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HORIZONS

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THE RETURN OF HISTORY

THE HOUR OF CENTRAL ASIA?

INSIDE THE MIDDLE EAST

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HORIZONS

EDITORIAL

FRANCIS Fukuyama's 1989 proclamation of the "end of history" is perhaps the most memorable of the myriad endeavors to herald the dawn of a new era in which democratic governments would dominate the world and be primarily occupied with overseeing the "satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands." Nuances notwithstanding, the general conclusion was that a door was opening to the establishment of a permanent system of universal governance subsequently termed the "rules-based liberal international order."

THIS IS hardly the first time that the promoters of a new global framework believed that it would both render obsolete inter-state warfare and become entrenched in the very fabric of world politics for good, much like the contemporaries of the congresses of Vienna, Versailles, or San Francisco. But those who embraced the "end of history" and the Washington Consensus paradigms did not foresee the brevity of the unipolar era.

HISTORY did not come to its end. The waging of wars and other violations of UN member states' sovereignty and territorial integrity did not enter into remission, as the populations of Yugoslavia, Iraq, or Libya can grimly confirm. Their cumulative impact on public opinion in the states of the Global South helps explain the lukewarm response to Western entreaties to join the sanctions regime against Russia, brought forth in response to the Kremlin's war in Ukraine.

TODAY, "realist" worldviews are vigorously disputed in the West; yet the return of history is no longer. The question now is how to influence the flow of history in the time ahead. Seventeen truly distinguished authors from all corners of the world offer penetrating insights into this critical question in this issue of *Horizons*.

HOWEVER much they may differ, our authors concur that the international system is "fundamentally broken," in the words of one of them. One would hope that a crisis of the present magnitude can serve as the wakeup call to fix it. The question remains will whatever comes next be the product of "dialogue or dictation," as another of our authors might ask.

ADVOCATES OF all options ought to see the advantage of deepening engagement with regions like Central Asia. The development of transport connectivity between East and West today requires a strategic emphasis on the Middle Corridor—a route that inescapably traverses its most important country: Kazakhstan. Its vast natural resources also hold a key to the diversification of supply not only for East and South Asia, but Europe as well. Getting these to market safely has never been more critical. The hour of Central Asia may thus very well be at hand.

THE FINAL theme of this issue is the Middle East. The future of the Kurds and Iraq, as well as Iran and its neighbors in the Gulf, remains notoriously difficult to forecast. And this raises a question one of the Arab world's elder statesmen examines in our concluding essay: can we change the global culture?

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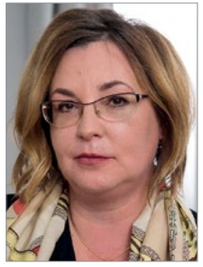

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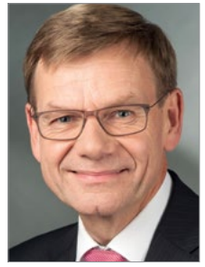

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The Causes and Consequences of the Ukraine War

John J. Mearsheimer

THE war in Ukraine is a multi-dimensional disaster, which is likely to get much worse in the foreseeable future. When a war is successful, little attention is paid to its causes, but when the outcome is disastrous, understanding how it happened becomes paramount. People want to know: how did we get into this terrible situation?

I have witnessed this phenomenon twice in my lifetime—first with the Vietnam War and second with the Iraq War. In both cases, Americans wanted to know how their country could have miscalculated so badly. Given that the United States and its NATO allies played a crucial role in the events that led to the Ukraine war—and are now playing a central role in the conduct of that war—it is appropriate to evaluate the West's responsibility for this calamity.

I will make two main arguments today.

First, the United States is principally responsible for causing the Ukraine crisis. This is not to deny that Putin started the war and that he is responsible for Russia's conduct on the battlefield. Nor is it to deny that America's allies bear some responsibility, but they largely follow Washington's lead on Ukraine. My key point, however, is that the United States has pushed forward policies toward Ukraine that Putin and his colleagues see as an existential threat to their country—a point they have made repeatedly for many years. Specifically, I am talking about America's obsession with bringing Ukraine into NATO and making it a Western bulwark on Russia's border. The Biden administration was unwilling to eliminate that threat through diplomacy and indeed recommitted itself to bringing Ukraine into NATO in 2021. Putin responded by invading Ukraine on February 24th, 2022.

John J. Mearsheimer *is R. Wendell Harrison Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago. This lecture was delivered at the Robert Schuman Centre of the European University Institute in Florence, Italy on June 16th, 2022. Its written version is published with permission.*

Photo: Guliver Image

The beginning of trouble? Presidents Yushchenko (Ukraine) and Bush (U.S.) at the 2008 Bucharest NATO Summit

Second, the Biden administration has reacted to the outbreak of the war by doubling down against Russia. Washington and its Western allies are committed to decisively defeating Russia in Ukraine and employing comprehensive sanctions to greatly weaken Russian power. The United States is not seriously interested in finding a diplomatic solution to the war, which means the war is likely to drag on for months, if not years. In the process, Ukraine, which has already suffered grievously, is going to experience even greater harm. In essence, the United States and its allies are helping lead Ukraine down the primrose path.

Furthermore, there is a danger that the war will escalate, as NATO might get dragged into the fighting and nuclear weapons might be used. We live in perilous times.

Let me now lay out my argument in greater detail, starting with a description of the conventional wisdom about the causes of the conflict.

THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

It is widely and firmly believed in the West that Putin is solely responsible for causing the Ukraine crisis and certainly the ongoing war. He is said to have imperial ambitions, which is to say he is bent on conquering Ukraine and other countries as well—all for the purpose of creating a greater Russia that bears some resemblance to the former Soviet Union. In other words, Ukraine is Putin's first target, but not his last. As one scholar put it, he is "acting on a sinister, long-held belief: to erase Ukraine from the map of the world." Given Putin's purported goals, it makes perfect sense for Finland and Sweden to join NATO and for the alliance to increase its force levels in Eastern Europe. After all, Imperial Russia must be contained.

The United States is principally responsible for causing the Ukraine crisis. This is not to deny that Putin started the war and that he is responsible for Russia's conduct on the battlefield.

While this narrative is repeated over and over in the mainstream media and by virtually every Western leader, there is no evidence to support it. To the extent that purveyors of the conventional wisdom provide evidence, it has little if any bearing on Putin's motives for invading Ukraine. For example, some emphasize that he said that Ukraine is an "artificial state" or that it is not a "real state." Such opaque comments, however, say nothing about his reason for going to war. The same is true of Putin's statement that he views Russians and Ukrainians as "one people" with a common history. Others point out that he called the collapse of the Soviet Union "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century." Of course, Putin also said, "Whoever does not miss the Soviet Union has no heart. Whoever wants it back has no brain." Still, others point out that he said that "Modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia or, to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia." But as he went on to say in that same speech: "Of course, we cannot change past events, but we must at least admit them openly and honestly."

To make the case that Putin was bent on conquering all of Ukraine and incorporating it into Russia, it is necessary to provide evidence that first, he thought it was a desirable goal, that second, he thought it was a feasible goal, and third, he intended to pursue that goal. There is no evidence in the public record that Putin was contemplating, much less intending to put an end to Ukraine as an independent state and make it part of a greater Russia when he sent his troops into Ukraine on February 24th.

In fact, there is significant evidence that Putin recognized Ukraine as an independent country. In his July 12th, 2021, article about Russian-Ukrainian relations, which proponents of the conventional wisdom often point to as evidence of his imperial ambitions, he tells the Ukrainian people, "You want to establish a state of your own: you are welcome!" Regarding how Russia should treat Ukraine, he writes, "There is only one answer: with respect." He concludes that lengthy article with the following words: "And what Ukraine will be—it is up to its citizens to decide." It is hard to reconcile these statements with the claim that he wants to incorporate Ukraine within a greater Russia.

To make the case that Putin was bent on conquering all of Ukraine and incorporating it into Russia, it is necessary to provide evidence that he thought it was a desirable goal, he thought it was a feasible goal, he intended to pursue that goal. There is no evidence that Putin was contemplating, much less intending to put an end to Ukraine as an independent state.

In that same July 12th, 2021, article and again in an important speech he gave on February 21st, 2022, Putin emphasized that Russia accepts "the new geopolitical reality that took shape after the dissolution of the USSR." He reiterated that same point for a third time on February 24th, 2022, when he announced that Russia would invade Ukraine. He also made it clear that "it is not our plan to occupy Ukrainian territory" and that he respected Ukrainian sovereignty, but only up to a point: "Russia cannot feel safe, develop, and exist while facing a permanent threat from the territory of today's Ukraine." In essence, Putin was not interested in making Ukraine a part of Russia; he was interested in making sure it did not become a "springboard" for Western aggression against Russia, a subject I will say more about shortly.

One might argue that Putin was lying about his motives, that he was attempting to disguise his imperial ambitions. As it turns out, I have written a book about lying in international politics—*Why Leaders Lie: The Truth about Lying in International Politics*—and it is clear to me that Putin was not lying. For starters, one of my principal findings is that leaders do not lie much to each other; they lie more

often to their own publics. Regarding Putin, whatever one thinks of him, he does not have a history of lying to other leaders. Although some assert that he frequently lies and cannot be trusted, there is little evidence of him lying to foreign audiences. Moreover, he has publicly spelled out his thinking about Ukraine on numerous occasions over the past two years and he has consistently emphasized that his principal concern is Ukraine's relations with the West, especially NATO. He has never once hinted that he wants to make Ukraine part of Russia. If this behavior is part of a giant deception campaign, it would be without precedent in recorded history.

Putin and other Russian leaders surely understand from the Cold War that occupying counties in the age of nationalism is invariably a prescription for never-ending trouble.

Perhaps the best indicator that Putin is not bent on conquering and absorbing Ukraine is the military strategy Moscow has employed from the start of the campaign. The Russian military did not attempt to conquer all of Ukraine. That would have required a classic blitzkrieg strategy that aimed at quickly overrunning all of Ukraine with armored forces supported by tactical airpower. That strategy was not feasible, however, because there were only 190,000 soldiers in Russia's invading army, which is far too small a force to vanquish and occupy Ukraine, which is not only the largest country between the Atlantic Ocean and Russia, but also has a population over 40 million. Unsurprisingly, the Russians pursued a limited aims strategy, which focused on either capturing or threatening Kyiv and conquering a large swath of territory in eastern and southern Ukraine. In short, Russia did not have the capability to subdue all of Ukraine, much less conquer other countries in Eastern Europe.

To take this argument a step further, Putin and other Russian leaders surely understand from the Cold War that occupying counties in the age of nationalism is invariably a prescription for never-ending trouble. The Soviet experience in Afghanistan is a glaring example of this phenomenon, but more relevant for the issue at hand is Moscow's relations with its allies in Eastern Europe during the Cold War. The Soviet Union maintained a huge military presence in that region and was involved in the politics of almost every country located there. Those allies, however, were a frequent thorn in Moscow's side. The Soviet Union put down a major insurrection in East Germany in 1953, and then invaded Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968—all for the purpose of keeping those countries in line. There was serious trouble in Poland in 1956, 1970, and again in 1980-1981. Although Polish authorities dealt with these events, they served as a reminder that intervention might be necessary. Albania, Romania, and Yugoslavia routinely caused Moscow trouble, but Soviet leaders tended to tolerate their misbehavior, because their location made them less important for deterring NATO.

Hardly anyone made the argument that Putin had imperial ambitions from the time he took office in 2000 until the Ukraine crisis first broke out on February 22nd, 2014.

What about contemporary Ukraine? It is obvious from Putin's July 12th, 2021, essay that he understood at that time that Ukrainian nationalism is a powerful force and that the civil war in the Donbass, which had been going on since 2014, had done much to poison relations between Russia and Ukraine. He surely knew that Russia's invasion force would not be welcomed with open arms by Ukrainians, and that it would be a Herculean task for Russia to subjugate Ukraine if it had the necessary forces to conquer the entire country, which it did not have.

Finally, it is worth noting that hardly anyone made the argument that Putin had imperial ambitions from the time he took office in 2000 until the Ukraine crisis first broke out on February 22nd, 2014. In fact, the Russian leader was an invited guest to the April 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest where the alliance announced that Ukraine and Georgia would eventually become members. Putin's opposition to that announcement had hardly any effect on Washington because Russia was judged to be too weak to stop further NATO enlargement, just as it had been too weak to stop the 1999 and 2004 tranches of expansion.

Relatedly, it is important to note that NATO expansion before February 2014 was not aimed at containing Russia. Given the sad state of Russian military power, Moscow was in no position to pursue revanchist policies in Eastern Europe. Tellingly, former U.S. ambassador to Moscow Michael McFaul notes that Putin's seizure of Crimea was not planned before the crisis broke out in 2014. It was an impulsive move in response to the coup that overthrew Ukraine's pro-Russian leader. In short, NATO enlargement was not intended to contain a Russian threat but was instead as part of a broader policy to spread the liberal international order into Eastern Europe and make the entire continent look like Western Europe.

It was only when the Ukraine crisis broke out in February 2014 that the

United States and its allies suddenly began describing Putin as a dangerous leader with imperial ambitions and Russia as a serious military threat that had to be contained. What caused this shift? This new rhetoric was designed to serve one essential purpose: to enable the West to blame Putin for the outbreak of trouble in Ukraine. And now that the crisis has turned into a full-scale war, it is imperative to make sure that he alone is blamed for this disastrous turn of events. This blame game explains why Putin is now widely portrayed as an imperialist here in the West, even though there is hardly any evidence to support that perspective.

The taproot of the crisis is the American-led effort to make Ukraine a Western bulwark on Russia's borders. That strategy has three prongs turning Ukraine into a pro-Western liberal democracy and most importantly, incorporating Ukraine into NATO.

Let me now turn to the real cause of the Ukraine crisis.

THE REAL CAUSE OF THE CRISIS

The taproot of the crisis is the American-led effort to make Ukraine a Western bulwark on Russia's borders. That strategy has three prongs:

- integrating Ukraine into the EU
- turning Ukraine into a pro-Western liberal democracy and
- most importantly, incorporating Ukraine into NATO.

The strategy was set in motion at NATO's annual summit in Bucharest in April 2008, when the alliance announced that Ukraine and Georgia "will become members." Russian leaders responded immediately with outrage, making it clear that this decision was an existential threat to Russia, and that they had no intention of letting either country join NATO. According to a respected Russian journalist, Putin "flew into a rage," and warned that "if Ukraine joins NATO, it will do so without Crimea and the eastern regions. It will simply fall apart."

William Burns, who is now the head of the CIA, but was the U.S. ambassador to Moscow at the time of the Bucharest summit. He wrote a memo to then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice that succinctly describes Russian thinking about Ukraine joining NATO. "Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all red lines for the Russian elite, not just Putin. In more than two and a half years of conversations with key Russian players, from knuckle-draggers in the dark recesses of the Kremlin to Putin's sharpest liberal critics, I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests." NATO, he said, "would be seen … as throwing down the strategic gauntlet. Today's Russia will respond. Russian-Ukrainian relations will go into a deep freeze...It will create fertile soil for Russian meddling in Crimea and eastern Ukraine."

Burns, of course, was not the only policymaker who understood that bringing Ukraine into NATO was fraught with danger. Indeed, at the Bucharest Summit, both German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy were opposed to moving forward on NATO membership for Ukraine because they feared it would infuriate Russia. Angela Merkel recently explained her opposition in an interview: "I was very sure […] that Putin is not going to just let that happen. From his perspective, that would be a declaration of war."

The Western response to the events of 2014 was to double down on the existing strategy and effectively make Ukraine a de facto member of NATO. The alliance began training the Ukrainian military in 2014, averaging 10,000 trained troops annually over the next eight years.

The Bush administration, which was pushing such a decision for NATO however, cared little about Moscow's "brightest of red lines" and pressured the French and German leaders to agree to issuing a public pronouncement that said unequivocally that Ukraine and Georgia would eventually join the alliance.

Unsurprisingly, the American-led effort to integrate Georgia into NATO resulted in a war between Georgia and Russia in August 2008—just four months after the Bucharest summit. Nevertheless, the United States and its allies continued moving forward with their plans to make Ukraine a Western bastion on Russia's borders. These efforts eventually sparked a major crisis in February 2014, after a U.S.-supported uprising caused Ukraine's pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych to flee the country. He was replaced by pro-American Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk. In response, Russia seized Crimea from Ukraine and helped fuel a civil war that broke out in the Donbass between pro-Russian separatists and the Ukrainian government.

One often hears the argument that in the eight years between when the crisis broke out in February 2014 and when the war began in February 2022, the United States and its allies paid little attention to bringing Ukraine into NATO. In effect, the issue had been taken off the table, and thus NATO enlargement could not possibly have been an important cause of

the escalating crisis in 2021 and the subsequent outbreak of war earlier this year. This line of argument is false. In fact, the Western response to the events of 2014 was to double down on the existing strategy and effectively make Ukraine a de facto member of NATO. The alliance began training the Ukrainian military in 2014, averaging 10,000 trained troops annually over the next eight years. In December 2017, the Trump administration decided to provide Kyiv with "defensive weapons." Other NATO countries quickly got into the act, shipping even more weapons to Ukraine.

There is little doubt that starting in early 2021 Ukraine began moving rapidly toward joining NATO. Some supporters of this policy argue that Moscow should not have been concerned that is not how Putin and other Russian leaders think about NATO and it is what they think that matters.

In addition, Ukraine's military began participating in joint military exercises with NATO forces. In July 2021, Kyiv and Washington co-hosted Operation Sea Breeze, a naval exercise in the Black Sea that included navies from 31 countries and was directly aimed at Russia. Two months later in September 2021, the Ukrainian army led Rapid Trident 21, which according to an official press-release from the U.S. Army was a "U.S. Army Europe and Africa assisted annual exercise designed to enhance interoperability among allied and partner nations, to demonstrate units are poised and ready to respond to any crisis." NATO's effort to arm and train Ukraine's military explains in good part why it has fared so well against Russian forces in the ongoing war. A headline in a recent issue of *The Wall Street Journal* put it quite nicely, "The Secret of Ukraine's Military Success: Years of NATO Training."

In addition to NATO's ongoing efforts to make the Ukrainian military a more formidable fighting force, the politics surrounding Ukraine's membership in NATO and its integration into the West changed in 2021. There was renewed enthusiasm for pursuing those objectives in both Kyiv and Washington. President Zelensky, who had never shown much enthusiasm for bringing Ukraine into NATO and who was elected in March 2019 on a platform that called for working with Russia to settle the ongoing crisis, reversed course in early 2021 and not only embraced NATO expansion but also adopted a hardline approach toward Moscow. He made a series of moves—like shutting down pro-Russian TV stations and arresting an especially close friend of Putin and charging him with treason—that were sure to anger Moscow.

President Biden, who moved into the White House in January 2021, had long been committed to bringing Ukraine into NATO and was also super-hawkish towards Russia. Unsurprisingly, on June 14th, 2021, NATO issued the following communiqué at its annual Brussels summit:

> *We reiterate the decision made at the 2008 Bucharest Summit that Ukraine will become a member of the Alliance with the Membership Action Plan (MAP) as an integral part of the process; we reaffirm all elements of that decision, as well as subsequent decisions, including that each partner will be judged on its own merits. We stand firm in our support for Ukraine's right to decide its own future and foreign policy course free from outside interference.*

On September 1st, 2021, Zelensky visited the White House, where Biden made it clear that the United States was "firmly committed" to "Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations." Then on November 10th, 2021, Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba, signed an important document—the "U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership." The aim of both parties, the document stated, is to "underscore […] a commitment to Ukraine's implementation of the deep and comprehensive reforms necessary for full integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions." That document explicitly builds not just on "the commitments made to strengthen the Ukraine-U.S. strategic partnership by Presidents Zelensky and Biden," but also reaffirms the U.S. commitment to the "2008 Bucharest Summit Declaration."

In short, there is little doubt that starting in early 2021 Ukraine began moving rapidly toward joining NATO. Even so, some supporters of this policy argue that Moscow should not have been concerned, because "NATO is a defensive alliance and poses no threat to Russia." But that is not how Putin and other Russian leaders think about NATO and it is what they think that matters. There is no question that Ukraine joining NATO remained the "brightest of red lines" for Moscow.

To deal with this growing threat, Putin stationed ever-increasing numbers of Russian troops on Ukraine's border between February 2021 and February 2022. His aim was to coerce Biden and Zelensky into altering course and halting their efforts to integrate Ukraine into the West. On December 17th, 2021, the Russians reached a boiling point. And Moscow sent separate letters to the Biden administration and NATO demanding a written guarantee that:

1. Ukraine would not join NATO
2. no offensive weapons would be stationed near Russia's borders, and
3. NATO troops and equipment moved into eastern Europe since 1997 would be moved back to western Europe.

Putin made numerous public statements during this period that left no doubt that he viewed NATO expansion into Ukraine as an existential threat. Speaking to the Defense Ministry Board on December 21st, 2021, he stated: "what they are doing, or trying or planning to do in Ukraine, is not happening thousands of kilometers away from our national border. It is on the doorstep of our house. They must understand that we simply have nowhere further to retreat to. Do they really think we do not see these threats? Or do they think that we will just stand idly watching threats to Russia emerge?" Two months later at a press conference on February 22nd, 2022, just days before the war started, Putin said: "we are categorically opposed to Ukraine joining NATO because this poses a threat to us, and we have arguments to support this. I have repeatedly spoken about it in this hall." He then made it clear that he recognized that Ukraine was becoming a de facto member of NATO. The United States and its allies, he said, "continue to pump the current Kyiv authorities full of modern types of weapons." He went on to say that if this was not stopped, Moscow "would be left with an 'anti-Russia' armed to the teeth. This is totally unacceptable."

