<sup>8</sup>

*In conclusion, whichever scenario occurs, the resulting peace will be more of a truce for individuals. In a period of deepening calm, balance can only be achieved by engaging individual power. The power potential of the world’s small communities and families must also be involved. Ukrainian cooperation in cyberspace also needs to be moderated, monitored and harmonised.*

<sup>8</sup> The economic centres of our globalised world look to the same individuals as consumers, who are also the population that gives the political power to democracies and respects the legal system of state participants. The higher level of the system must be in tune with the individuals who make up the various communities. The international economic principles of capitalism are accepted by societies such as China or India, with their somewhat differently regulated internal markets, as well as by states that prefer free markets in the Anglo-Saxon sense. Economic competition has had an impact on the bipolar world order, often causing conflicts and, if we think of the economic crises of 1939 or 2008, global crises. The system of road traffic rules has not eliminated conflicts and accidents, but has evolved to meet individual and collective needs for mobility at local, regional and global level. In this area, the issue of transport in space also raises a discourse of similar scale and social importance. Rules that are substantially different from international and open water navigation may require new thinking and geographical projection.

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**In the times gone by, history would amble at so slow a gait that people of those days could discern only with utmost difficulty those events that would impact their personal lives. Few could see the great shifts. Today, we are exposed to the opposite extreme. Change and progress are so dynamic that society, and the life of the individual cannot escape being transformed by the emergence of opportunities and virtual realities generated by the internet, globalisation, and the social, political, and economic change that has been unleashed. Amid the accelerated pace of history, communities and individuals alike are exposed to so many impulses that identifying significant events is cumbersome, anew. The authors of this volume view the year 2022 as a key milestone in the passage from the unipolar to a multipolar, potentially regional world order. The volume seeks to present the great power mentalities that characterise the United States of America and the Russian Federation, as well as the major shifts in the world economy, and the narrow – or sometimes, to the contrary, quite expansive – opportunities of the individual who is inevitably swept along like a droplet in the ocean of human history. By presenting their interpretation of some of the defining currents that underlie the events of our time, the authors hope to offer readers a compass to better navigate the changes that re-define our world.**

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