This war is an unmitigated disaster for Ukraine. Putin made it clear in 2008 that Russia would wreck Ukraine to prevent it from joining NATO. He is delivering on that promise.

Putin's logic should be manifestly clear to Americans in the audience, who have long understood that we have the Monroe Doctrine, which stipulates that no distant great power is allowed to place any of its military forces in the Western Hemisphere.

I might note that in all of Putin's public statements during the months leading up to the war, there is not a scintilla of evidence that he was contemplating conquering Ukraine and making it part of Russia, much less attacking other countries in Eastern Europe. Other Russian leaders—including the defense minister, the foreign minister, the deputy foreign minister, and the Russian ambassador to Washington—also emphasized the centrality of NATO expansion for causing the Ukraine crisis. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov made the point succinctly at a press conference on January 14th, 2022, when he said, "the key to everything is the guarantee that NATO will not expand eastward."

Nevertheless, the efforts of Lavrov and Putin to get the United States and its allies to abandon their efforts to make Ukraine a Western bulwark on Russia's border failed completely. Secretary of State Antony Blinken responded to Russia's mid-December demands by simply saying, "There is no change. There will be no change." Putin then launched an invasion of Ukraine to eliminate the threat he saw from NATO.

WHERE ARE WE NOW & WHERE ARE WE GOING?

The Ukraine war has been raging for almost four months I would like to make three separate points. 1) I would like to talk about the specific consequences of the war for Ukraine; 2) the prospects for escalation; and 3) the prospects for ending the war in the foreseeable future.

Both Russia and the United States are deeply committed to winning the war and it is impossible to fashion an agreement where both sides win. The key to a settlement from Russia's perspective is making Ukraine a neutral state that outcome is unacceptable to the Biden administration and a large portion of the American foreign policy establishment, because it would represent a victory for Russia.

This war is an unmitigated disaster for Ukraine. As I noted earlier, Putin made it clear in 2008 that Russia would wreck Ukraine to prevent it from joining NATO. He is delivering on that promise. Russian forces have conquered at least 20 percent of Ukrainian territory and destroyed or badly damaged many Ukrainian cities and towns. More than 6.5 million Ukrainians have fled the country, while more than 8 million have been internally displaced. Many thousands of Ukrainians—including innocent civilians—are dead or badly wounded and the Ukrainian economy is in shambles. The World Bank estimates that Ukraine's economy will shrink by almost 50 percent over the course of 2022. Estimates are that approximately $100 billion worth of damage has been inflicted on Ukraine and that it will take close to a trillion dollars to rebuild the country. In the meantime, Kyiv requires about $5 billion of aid every month just to keep the government running.

Furthermore, there appears to be little hope that Ukraine will be able to regain use of its ports on the Azov and Black Seas anytime soon. Before the war, roughly 70 percent of all Ukrainian exports and imports—and 98 percent of its grain exports—moved through these ports. This is the basic situation after less than four months of fighting. It is downright scary to contemplate what Ukraine will look like if this war drags on for a few more years.

So, what are the prospects for negotiating a peace agreement and ending the war in the next few months? I am sorry to say that I see no way this

war ends anytime soon. This is a view shared by prominent policymakers on both the Western and the Russian sides. The main reason for my pessimism is that both Russia and the United States are deeply committed to winning the war and it is impossible to fashion an agreement where both sides win. To be more specific, the key to a settlement from Russia's perspective is making Ukraine a neutral state, which means that Ukraine must divorce itself from the West, especially the United States. But that outcome is unacceptable to the Biden administration and a large portion of the American foreign policy establishment, because it would represent a victory for Russia.

It is hard to fathom Moscow voluntarily giving up any of the Ukrainian territory it now occupies, as Russia's territorial goals today are probably not the ones they started the war with.

Ukrainian leaders have agency of course, and one might hope that—given all the horror being inflicted on their country—they will push for neutralization to spare their country further harm. Indeed, Zelensky briefly mentioned that possibility in the first month of the war, but he never seriously pursued it. There is little chance, however, that Kyiv will push for neutralization, because the ultra-nationalists in Ukraine, who wield significant political power, have zero interest in yielding to any of Russia's demands, especially one that dictates Ukraine's political alignment with the outside world. The Biden administration and the countries on NATO's eastern flank—Poland and the Baltic states—are likely to support Ukraine's ultra-nationalists on this issue.

To complicate matters further, how does one deal with the large swaths of Ukrainian territory that Russia has conquered since the war started, as well as Crimea's fate? It is hard to fathom Moscow voluntarily giving up any of the Ukrainian territory it now occupies, much less all of it, as Russia's territorial goals today are probably not the ones they started the war with. At the same time, it is difficult to imagine any Ukrainian leader accepting a deal that allows Russia to keep any Ukrainian territory, except possibly Crimea. I certainly hope I am wrong, but I see no end in sight to this ruinous war.

Let me now turn to the matter of escalation. It is widely accepted among international relations scholars that there is a powerful tendency for protracted wars to escalate. Other countries can get dragged into the fight and the level of violence is likely to escalate. The potential for this happening in the Ukraine war is real. There is a danger that the United States and its NATO allies will get dragged into the fighting, which they have been able to avoid up to this point, even though we are now effectively at war with Russia. There is also the possibility that nuclear weapons might be used in Ukraine and that might even lead to a nuclear exchange between Russia and the United States. The underlying reason these outcomes might be realized is that the stakes are so high for both sides, and thus neither can afford to lose.

Putin and his lieutenants believe that Ukraine joining the West is an existential threat to Russia that must be eliminated. In practical terms, that means Russia must win its war in Ukraine.

As I have emphasized, Putin and his lieutenants believe that Ukraine joining the West is an existential threat to Russia that must be eliminated. In practical terms, that means Russia must win its war in Ukraine. Defeat is unacceptable. The Biden administration, on the other hand, has stressed that its goal is not only to defeat the Russians in Ukraine, but also to use sanctions to inflict egregious damage on the Russian economy. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin has emphasized that the West's goal is to weaken Russia to the point where it could not invade Ukraine again. In effect, the Biden administration is committed to knocking Russia out of the ranks of the great powers. At the same time, President Biden himself has called Russia's war in Ukraine a "genocide" and charged Putin with being a "war criminal" who should face a "war crimes trial" after the war. Such rhetoric hardly lends itself to negotiating an end to the war. After all, how do you negotiate with a genocidal state?

American policy has two significant consequences. For starters, it greatly amplifies the existential threat Moscow faces in this war and makes it more important than ever that it prevails in Ukraine. At the same time, it means the United States is deeply committed to making sure that Russia loses. The Biden administration has now invested so much in the Ukraine war—both materially and rhetorically—that a Russian victory would represent a devastating defeat for Washington.

Obviously, both sides cannot win. Moreover, there is a serious possibility that one side will begin to lose badly. If American policy succeeds and the Russians are losing to the Ukrainians on the battlefield, Putin might turn to nuclear weapons to rescue the situation. The U.S. Director of National Intelligence, Avril Haines, told the Senate Armed Services Committee in May 2022 that this was one of the two situations that might lead Putin to use nuclear weapons in Ukraine. For those of you who

think this is unlikely, please remember that NATO planned to use nuclear weapons in similar circumstances during the Cold War. We were planning to use nuclear weapons in West Germany if the Warsaw Pact overran it. If Russia were to employ nuclear weapons in Ukraine, it is difficult to say how the Biden administration would react, but it surely would be under great pressure to retaliate, thus raising the possibility of a great-power nuclear war. There is a perverse paradox at play here. The more successful the United States and its allies are at achieving their war aims, the more likely it is that the war will turn nuclear.

Obviously, both sides cannot win. Moreover, there is a serious possibility that one side will begin to lose badly. If American policy succeeds and the Russians are losing to the Ukrainians on the battlefield, Putin might turn to nuclear weapons to rescue the situation.

Let's turn the tables and ask what happens if the United States and its NATO allies appear to be heading toward defeat, which effectively means that the Russians are routing the Ukrainian military and the government in Kyiv moves to negotiate a peace deal intended to save as much of the country as possible. In that event, there would be tremendous pressure on the United States and its allies to get even more deeply involved in the fighting. It is not likely, but certainly possible that American or maybe Polish troops would get pulled into the fighting, which means NATO would literally be at war with Russia. This is the other scenario, according to Avril Haines, where the Russians might turn to nuclear weapons. It is difficult to say precisely how events will play out in the Ukraine war, but there is no question there will be serious potential for escalation, to include nuclear escalation. The mere possibility of that outcome should send shivers down your spine.

There are likely to be other disastrous consequences from this war, which I cannot discuss in any detail because of time constraints. For example, there is reason to think the war will lead to a world food crisis in which many millions of people will die.

Furthermore, relations between Russia and the West have been so thoroughly poisoned that it will take many years to repair them. In the meantime, that profound hostility will fuel instability around the globe, but especially in Europe. Some will say there is a silver lining: relations among countries in the West have markedly improved, Transatlantic relations, NATO and the EU are in better shape than ever. That is true for the moment, but there are deep fissures below the surface, and they are likely to manifest themselves over time. For example, relations between the countries of eastern and western Europe are likely to deteriorate as the war drags on.

Finally, the conflict is already damaging the global economy in major ways and this situation is likely to get worse with time. Jamie Diamond, the CEO of JPMorgan Chase says we should brace ourselves for an economic "hurricane." These economic shocks will affect the politics of every Western country, undermining liberal democracy, and strengthening its opponents on both the left and the right.

The tragic truth is that if the West had not pursued NATO expansion into Ukraine, it is unlikely there would be a war in Ukraine today and Crimea would still be part of Ukraine.

In conclusion, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine is a colossal disaster, which as I noted at the start of my talk, will lead people all around the world to search for its causes. Those who believe in facts and logic will quickly discover that the United States and its allies are mainly responsible for this train wreck. The April 2008 decision to bring Ukraine and Georgia into NATO was destined to lead to conflict with Russia. The Bush administration was the principal architect of that fateful choice, but the Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations have doubled down on that policy at every turn and America's allies have dutifully followed Washington's lead. Even though Russian leaders made it perfectly clear that bringing Ukraine into NATO would be crossing "the brightest of red lines," the United States simply refused to accommodate Russia's deepest security concerns and instead moved relentlessly to make Ukraine a Western bulwark on Russia's border.

The tragic truth is that if the West had not pursued NATO expansion into Ukraine, it is unlikely there would be a war in Ukraine today and Crimea would still be part of Ukraine. In essence, Washington played the central role in leading Ukraine down the path to destruction. History will judge the United States and its allies with abundant harshness for their remarkably foolish policy on Ukraine. Thank you.

WHAT PUTIN FEARS MOST

Michael McFaul & Robert Person

RUSSIA'S brutal invasion of Ukraine has ignited the largest war in Europe since World War II, indiscriminately spilling the blood of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers and innocent civilians. Russian President Vladimir Putin wants you to believe that NATO is to blame. He has frequently claimed that NATO expansion—not the 200,000 Russian soldiers and sailors attacking Ukraine's ports, airfields, roads, railways, and cities—is the central driver of this crisis. Following John Mearsheimer's provocative 2014 *Foreign Affairs* article arguing that "the Ukraine crisis is the West's fault," the narrative of Russian backlash against NATO expansion has become a dominant framework for explaining—if not justifying—Moscow's ongoing war against Ukraine. This notion has been repeated not only in Moscow but in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere by politicians, analysts, and writers. Multiple rounds of enlargement, they argue, exacerbated Russia's sense of insecurity as NATO forces crept closer to Russia's borders, finally provoking Putin to lash out violently, first by invading Georgia in 2008, then Ukraine in 2014, and now a second, likely far larger, invasion of Ukraine today. By this telling, the specter of Ukraine's NATO membership points both to the cause of the conflict and its solution: take membership off the table for Ukraine, so the argument goes, and future wars will be prevented.

This argument has two flaws, one about history and one about Putin's thinking. First, NATO expansion has not been a *constant* source of tension between Russia and the West, but a *variable*. Over the last 30 years, the salience

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Photo: Guliver Image

A wave of "democratic expansion": the 2013 EuroMaidan protests in Kyiv

of the issue has risen and fallen not primarily due to waves of NATO expansion, but instead as a result of waves of democratic expansion in Eurasia. In a very clear pattern, Moscow's complaints about the alliance spike after democratic breakthroughs. While the tragic invasions and occupations of Georgia and Ukraine have secured Putin a de facto veto over their NATO aspirations, since the alliance would never admit a country under partial occupation by Russian forces, this fact undermines Putin's claim that the current invasion is aimed at NATO membership. He has already blocked NATO expansion for all intents and purposes, thereby revealing that he wants something far more significant in Ukraine today: the end of democracy and the return of subjugation. On February 24th, 2022, in an hour-long, meandering rant explaining his decision to invade, he said so directly.

This reality highlights the second flaw: because the primary threat to Putin and his autocratic regime is democracy, not NATO, that perceived threat would not magically disappear with a moratorium on NATO expansion. Putin would not stop seeking to undermine democracy and sovereignty in Ukraine, Georgia, or the region as a whole if NATO stopped expanding. As long as citizens in free

countries exercise their democratic rights to elect their own leaders and set their own course in domestic and foreign politics, Putin will continue to try to undermine them. Putin's declared goal of "denazification" in Ukraine is a code word for regime change—antidemocratic regime change.

HOW WE GOT HERE

To be sure, NATO and its expansion have always been sources of tension in U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-Russian relations. Two decades ago, one of us coauthored (with James Goldgeier) a book on U.S-Russia relations entitled *Power and Purpose: U.S. Policy toward Russia After the Cold War* (2003), which includes a chapter called "NATO Is a Four-Letter Word." To varying degrees, Kremlin leaders Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin, and Dmitri Medvedev have expressed concerns about the expansion of the alliance.

Since its founding in 1949, NATO has kept its door open to new members who meet the criteria for admission. After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, no one should be surprised that countries formerly annexed, subjugated, and invaded by the Soviet Union might seek closer security ties to the West. The United States and other NATO allies have worked hard not to deny the aspirations of those newly free societies while also partnering with Russia on European and other security issues. They have sometimes had success and sometimes not.

Because the primary threat to Putin and his autocratic regime is democracy, not NATO, that perceived threat would not magically disappear with a moratorium on NATO expansion.

Many of those who blame the current Ukraine conflict on NATO overlook the fact that in the 30 years since the end of the Cold War, Moscow's rejection of NATO expansion has veered in different directions at different times.

When President Boris Yeltsin agreed to sign the Russia-NATO Founding Act in 1997, Russia and the alliance codified into this agreement a comprehensive agenda of cooperation. At the signing ceremony Yeltsin declared,

> What is also very important is that we are creating the mechanisms for consultations and cooperation between Russia and the Alliance. And this will enable us—on a fair, egalitarian basis—to discuss, and when need be, pass joint decisions on major issues relating to security and stabilities, those issues and those areas which touch upon our interests.

In 2000 while visiting London, Putin, then serving as acting Russian president, even suggested that Russia could join NATO someday:

> Why not? Why not [...] I do not rule out such a possibility [...] in the case that Russia's interests will be reckoned with, if it will be an equal partner. Russia is a part of European culture, and I do not consider my own country in isolation from Europe [...] Therefore, it is with difficulty that I imagine NATO as an enemy.

Why would Putin want to join an alliance allegedly threatening Russia?

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, American President George W. Bush and Putin forged a close, cooperative relationship to fight a common enemy: terrorism. At the time, Putin was focused on cooperation with NATO, not confrontation. The only time the alliance has ever invoked Article 5 on collective defense was to support a NATO intervention in Afghanistan, an action that Putin supported at the UN Security Council. He then followed up this diplomatic support with concrete military assistance for the alliance, including helping the United States to establish military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. If NATO was *always* a threat to Russia and its "sphere of influence," why did Putin facilitate the opening of these bases in the former Soviet Union?

During his November 2001 visit to the United States, Putin struck a realistic but cooperative tone:

> We differ in the ways and means we perceive that are suitable for reaching the same objective ... [But] one can rest assured that whatever final solution is found, it will not threaten ... the interests of both our countries and of the world.

In an interview that month, Putin declared,

> Russia acknowledges the role of NATO in the world of today, Russia is prepared to expand its cooperation with this organization. And if we change the quality of the relationship, if we change the format of the relationship between Russia and NATO, then I think NATO enlargement will cease to be an issue—will no longer be a relevant issue.

When NATO announced in 2002 its plan for a major (and last big) wave of expansion that would include three former Soviet republics—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—Putin barely reacted. He certainly did not threaten to invade any of the countries to keep them out of NATO. When American journalist Robert Siegel asked Putin specifically in late 2001 whether he opposed the Baltic states' membership in NATO, he stated, "We of course are not in a position to tell people what to do. We cannot forbid people to make certain choices if they want to increase the security of their nations in a particular way."

Putin even maintained the same attitude when it was a question of Ukraine someday entering the Atlantic Alliance. In May 2002, when asked for his views on the future of Ukraine's relations with NATO, Putin dispassionately replied,

> I am absolutely convinced that Ukraine will not shy away from the processes of expanding interaction with NATO and the Western allies as a whole. Ukraine has its own relations with NATO; there is the Ukraine-NATO Council. At the end of the day, the decision is to be taken by NATO and Ukraine. It is a matter for those two partners.

A decade later, under President Medvedev, Russia and NATO were cooperating once again. At the 2010 NATO summit in Lisbon, Medvedev declared,

> The period of distance in our relations and claims against each other is over now. We view the future with optimism and will work on developing relations between Russia and NATO in all areas ... [as they progress toward] a full-fledged partnership.

At that summit, he even floated the possibility of Russia-NATO cooperation on missile defense. Complaints about NATO expansion never arose.

From the end of the Cold War until Putin's invasion of Ukraine in 2014, NATO in Europe was drawing down resources and forces, not building them up. Even while expanding membership, NATO's military capacity in Europe was much greater in the 1990s than in the 2000s. During this same period, Putin was spending significant resources to modernize and expand Russia's conventional forces deployed in Europe. The balance of power between NATO and Russia was shifting in favor of Moscow.

These episodes of substantive Russia-NATO cooperation undermine the argument that NATO expansion has always and continuously been *the* driver of Russia's confrontation with the West during the last three decades. The historical record simply does not support the thesis that an expanding NATO bears sole blame for Russian antagonism with the West and Moscow's aggression against Ukraine since 2014. Rather, we must look elsewhere to understand the genuine source of Putin's hostility to Ukraine and its Western partners.

The more serious cause of tensions has been a series of democratic breakthroughs and popular protests for freedom in post-communist countries throughout the 2000s, which many, including Putin, refer to as the "color revolutions." Putin believes that Russian national interests have been threatened by what he portrays as U.S.-supported coups. After each of them—Serbia in 2000, Georgia in 2003, Ukraine in 2004, the Arab Spring in 2011, Russia in 2011–12, and Ukraine in 2013–14—Putin has pivoted to more hostile policies toward the United States, and then invoked the NATO threat as justification for doing so.

Boris Yeltsin never supported NATO expansion but acquiesced to the plans on the first round of expansion in 1997—by signing an agreement with NATO that included references to new membership—because he believed that his close ties to President Bill Clinton and the United States were not worth sacrificing over this comparatively smaller matter. Through NATO's Partnership for Peace program and especially the NATO-Russia Founding Act, Clinton and his team made a considerable effort to keep U.S.-Russian relations positive while at the same time managing NATO expansion. The 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia to stop ethnic cleansing in Kosovo severely tested that strategy but survived in part because Clinton gave Yeltsin and Russia a role in the negotiated solution. When the first post-communist color revolution overthrew Slobodan Milošević a year later, Russia's new president, Putin, deplored the act but did not overreact. At that time, he still entertained the possibility of cooperation with the West, including NATO.

Ukraine's relationship with NATO and the United States was just a symptom of what Putin believes is the underlying disease: a sovereign, democratic Ukraine.

Yet the next round of democratic expansion in the post-Soviet world, the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia, escalated U.S.-Russian tensions significantly. Putin blamed the United States directly for assisting this democratic breakthrough and helping to install someone whom he saw as a pro-American puppet, President Mikheil Saakashvili. Immediately after the Rose Revolution, Putin sought to undermine Georgian democracy, ultimately invading in August 2008 and recognizing two Georgian regions—Abkhazia and South Ossetia—as independent states. U.S.-Russian relations reached a new post-Soviet low in 2008.

A year after the Rose Revolution, the most consequential democratic expansion in the post-Soviet world, the Orange Revolution, erupted in Ukraine in 2004. In the years prior to that democratic breakthrough, Ukraine's foreign-policy orientation under President Leonid Kuchma was relatively balanced between east and west, but with gradually improving ties between Kyiv and Moscow. That changed when a falsified presidential election in late 2004 brought hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians into the streets, eventually sweeping away Kuchma's—and Putin's—handpicked successor, Viktor Yanukovych. Instead, the prodemocratic and pro-Western Orange Coalition led by President Viktor Yushchenko and Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko took power.

Compared to Serbia in 2000 or Georgia in 2003, Ukraine's Orange Revolution was a much larger threat to Putin. First, the Orange Revolution occurred suddenly and in a much bigger and more strategic country on Russia's border. The abrupt pivot to the West by Yushchenko and his allies left Putin facing the prospect that he had "lost" a country on which he placed tremendous symbolic and strategic importance.

To Putin, the Orange Revolution undermined a core objective of his grand strategy: to establish a privileged and exclusive sphere of influence across the territory that once comprised the Soviet Union.

To Putin, the Orange Revolution undermined a core objective of his grand strategy: to establish a privileged and exclusive sphere of influence across the territory that once comprised the Soviet Union. Putin believes in spheres of influence—that as a great power, Russia has a right to veto the sovereign political decisions of its neighbors. Putin also demands exclusivity in his neighborhood: Russia can be the only great power to exercise such privilege (or even to develop close ties) with these countries. This position has hardened significantly since Putin's conciliatory stance of 2002 as Russia's influence in Ukraine has waned and Ukraine's citizens have repeatedly signaled their desire to escape Moscow's grip. Subservience is now required. As Putin explained in a recent article, in his view Ukrainians and Russians are "one people" whom he is seeking to reunite, even if through coercion. For Putin, therefore, the 2004 "loss" of Ukraine to the West marked a major negative turning point in U.S.-Russian relations that was far more salient than the second wave of NATO expansion that was completed the same year.

Second, those Ukrainians who rose up in defense of their freedom were, in Putin's own assessment, Slavic brethren with close historical, religious, and cultural ties to Russia. If it could happen in Kyiv, why not in Moscow? Several years later, it almost did occur in Russia when a series of mass protests erupted in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and other cities in the wake of fraudulent parliamentary elections in December 2011. They were the largest protests in Russia since 1991, the year the Soviet Union collapsed. For the first time in Putin's decade-plus in power, ordinary Russians showed themselves to have both the will and the capability to threaten his grip on power. That popular uprising in Russia occurred the same year as the Arab Spring and was followed by Putin's return to the Kremlin as president for a third term in 2012. The combination of these mass protests and Putin's reelection as president caused another major negative turn in U.S.-Russian relations and ended the "reset" launched by Presidents Barack Obama and Dmitri Medvedev in 2009. Democratic mobilization, first in the Middle East and then across Russia—not NATO expansion—ended this last chapter of U.S.-Russian cooperation. There have been no new chapters of cooperation since.

For Putin the 2004 "loss" of Ukraine to the West marked a major negative turning point in U.S.-Russian relations that was far more salient than the second wave of NATO expansion that was completed the same year.

U.S.-Russian relations deteriorated even further in 2014, again because of new democratic expansion, not NATO expansion. The next democratic mobilization to threaten Putin happened again in Ukraine in 2013–14. After the Orange Revolution in 2004, Putin did not invade Ukraine, but wielded other instruments of influence to help his protégé, Viktor Yanukovych, narrowly win the Ukrainian presidency six years later. Yanukovych, however, turned out not to be a loyal Kremlin servant, but tried to cultivate ties with both Russia and the West. Putin finally compelled Yanukovych to make a choice, and the Ukrainian President chose Russia in November 2013 when he reneged on signing an EU association agreement in favor of pursing membership in Russia's Eurasian Economic Union.

To the surprise of everyone in Moscow, Kyiv, Brussels, and Washington, Yanukovych's decision to scuttle this agreement with the EU triggered mass demonstrations in Ukraine again, with hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians pouring into the streets in what would become known as the EuroMaidan or "Revolution of Dignity" to protest Yanukovych's turn away from the democratic West. The street protests lasted several weeks, punctuated tragically by the killing of dozens of peaceful protestors by Yanukovych's government, the eventual collapse of that government and Yanukovych's flight to Russia in February 2014, and a new pro-Western government taking power in Kyiv. Putin had "lost" Ukraine for the second time in a decade, again because of democratic regime change.

But this time, Putin struck back with military force to punish the alleged U.S.-backed, neo-Nazi usurpers in Kyiv. Russian armed forces seized Crimea; Moscow later annexed the Ukrainian peninsula. Putin also provided money, equipment, and soldiers to back separatists in eastern Ukraine, fueling a simmering eight-year war in Donbas that claimed the lives of approximately

14,000 people. After invading—not before—Putin amped up his criticisms of NATO expansion to justify his belligerent actions.

In response to the second Ukrainian democratic revolution, Putin concluded that cooptation through elections and other nonmilitary means had to be augmented with greater coercive pressure, including military intervention. Since the Revolution of Dignity, Putin has waged an unprecedented assault against Ukraine's democracy using a full spectrum of military, political, informational, social, and economic weapons in an attempt to destabilize and eventually topple Ukraine's democratically elected government. Ukraine's relationship with NATO and the United States was just a symptom of what Putin believes is the underlying disease: a sovereign, democratic Ukraine.

In response to the second Ukrainian democratic revolution, Putin concluded that cooptation through elections and other nonmilitary means had to be augmented with greater coercive pressure, including military intervention.

PUTIN'S REAL *CASUS BELLI*

Amazingly, eight years of unrelenting Russian pressure did not break Ukraine's democracy. Just the opposite. After Putin's annexation and ongoing support for the war in Donbas, Ukrainians are now more united across ethnic, linguistic, and regional divides than at any other point in Ukrainian history. In 2019, Volodymyr Zelensky won the Ukrainian presidency in a landslide election, winning popular support in every region of the country. Not surprisingly, Putin's war in eastern Ukraine also has fueled greater enthusiasm for joining NATO among Ukrainians.

In February 2022, Putin embarked on a new strategy for ending Ukrainian democracy: massive military intervention. Putin claims that his purpose is to stop NATO expansion. But that is a fiction. Nothing in Ukraine-NATO relations has changed in the past year. It is true that Ukraine aspires to join NATO someday. (The goal is even embedded in the Ukrainian constitution.) But while NATO leaders have remained committed to the principle of an open-door policy, they also clearly stated prior to the war that Ukraine was not yet qualified to join. Putin's *casus belli* is his own invention.

On the eve of his invasion, Putin's strategy to undermine Ukrainian democracy looked as if it might succeed without military force. The very threat of war did significant damage to the Ukrainian economy and fueled new divisions among Ukraine's political parties over how Zelensky handled the leadup to the crisis. Some argued that Zelensky should have created a new grand coalition or unity government; others lamented his alleged inadequate preparations for war. And some claimed that Zelensky showed his diplomatic inexperience by arguing with U.S. President Joe Biden about the probability of a Russian invasion at a time when unity with the West was most needed.

But an impatient and angry Putin could not wait anymore. He attacked with the full might of the Russian armed forces. As we all know, the war is still raging.

Russia's aggression has galvanized a Ukrainian people who will forevermore turn their backs on Muscovy's autocracy, choosing instead to embrace the universal value of freedom—freedom from Russian domination, freedom to choose their own destiny, freedom to live in peace.

Putin's strategy has backfired thus far. Contrary to his expectations, Putin's use of force has strengthened Ukrainian democracy, not weakened it. His decision to invade Ukraine has united Ukrainians and strengthened Zelensky's popularity and image as a leader of the nation. While Putin has remained isolated from his subjects and even his own courtiers while his bombs wreak devastation in a far-off land, the charismatic Zelensky has vowed to stay in Kyiv with his soldiers and fight for Ukraine's democratic future, rallying public opinion in Ukraine and around the world. Putin may still believe that there is no such thing as a Ukrainian nation, as he has claimed on multiple occasions. But just as warfare has forged national identities for centuries, Russia's aggression has galvanized a Ukrainian people who will forevermore turn their backs on Muscovy's autocracy, choosing instead to embrace the universal value of freedom—freedom from Russian domination, freedom to choose their own destiny, freedom to live in peace.

But despite early Ukrainian successes on the battlefield, the long-term survival of Ukraine's democracy hangs in the balance. Putin's continued bellicose rhetoric and rejection of any serious attempts to negotiate a ceasefire suggest that Moscow's assault will continue unabated. Russia's initial military operations suggest that Putin envisioned a blitzkrieg invasion from multiple fronts that would face little resistance and rapidly encircle Kyiv, resulting in Zelensky's forcible removal from power. New elections held at gunpoint would then deliver Putin his desired puppet government, just as they did in post–World War II Eastern Europe in the shadow of Soviet tanks.

In one Ukrainian city, Melitopol, in a facsimile of Stalin's methods in Eastern Europe after 1945, Russia's occupying forces have already removed the mayor and installed a Moscow puppet. At the time of this writing, however, Russia's military has been bogged down by fierce Ukrainian resistance and is now settling in for the unpleasant prospect of a long, bloody slog across miles of inhospitable Ukrainian territory. Russia's armies will be treated by Ukrainians as the occupiers of 1941, not the liberators of 1945. It is too early to predict the outcome of this gruesome war. But despite the Russian army's relatively poor performance so far, there is no evidence to suggest that Putin has abandoned his objective to remove Zelensky from power and subjugate Ukraine to Moscow's control.

Putin may dislike NATO expansion, but he is not genuinely frightened by it. Russia has the largest army in Europe, engorged by two decades of lavish spending. NATO is a defensive alliance. It has never attacked the Soviet Union or Russia, and it never will.

Putin may dislike NATO expansion, but he is not genuinely frightened by it. Russia has the largest army in Europe, engorged by two decades of lavish spending. NATO is a defensive alliance. It has never attacked the Soviet Union or Russia, and it never will. Putin knows that. But Putin is threatened by a flourishing democracy in Ukraine. He cannot tolerate a successful and democratic Ukraine on Russia's border, especially if the Ukrainian people also begin to prosper economically. That would undermine the Kremlin's own regime stability and proposed rationale for autocratic state leadership. Just as Putin cannot allow the will of the Russian people to guide Russia's future, he cannot allow the people of Ukraine, who have a shared culture and history, to realize the prosperous, independent, and free future that they have voted and fought for.

Although the chance of a stable ceasefire seems remote today, unprecedented sanctions and growing public dissent within Russia could, in theory, force Putin to the negotiating table. The fog of war is dense. But regardless of where the Russian invaders are stopped—be it Luhansk and Donetsk or Kharkiv, Mariupol, Kherson, Odesa, Kyiv, or Lviv—the Kremlin will remain committed to undermining Ukrainian (and Georgian, Moldovan, Armenian, and the list goes on) democracy and sovereignty for as long as Putin remains in power and maybe longer if Russian autocracy continues. And the Ukrainian people have already proved their mettle: they will fight for their democracy until the day Russian forces leave Ukraine.

WHY RUSSIA INVADED UKRAINE

Taras Kuzio

DURING the 2014 Ukraine crisis, influential Western scholars and think-tank experts blamed the West, the United States, NATO, and even the EU for the crisis and deflected the blame from Russian President Vladimir Putin. In 2022, following Russia's invasion, this group of scholars and experts are suspiciously quiet. Why? Because blaming the West never had any facts to back it up in the first place. Western policymakers and experts began to change their minds after Putin's long 6,000-word article published in July 2021, which brought together arguments that he and other Kremlin leaders had been making since the mid-2000s. Still, these arguments had been noticed by a small number of scholars, such as this author in his 2017 book *Putin's War Against Ukraine*. Putin's July 2021 essay is his ideological treatise for the February 2022 invasion.

Russia invaded Ukraine because Putin has held a long-term obsession with Ukraine as a Little Russian part of the pan-Russian nation (*obshcherusskij narod*), together with Great Russians and White Russians (Belarusians). This stagnation in Russian attitudes to Ukrainians came about as a consequence of the rehabilitation of White Russian emigres, which took place from the mid-2000s. White Russian emigres believed the Bolsheviks had created an "artificial" Ukrainian nation, a view upheld by Putin who is an arch critic of Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin. According to this conspiratorial mindset, Ukrainians were artificially built by the Austrians in the late nineteenth century; Poles and Lenin in the early twentieth; and the United States, CIA, and the EU in more recent times. Ukraine is, in the minds of the Kremlin, a U.S. puppet state that is preventing Little Russians from fulfilling their destiny of uniting

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Photo: Guliver Image

Destruction and disintegration: an Orthodox church in Ukraine

with Russians. Hence, Putin believed that Russian troops would be welcomed by Little Russians as 'liberators.' Needless to say, nothing of the kind has happened to this day.

Most Western experts on Russian nationalism ignored this. Two major books, one edited by Pal Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud and entitled *The New Russian Nationalism: Imperialism, Ethnicity and Authoritarianism 2000-15* (2016), and another authored by Marlene Laruelle and published under the title *Russian Nationalism: Imaginaries, Doctrines, and Political Battlefields* (2019), are both glaring examples of the same mistake. The lack of understanding of the Kremlin's military aggression against Ukraine since 2014 was the reason I published my book *Crisis in Russian Studies* (2020). Putin's obsession is center-stage in my book entitled *Russian Nationalism and the Russian-Ukrainian War* (2022), published only three weeks before the invasion. Ignoring Putin's obsession with losing Ukraine is surprising, as he said in his first year in power in 2001, "we must do something, or we'll lose it." A senior Russian official told *The Financial Times* "we will not allow Europe and the U.S. to take Ukraine from us." Russia's leaders believe that Ukrainian history and

territory belong to Russian history and the Russian state.

Putin's obsession and unwillingness to recognize a Ukrainian state and nation is a step backwards from the Soviet regime, for which he has deep nostalgia. The Soviet regime recognized Ukraine as a 'sovereign' republic within the USSR, successfully lobbied for it to be a founding member of the UN (the USR had three seats) and recognized the Ukrainian language. In Soviet historiography and propaganda, Ukrainians were separate to but close to Russians. In Putin's world, Ukrainians do not exist and are a branch of the pan-Russian people.

Ukraine is, in the minds of the Kremlin, a U.S. puppet state that is preventing Little Russians from fulfilling their destiny of uniting with Russians. Hence, Putin believed that Russian troops would be welcomed by Little Russians as 'liberators.' Needless to say, nothing of the kind has happened to this day.

Putin's deep obsession with Ukraine means that as long as he is Russian President, the Russo-Ukrainian war will continue. There are three major reasons for this. The first is that Putin is de facto president for life following the summer 2020 changes to the Russian constitution that extended his term in office until 2036. The second is that Putin is not the *only* problem, it is also Russian chauvinism—specifically a denial of the existence of Ukraine and Ukrainians. Such beliefs are commonly held across the political spectrum in Russia and among most Russian elites. After all, even jailed opposition leader Alexei Navalny said that Russians and Ukrainians are 'one people,' and has supported Russia's annexation of Crimea. Thirdly, the root origins of the annexation of Crimea and Russo-Ukrainian war are Russian national identity, and we know from historical examples in other countries that these do not change over-night.

Negotiating peace will be nearly impossible because compromise is not something Russian leaders will contemplate towards what they regard as a renegade "Russian province." The Kremlin demands that Ukraine acts like Belarus, and its future presidents mimic Russian satrap Aleksandr Lukashenka. Russian "normality" in Ukraine would be achieved once Little Russia acts like White Russia. For this to happen, Russia needs to change Ukraine's identity to an eastern Slavic (i.e., Russian-Ukrainian) identity similar to the Russian-Belarusian which exists in Belarus.

Russians and Ukrainians have looked at the annexation of Crimea in starkly different terms. Since 2014, there was a constant level of Russian support for Crimea's annexation of between 84-86 percent, with only 10 percent opposed. The Moscow-based Levada Centre, Russia's last remaining independent pollster, said this was the most stable polling figure they had. In contrast, Ukrainians have never accepted Russia's occupation of Crimea and a high 68 percent of Ukrainians supported using all means necessary to return Crimea.

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Ukrainians and Russians have also looked very differently at the question of Russian speakers in the Donbas and Southeast Ukraine. No Ukrainian opinion poll has ever had more than 5-10 percent complaining about the alleged persecution of Russian speakers. A poll after Russia's invasion found that only 2 percent of Ukrainians believed the Kremlin's claim of genocide of Russian speakers as the reason for the invasion.

High proportions of Russians have supported separatism in Ukraine, in both Crimea and the Donbas, believing Kremlin propaganda about the alleged persecution of Russian speakers. Fifty-three percent of Russians supported the detachment of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) either as "independent" states or annexed by Russia, with only 26 percent supporting them remaining within Ukraine. In 2014-2015, during the height of the Russian-Ukrainian war, an average of 60 percent of Russians supported "volunteers" (i.e., nationalist mercenaries) fighting for the DNR and LNR. Fifty-two percent of Russians believed the Kremlin's disinformation, which claimed that there are no Russian armed forces in Ukraine, with only 3-4 percent believing the war is due to Russian military intervention. Russians had bought into the conflict as a "civil war" between Russian and Ukrainian speakers. Seventy percent of Russian citizens supported the distribution of Russian passports to Ukrainian citizens with only 22 percent opposed. These polling results explain why such a high proportion of Russians support the invasion.

The Role of White Russian Émigrés

There are two inter-related drivers of Russian policy towards Ukraine. The first is chauvinism, which I define as a Russian unwillingness to

accept the existence of a Ukrainian independent state and a Ukrainian nation. The second is that Russian policy seeks to prevent "losing" Ukraine, which the Kremlin sees as belonging within the *Russkij Mir* (Russian World) under Russia's elder brother leadership. In the Kremlin's eyes, the eastern Slavic Russian World is the core of the Eurasian Economic Union in a similar role to how the eastern Slavs were the core of the Soviet Union.

Since 2005, Putin has supported the rehabilitation of White Russian émigré writers and military officers and their re-burial in Russia. The reburials were personally supervised by Putin. In 2007, the Russian World Foundation was created which used soft power and covert means to subvert Ukraine and Russia's neighbors. The Russian World was defined by Russian culture and the Russian language; state boundaries were irrelevant.

In the same year the domestic and émigré branches of the Russian Orthodox Churches were re-united. The émigré Russian Orthodox Church's chauvinism towards Ukraine and Ukrainians had been frozen in time since the 1920s and through its alliance with white Russian émigré groups. The émigré Russian Orthodox Church had close relations with the National Alliance of Russian Solidarists, an émigré Russian nationalist party founded in Belgrade in 1930, and upheld the Tsarist Russian imperialist nationalist belief in a pan-Russian nation.

The 2009 election of Kirill as Patriarch of the re-united Russian Orthodox Church injected fundamentalist nationalism into the Russian World. Returning to the presidency in 2012, Patriarch Kirill and the Russian Orthodox Church provided ideological support for the Russian leaders' goal of entering Russian history as the "gatherer of Russian [i.e., east Slavic] lands."

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Putin has drawn closer to the views of White Russian émigrés and former dissident nationalists, such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who had returned to live in Russia. In 2007, a year before he died, Solzhenitsyn received the Russian Federation National Award for his work. As an alternative to the USSR, Solzhenitsyn presented the "Russian Union" (1990), which would be a state composed of the pan-Russian nation. Putin's Russian World is de facto Solzhenitsyn's Russian Union of Great, Little and White Russians. After returning to the presidency in 2012, Putin began implementing policies towards the "gathering of Russian lands," of which Ukraine was the central prize. Crimea was annexed in 2014 and Belarus turned into a satellite dependency after the 2020 presidential elections in which Lukashenka was defeated. Ukraine was the next (and main) target as there could not be a Russian Union without the city of Kyiv, the birthplace of the medieval Kyivan Rus'.

Russian chauvinistic views have been coupled with longstanding territorial claims to Ukraine's southeast. Solzhenitsyn's denial of Ukraine's right to its southeast was taken up by Putin as early as April 2008, when he questioned Ukraine's territorial integrity during his speech to the NATO-Russia Council in Bucharest. Without using the term "New Russia"—the tsarist name for southeastern Ukraine that Putin revived in the spring of 2014—he declared this region to be inhabited by "Russians" which had been wrongly included by Lenin within Ukraine. Putin and other Russian leaders repeated this on countless occasions after 2014 and acted on it during the 2022 invasion.

The most important influence of White Russian émigrés came from Ivan Ilyin whose remains, together with another émigré writer Ivan Shmelev, were reburied in Russia in 2005. Despite Ilyin's controversial praise for Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese fascism, Putin was impressed with his writings which were recommended for use in Russian schools, the army, and state governors. Putin first cited Ilyin in his 2005 state of the nation address that built a bridge to Russia's imperial past. In addition to Putin, his senior adviser Vladyslav Surkov, former President and Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, Liberal Democratic Party of the Russian Federation and Russian Orthodox Church all sang the praises of Ilyin. Ilyin was promoted in history programs on Russian television that provided a positive reflection on the Tsarist era during the

100th anniversary of the 1917 revolution.

Similar to all White Russian émigrés, Ilyin believed there is no Ukrainian nation and the very concept of a Ukraine separate to Russia was a Western conspiracy to divide the so-called pan-Russian nation. Ilyin's "organic model" of Russians and Ukrainians as "one people" has been repeated many times by Putin, as has the belief that the United States and the West are seeking to "divide the Russian [i.e., east Slavic] nation." The White Russian nationalist émigré conspiracy of the West seeking to split the pan-Russian nation had been an article of faith among White Russian émigrés. A century after White Russian émigré Prince Alexander Wolkonsky denied the existence of Ukrainians in his 1920 book, these views have become dominant among Russian leaders and have led to the invasion of Ukraine.

The return of White Russian émigrés negatively influenced Russian-Ukrainians relations prior to the invasion. General Anton Denikin died in 1947 in the United States and was reburied in 2005 in Russia. Putin asked a *Komsomolskaya Pravda* journalist if he had read Denikin's diaries. He hadn't so Putin recommended the entries about Ukraine where Denikin had written that "no Russian, reactionary or democrat, republican or authoritarian, will ever allow Ukraine to be torn away." During Denikin's White Russian occupation of Kyiv in 1919, Ukrainian schools were closed, and Ukrainian language signs were replaced by Russian. Denikin viewed Ukraine as "Little Russia" and supported the "Little Russian" dialect to be only used in elementary schools. Putin agrees with Denikin.

Putin's Miscalculated Invasion

Vladimir Putin's speech to the Russian Security Council on March 1st, 2022, was another example of the Russian leader "living in a parallel universe," as French TV presenters said. Putin showed himself, again, to be a sociopath with no remorse for the suffering that his invasion is bringing to Ukraine. Putin stressed again that Russians and Ukrainians are "one people" and that Ukrainians have been led astray by "nationalist propaganda."

Putin outlined his goal as destroying the "anti-Russia" created by the West. Putin's anger with the West for the alleged lack of respect for Moscow is manifesting itself through Russia's indiscriminate destruction of Ukraine.

The best way to understand Putin is to dissect his personality into three components.

The first is Putin's career as a KGB officer, which he joined in the 1970s at a time when most Soviet people had given up on communism. This was after all the Breznevite "era of stagnation." But stagnation was not the way Putin remembered the USSR, whose demise he has lamented as a "geopolitical disaster." Putin is visibly nostalgic for the USSR and has incorporated the Soviet national anthem and Soviet historical mythology about the Great Patriotic War into his understanding of Russian national identity. Putin's Russia continues to fight "Nazis," who are understood as any Ukrainians that do not accept their Little Russian identity.

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The source of Putin's xenophobia and paranoia about Western conspiracies behind color revolutions and opposition protests lies in his KGB background. Putin, for example, believes that Russian forces have failed to make progress in the invasion of Ukraine because Americans and other NATO members are fighting alongside Ukrainian nationalists.

Putin's second personality trait is the adoption of Tsarist Russian imperial nationalism, which believed that the three east Slavic peoples were branches of a single pan-Russian nation. Putin has repeatedly denied the existence of Ukraine and Ukrainians, said that Ukraine is a Russian land and Russians and Ukrainians are "one people." Putin's personality cult has massively increased the Tsar's narcissism and his belief in a historical mission to "gather the Russian Lands."

Putin is literally obsessed with returning the "Russian Land" of Ukraine to the Russian World, which is best understood as a twenty-first-century reincarnation of the medieval "Kievan Russia" (Kyivan Rus'). In 2016, Putin unveiled a huge monument next to the Kremlin to Grand Prince Vladimir (Volodymyr), who ruled Kyivan Rus' over a century before Moscow was founded. Putin's Tsarist imperial nationalism believes the three East Slavs were born in "Kievan Russia" and should always remain together in the pan-Russian nation. Ukrainians who do not wish to be part of the Russian World are traitors and "Nazis." "De-Nazification" of Ukraine is to be undertaken by the incarceration and murder of pro-Western and Ukrainian nationalist (which he considers to be one and the same) politicians, Church leaders, civil society activists, academics, think-tankers, and journalists.

Putin's third personality trait is that of a corrupt kleptocrat. Because politics and money are closely connected in Putin's political system, the ultimate leader must have the most money to receive respect from his lower oligarchs. The Russian "Blackmail State" allows its oligarchs to plunder the country and not be prosecuted

only if they remain loyal to the Tsar. Corruption and kleptocracy reinforce the cynicism that pervaded Soviet peoples during the "era of stagnation," and which deepened during the chaotic asset-stripping of the Russian state in the 1990s.

Following constitutional changes in July 2020, there are no more balances of power in Russia; there is only a Tsar who has conflated the Russian state with his inflated ego. Putin and Russia have become one. The extreme concentration of power is a sign of Putin's megalomania. This is coupled with his extreme isolation from the outside world during the COVID pandemic. Surrounded by sycophants stroking his ego, Putin is uninformed and never takes advice while at the same time believing he is all knowledgeable. This trait is made even worse when dealing with Ukraine. As most Russian elites think similarly to Putin about Ukraine, there are no academics, think-tankers, and especially journalists in Russia who understand Ukraine. Hence the mistaken view of Ukraine as a country of Little Russians eager to welcome Russian liberators.

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Russia's dictatorship cannot exist without internal and external enemies. The origins of this paranoia lie in KGB attitudes to dissidents and the opposition, who were viewed as agents of foreign powers. These Soviet attitudes are reflected in Russian legislation requiring registration for independent media and opposition and civil society groups as "foreign agents." The opposition in Russia are working on behalf of foreign interests. Color revolutions are CIA operations directed against Russia. A Ukrainian people is a conspiracy devised by Austrians, Poles, and Americans to divide the "Russian nation." Transposed to Ukraine, the Kremlin believes Ukraine is an American puppet state run by West Ukrainian "fascists," who came to power in the Euromaidan Revolution. As justification for his invasion, Putin claimed Russian speakers were being subjected to "genocide" by the U.S. puppet regime. Russia's "special military operation" thus aimed to "liberate" Little Russian Ukrainians from the American and Ukrainian "drug addicts and Nazis."

Diametrically Opposite Views

Between 2014 and the 2022 Russian invasion, nearly three quarters of Ukrainians believed that Russia and Ukraine were at war. Seventy-two percent of Ukrainians, including 62 percent in the south and 47 percent in the east, believed Ukraine was at war with Russia. This was not the case in Russia where the predominant view was that of a "civil war" between Russian and Ukrainian speakers, which had nothing to do with reality as most Russian speakers were fighting on Ukraine's side. The region of Dnipropetrovsk, for example, to the west of Donetsk is Russian-speaking with an influential Jewish community from which Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky hails. Dnipropetrovsk was staunchly pro-Ukrainian from the first days of crisis in 2014, and the name "Ukraine's Outpost" testifies to that.

In reality, Russian leaders are unable to fathom the concept of Russian-speaking Ukrainian patriotism. Russian primordial nationalism means they believe Russian speakers constitute the Russian World spiritual union, whose primary loyalty is to Moscow, not Ukraine or Belarus. This author has travelled five times to the Donbas war zone between 2015 and 2019, and found numerous Russian-speakers fighting for Ukraine. This patriotism has been evident since the invasion began. In fact, not a single region of Ukraine's southeast has welcomed Russian troops, who are seen by all Russian-speaking Ukrainians as occupiers.

From 2014 to 2021, most Ukrainians differentiated between Russian leaders, which they despised, and the Russian people, which they did not. A major change brought on by the invasion is that most Ukrainians no longer differentiate and believe that most Russians support the invasion. As a consequence, Ukrainians will hate Russians for decades to come.

Between 2014 and 2022, Russian leaders and a majority of Russian citizens always denied Russia's involvement in the war in Ukraine, and instead alleged a "civil war" was taking place there. Since the invasion, over 80 percent of Russians have bought into the Kremlin's propaganda claim that it is undertaking a 'special military operation' to "de-nazify" and "demilitarize" Ukraine. All Ukrainians believe Russia is undertaking a full-scale invasion of their country and is committing genocide against Ukrainians. Putin's invasion has wiped out all previous regional divisions over Ukrainian attitudes towards Russia.

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Western governments and international organizations always viewed the so-called

DNR and LNR as being under Russian occupation. The First and Second Corps of the DNR and LNR respectively, which numbered 35,000 troops, were under the jurisdiction of the Russian Southern Military District. Prior to the invasion, Russia always denied it was militarily involved in Ukraine. The fiction of a "civil war" was perpetuated by Russia's membership in the Normandy Format, which allowed Moscow to act both as the military aggressor and the supposed peacemaker. A major obstacle to peace talks prior to the invasion had been Russia's demand the First and Second Corps be transformed into a local security force in charge of the DNR-LNR "special status" region, which would be a Russian Trojan Horse inside Ukraine.

Even if Putin were to be replaced because of military defeat in Ukraine, it is likely his successor will hold similar chauvinistic views of Ukraine and Ukrainians.

Six Roadblocks to Peace

There are six factors that prevent an early end to the Russia-Ukraine War. The first is that Putin will remain in power until 2036. Because of his obsession, there will be war with Ukraine for as long as he remains in office. The second is the influence of White Russian emigres who have convinced Russian leaders and people into viewing Ukraine as an "artificial" state, and Russians and Ukrainians as "one people."

The third is the problem with Russian national identity, irrespective of who is in power in the Kremlin. Even if Putin were to be replaced because of military defeat in Ukraine, it is likely his successor will hold similar chauvinistic views of Ukraine and Ukrainians. The fourth is the popularity of Crimea's annexation which makes it impossible that Russia under any leader, imperial nationalist or (unlikely) a democrat, would end Russia's occupation. The fifth are the diametrically opposite views of Russia and Ukraine over a war or "civil war" waged between 2014 and 2022 and full-scale invasion or "special military operation" since February 2022.

Putin is obsessed, paranoid, angry, and bitter. His 22 years in power have revealed him to be a sociopath with no feeling for the loss of Russian or non-Russian lives. His invasion of Ukraine has already killed 50,000 Russians, triple the number the USSR lost in a decade in Afghanistan.

The crisis that began in November 2021 is completely artificial, a product of Putin's three personality traits and obsession with "gathering" the "Russian lands" of Ukraine. Putin's badly planned invasion is disastrous for Russia, will turn Ukrainians against Russians for decades to come, and lead to the biggest deterioration in Russia's relations with the West since the Cuban missile crisis.

A New Western Cohesion and World Order

Andrey Kortunov

THE recent decisions of Finland and Sweden to join NATO, together with a radical shift in Germany's view of its own military and political role in Europe, have become the most graphic illustrations of the West's emerging cohesion. However, there has is plenty of other evidence of this newfound unity since February 24th, 2022. Examples include a quick agreement on harsh sanctions against the Russian Federation, swiftly approved plans to send military and economic aid to Ukraine, and a well-coordinated offensive against Moscow in major international organizations, to name just a few.

The question that arises here is whether this cohesion is purely situational or is likely to take more strategic contours. The answer to that question will determine whether this emerging trend will survive and become stronger beyond the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. It will be particularly crucial to see whether the West's emerging cohesion will define the future relations of its component national parts with China—the West's main strategic opponent.

To some extent, the sustainability of this cohesion already depends on when and how the Russian-Ukrainian conflict will end. Many Western politicians and analysts approach the standoff between Moscow and Kiev not as another regional crisis, but an existential conflict between democracies and autocracies. Its resolution, the thinking goes, will pave the way for the subsequent evolution of the international system.

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Photo: Guliver Image

On a quest to restore (the old) order: an American destroyer in the South China Sea

Should the conflict be resolved on Western terms—i.e., forcing the Kremlin to retreat without achieving its goals—such an outcome will undoubtedly form the foundation to preserve the West's cohesion for a long time. A "Western victory" could be a significant factor in legitimizing American leadership, thus breathing new life into the Western-led multilateral institutions that ensure foreign and defense policy coordination.

On the other hand, should Moscow emerge victorious, one could easily foresee a heated debate in the West about "who lost Ukraine." New political frictions and divisions would likely accompany the debate, both within and between Western states. Moscow's victory will equal a foreign policy defeat for the United States and create serious problems for the Biden administration, and even its successors.

Russia's special military operation has become a powerful catalyst of centripetal trends. However, it cannot be considered to be the main, let alone the only, source of the West's emerging consolidation. This movement was marked long before February 24th, 2022. Thinking back to 2021 and events like the launch of AUKUS—a new military-

political alliance to include the United States, the UK, and Australia—lifting the Australian-Indian-American-Japanese security dialogue (QUAD) to a higher institutional level; Washington's grandiose "summit for democracy;" and the intensification of efforts to consolidate the traditional formats of interaction between the leading Western powers, such as NATO, EU, and G7 summits. It becomes clear that most of these initiatives were not limited to the sole purpose of deterring the Kremlin.

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What seems like a period of consolidation may last for at least the next few years. Perhaps even longer—if the circumstances are right. Meanwhile, the ongoing consolidation remains temporary, and it will be inevitably followed by another rise of intra-Western contradictions and decreased unity. The question of when current trends might be expected to lose steam remains open.

Centrifugal and Centripetal Cycles

The first post-war "disintegration" cycle can be attributed to the early 1970s, when the United States suffered a military defeat in Vietnam, abandoned the gold standard, began to limit American commitments abroad as part of the Nixon Doctrine, and then found itself in a deep domestic political crisis (i.e., the Watergate scandal). Conversely, this was also a period of economic boom in Japan and the expansion of the European Economic Community (EEC). In the early 1970s, the UK, Denmark, and Ireland joined the EEC, and negotiations later began on the accession of Greece, Portugal, and Spain against the backdrop of internal political changes in these countries. The interests of the three main centers of Western power began to diverge more clearly on many important issues, raising doubts about the sustainability of both American leadership and Western unity.

To counter the emergence of centrifugal trends, Western leaders attempted to introduce elements of multilateralism into their interaction. The Trilateral Commission was established, followed by the Group of Six (G6), which quickly became the Group of Seven (G7). American President Ronald Reagan's ascendency to power allowed the United States to get out of the protracted crises of the 1970s, unite American society, and strengthen American leadership. The accelerating decline of the Soviet Union, and the resulting collapse of the socialist system in 1989, only contributed to restoring the West's cohesion.

The next "disintegration" cycle started about two decades ago with the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. This split the West, pitting the English-speaking coalition against much of continental Europe—most notably France and Germany. Although the split never led to a long-term confrontation between allies, it clearly outlined the limits of the "unipolar world."

The West has been able to draw appropriate lessons from its past difficulties, mobilize quickly and relatively successfully, prevent new offensives of right- and left-wing populists, and put aside many of the squabbles of recent decades. This has allowed the West to form a united front against common opponents and competitors.

Centrifugal tendencies intensified during the Obama administration, which for the first time publicly shifted away from the Atlantic and toward the Asia-Pacific region. This, in turn, provided America's European partners with an opportunity to play more active roles in two theaters: on the West's "Eastern flank," namely the former Soviet republics, and its "Southern neighborhood," namely the Middle East and North Africa.

The efficiency of such geographical power distribution remains a subject of debate among historians. Nevertheless, the cracks that appeared in the West during the Obama years (2009-2017), only widened with Donald Trump (2017-2021). Over the years, the divergence between the United States and its allies on fundamental issues like the green energy transition, the Iranian nuclear program, the Israeli-Palestinian settlement, and economic assistance to the Global South became explicit. Trade and economic contradictions worsened, ultimately leading the United States and the EU to the brink of a trade war. In the security department, the Trump administration tried to act as a provider of commercial services, for which it insisted on increased payments from multiple American "customers" around the globe.

Yet new "unifying" trends in the West have occurred over the last two years—at the very least. If one takes the first months of 2020 as a starting point—when the COVID-19 pandemic awakened the most archaic reflexes of national egotism in the West, calling its common values into question—the progress made until the present day should be manifestly clear. The West has been able to draw appropriate lessons from its past difficulties, mobilize quickly and relatively successfully, prevent new offensives of right- and left-wing populists, and put aside many of the squabbles of recent decades. This has allowed

the West to form a united front against common opponents and competitors.

An important role in the ongoing consolidation was played by of U.S. President Joe Biden. During the election campaign, Biden spoke a lot about the task of "reuniting the West" as one of his main priorities. He also invariably promised that the new American leadership would take into account the positions, interests, and priorities of American allies, favoring multilateral formats of engagement with its partners.

The Biden administration has not always and consistently lived up to this promise. American-style multilateralism remained very specific, even after the departure of Donald Trump. For example, the decision to hastily withdraw all U.S. troops from Afghanistan in 2021 was seemingly made without prior consultations with allies, which naturally caused discontent and even deaf grumbling among the latter. Building a united front against Beijing with European allies proved impossible in the short run, as evidenced by rare and somewhat ambiguous references to Beijing in the final communiqué of the June 2021 NATO summit in Brussels. Until February 2022, there were serious differences between Washington and Berlin on the prospects for energy cooperation with Moscow as well. Finally, there is no complete consensus between the United States and the "European troika" (the UK, France, and Germany) on restoring the multilateral Iran nuclear deal.

However, these tactical failures did not lead to deep new splits within the West. The new attitude of the White House coincided with the expectations of their European and East Asian allies, who for the most part did not approve of Trump's foreign policy course. During the 2020 U.S. presidential election campaign, they bet on Biden and unequivocally welcomed the "revival of American leadership."

The Roots of Current Cohesion

Continued disunity of the West is a bearer of numerous risks. Western elites are aware of this, and the emerging cohesion is partly a result of this awareness. The divided West was steadily losing important economic, political, and geostrategic positions in the international system. Moreover, the West was increasingly losing its former status as a global role model. Western patterns of development were increasingly becoming associated with unresolved social and economic problems rather than past achievements. Politicians and experts began to speak of a "post-Western" world not only as a possibility, but as an omnipresent reality.

This trend towards the "demythologization" of the West was further articulated during the new coronavirus pandemic. Nonetheless, it had started much earlier—i.e., with the inability of the West to cope with the fallout of the 2008 global economic crisis, find a convincing response to the challenges posed by the 2011 "Arab Spring,", and prevent the trends that led to the UK's 2016 decision to leave the EU. When compared to the triumphant tides of the late 1990s and early 2000s, these failures appeared particularly painful. The self-preservation instinct called for consolidation, eventually pushing tactical differences and disagreements aside.

Unlike during the Cold War, the main challenge for the West today is China, not Russia. It is therefore the "Chinese challenge" that feeds the drive towards consolidation.

America's European and Asian allies proved continuously unwilling to assume more responsibility for the state of the international system and the future of world order. The statements about the EU's "strategic autonomy," which for years kept coming from German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron, remained for the most part general declarations, especially with regard to security issues. Despite repeated statements on the urgent need for an alternative to American leadership, no such replacement was ever found in either Europe or Asia. Biden's assumption of presidential duties was thus cheered by many in the West as a return to the natural state of affairs, which had emerged only in the early Cold War period.

Unlike during the Cold War, the main challenge for the West today is China, not Russia. It is therefore the "Chinese challenge" that feeds the drive towards consolidation. Unsurprisingly, Biden already made an attempt to negotiate with Moscow in 2021, quickly agreeing to the extension of the New START Treaty until February 2026, and then meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Geneva in June 2021. Notably, no such bilateral summit took place between the U.S. and China. The White House seems to have planned to achieve some sort of stabilization of relations with Russia, reduce risks of U.S.-Russian confrontation, and focus on dealing with China as a more formidable strategic competitor.

It is unlikely that Washington could have counted on Moscow to abandon its strategic partnership with Beijing. Similarly, launching a new "reset" was off the table, but the task of minimizing the costs remained a priority. Overall, most American allies in Asia and Europe supported this prioritization, apart from a small number of Central

and Eastern European states that had traditionally tried to portray Moscow as the main threat to the West. In parallel with Washington's efforts throughout 2021, several attempts were made by the EU to find new areas of common interests with Russia. In particular, this was attempted in the field of "energy transition" and fifth-generation information technologies.

However, the attempt to fix relations with Moscow and focus on Beijing ended in failure. First, Moscow did not demonstrate a readiness to "fix relations" on American terms. Instead, the list of Russian demands to Washington continued to grow after the Geneva summit. At the end of 2021, Russia demanded a radical overhaul of the European security system that was twenty years in the making. This system relied on the central roles of the United States and NATO. Naturally, making concessions of this magnitude was unacceptable to both Washington and its European allies. Finally, Russian domestic trends signaled a further stray from liberal democracy, which in turn diminished any chances of rapprochement with the West.

Second, the Biden administration failed to quickly rally a coalition for a long and uncompromising struggle against Beijing. This became evident in the restrained reactions of EU member states to the diplomatic conflict between Lithuania and China in the last months of 2021. While European countries gradually tightened their policy toward China—at some point even freezing the ratification of the 2020 comprehensive investment agreement that Brussels had successfully negotiated with Beijing during the German presidency of the Council of the EU—the continent continued to lag behind the United States in its confrontation measures against Beijing.

Moscow's special military operation on February 24th, 2022, thus came as a long-anticipated, invaluable gift for Washington. It allowed American strategists to take away the role of the world's villain from China and hand it to Russia.

Accordingly, it was necessary to revise the tactics of Western consolidation, which required strong shocks. The coronavirus pandemic and the economic turmoil it caused did not come as such a shock, nor did the calamitous withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. Moscow's special military operation on February 24th, 2022, thus came as a long-anticipated, invaluable gift for Washington. It allowed American strategists to take away the role of the world's villain from China and hand it to Russia. Russia's special operation has provided an opportunity to the West to re-focus on immediate areas of common interest. Furthermore, it has also shed light on what institutional formats should be prioritized in pursuing Western cohesion.

While a prospective "pacification" of Moscow cannot remove the subsequent task of "taming" Beijing from the agenda, it serves as an important step towards approaching the larger problem. Moreover, the Russian special operation forced many wavering Western countries to take a fresh look at both Moscow and Beijing. Persistent attempts by the Chinese leadership to stay away from the unfolding conflict are unlikely to prevent the further consolidation of the West in confronting China in the Pacific and Indian oceans.

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Manifestations of Unity

As expected, Western consolidation began with the strengthening of security. This trend is taking place within a revived NATO and in the context of other multilateral and bilateral formats between the United States and its partners. NATO member states' total military budgets already account for more than half of global defense spending, with this share likely to grow even further in the near future. The lessons of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict are carefully studied, including the performance of the Western weapons supplied to Ukraine. These assessments are expected to have an impact on military modernization plans in the West.

The main focus seems to be on maintaining the West's critical technological advantages coupled with the further expansion of U.S.-led security alliances. The trend towards the "globalization" of NATO is only likely to gain speed—the bloc will increase its military presence both in the Arctic region as well as in the Indian and Pacific oceans. There is a clear trend towards greater coordination among allies in Europe and Asia, and there is every reason to believe that Washington will actively encourage further transcontinental coordination.

Of course, not all European members of NATO are ready to fully support the United States in the upcoming confrontation with China. For instance, Germany is likely to confine itself to a merely symbolic military presence in the Pacific. But a sharp increase in German military spending—aimed at containing Russia—will pave the way for a corresponding redistribution of roles in NATO. This will allow other countries—especially the UK and

France—to strengthen their support for the United States in regions far beyond Europe. How exactly this will occur remains unclear. Nevertheless, the mechanisms for achieving such goals will be vigorously tested in the time ahead.

The United States will be the principal beneficiary of unifying trends. America's dominant position in global arms-trade markets will be significantly strengthened, and any ideas of a European "strategic autonomy" from NATO will have to wait for better times. The information warfare against Russia—which entered a new phase on February 24th, 2022—has a goal to discredit Russian weapons as "obsolete" and "ineffective." This, in turn, should lead to a redistribution of world arms markets in favor of the American defense sector.

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However, this is not just a fight against Russian or Chinese arms manufacturers. The ongoing consolidation will likely strengthen the American defense sector vis-à-vis their EU competitors. In theory, the growth in EU military spending could lead to a consolidation of large European arms producers, increasing the competitiveness of EU exporters in global markets. In practice, this does not look very likely. Strengthening the positions of the EU defense complex in global markets is hardly possible without the actualization of the bloc's "strategic autonomy" from the United States. The security consolidation of the West will be done on American terms and mainly in American interests. Under existing conditions, Germany is the only European state with realistic opportunities to increase weapons exports. Yet, Berlin too faces constrains when it comes to the most modern and expensive systems.

The American foreign policy position vis-à-vis its partners will also get stronger. While the Russian-Ukrainian conflict strengthened EU unity, this is unlikely to turn the EU into a truly global player. In fact, it seems more likely that Brussels will fixate itself on a predominantly regional agenda without attempts to pursue its own strategy in the South or East Asia. The EU may well get more active in Africa or the Middle East, but only because both regions might remain on the periphery of American interests.

In the economic domain, one can foresee vigorous efforts to resolve existing trade and financial contradictions within the West—between America and the EU, but also with Washington's main trading partners in East Asia. The Biden administration has already demonstrated more flexibility and willingness to compromise than Trump. For example, in October 2021, the United States lifted parts of the import tariffs imposed by the Trump administration on EU steel and aluminum. One can assume that the long-awaited synchronization of export controls towards third countries (primarily China and Russia) will soon start to materialize.

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Priorities in Western cooperation will increasingly include strategic research and development. New multilateral consortia are going to emerge in key areas of ICT, AI, space and biotechnologies, green energy, and other fields. Most of these consortia will be led by American corporations, aided perhaps by European and East Asian partners where necessary. One of the most important goals of cooperation in research and development will be to preserve the West's leadership in determining the technical standards of Industry 4.0. On new technological chains, prioritizing national security and minimizing political risk will come before economic feasibility and commercial efficiency. Deep integration between Western and Chinese high-tech corporations will become even more unlikely—even in the absence of a Sino-American trade war.

This cohesive and confident West will undoubtedly aspire to maintain unity on key aspects of global development. This applies to issues such as climate change, energy transition, internet governance, global digitalization standards, food security, pandemic prevention, cross-border migrations, gender and racial equality, protection of minority rights, and social and economic discrepancies within and between countries. Determining the future development agenda is becoming one of the key parameters for restoring Western moral leadership in global politics. It is possible that the EU—rather than the United States—will take the lead on many issues of global development. Still, without American support, promoting these issues to the international community will be difficult.

In any case, Western elites will try to sell their agenda to the rest of the world with renewed vigor. The concept of a "rules-based liberal international

order" will be further elaborated. However, it will continue to imply the West's commanding role in developing the principles and norms for the behavior of states in particular spheres. These norms will then gradually be expanded to other actors. Those unprepared to follow the "rules of conduct" will be pushed to the periphery of the international system. The West will likely operate on the assumption that America's geopolitical opponents will remain unable to offer comprehensive alternatives to the "rules-based liberal international order," which will ultimately force them to adapt to Western standards.

Any Western consolidation can hardly do without attempts to push the boundaries of this world beyond the "historical West." The main battleground is likely to remain in East Asia, where the United States faces pressure from China. Of course, the confrontation with China and Russia will not be limited to any specific geographical theater. One can foresee a continuous fight for the "souls" of countries like India, Indonesia, Nigeria, South Africa, Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico. Large-scale regional and even continental projects will be developed and implemented to link parts of the Global South (i.e., the Middle East, Southeast Asia, North Africa, and the Caribbean) to the West. There may be attempts to recruit new members to multilateral structures such as AUKUS, the Five Eyes, and the Quad.

While striving to weaken Russia and isolate China, the West inevitably faces a contradiction between its proclaimed ideological purity and the need for political expediency. This contradiction is particularly explicit in the regions of the world where Western-style liberal democracy is not popular and local attitudes to human rights are controversial.

While striving to weaken Russia and isolate China, the West inevitably faces a contradiction between its proclaimed ideological purity and the need for political expediency. This contradiction is particularly explicit in the regions of the world where Western-style liberal democracy is not popular and local attitudes to human rights are controversial, to say the least. The Biden administration, with its emphasis on "values," has already faced significant pushback from its partners in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and North Africa. This contradiction, as has happened many times in the past, will most often be resolved in favor of political expediency—although a complete rejection of liberal values as a foundation of Western cohesion will not happen any time soon.

For evident reasons, Western leaders will draw the main dividing line between "responsible" and "irresponsible" actors on the world stage—and not between democracies and autocracies. This may even be used in attempts to reach tactical compromises with China and obstruct the deepening of Beijing's partnership with Moscow. Geopolitical opponents of the West—from Russia and Iran to North Korea and Nicaragua—will be situationally included in the category of "irresponsible" players. The list will be constantly updated, depending on the specific political needs of the West. It is clearly more appropriate for the West to deal with its opponents in sequence—as opposed to in parallel—thus expanding the Western geopolitical space and narrowing its opponents' room for maneuver.

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IMPACT ON THE WORLD ORDER

Should Western cohesion prove sustainable over the coming years, it will have significant consequences for the system of international relations. The rallying of allies around the United States might postpone the prospect of a "mature" multipolarity for the foreseeable future. While multipolarity implies a relative equidistance of independent global power centers from each other—and the comparability of their military, economic, technological, and other potentials—Western consolidation would again result in the creation of a "supercenter."

Multipolarity also implies flexibility of geopolitical alliances and coalitions. Should there be excessive strengthening of one of the poles, the others will group themselves in such a way as to prevent the domination of a single hegemon. The quest for this emerging consolidation does not imply such flexibility within the West. It is hard to imagine the EU uniting with Russia to counter the United States, or Washington joining forces with Beijing to limit the activity of Brussels.

While references to multipolarity will continue to be an important part of Western political rhetoric, the efforts of the Biden administration and its allies will be aimed at recreating a model based on an asymmetric interaction between the 'global core' (the West) with the 'global periphery' (the rest). This model envisions a gradual expansion of the core at the expense of the periphery.

It is often assumed that a binary division of the international system to the 'core' and 'periphery' will not necessarily lead to a bipolar world in

the classic sense. On the contrary, large countries of the "non-West" will have to compete with each other for better terms of admission into the 'global core.' The potential rallying of the "non-West" around China or Russia is clearly not a matter of immediate future. Besides, the consolidated West retains many diverse opportunities to effectively counteract this process. Following in the footsteps of this logic, associations of those outside the 'global core'—like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS, or the Eurasian Economic Union—are based on common denominators of opportunistic interests of their participants, and therefore lack long-term strategic prospects. This means that even though these countries outnumber the West in population, natural resources, and even economic potential, they will still be ill-equipped to compete effectively.

The return of the "unipolar world" would not necessarily mean that the West should refuse any concessions to the Global South in the fields of economics, finance, sustainable development, and more broadly, in democratizing the international system. However, these concessions will not merely be a result of a growing pressure of the South, but instead a goodwill gesture of the West, designed to avoid destabilization in the 'periphery.'

Optimistic forecasts of the aforementioned scenario envision a deepening of the economic, technological, political, and cultural dependencies of the global 'periphery' on the 'core.' If this were to materialize, globalization would be set to resume, making the crises of the early 2020s only a temporary suspension of trends. These forecasts entail that the technological superiority of the West over the Global South allows the former to determine development parameters in key sectors of the latter—a critically important example of which is agriculture. The West's soft power will be even more significant as the international system becomes more stable. And if preventing regional crises in the 'periphery' from escalating proves feasible, the international order will be relatively stable—at least over the mid-term.

The return of the "unipolar world" would not necessarily mean that the West should refuse any concessions to the Global South in the fields of economics, finance, sustainable development, and more broadly, in democratizing the international system. However, these concessions will not merely be a result of a growing pressure of the South, but instead a goodwill gesture of the West, designed to avoid destabilization in the 'periphery.' Therefore, the adjustments will be strictly measured and dependent on reciprocal commitments from the Global South. An increase in economic assistance to developing nations might be conditioned by their cooperation with the West. For instance, in restricting migration flows or making appropriate pledges on human rights.

Relations between the West and the Global South in this scenario would remain complex and sometimes prone to conflict. Yet, at the end of the day, it is the West that will remain the leading power in this bundle. The world 'periphery' in this logic does not have a fully-fledged international subjectivity, and therefore needs elements of external governance by "mature" states and societies. Pushing Russia and then China to the margins of global politics will make it possible to restore Western monopolies over modernization, tying the global 'periphery' even more to the global 'core.'

In order to get back to unipolarity, the West will have to manage the China challenge. It seems that the Western strategy will imply three goals: weakening Russia, isolating China, and preventing the onset of an "Asian century."

The gradual expansion of existing political and military blocs would likely continue. However, it seems more likely that the less formalized multilateral associations, like the Quad, would become more instrumental in international security. The containment of China would remain the principal goal of these institutions, with their agendas becoming more inclusive over time, expanding perhaps to areas of 'soft security' and development.

The West might also try to rebalance the roles of some multilateral organizations. For instance, the G20 could be replaced by the G7 as the main platform for discussing the global economy. The latter may co-opt new members as necessary or invite individual countries of the Global South as observers on specific issues. Naturally, such a strategy could succeed only if the West presents the G7 as a global laboratory that produces universal rules of the game based on the interests of the entire globe.

In order to get back to unipolarity, the West will have to manage the China challenge. The extent of the West's willingness to compromise with Beijing remains unclear, and this will be determined by what the balance of power will look like. Still, it seems that the Western strategy will imply three goals: weakening Russia, isolating China, and preventing the onset of an

"Asian century." Achieving the first goal facilitates movement in the direction of the second, and the implementation of the second almost guarantees the achievement of the third.

In the West, there is no shortage of predictions about the inevitable slowdown of the Chinese economy, rising domestic social tensions, and the unsustainability of the Chinese economic and social model. If time is against China, then the West has no interest in making long-term arrangements and compromises with Beijing. The ongoing restructuring of the Chinese economy, social and demographic shifts, and China's participation in globalization are believed to be leading toward the liberalization of the Chinese political system. As a result, the argument goes, China will be forced to play by Western rules and obey the logic of the resurrected 'unipolar' world.

The potential rallying of the "non-West" around China or Russia is clearly not a matter of immediate future.

If the West-China competition is a long-term game, then the main tactical task of the moment is to preserve Western cohesion when facing Beijing and, above all, prevent European allies from making their own deals with China. Accordingly, Washington should make maximum use of existing bilateral and multilateral mechanisms at its disposal to prevent any possible unsolicited-by-America "détente."

In this renewed 'unipolar' environment, Russia would find itself relegated to the positions it held in the early 1990s. In fact, its position would be even more difficult, because Moscow would lose the trust it had enjoyed after the Cold War ended. The pressure on Russia would be stronger than in the 1990s, and potential rewards for "good behavior" modest and delayed. Nevertheless, sooner or later Russia would also be integrated into the West and used by the latter as a significant additional resource in its confrontation with China.

Until this happens, the West would have its eyes set on maximal geopolitical, military, and economic weakening of Russia. This would include the consistent ousting of Moscow from regional and global multilateral organizations, the severing of economic and scientific ties, and placing pressure on countries that seek cooperation with Russia in any form. The main task of the West's information offensive against Moscow would be to change the attitude of the Global South towards Russia.

At the same time, the West should be ready to maintain a minimum of contacts, primarily for the sake of keeping

strategic arms control and reducing risks of direct military confrontation. Beyond that, Western hopes would be pinned on the inevitability of leadership change in the Kremlin under growing internal and external pressure. Minimizing Moscow's international political role should become an additional instrument of pressure on China, which will have to face the strengthened West on its own.

The current consolidation cycle is based more on the fear of a rising China and a resurgent Russia. Most Western leaders today do not have the same confidence in the triumph of liberal values, even within their own countries.

This, then, is a broad picture of a "desirable future," as conceptualized by the West—vengeance for geopolitical retreats of the past two decades. Naturally, in political rhetoric, this picture looks somewhat different. Its fundamental elements appear in compliance with universal norms of international law, basic human rights, effective global governance, and inclusiveness. Nevertheless, this picture is based on an old idea to restore the unconditional leadership of the United States.

The Limits of Current Trends

How realistic is a scenario that preserves and strengthens the cohesion of the West as a foundation of the international system? While it seems that Western consolidation has potential to continue, it also has its limitations, which cast doubt about its long-term sustainability.

Although many intra-Western disputes have been put on the backburner since Biden took office in 2021, their deep roots remain intact. Sooner or later, these roots may produce new sprouts. It is worth noting that the previous consolidation cycle of the end of the twentieth century had stronger foundations than the current cycle. At that time, liberal triumphalism, a deep belief in historical righteousness, and claims regarding the universal applicability of Western values all served as the foundations of Western cohesion. The current consolidation cycle is based more on the fear of a rising China and a resurgent Russia. Most Western leaders today do not have the same confidence in the triumph of liberal values, even within their own countries. This casts doubt over the newly found cohesion of the West, making its endurance an uncertain prospect.

At present, several factors challenge the cohesion. First, the economic interests of the United States, the EU, and developed East Asia do not converge on everything. For example, disputes over American agricultural exports to

the European Union are unlikely to be resolved. The same applies to automobile exports from the EU to the United States. The U.S. dollar and the euro will continue to compete against each other in global financial markets—with the competition likely to intensify as other currencies begin to strengthen. In a more general sense, America's ability to indefinitely rely on external borrowing is questionable.

Then there is the feasibility of synchronizing political cycles among the Western countries. For instance, while the left-wing is currently on the offensive in Northern Europe, the upcoming November 2022 midterm elections in the United States might bring victory to the American right.

As opposed to disappearing over time, the differences between the Anglosphere and continental European models of social and economic development have become more significant. Repeated attempts by continental Europeans to borrow social and economic recipes from the U.S. and the UK have ended in failure. The changing ethnic and demographic pictures further add to issues in maintaining a common foreign and security policy.

Another obstacle pertains to political differences. It is one thing to unite situationally during an acute security crisis and against an economically insignificant opponent. Waging a long-term fight with an economic superpower like China is a whole other issue. There is no complete unity within the West on a strategy towards India, let alone on effective crisis management in the Middle East. It is hard to imagine how America and the EU will achieve complete unity on how to expand economic assistance to the Global South.

As the Ukraine crisis disappears from the headlines, Western cohesion will be increasingly difficult to maintain. Once the military phase of the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation is over, disagreements on how to build future relations with Moscow will likely deepen.

The ability of the West to isolate Russia over the long term is another questionable prospect. The world's reaction to Russia's special military operation has been mixed, and the sustainability of the anti-Russian consensus is far from certain. As the Ukraine crisis disappears from the headlines, Western cohesion will be increasingly difficult to maintain. Once the military phase of the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation is over, disagreements on how to build future relations with Moscow will likely deepen.

Since the burden of anti-Russian sanctions is not evenly distributed between the United States and EU member states, disagreement is easy to predict. These trends will intensify if this conflict becomes a catalyst of a global economic crisis. Worse, it will sow greater discord should additional sacrifices by the West be required to prevent a Russian military victory.

Further differences between the United States and its allies on the optimal military posturing of the West cannot be ruled out either. While some American policymakers may consider a limited nuclear conflict between Russia and NATO acceptable, they are unlikely to find likeminded partners on the continent, where the probability of nuclear exchange would be the highest.

The concept of a "rules-based liberal international order" will continue to imply the West's commanding role in developing the principles and norms for the behavior of states in particular spheres.

Even more challenging is the task of economically and technologically containing China. Attempts to isolate Beijing by severing economic and technological ties will lead to growing costs for the West itself. Beijing has been closely watching the West's decisions on sanctions against Russia, and it has begun to take preventive measures as a way to preempt the effects of such actions being taken against China. The crisis proved as an additional catalyst for Russian-Chinese cooperation in various fields, providing China with additional opportunities to counter the United States. Most experts predict that as the noise of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict fades, China's political and economic support for Russia will likely increase.

American intentions to isolate China in the Indo-Pacific—where China remains the leading trading and investment partner for most economies—looks unrealistic. At the moment, Washington is not ready to fully open American markets to Asian states, and the U.S. also cannot challenge Beijing on large infrastructure projects in Asia. The United States has many tariff, technological, and monetary benefits that it could offer its partners in the Indo-Pacific, but their provision remains constrained by the domestic weakness of the Biden administration. Moreover, Asians cannot count on continuity of American policy after the 2024 U.S. presidential election. All of this makes the West unable to offer a superior alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Cynical as it may sound, the Western public is getting used to unresolved military conflicts, especially when they do not reflect vital national interests. Events in Ukraine will be increasingly perceived as a regional problem, rather than a global challenge to the West. While this does not mean

that the Western public will become pro-Russian, the conflict in Ukraine as a tool of political mobilization has an expiration date.

The most dangerous challenge to the Western cohesion is internal. The United States in particular and the West in general face a number of fundamental economic, social, and political problems that have not been properly addressed. Western societies remain divided along many lines, and prospects for restoring internal unity remain dim. This, in turn, undermines the prospect of long-term and consistent foreign policy—fundamental to preserving the cohesion of the West.

The next shift from centripetal to centrifugal trends in the West is only a matter of time, which can be measured in years rather than decades. Trends may change in the second half or by the end of the 2020s, creating additional opportunities for non-Western powers, including Russia.

Options for the Rest

With all the present uncertainties, it seems obvious that a shift in trends will not occur in the immediate future. So far, Western consolidation has only been gaining momentum, spreading to new directions of foreign policy, and affecting new dimensions of life. This means that Moscow, Beijing, and other non-Western powerhouses need to prepare themselves for a long-term interaction with a cohesive West that will remain capable of preventing, or at least mitigating, manifestations of dissent within its ranks. This new reality poses serious challenges to everyone unprepared to accept Western-generated rules of the game.

If Moscow is not ready to return to its international standing of the early 1990s, then one of the fundamental tasks of its foreign policy should be to deal with a much more committed and focused opponent than in the wake of the Cold War. The next couple of years will be the most difficult time for Russia in its post-Soviet history, marking the peak of political, economic, and military pressure on Moscow from a cohesive West.

The success of Russia's strategy now depends crucially on Moscow's ability to mobilize domestic resources and find a development model suited to survive a long-term rupture with the West. In foreign policy, the main task is to consolidate Russia's positions in the non-Western world, without abandoning the option to resume communication with the West. To expand its presence in the Global South, the Kremlin will have to thoroughly work on its foreign policy tools, which now fall short of expectations of potential partners.

For many in the Global South, Moscow's bid for a leading role in the non-Western world does not look very convincing. Oftentimes, Russia is perceived as part of the West, albeit with its own specificities. The current conflict in and around Ukraine has been interpreted by many in the Global South as a conflict within the "greater West," with the South allegedly having to pay for a "Western" problem. In its relations with partners in the East and South, Russia should avoid using ambitious but shallow ideological schemes. In particular, attempts to present multilateral initiatives like SCO or BRICS as "anti-Western" projects or to declare the "Indo-Pacific" concept as a purely American construction seem unjustified. Cooperation with the East and South should proceed mainly in the format of specific, purely applied, incremental projects.

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Given the consolidation of the West, Moscow will have to coordinate even the most limited of agreements on the "Western front" with Washington. Attempts to play on the contradictions between the United States and the EU will likely prove counterproductive.

Attempts to completely self-isolate from the West or to look at Russia's interaction with the West as an inevitable "zero-sum game" seem equally futile. The growing pressure of common problems—from non-proliferation of nuclear weapons to climate change—will push the parties to coordinate their positions and collaborate in limited, mutually beneficial areas. Short-term collaboration will not change the negative outlook of relations. In the future, however, gradually expanding the range of issues might help restore positive interaction.

The current political split in American society imposes constraints on Western consolidation around the United States; it also turns America into an unpredictable international actor. Nevertheless, the United States remains an indispensable global player, making the restoration of limited dialogue vital for Moscow.

Russia should avoid the temptation to divide prospective partners by saying "you're either with us, or against us." Given the emerging balance of power in the world, attempts to form broad anti-Western alliances are unlikely to succeed. More promising is the emphasis on situational coalitions around specific tasks, the solutions to which are in everyone's interest. Stable alliances can grow from situational coalitions only after enough time has passed. In other words, strategic patience should become one of the inherent features of Russian foreign policy.

TRANSFORMING THE WORLD THROUGH CRISES

Ian Bremmer

"WHERE is the peace that the United Nations was created to guarantee?" That is the pointed question Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky asked the UN Security Council during a video speech on April 5th, 2022, in response to Russia's war on his country. "Where is the security that the Security Council must guarantee?" he asked.

The urgency of his questions needs no explanation. Russian President Vladimir Putin has decided that Ukraine belongs to Russia, and there are no boundaries, treaties, or warnings that will prevent him from waging war to make it so. At this point, why should Ukraine's President, or anyone else, have much confidence that the "international community" will stop this war?

More broadly, loss of faith in governing authorities is the defining story of our era. The United States, the only nation that can project military power into every region of the world, has become its most politically dysfunctional major power. A third of Americans say Joe Biden is not a legitimately elected President. Europeans have lost faith too. In 2016, the UK voted its way out of the EU, and anti-establishment, xenophobic parties of the far right shifted the politics inside many European states.

In fact, the entire international system is increasingly in question. China has advanced from impoverished to powerhouse over four decades and increasingly rejects the right of Western-led institutions to make and enforce global rules. Strongmen have emerged in Russia, India, Turkey, Brazil and even EU members Hungary and Poland to challenge principles of freedom of the press, democratic checks and balances, and minority rights. Few in any country have faith the UN can do much more than help care for and feed the refugees fleeing conflicts no one can resolve.

The UN and institutions like the World Bank and IMF were built atop the ashes of a war that ended 77 years ago. That is why Germany and Japan, wealthy and dynamic free-market democracies committed to multilateralism and the rule of law, had no seats at the table for Zelensky's speech to the Security Council—while Russia did.

The international system is fundamentally broken. To fix it, the world needs a crisis. It was World War II that created institutions and alliances that helped keep the peace and invest in global development for decades after. True enough, our world has faced no shortage of shocks in recent years: the 2008 global financial crisis, the Arab Spring, the 2015-2016 tidal wave of migrants into Europe, Brexit, and the rise of angry populists in Europe and America. But none of these events created a new sense of unity and purpose.

Then, the worst pandemic in 100 years hit and Russia invaded Ukraine.

Photo: Guliver Image

A rare case of comprehensive global cooperation (vaccines being delivered to Tunisia as part of the COVAX program)

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Can these crises bolster dying institutions and create new ones?

PUTIN'S WAR

Putin's invasion of Ukraine has spawned the most significant geopolitical emergency since the end of the Cold War. War is killing civilians by the thousands, millions of refugees have headed west, NATO and Russia have moved to high alert, and fuel and food prices around the world have soared. The Russian government has even threatened the use of nuclear weapons and warned of World War III.

Putin has achieved the nearly unimaginable in American politics: he has persuaded many Americans to hate him more than they hate their compatriots of the opposite party.

Fast forward six months, and Ukraine remains mostly free. Putin's efforts to remove Zelensky have failed. And the United States and its allies mustered a far stronger response than any observer would have predicted. In terms of sanctions against Russia—the toughest ever placed on a G20 country—with meaningful sacrifice taken by nearly all EU member states. In terms of support for Ukraine, a country whose military spending is ten times smaller than that of Russia, now with NATO and other support set to nearly match it in 2022.

Before the war, NATO was adrift, "brain dead" according to French President Emmanuel Macron. During his presidency, Donald Trump sometimes talked down NATO's value for US national security, and some of his former aides say he wanted to remove the United States from the alliance. The transatlantic relationship was weaker than ever and fragmenting. And after Iraq, Afghanistan, and the January 6th, 2021 insurrection in Washington, the ability of the United States to lead an international coalition was in question. Its willingness to lead was another unknown variable.

Now, NATO is revitalized, Europe is meeting its defense obligations, Finland and Sweden are about to join, and Emmanuel Macron now says that Putin's invasion has delivered an "electric shock" and "strategic clarification" for the alliance. Putin wanted to deal the alliance a death blow with a show of force and resolve in Ukraine. Instead, he seems to have strengthened it.

The shift in Germany is a big part of this story. The economic engine of Europe, with a government that has long tried to manage relations with Russia by cultivating cooperation through trade, has sharply changed its strategic direction in recent months. Three days after the Russian invasion, Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced during a historic speech to Parliament that Germany would send weapons to Ukraine, impose genuinely tough sanctions on Russia, and more than double German defense spending. His government announced in April 2022 that it would stop importing Russian oil by the end of this year.

The EU also has a renewed sense of mission. Scorned by Britain and chastised by populists within many member countries, the EU has been given new energy by the war. The governments of Hungary and Poland have openly rebelled against its rules in recent years, but Russia's invasion has forced Hungary's Viktor Orban to curb his pro-Putin enthusiasm and presented Poland with a chance to play European hero by accepting millions of Ukrainian refugees.

Even though China's President Xi Jinping expressed his "friendship without limits" for Vladimir Putin, it has turned out that it is also a friendship without military support or much money.

Washington's pivot to Asia no longer feels like the Americans are leaving Europe behind. The June 2022 NATO summit in Madrid brought America's Asian allies to the table, and quiet but active negotiations are starting to expand the international security architecture through NATO and the G7 to create a new and more flexible alignment that unites the world's advanced industrial democracies.

If these developments were not striking enough, consider that Putin has even given America's Democrats and Republicans a sense of political unity that was best illustrated in March 2022 by a 424-8 vote in the House of Representatives to suspend normal trade relations with Russia and its ally Belarus. Putin has achieved the nearly unimaginable in American politics: he has persuaded many Americans to hate him more than they hate their compatriots of the opposite party.

And even though China's President Xi Jinping expressed his "friendship without limits" for Vladimir Putin, it has turned out that it is also a friendship without military support or much money. China does not want to fall afoul of western sanctions and values its economic relationship with the G7 much more than it does Xi's bromance with the Russian president.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine turned out to be a "goldilocks crisis": not so big that we are crippled by it, not so small that we don't react to it, just right to compel meaningful positive change. The West completely agrees about the challenge and the evolution of the crisis has only sharpened the response.

Of course, we must remain realistic. America, Europe, and the institutions that strengthen their partnership will face significant tests in the coming months and years. The United States is headed for yet another bitter election season ahead of the midterms in November. Americans and Europeans know that noted NATO skeptic Donald Trump may well become the Republican nominee in 2024. In Europe, the fallout from a likely prolonged military stalemate in Ukraine might change the political temperature. President Biden's calls for unity among democracies will antagonize both China and Russia as well as developing nations uninterested in entering the fray. And though China seems unlikely to jeopardize its economic future by entering a long-term struggle with top trade partners Europe and America just to help Russia, the longer-term challenges it will pose for Western values and interests are much bigger than anything Putin can muster.

The international system is fundamentally broken. To fix it, the world needs a crisis.

In short, the Ukraine crisis has boosted some Western institutions that can strengthen democracy, the rule of law, and human rights at the expense of authoritarians—or at least the one who works in the Kremlin. Still, it will not resolve the larger crisis of confidence to solve common problems that ails us. That will require something bigger.

Global Pandemic(s)

This pandemic has created the biggest genuinely global crisis of our lives, and there were real breakthroughs in multinational cooperation. Scientists, public policy experts, and government leaders had been saying that the emergence of such a disease was inevitable. When it finally hit—and the world was largely unprepared—there was an enormous and nearly global effort to use science to develop better understanding and tools to fight the disease.

Scientists shared ideas and information. Central bankers took complementary, if not coordinated, action to boost sagging economies. International lenders offered emergency help, and vaccines were developed at unprecedented speed via joint ventures. Without the COVAX project, for example, the problems of vaccine hoarding and inequality between rich and developing nations would have been even worse than they are. The willingness of some countries to export surplus vaccines—as the United States did for neighbors Mexico and Canada and the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia did for other countries—created a blueprint for shared sacrifice at a time of severe political and economic stress for all these countries.

Economic responses also brought people together. The United States, despite fierce displays of partisanship, was able to put aside its differences to coordinate the most effective domestic fiscal response in the world. Trump's Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi worked together to ensure workers and businesses were not derailed by the disruption. Biden added more stimulus during a second COVID wave when he became president with a Democratic-majority House and Senate. These measures helped buffer the income shock and reduced inequality at a time when it was accelerating globally (though now there is a credible case that those same policies fueled inflation and post-pandemic political division).

The COVID-19 pandemic was not frightening enough to make us build a new system of global public-health cooperation. There has been too little global cooperation, and over 6 million people have perished thus far as a result.

At the government level, international cooperation was most successful in providing the world's poorest countries with economic support: advanced democracies and China agreed to transfer special drawing rights allocated from the IMF, reduced conditionality on existing loans, and helped some of the world's most economically stressed governments to avoid major financial crises. Those decisions were taken quickly and at scale.

The biggest geopolitical win came from Europe, which emerged from the pandemic politically stronger than it came in. European leaders learned a lot from the last decade of global financial crisis, currency crises, and Brexit; recognizing a stronger Europe was essential for keeping their own houses in order. Taking a radically different approach from the pressure placed on Greece in 2010 to be accountable (and face a crippling depression), the wealthy European countries supported an unprecedented economic package to redistribute wealth to the poorer countries—a Marshall Plan for southern and eastern Europe—leading to much stronger support for Europe. The same was true for vaccines—Europe is bureaucratic and slow, and they were unwilling to pay "whatever it takes" for access, so their efforts to secure vaccines took longer than operation warp speed in the United States. However, the European response ensured everyone in Europe got vaccine access, ultimately leading to a stronger, more united Europe.

Still, the COVID-19 pandemic was not frightening enough to make us build a new system of global public-health cooperation. There has been too little global cooperation, and over 6 million people have perished thus far as a result. Few leaders recognized

that COVID-19 was a global threat that could never be effectively addressed without a global solution.

In the United States, a feeling developed among many—especially once vaccines became available—that the disease was not that big of a deal. It was downplayed as something primarily affecting the elderly and those with preexisting conditions, which led to deep and politicized disagreement on how seriously to take it.

China, meanwhile, felt like it had a handle on COVID-19 early on—after initially covering it up—and thought the West was irresponsible and indifferent to the fate of their seniors, so it saw little reason to cooperate. But complacency about their low infection rates translated into a lack of urgency in vaccinating their elderly population. They accordingly got locked into a zero COVID policy, only to later end up with new variants and weaker vaccines, as well as an under-vaccinated elderly population. China's zero COVID policy is a big problem for them, but not big enough to turn to the West and ask for mRNA vaccines that work.

The developing world mostly got the short end of the stick. Developed countries ensured they got vaccines first and worried less about the emergence of new variants from the disease expanding unchecked among unvaccinated populations (like in South Africa, where omicron exploded).

Ultimately, the pandemic was too small a crisis to force the kind of collaboration we needed. When the next deadly virus emerges, will we be better prepared?

Climate Change

Climate change is the crisis that should give us the most hope. It is the emergency most likely to force world leaders to share more information, costs, and responsibilities because it creates disasters that can destroy the lives of hundreds of millions of people, with impacts felt in every region of the world. Here, as in other areas, mutual suspicion will limit American leadership and U.S.-China cooperation, but there are other actors that can lead.

Europe has already made genuinely historic progress. The so-called European Green Deal has boosted the continent as a leader on climate by committing unprecedented amounts of money toward the net-zero carbon-emissions goal. By making climate spending a central pillar of its most recent budgets and COVID-19 economic-relief plans, the European Commission has boosted its power to raise future funds for pandemic relief and climate change from reluctant member states. Only those that comply with EU standards on emissions and other climate—relevant policies can expect to get generous support for COVID recovery. It is also possible that Russia's war in Ukraine—and the need it creates to relieve European reliance on Russia for oil and gas—will spur large-scale investment in green technologies.

But progress is hardly limited to Europe. In fact, on the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 195 countries signed on to a document that accepts the climate crisis as man-made. There is now a crucial global consensus on how much and how quickly the planet is warming, which parts of the world have been affected the most, and the scale and likelihood of long-term scenarios. The governments of the world's biggest polluters, including the United States and China, have committed to reducing their carbon emissions to net zero. Some of the world's biggest companies have offered their own public commitments. In short, climate change has presented an immediate, potentially crippling global problem that has forced many governments, the private sector, and civil-society organizations to work together. But there are big unanswered questions. A certain degree of warming has already become inevitable, and governments and private-sector leaders need to accept and spend more on climate-adaptation strategies.

The shift toward cleaner energy will transform longstanding fossil-fuel-based trade partnerships like those between China and Russia or the United States and Saudi Arabia. That trend will shift the balance of power across entire regions and stoke conflicts that must be contained.

They also need to prepare for the economic—and, therefore, geopolitical—disruptions to come. EU leaders are currently working hard to end their dependence on Russian oil and natural gas. However, this is simply an acceleration of a process that global warming had already kickstarted. In coming years, as rising seas and violent storms command our attention and green energy technologies become more affordable, the governments of countries that remain dependent on fossil fuel exports will face collapse. As decarbonization strategies advance, these countries will export less oil and more turmoil.

The shift toward cleaner energy will transform longstanding fossil-fuel-based trade partnerships like those between China and Russia or the United States and Saudi Arabia. That trend will shift the balance of power across entire regions and stoke conflicts that must be contained. One of the most critical questions is how to prepare for a world with tens of millions of climate refugees. The political, economic, and humanitarian stakes could not be higher.

DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

There is another challenge that may also amount to a crisis. A wide range of disruptive new technologies is fundamentally changing our relationships with our governments and one another. These technologies are changing how we think and live, often in ways we do not understand.

Even at a time of pandemic, when millions of lives depend on scientists and doctors to develop new protections and treatments quickly, we do not inject large numbers of people with a new drug before testing it. We need to know how it will affect people, whether it will protect them, how long the protection will last, and what side effects it might have. But when new algorithms are developed that determine which ideas, information, and images will be ingested, how money will be spent, what products we will buy, and how we will interact with other people, no testing is done at all. Private companies are allowed to inject all this directly into the public bloodstream.

Consider the many other ways new technologies are transforming our lives. For example, they are already reinventing the skills needed to earn a living. We know that many workplaces are being automated, and robots are performing many jobs that people once held. A 2019 study from the Brookings Institution found that workers with graduate or professional degrees will be almost four times as exposed to AI displacement in coming years as workers with a high school diploma.

New technologies are also changing warfare. In the coming age of autonomous weapons, war will more often be waged through buttons that push themselves—by calculating how and when to strike without human oversight. In addition, cyberweapons are far more likely to be used on a large scale than far more expensive and complex to use nuclear weapons. They have already been deployed with increasingly disruptive effects in recent years, and the emerging confrontation between Russia and the West will highlight their dangers.

It will also become even cheaper and easier for rogue states, or worse yet, non-state actors, to develop or acquire cyberweapons, which are easier to attain and harder to police and deter yet have nearly as much potential (and, soon, potentially more) to terrorize cities, take down economies, and bring war.

Quantum computing has moved from publicly shared research to a small number of companies (some supported by governments) bringing their efforts in-house, making it harder to assess comparative capabilities and the potential for game-changing breakthroughs. Many believe functional quantum computers would make cryptographic security obsolete, rendering the most advanced national security systems vulnerable. What would happen if the United States or China were about to build such a capability? The logic for the other country to engage in a preemptive strike would be strong, lest they become irreversibly vulnerable.

Then there is the artificial intelligence revolution, with algorithms that programmers themselves do not understand being released into the "wild" and tested on populations in real-time. It is inconceivable that companies would be allowed to make such decisions around genetically modified food or new vaccines and therapeutics, but with AI algorithms, this is routine. Can a civil society continue to function in such an environment? Can democracies still be fit for purpose, or will centralized control in governance become the "new normal?"

The advance of disruptive technologies is the least well understood of all global crises today. Governments are the least prepared and resourced to respond to it effectively. This, however, partly reflects the potential solution: technology companies themselves are principal actors, exercising sovereignty over the digital domain.

The world's largest tech companies have far more power to effectively govern the digital space than any government does. Defending against cyberattacks is increasingly and principally a matter for these technology companies. So is identifying disinformation and protecting populations from its dangers.

The primary cause for optimism will not come from American leadership, hampered by bitter partisan divisions, or from U.S.-China cooperation, particularly in areas of fundamental ideological differences over individual rights. Fortunately, Europe is already playing a crucial regulatory role in some of these areas. EU leaders are using the size of the European market to set data use and privacy rules for the globe.

Still, the world's largest tech companies—Facebook, Google, Amazon, Microsoft, and Apple— have far more power to effectively govern the digital space than any government does. Defending against—and even identifying—cyberattacks is increasingly and principally a matter for these technology companies. So is identifying disinformation and protecting populations from its dangers. Accordingly, tech companies are critical to creating policies, institutions, and global architec-

ture needed to respond to the crises of disruptive technologies. How effective the response is will depend in part on cooperation between governments and corporations, as well as on the global models the tech companies choose to align themselves with.

COOPERATION BEFORE AFFINITY?

There are crises already unfolding that will offer real opportunities to boost international cooperation—if we can learn from the mistakes of the recent past. Whether the crisis that must be addressed is a new Cold War, the next pandemic, the profound impacts of climate change, or the disruptive power of many new technologies, American leadership will remain limited by the bitter partisan infighting that makes the United States so dysfunctional, and mistrust will limit how Washington and Beijing can work together.

The advance of disruptive technologies is the least well understood of all global crises today. Governments are the least prepared and resourced to respond to it effectively.

But if they can form pragmatic partnerships in critical areas, there are others that can play vital roles in boosting global cooperation. The EU, in particular, has shown that alliances of like-minded countries can still offer big solutions to big problems in their common interest. There are also roles for the private sector, the international scientific community, and ordinary citizens in boosting cooperation.

Our decision-makers and influencers do not have to like one another, much less agree on a single set of political and economic values. They do not need to solve every problem. On the other hand, never has it been more evident that political leaders, the private sector, and citizens of all countries had better cooperate toward goals that we cannot achieve alone. History shows it is both necessary and possible.

WHY CHINA'S RISE WILL CONTINUE

Wang Wen

A FEW American scholars have blindly forecast recently, "The End of China's Rise", "China Is a Declining Power." When Chinese scholars hear this, many smile wide, suppressing chuckles. To them, these erroneous end-of-China slogans only reveal knee-jerk jealousy, and nothing more.

After all, these blowhard oracles are only displaying their raw ignorance. They are not worth refuting. This is why Chinese scholars have not spent a nickel's worth of free advice to disabuse Michael Beckley and Hal Brands, who published long articles on these topics in *Foreign Affairs* and *Foreign Policy* in late 2021. Over the past 20 years, there have been a slew of distorted remarks concocted about China by American scholars, which includes, for instance, the work of David Shambaugh or Gordon G. Chang's *The Coming Collapse of China* (2001). Each time, they were vigorously countered by Chinese scholars. This time, the Chinese intellectual community is obviously remaining calm and confident.

However, American intellectuals should not be entertaining these highly deceptive viewpoints. They should instead be brighter and far more sophisticated. Especially if they are to postulate points for policymakers, businesses, and the American public to negotiate properly with China. Predicting China's decline carries similar risks as predicting its collapse. Both deviate from China's common sense with strategic misjudgments. Any theoretical analysis should not go against common sense. China's rise is irreversible. Its rise is not unhelpful to American interests. Nor is it frightening. Instead, either ignoring or demonizing the rise of China is extremely worrying. It misses the ball entirely—and China is all about playing ball.

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Photo: Gulliver Image

Binge-building as China's signature take on infrastructure development

THE BASICS OF CHINA'S SUSTAINED RISE

The inertia of China's development over the past four decades of reform and opening has made the country's future development trends less difficult to predict. Many strategists who know how to invest in China usually look sinecure development tracks in the Five-Year Plans, Party Congress Reports, and government work reports. Even those who doubt the Communist Party document cannot avoid the following three basic facts that underpin China's continued rise.

The first basic fact is this: all Chinese people seek a better life. This is the driving force behind sustained rise. Compared with the time of former President Mao Zedong, Chinese people are no longer willing to endure poverty for revolutionary ideals. Pursuing better material benefits and spiritual enjoyment has become the biggest national dream of China since the era of Deng Xiaoping in 1978. It also presently carries the broadest national consensus. On his first day in office in 2012, President Xi Jinping declared that the people's desire for a better life is the goal of the Communist Party of China (CPC).

China is now firmly the world's second-largest economy, compared with

1978 when it was one of the poorest countries in the world. This growth is tangible everywhere across the country. For example, China's urban housing per capita is only 39 square meters, but this is five times that of the 8.1 square meters in 1978. This is still less than two-thirds that of Americans (about 65 square meters). Also, the average Chinese owns just 0.21 cars per person, a fifth as many as Americans. China's urbanization rate is only 57 percent, compared with 82 percent in the United States. The average annual consumption of consumer goods in China is about $4,600, only a quarter of that in the United States.

Common sense tells us that as long as diligent Chinese people want to eat better, live better, and dress better, this will ensure that their personal dreams are gradually realized. The translation? China will have another 200 million middle class residents by 2035.

Other statistics are more illuminating. As of 2021, China had about 600 airports, while the United States had more than 13,500. In China, there are still a billion citizens who have never flown in the sky. And 200 million Chinese still do not have western toilets in their homes, using basic squat toilets instead. Only 4 percent of Chinese have a college education, compared with about 25 percent in the United States.

However, in the first 20 years of the twenty-first century, China created 200 million new middle class citizens. The world today witnesses with wide-eyes China's prosperity through the high-rise buildings of Shenzhen and Shanghai, particularly Pudong district. But it should not be forgotten that Shenzhen and Pudong were poor places 20 years ago. In fact, many parts of China today resemble these two places from before they developed. These other parts of the country will change too, soaring to the clouds. Common sense tells us that as long as diligent Chinese people want to eat better, live better, and dress better, this will ensure that their personal dreams are gradually realized. The translation? China will have another 200 million middle class residents by 2035. The volume of the world's second-largest economy cannot be the upper limit of China's development.

Certain Western naysayers need to think hard about this. Some will question whether China can introduce policies to sustain this effervescent growth. This is the second basic fact that Americans struggle to grasp: the continuity of Chinese policy. The policy of reform and opening up, established during Deng Xiaoping's reign, continued well under Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, and thrives today under Xi Jinping. The difference is that some adjustments have been made based on realistic challenges as times changed dramatically. For example, the one-child policy was adhered to for more than 30 years. With the emergence of an aging population, the policy has been changed to a two-child and three-child policy under Xi Jinping. On the basis of lifting 800 million people out of absolute poverty, China is nurturing rural revitalization plans. After establishing policies that put science and technology as the primary productive forces, China is carrying out policies for independent power in science and technology. This is successfully being implemented despite facing the technological blockades from the United States.

After establishing policies that put science and technology as the primary productive forces, China is carrying out policies for independent power in science and technology. This is successfully being implemented despite facing the technological blockades from the United States.

In the wake of the real estate bubble, China has implemented the policy of "no speculation in housing." It has also instituted a pilot property tax to ensure that prices remain stable over a period of five years. Moreover, China became the world's largest recipient of foreign capital for the first time in 2020. It did so by gradually advancing financial opening-up measures while ensuring financial stability.

These reforms and measures aimed at gradual opening were skillfully set in motion in accordance with the actual conditions of state policies established during the Deng Xiaoping era. Chinese leaders are constantly alert and self-aware. They do not have a sense of crisis to prevent from losing their country. On average, every two months, the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee (25 people in total), as the highest decisionmaking body, will collectively study the situational landscape. In 2021, collective learning included eight themes, covering the digital economy, blockchain, and biosafety. During each study session, Xi stressed the importance of meeting the needs of the people. All Chinese people know that the Chinese path towards 2035 and 2050 must meet the needs of the people. Sure, the path is twisty, muddy, and bumpy. But the direction is certain.

Can external forces stop the pursuit of a better life and interrupt the continuity of Chinese policy? No outside force dares to invade China. This is the third element of basic common sense. To put this into historical perspective, Iran's rise after the 1979

Islamic Revolution was interrupted by the Iran-Iraq War. The invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was the beginning of the Soviet Union's last spasm and eventual decline. Many contented that the Afghan war in 2001 was the point at which American hegemony fell.

In this same 40-year stretch, China was the only major economy that remained uninvolved in a war. Instead, China reaped the growing peace dividend, just as the United States did in the first half of the twentieth century when it moved away from World War I and World War II. China has meanwhile developed and invested in state- of-the-art aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, and intercontinental missiles. However, unlike the United States—which has hundreds of military bases overseas—China has kept a precise balance between not waging war and preventing foreign invasion.

At present, if the province of Taiwan declares independence, the Mainland will deploy military force. Beijing will not hesitate to be an enemy of any external forces to help defend the Taiwan Province, which is presently the biggest risk for sparking an armed conflict in the region. This tests the wisdom of the Chinese people. It also informs the wisdom and rationality of the whole world, especially Americans, to mitigate and prevent risks. China is doing its best to avoid incidents similar to the Ukraine crisis in the Taiwan Strait, but it must also resolutely defend China's core interests and national unity. In August 2022, the reaction to U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan fully demonstrated this resolve.

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Based on these facts, the likelihood of China's rise ending any time soon is quite low.

Five Misunderstandings of China's Development

The basis for speculating about the end of China's rise rests upon this salient detail: the continuous decline of China's GDP growth rate over the past decade. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, China's average annual GDP growth was about 10.4 percent, but it dropped to 7.7 percent in the second decade. It is estimated to fall to around 5 percent in the third decade. But remember, China's GDP base is increasing. A slower growth rate does not mean a lower increment. For example, China's GDP growth of 6 percent in 2019 is equivalent to its total GDP in 1996. Ignoring the complexity of the decline in GDP growth rate is a major misjudgment by certain American scholars when it comes to observing Chinese development.

The first misjudgment is to regard the decline in China's GDP growth rate as an economic recession. In fact, even with a 5 percent growth rate in the third decade of the twenty-first century, China is still one of the fastest-growing major economies. It is likely to overtake the United States as the largest economy in 2030. Since 2012, China has been fighting corruption. More than 200 officials at or above the provincial and ministerial levels have been convicted for corruption. More than 600,000 officials were punished. Some have even been sentenced to death. In the "pre-modernized" society, corruption was often the lubricant of economic growth. Some officials took bribes to relax regulations or speed up project approvals. However, with the modernization of state governance, China needs a clean political environment. The people's war against anti-corruption has greatly reversed China's economic inertia, which used to revolve around power and money. While its ledgers show GDP growth rate is declining, it is also abundantly clear that popular support for the party is mounting.

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Since 2017, China has defined "three tough battles," which entail preventing and defusing major risks, accurately eliminating poverty, as well as mitigating and managing pollution. Like a physical examination to cure a disease, China is committed to healthy economic development. Of course, one should not deny economic problems. Additionally, the Chinese experience since Deng Xiaoping has involved resolving problems as the driving force for sustained economic growth and social prosperity.

The second misjudgment is to regard the bankruptcy of some large private enterprises in China as market economy stagnation. As a matter of fact, the bankruptcy and reorganization of major private enterprise groups—such as Anbang, HNA and CEFC, or the current rectification of Evergrande—demonstrates that the country's economic policy is not about "promoting communism," as some American media said.

This is about regulating the disorderly expansion of capital in accordance with the law.

In China, the legal operation of private companies (such as Huawei, Tencent, Alibaba, and ByteDance) is strictly protected by law. Over the past decade, China has registered more than 10,000 new market players every day. The prosperity and bankruptcy of private enterprises is a normal economic law in and of itself. The implementation of laws governing labor, property, as well as civil and commercial matters, reflect the legal efforts of the Chinese people to maintain ownership rights. A stark case in point: during the COVID-19 outbreak, the Chinese government rescued the people at all costs. When the pandemic first broke out, the death rate per million was the lowest in the entire world. China also exported 50 percent of the masks it produced, including also 20 percent of ventilators, and 60 percent of its COVID-19 vaccines to the rest of the world. This testifies to the Chinese people's respect for life. This is a fact that everyone must admit.

China's rise is irreversible. Its rise is not unhelpful to American interests. Nor is it frightening. Instead, either ignoring or demonizing the rise of China is extremely worrying. It misses the ball entirely—and China is all about playing ball.

The third misjudgment is to regard the centralized power as a "state dictatorship." Some American scholars are in the bad habit of using models of fascism and Soviet communism to evaluate China. Summing up the experience of the CPC over the course of the past 100 years is not easy. Still, it boils down to this: the authority of the Central Committee and leadership of the CPC is the strongest guarantee for the effective governance of 1.4 billion Chinese people. This means managing a diverse society, numerous nationalities, and complex regions.

Americans should appreciate this. After all, the first paragraph of Article IV of the American Constitution reads: "each state should give complete trust and respect to the public bills, records and judicial procedures of other states." In this respect, why do Americans often have no basic trust and respect for China's governance process? Every year, the Pew Research Center in the United States makes a global adjustment of people's satisfaction with their government. In it, China is ranked above 80 percent, which is among the highest in the world. China is not the Soviet Union, much less Nazi Germany or Imperial Japan. On the contrary, Chinese policymakers are constantly wary of a return to autocracy. They define China's future in its constitution as a "prosperous, democratic, and civilized country."

The fourth misjudgment is to regard the complaints made by certain members of China's elite as a sign of backsliding. Elites often monopolize the right to speak on national development. However, Washington's political complaints often make people lose sight of the romance, quietness, and peace of the American Midwest. Similarly, in China, some middle-and high-income groups will complain about the high tax, the introduction of property taxes, and the strictest "eight regulations" in history, which lasted for nearly 10 years.

Summing up the experience of the CPC over the course of the past 100 years is not easy. Still, it boils down to this: the authority of the Central Committee and leadership of the CPC is the strongest guarantee for the effective governance of 1.4 billion Chinese people.

But the implementation of the policy of "two guarantees and three assurances" (the guarantees being food and clothing, and the assurances referring to compulsory education, basic medical care, and housing safety) for low-income people is often neglected. The society owned, governed, and enjoyed by the one percent that Stiglitz criticized is something against which China is firmly on guard. Measured by household income, China's Gini coefficient has shown a trend of fluctuation and decline, from the peak of 0.491 in 2008 to 0.468 in 2020. To control and narrow the gap between the rich and poor, China still faces tremendous challenges. This will not be achieved without complaints, but these should be articulated with solutions and proper courses of action.

The fifth misjudgment is to regard patrols of Taiwan as the harbingers of imminent invasion. Both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to China, with which most of the world agrees. It is central to the bilateral consensus in the three China-U.S. communiques. The conundrum is that the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) government of Taiwan is taking risks by slicing its way to *de jure* independence with the help of the United States. I have repeatedly told my American friends not to touch the Taiwan red line, just as Mao Zedong warned MacArthur not to cross the Military Demarcation Line in 1950. No Chinese citizen will allow Taiwan to become independent.

There are additional bellwether signals that the Taiwan issue cannot be dragged on indefinitely. No great power can truly rise with territorial disunity.

China will not give up its efforts for a final peaceful settlement of the cross-strait issue until Taiwan makes the Mainland use its fully operational forces. If the West misjudges the determination of the Chinese people, it will pay a greater price than it did on the Korean battlefield in the 1950s. It will suffer more than on the battlefields of Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s. It will awaken stunned, much like it was with the issue of Crimea in 2014.

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Chinese (not U.S.)-led Development

In the third decade of the twenty-first century, China has more control over the pace of development than ever before. Unlike Japan, China cannot be lectured and manipulated by the United States. China is not Iran either, which pursues a completely anti-American strategy. China maintains its power against the United States, and can defend its core interests without being led by Washington's heavy-handed will.

An important example of this transpired in the previous presidential administration. Trump, Pompeo, and others constantly provoked China with the most vicious language. Except for the necessary counter-measures and criticisms made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the top decisionmaking level of China never countered the "Trumpkins" with harsh words. China diplomatically avoided provoking the Americans more seriously. This prevented China and the United States from falling into a new "Cold War" trap.

Of course, the United States should not take any chances. If cases similar to the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia in 1999, or the 2001 collision between Chinese and American military aircraft over the South China Sea were to happen again, the United States would surely face a strong response. That would be a disaster for Sino-American relations, and a tragedy for humanity. In this regard, the Washington Post reported that the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley had a phone call with highest-ranking officers in the Chinese military and promised not to launch an attack on China. If true and genuine, such military rationality and calmness should be appreciated.

The United States should give up any illusions that China will not fight back. In fact, since the launch of U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's policy toward China, the world has seen Beijing maintain its ability to strike back at others with anti-sanction measures. If the United States imposes 25 percent tariffs on Chinese goods, China will impose 25 percent tariffs on American goods. Should the Americans close the Chinese Consulate General in Houston, China will reciprocate by closing the U.S. Consulate General in Chengdu. If Washington sanctions Chinese officials, Beijing will retaliate against American officials.

China's global strategic goal is still to maintain the stability of the international order.

China is an opponent of the same order as the United States. I agree with Dr. Henry Kissinger's latest statement that no country has the potential to dominate the world. There should be no illusions that the United States can dominate China.

China's global strategic goal is still to maintain the stability of the international order. According to Professor Alastair Iain Johnston of Harvard University, China is a country that likes to maintain the status quo. It has joined most international treaties and organizations since World War II. China has acceded to some international treaties, but the United States has not, such as the International Convention on the Law of the Sea. From others—like the Arms Trade Treaty that China recently joined—the United States withdrew. China is the biggest supporter of the Paris Agreement in climate change. Overall, China and the United States maintain a highly consistent strategy on climate change, as well as combatting money laundering, terrorism, and cyber-crime.

During the 2008 global financial crisis, then U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton came to China, hoping to get the two nations to "help each other." Secretary Clinton asked China to increase its holdings of U.S. Treasury bonds, and China did. Since 2013, China has promoted the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) strategy, even inviting the United States to join it many times. Now, it is also advocating cooperation with the Build Back Better World (B3W) program—an American economic initiative designed to serve as an alternative to BRI. Total U.S. assets in China have exceeded $2.2 trillion. The average annual profit margin of American companies in China remains above 15 percent. In fact, the Federal Retirement Reserve Board, which controls more than $600 billion, has repeatedly vowed to increase investment in Chinese capital markets. From this point of view, it is not in line with the facts if we exaggerate the strategic differences between China and the United States.

There is also an often-overlooked fact; in no legal documents or official reports does the Chinese government set to surpass other countries as its strategic goal. In 2014, both the IMF and the World Bank released a study stating that China's economic size had surpassed that of the United States in purchasing power parity terms. However, the Chinese government did not accept this statement. On the contrary, China has always stressed that it will always be a developing country. It will not accept G2 membership, or join the rich countries club. No other country in the history of the world has ever been as self-disciplined as China with its rise. China declares that it will never seek hegemony, that it will not be the first to use nuclear weapons, and that it will never invade other countries. It has consciously written these declarations into its constitution. Indeed, over the course of the past 500 years of globalization, is there any country whose rise has been more civilized than China's daring ascent?

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Reshaping Sino-American Competition

Human civilization is approaching the end of the first quarter of the twenty-first century. What kind of a competition do China and the United States need if they are to advance global civilization in their great power competition?

In my opinion, China and the United States should first compete to solve the dilemma of global development. The United States was once regarded as a "lighthouse state," making significant contributions to economic recovery, financial stability, social development, and scientific and technological innovation of various countries after World War II. But just as President Franklin Delano Roosevelt worried, the United States in the twenty-first century has failed to promote national health, the creation of new enterprises, and the continuous improvement of employment opportunities in the world. In the eyes of many Chinese people, the fall of the American myth began with the 2008 financial crisis. The Trump presidency, especially the failure of COVID-19 prevention and control, have dealt a full blow to the long-established "national identity" of the United States. According to the September 2020 Pew Research Center global survey, the U.S. national image and that of then-President Donald Trump degraded from poor to abysmal. This was directly due to the American government's poor response to the pandemic. Only 16 percent believed Trump would "do the right thing in world affairs."

By contrast, the successful hosting of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games accelerated the rise of China's national reputation. Since then, high-speed rail construction, e-commerce, e-payments, poverty eradication, corruption and pollution prevention and control have greatly boosted the attractiveness of China's development model to developing countries. This has made China's path an alternative solution to the global development dilemma. Just as in the third wave of democratization in the 1970s, dozens of countries took the United States as an example to promote their political transformation. In the 2020s, Africa and Asia also witnessed the germination of learning from China's hard-won experience. In the eyes of many countries, the democratic transformation of the past half-century has completely changed the fate of a small number of countries. Yet the majority of poor countries are still poor. However, China's counter-attack road from poverty to wealth makes China appear competitive enough to the U.S. model.)

In the eyes of many countries, the democratic transformation of the past half-century has completely changed the fate of a small number of countries. Yet the majority of poor countries are still poor. China's counter-attack road from poverty to wealth makes China appear competitive enough to the U.S. model.

In 2021, America led the G7 in launching the B3W strategy to support infrastructure construction in developing countries. This revealed America's first recognition of BRI as an effective undertaking. It reflected the rational response the United States was forced to make to compete with the Chinese model. The essence of the competition between China and the United States to solve the global development dilemma lies in this question: which country can offer more effective solutions to world development? More importantly, which country can best manage the convenience of life, the well-being of its people, social stability, and economic recovery?

Second, China and the United States should compete to deal with global climate change. Climate change has reached a critical moment. More and more climate scientists believe that if the global mean temperature continues to rise without taking substantive and effective measures, the twenty-first century could be the last complete century of human civilization. Many do not rule this out. The climate crisis will also be accompanied by other sharp crises: energy, financial, and social. These will be of much greater magnitude than the suffering caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

By the end of 2020, some 130 countries had pledged to reach carbon neutrality over the next 20 to 40 years. This included the United States by 2050 and China by 2060. Yet the world has obviously overestimated the prospects for cooperation between the two countries in addressing climate change. China and the United States account for about 45 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions, and can provide more than 60 percent of the world's financial resources. If the two countries continue to maintain tensions over geopolitics, economics and trade, regional security, and other fields, their joint efforts to deal with climate change will be severely damaged. This will test U.S. President Joe Biden's China policy. Already, the Biden administration has tried to direct cooperation, competition, and confrontation between two nations to work in the service of humanity's future.

On this matter, I spoke with China's climate envoy Xie Zhenhua. China very much welcomes the Biden administration's effort to lead the United States back to the framework of Climate Governance. However, it is also concerned about the back-and-forth of U.S. climate policy in the post-Biden era. China and the United States should lead the world to compete in the field of climate change. This should include (but not be limited to) providing climate remote sensing satellites for Africa, building low-carbon demonstration zones for Southeast Asia, and installing energy-saving lamps for small island countries in the South Pacific. The two need to provide credit and funds for more green infrastructure, energy, transportation, and technology for the world. The world expects the China-U.S. competition to make global cooperation on climate change more practical and lasting.

Moreover, China and the United States should compete to promote global technological innovation. Developing intelligent technology is like opening "Pandora's box." Will human beings become stronger or weaker in the face of artificial intelligence technology? Towards new prosperity, or extinction? These will be the ultimate tests of humanity's thinking.

On November 17th, 1944, President Roosevelt asked Dr. Vannevar Bush about the future role of science in peacetime. Here is a moving line from that conversation: "Before us are new frontiers of thought, and if we use them with the same vision and courage and drive that we used to fight this war, we can create jobs and lives that are fuller and richer." Eight months later, Dr. Bush responded to the president's inquiry with a report titled, "Science: The Endless Frontier." The report became the great document that drove the development of science and technology in the United States after World War II. Seventy-five years later, when the report was published in Chinese, hundreds of Chinese scientists and IT entrepreneurs praised it and debated what China could learn from it. The race for the "endless frontier" is already underway in China and the United States.

The United States is not necessarily losing this competition. Nor is China destined to win it. More precisely, as long as one country loses, the other cannot win.

However, for Chinese social science scholars like me, the scope of the "competition for endless frontiers" between China and the United States is probably broader and more complex than it was in the days of Dr. Bush. The United States is not necessarily losing this competition. Nor is China destined to win it. More precisely, as long as one country loses, the other cannot win. Just as with COVID-19, as long as the virus is not under control, it is impossible to say who is winning the war against the pandemic. This is myopic thinking, and we truly both need to put our heads together to correct facts, and forge win-win initiatives.

We can deduce this much: 2021 is a landmark year in the history of Sino-American relations. The United States has ended its vacillation on China's strategic positioning since the twenty-first century commenced. It formally regards China as a "primary competitor" in a hope to maintain American hegemony. The word "competition" is not rejected by Chinese policymakers. However, they do not understand it in the same way the American policymakers do. In 2018, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said, "if there is competition between China and the United States, it should also be a healthy and positive one." In January 2021, Chinese President Xi Jinping hinted at the prospect of competition between China and the United States in a video speech at Davos. President Xi said, "we should promote competitions based on fairness and justice, and carry out competitions that seek to catch up with each other and improve together, rather than engage in a fight that attacks each other."

If the two countries have to compete, I hope it will not be a boxing match. I hope it will be more like golf. Whoever wins will need to support global civilization, and development of the world. From this point of view, the real test of the two countries' competitive civilization has just begun. At this new starting point, talking about the end of China's rise is incredibly shortsighted—if not altogether blind.

The World after the Invasion

A View from India

Samir Saran

WHEN Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24th, 2022, the world found itself in uncharted territory. Much of the global community quickly rallied behind the notion that violating a country's territorial integrity in the twenty-first century was inconceivable and unacceptable. This twentieth-century impulse of choosing cruise missiles over conversations was not something that most foreign policy strategists, at least in the West, were expecting, though some could see the looming possibility. The only true surprise was the pace at which it unfolded and the audacity of Putin's decision.

While considerable time has been spent on arguing the Russian red lines in the Ukraine war and the West's conduct to avoid crossing them, it is moot to believe that Russia could come up with any other conventional response or escalation. After all, other than the nuclear arsenal, pretty much everything in their military and political toolkit has already been deployed. While that one exception continues to be a source of great concern, it should also compel the West to give Russia room for an exit strategy. That off-ramp to end the conflict is nearly impossible to define and agree upon because it needs to be acceptable to both Ukraine and Russia and the larger public—implicated by emotions across ideological divides.

Amidst all this, there are two trends for which we need to watch out. First is the distinction between Russians and their President. While there arguably exists a significant distance between the two, the question that we need to ask is whether that distance will increase or narrow as the conflict progresses and the mediated hysteria punishes all Russians and not just the leadership. This will also determine the broader outlook for European security. If the people of Russia continue to align with the Kremlin, we might be in for a rough decade in Europe. After all, history tells us that a Russian society that unites against a sense of assault is resilient, and Europeans might just feel the full extent of Russian nationalism.

Photo: Guliver Image

Anti-war activists in Bhopal, India

Both Europe and the United States are guilty of uniting the Russian public with its leadership by attacking and censoring everyday Russian activities. When musical or ballet performances are shut down or people are prevented from participating in sports events due to their Russian nationality, all Russians will see themselves as being the target of hostility. This geopolitical equivalent of the "cancel culture" that now pervades Western thinking is alien to several non-Western societies. Should Americans be targeted because their government threw the Afghan people under the bus in 2021, or for the decision to invade Iraq in 2003? This Manichean splitting everything into binary choices is an age-old European obsession in which much of the world may not want to participate. Russians are more than Putin, and this should at least inform, if not guide, the thinking of the international community in the time ahead. Else, they are en route to an unremitting hostility in the heart of Europe.

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The second trend is how and when equilibrium can be reached. A possible equilibrium is, of course, the creation of new territories and borders on the map. After this, the inhabitants of new political entities on both sides of the frontline would be expected to move on. This is exceedingly hard to imagine and more importantly, such an equilibrium would certainly not lead to lasting peace. Each side would be looking for the first opportunity to reverse the arrangement in its favor. This brings us to the second vision of equilibrium: It entails a complete Russian retreat, reverting to the pre-Crimea times, and a new beginning. The Russians are not going to agree to this even if the regime in Moscow was to undergo significant changes. Chances that the next President of Russia undoes what Vladimir Putin seeks to achieve are slim. Instead, any successor administrations are only likely to double down. The loud cries for regime change emanating from quarters across the Atlantic reflect shallow thinking, not mindful of outcomes.

Russians are more than Putin, and this should at least inform, if not guide, the thinking of the international community in the time ahead. Else, they are en route to an unremitting hostility in the heart of Europe.

Global Fallout

There are three perspectives to consider when we talk about the global fallout of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The first revolves around the European Union and its role in the coming years. While the present moment can serve as the defining point for the EU to truly become a political and strategic security actor, conversely, as the conflict lingers on, we might also see a reversal and witness the EU backsliding. Trade and transactions could again trump any value-based framework that the bloc today believes is fundamental to defend. We are already seeing a West-East and North-South divide within Europe begin to solidify.

Second, what about the votes that were garnered in favor of the UN General Assembly's resolution to demand the "unconditional withdrawal" of Russian forces from Ukraine's internationally recognized territory? How many of the 140-odd nations are going to hold the same view a few months from now? It is possible that the numbers stay the same, but those outside of the proverbial West might also begin to get exasperated by a never-ending family feud—the increasing non-western imagination of the Ukraine war. The chances that a significant number of nations will see this as a European problem and eventually get on with their lives are quite high—something the old Atlantic order is aware of, but is not fully factoring in at the moment.

Third, most of Asia and Africa see this decade as significant for their transformation. And thus, the trends emerging in 2022 have not helped this cause. Asian states are taking this predicament very seriously and have been carefully studying the consequences of the global shockwave. They are being buffeted by inflation and facing challenges around commodities and energy supplies. How long will it take before nations start blaming the United States and Europe for the inflation that they are experiencing at home? With food security issues, a growing energy crisis, and economies tumbling down, when will a larger chunk of the 140-odd countries that condemned Russia begin to change their mind? Many are reaching the assessment that the weaponization of the financial system, energy, and food is not just a consequence of Russian action, but more so due to the Western response to it. Moving forward, this might serve as another factor for the world to realign itself.

Chances that the next President of Russia undoes what Vladimir Putin seeks to achieve are slim. The loud cries for regime change emanating from quarters across the Atlantic reflect shallow thinking, not mindful of outcomes.

The anxiety that financial systems and technology platforms are partisan and have been weaponized is palpable in Asia and Africa. The use of the SWIFT system as an instrument of war, the threat of usurping other countries' reserves and freezing bank accounts and the imposition of secondary sanctions against third parties has troubled security and economic planners in much of the world. Add to this the big technology giants from the United States. The world is witnessing their capabilities of cancelling an entire country. This is a serious cause for concern for states around the world as they have seen how a set of actors—government or private—have effectively cancelled a country's communication capabilities overnight. Are these global platforms or do they just seek global revenues while adhering to partisan moorings?

No other conflict has seen such enthusiastic and prolific western mobilization against another major nation. Many argue if this war needs to be treated differently from other conflicts that dot the Asian and African landscapes. Some may also ask (and already do) if it is ethical to turn a limited and contained European conflict into a mother of all battles. For those whose aspirations are linked to this decade of action, the muscular and loud war cries emerging out of Europe are detrimental to their core policy priorities and do not resonate on any ethical or moral plane as well.

ANY TAKERS FOR THE RUSSIAN PROPOSITION?

Aside from far-reaching sanctions and impeded communication abilities, the Kremlin has other global reputational risks to worry about. If one looks at the performance of Russian-made weapons used both in the Second Karabakh War, between Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as what the Russians still call a "special military operation" in Ukraine, it is clear that many partner countries need to rethink their defense planning. Russian weaponry is not doing too well. This raises the question as to what extent should any country place reliance on defense procurement from Russia. Experts around the world are watching this conflict quite closely. If the lessons they draw end up affecting their countries' future planning, Russia will have cause to worry about a sector that has been a considerable source of foreign income for decades.

The Russia-Ukraine war has fundamentally changed other things as well. One telling example is that of BRICS, of which Russia is a member. Recently, the Minister of External Affairs of India, S. Jaishankar, said that BRICS assembles "three out of the five countries that have never violated the sovereignty and territorial integrity of anyone else." Coming from a group to which Russia is instrumental, this is a serious signal of how Moscow's actions are assessed even by its partners. The idea that the invasion of Ukraine is not going to affect "brand Russia" is naïve. Just because many will not join the EU's performative chorus against Putin does not mean that there is a huge base willing to condone what the Kremlin has done. The assumption that if one is not shouting out loud there is an affinity to Russian actions is false.

The idea that the invasion of Ukraine is not going to affect "brand Russia" is naïve. Just because many will not join the EU's performative chorus against Putin does not mean that there is a huge base willing to condone what the Kremlin has done.

Similarly, there is an obsession in the West to prevent business transactions and trade with Russia by other countries. India or other geographies procuring oil and commodities from Russia is not an endorsement of Russia's war. It is an act that seeks to serve the best interest of the individual country's own people. It would be pertinent to remember that the EU alone has transferred a gigantic share of revenues Russia has earned, even as it conducted its supportive operations in Ukraine. This hypocritical posturing by the United States and EU will wean away those who may have been voting in their favor in the past.

A BLUEPRINT FOR CHINA?

One important issue that has been raised by many is how Russian behavior, since February 2022, will impact China's actions in the days ahead—with respect to Taiwan or in any other theater, including its border conflict with India.

The first query or test is to assess whether China's President, Xi Jinping, has similar nostalgic yearnings for the Middle Kingdom, as clearly Putin does of *Russkiy Mir*. If the answer is affirmative, then will that yearning override the rationality that several have been attributing to China? Some voices from India and other neighbors of China would suggest that we are seeing a degree of irrational aggression from the latter in more than one political space. Yet, at the same time, we are seeing a determined effort by friends of Beijing in Europe and the Americas to give a free pass to Beijing, and present them as a partner in a world where the enemy is Russia. This is irresponsible and dangerous.

The Chinese lesson from Ukraine is yet to be learned. Beijing may learn from the West's response and Russia's mistakes, leading the Chinese military to avoid Moscow's fate.

And then, there are two realities to contend with vis-à-vis China. First, China as an economic actor that is going to be the overwhelming dominant in the coming decade. All countries will have to contend with this new reality. It will lead to economic responses like building our own resilience and creating a diversification strategy, but it will also imply building political muscularity to rebuff any strategic adventurism. For India, in particular, to pretend that the decade of rogue Chinese action did not happen would be tantamount to insanity. As it would be for Australia, Canada, Japan and many others.

Second, the Chinese lesson from Ukraine is yet to be learned. The Chinese play the long game. A year from now, Beijing may learn from the West's response and Russia's mistakes, leading the Chinese military to avoid Moscow's fate. They may also look beyond the bluster and noise of feeble sanctions and political hype. In Taiwan and otherwise, the lazy belief that the dragon may be either deterred by Russia's slower-than-anticipated progress in Ukraine or the Western response may not be entirely valid.

Amidst all this, it is important to figure out how one can curb and respond to any prospective aggression emanating from China. This is where the EU comes into play. While it is commendable that Europe has core interests, it is important to note that

its behavior has not reflected that over the past decade or during this conflict. The big question that must be asked is whether the EU can muster a more robust sanctions regime and political posture against China's potential action in Taiwan. Bullying the 1.5 trillion-dollar Russian economy with sanctions is one thing; taking on China's 15 trillion-dollar economy requires resolve of another order.

How has this crisis changed the world's approach to China? We see a vocal group of actors in Europe and America arguing for a more favorable approach to China and to see it as a partner instead of a threat. This strong lobby is difficult to wish away and will continue to define its interests based only on economic benefits that accrue from engaging with Beijing.

As a corollary, we must ask ourselves if a values-based strategic approach is only applicable in the European theater, or should it be a global baseline and must also apply to the developments in the Indo-Pacific and Asia? It is time we realize that the EU and Indo-Pacific as well as American and Indian interests are not independent of each other—they are all linked. And therefore, the common goal should be to make the multilateral world and multilateralism work within the framework of a truly multipolar architecture.

What was devised in 1945 is no longer valid or relevant. It is time to rethink multilateralism that may work with a multipolar global order.

We are in a very different world now and multilateralism as we know it today is not fit for purpose anymore. What was devised in 1945 is no longer valid or relevant. The world has not been creative in its pursuit of peace and development. It is time to rethink multilateralism that may work with a multipolar global order. Ukraine is a wake-up call for all to invest in the pursuit of sustainable peace for the decades ahead.

The War against Ukraine and the World Order

Johann David Wadephul

WE are in the midst of a brutal war waged by revisionist Russia against Ukraine, which represents an unprecedented breech of international law in the post-World War II era. Every day, innocent people are being killed, tortured, and even deported. Parts of Ukraine are being subjected to ethnic cleansing. Russia is deliberately using the worst war crimes as a daily means of warfare and committing atrocities. As opposed to former eras of military conflict, a blurry conflation between conventional armed forces, mercenary groups, and extensive cyber operations against Ukraine and other countries adds a new dimension to this war.

Moreover, this war already contains a global dimension. Energy prices are skyrocketing, causing economic downturns among Russia's adversaries and partners alike. Millions of people are starving due to shortages of basic nutritional products as a consequence of weeks-long grain export blockades.

And so far, we are only slowly starting to see the contours of the longer-term repercussions of this war: the effect it has on alliances, relations between countries, and the international order as a whole.

It is necessary to underline that this conflict continues every day. We don't know when, how, and under what circumstances it will stop and what Ukraine, Russia, and the new security architecture will look like then. However, we can already draw first conclusions and extrapolate repercussions in other fields.

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Photo: Guliver Image

Ukraine's President Zelensky receives a standing ovation from the German Bundestag

Let me start with the security realm—both in the international and German domestic context. The war against Ukraine has first and foremost strengthened NATO and underlined its unique importance and vitality.

If we remember the discussions we used to have in the past years about NATO being obsolete or "brain dead"—in the words of French President Emmanuel Macron—I think we can all agree that the exact opposite is now true. NATO is more alive and relevant than ever before. Allies have joined forces to come up with credible deterrence measures, as well as ensure and provide the capabilities and assets for robust territorial defense. Across the board, member states have increased defense budgets and expenditures. More importantly, member states are making an unprecedented and coordinated effort to supply Ukraine with weapons for self-defense.

The alliance has become so attractive that a country like Sweden, with a two-centuries-long tradition of neutrality, has decided to come under the umbrella of NATO. The same applies to Finland, which had long nurtured neutrality too. The two countries are extended a warm welcome of family

members—something we very much cherish and applaud. Sweden and Finland will significantly contribute to our collective defense and add additional security.

We are now forced to critically revisit the readiness of our forces and strengthen our capabilities in light of the new threat that became abundantly clear on February 24th, 2022. The new strategic concept of NATO, which was agreed-upon during the June 2022 NATO summit in Madrid, pays tribute to the new security environment and emerging threats.

We are not buying into the narrative of the Kremlin regime, which regards NATO as a direct threat and blames it for encircling Russia. NATO is and remains a defensive alliance with the principal purpose to credibly defend its member states and provide security.

At the same time, it is important to underline that we are not buying into the narrative of the Kremlin regime, which regards NATO as a direct threat and blames it for encircling Russia. NATO is and remains a defensive alliance with the principal purpose to credibly defend its member states and provide security.

This includes taking the threats that edge closer to NATO territory very seriously. Especially at times when rockets are hitting the ground only kilometers away from the Polish border. We also must take Russia's deployment of nuclear capable missiles in Kaliningrad seriously—a Russian exclave in the heart of Europe. It is also mandatory for us to find answers to threats stemming from new ballistic missile technologies, such as hypersonic weapons.

What counts for NATO as a whole is also reflected in the political debate and decisionmaking of each individual member state. The German case is quite remarkable. For the first time in decades, the German security policy debate has completely shifted. The most notable consequence of such a shift is the additional €100 billion allocated to the national budget for the German Armed Forces, which was agreed upon with overwhelming majority in the German Bundestag on July 3rd, 2022. Those political parties and actors that have traditionally hesitated to invest in our armed forces—most notably the Greens and Social Democrats—have finally made a U-turn and acknowledged the necessity to substantially strengthen our defense. After all, such an investment was necessary in order to provide the German forces with the kind of assets and capabilities the country has committed itself to within NATO.

This budgetary increase will make sure that Germany allocates more than 2 percent of its GDP to defense in the coming years. But more importantly, Germany will make sure that it will once again have the necessary assets in all military domains in order to fulfill its role within the Alliance. Following the discussion on the extent to which we are currently able to support the Ukrainian forces in their fight for freedom, it has become clear that the material readiness of the German Armed Forces is currently lagging.

The war that started in Ukraine on February 24th, 2022, was also a game changer in the sense that the Russian regime was willing to deliberately violate international law. The Kremlin dismissed the very security architecture that it helped to shape after the fall of the iron curtain.

But let us be clear, what German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has referred to as *Zeitenwende*, is not only a financial or budgetary issue. This needs to go hand-in-hand with a general shift of public debate towards a new alignment of priorities for the society, including a higher prioritization of security. Germany—as other countries—cannot shy away from this task and continue to prioritize wide-ranging, expensive contributions to the social system for an aging population. Security is a fundamental precondition in an effort to preserve and lead the way of life we do in the first place. It is up to us politicians to ensure that the momentum of support for security and the much-needed investment in it continue in times of potential economic downturn. We need to make sure that this support continues over the course of many years to come.

Let me briefly shift the focus from hard security to the broader geopolitical repercussions. The war that started in Ukraine on February 24th, 2022, was also a game changer in the sense that the Russian regime was willing to deliberately violate international law. Moreover, the Kremlin dismissed the very security architecture that it helped to shape after the fall of the iron curtain.

Should Russia get away with this aggressive behavior without being heavily sanctioned, this would mean the end of the international rules-based order. This cannot and will never be in our interest. This, again, is a global dimension of the current conflict. Core principles of the UN charter, such as non-violent conflict resolution and the self-determination of people, are at stake. It is no coincidence, that many eyes have rapidly turned to the situation in Taiwan. There too, a free and

liberal democracy is under severe threat, which keeps on increasing every day.

And other countries in Europe, such as the countries of the Western Balkans, Moldova, or the South Caucasus are carefully considering what this could potentially mean for them.

And then, there is a third dimension. The systemic rivalry—between the open, rules-based-order-adhering liberal democracies on the one side, and authoritarian regimes with state-driven economies on the other—is getting increasingly heated and less reconcilable. Let us not forget that the alignment between Russia and China had reached a new level even before the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

If we remember the discussions we used to have in the past years about NATO being obsolete or "brain dead" I think we can all agree that the exact opposite is now true. NATO is more alive and relevant than ever before.

The so-called "Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the International Relations Entering a New Era and the Global Sustainable Development" dated February 4th, 2022, must be considered as a historic step of alignment. The substance of the statement clearly demonstrates that these two countries are challenging the rules-based international order that has existed since the end of World War II. An order from which China itself has tremendously benefited.

This systemic rivalry is not merely an intellectual and theoretical question. It is very concrete. What is at stake, is our way of life around the world. With personal freedoms and liberties, the protection of human rights, peaceful resolution of conflicts, trust in the rule of law, peace, stability, and economic prosperity for all people. Even though we would like to adhere to a set of rules that all countries would obey—and not necessarily move back to an era of bloc confrontation—we cannot shy away from this rivalry. Russia and China are imposing it on us. We must rather make sure that our camp grows stronger and prevails. By saying "our," many often refer to the "West." I do not buy into this geographically restraining concept, because our camp is truly global. In fact, it includes many nations of Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia. It is a staunch family of liberal democracies.

In the recent past, as part of the growing systemic rivalry, we have already witnessed increased engagement in international organizations and fora. Russia and China are increasingly lobbying and even applying pressure on countries in order to drag them over to their side when it comes to votes in international organizations such as the UN.

This is where economic cooperation and infrastructure investment comes in. China has been very strategic when it comes to investing in certain countries and building up economic and commercial ties. Such ties will be increasingly used for political purposes over the mid- and long-term. We all know that the famous Belt and Road Initiative is primarily a political instrument to tie countries to China and make them docile. One needs to be self-critical for a moment and acknowledge that China is exploiting an existing void in infrastructure investment. We as "the West," including the G7, EU, NATO, and like-minded countries, have to ask ourselves a question: why haven't we so far come up with our own convincing offer to third countries?

The G7 nations, combined with the EU, are by far the largest investor, trading partner, and provider of humanitarian assistance and development in the world. But we are not using this potential to ensure our political goals.

It is important that the G7 and like-minded nations soberly acknowledge this development and agree to join forces to make attractive and sustainable counter-offers. The G7 nations, combined with the EU, are by far the largest investor, trading partner, and provider of humanitarian assistance and development in the world. But we are not using this potential to ensure our political goals, especially when it comes to preserving the rules-based international order. We have to do much better and work on improving our instruments.

As opposed to China and its economic weight, which Russia obviously does not have, Moscow has employed another strategy to create dependencies and subservience. On the one hand, it fuels instability in regions and acts as a spoiler, as is the case in the Sahel, Central Africa, and other regions. On the other hand, it creates dependencies through defense and security cooperation. The defense sector is the only sector, with the exception of fossil fuels, in which Russia remains somewhat competitive on the global scale.

This is something we need to acknowledge and take into account when thinking about our policies. This also forces us to resort to *Realpolitik* much more. If one looks at the countries that abstained in the votes of the UN bodies that condemned Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, it becomes clear that this was often not done on political grounds, but was instead based on their over-reliance on Russian military equipment. This was the case with many African countries.

This brings me back to the German debate. Defense cooperation and, more specifically, the export of defense goods and weapons has always been a very emotional topic in Germany. The German export control regime has always been very restrictive, which made it almost impossible to build up strategic partnerships in defense outside of NATO. This cannot be in our interest. Therefore, part of the *Zeitenwende* debate will also have to tackle this question. We need to be able to work much closer together on security and defense with India, South Korea, Japan, the Gulf states, and even countries in Africa and Latin America.

Even though we gave a promise almost 20 years ago in Thessaloniki to all six countries of the Western Balkans that they will be able to join the EU one day, we are yet to deliver on that promise.

Let me bring the geopolitical lens back to Europe. We are witnessing a higher degree of volatility and instability in our immediate neighborhood. The Western Balkans and the South Caucasus are a case in point. Even though we gave a promise almost 20 years ago in Thessaloniki to all six countries of the Western Balkans that they will be able to join the EU one day, we are yet to deliver on that promise. This is not to say that the responsibility lies solely with the EU. However, we need to self-reflect and analyze some hard-boiled realities: we lost our momentum and political attention in the past years. We were not willing to invest the necessary resources and political will to seriously move forward in the accession talks. Moreover, we have allowed individual countries to block potential accession talks without restraint. Third countries such as Russia, China, and Turkey have noticed this emerging vacuum and are now using it to expand their influence in the Western Balkans and the Caucasus.

If we were to only look at geography and the realities it presents us with, it would become clear that abandoning the aforementioned regions cannot possibly be in our interest. The Western Balkans is not only geographically, but also historically and culturally a core part of Europe. This is why the medium-term goal in the region can only be to include all six countries into the EU. We must invest new political energy and determination to speed up the process and ensure that we achieve tangible progress on the way towards EU accession soon.

It is thus commendable—as much as it was necessary—that we finally managed to overcome the blockade that Bulgaria imposed on North Macedonia, paving the way for the beginning of formal accession talks with Tirana and Skopje. We also call on the Serbian government to clearly align with the EU, especially on foreign and security policy in these times of crisis. Recent tensions at the border with Kosovo have only underlined how important it is to make rapid progress in the EU-mediated normalization dialogue.

Last but not least, the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains of great concern. The political stalemate in the country continues, and many of the current political forces prioritize factional politics for egoistic reasons. By doing so, they actively promote personal interests over policies that really cater to the people and bring the nation forward. It is of the utmost necessity that acting politicians stop taking their people hostage, overcome petty divisions, and allow for a new political and economic dynamism. The elections in early October 2022 will be a very important milestone, which will define the path for Bosnia and Herzegovina in the years to come.

Instead of devoting its time and energy to diversification efforts, Germany had become way too dependent on Russian gas. We have to own up to our mistakes and admit that allowing this to happen was indeed a huge blunder.

The war of aggression against Ukraine—and the subsequent sanctions regime implemented against Russia by a large number of nations across the world—have returned economic and energy policy to the center stage of global politics.

Instead of devoting its time and energy to diversification efforts, Germany became way too dependent on Russian gas. We have to own up to our mistakes and admit that allowing this to happen was indeed a huge blunder. Other countries in Europe and the world are going through similar experiences. The task of the day will be to diversify energy imports as soon as possible and accelerate the buildup of renewable energies. The challenge will be not to run from one dependency into another. We should not fully rely on other authoritarian regimes that could turn out to be politically unreliable.

An even bigger challenge is to critically look at potential dependencies of value-chains. This, again, mainly concerns our economic ties with China. Already now, some branches are overly dependent on the Chinese market, such as major German car producers. In some prime products, semi-finished products, or raw materials, we are up to 100 percent dependent on imports from China. This makes us vulnerable and needs to change in a step-by-step fashion. The aim cannot and should not be to decouple from the Chinese economy. Nor is it our wish to fully decouple

from the Russian economy either. But to make ourselves independent and become better protected from blackmail, this must be made a key national security priority.

Diversifying trade and economic partners should not only be seen as a question of commercial or trade policy, but as one of fundamental security policy. Hence, now would be the time for a renewed, ambitious, and accelerated trade policy on both sides of the Atlantic.

The aim cannot and should not be to decouple from the Chinese economy. Nor is it our wish to fully decouple from the Russian economy either.

European trade policy has often been too sluggish in the past years—mainly because of vested interests of individual member states. We are not even on track to ratifying the EU-Mercosur Agreement, even though the negotiations were finalized in 2019. This bloc would easily be the largest trading zone in the world. Setting the standards and bringing these two regions closer together would have a huge impact economically and politically.

And so far, we have not even found it necessary to ratify a comprehensive free trade agreement with our sunshine partner Canada. This underwhelming level of ambition can simply no longer be representative of the EU—certainly not at a time of pressing need to diversify trade and production markets.

Quite the opposite, we should access additional markets in the Asia-Pacific and launch a new initiative aimed at more comprehensive free-trade negotiations with the United States. After all, this is in our mutual interest. And yes, this also comes as a consequence of the war Russia launched against Ukraine and the increasing insecurity in our economic relations with China.

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AFRICA'S PLACE IN A NEW GLOBAL (DIS)ORDER

Vasu Gounden & Andrea Prah

THIRTY years after the end of the Cold War, Europe is once again facing the familiar threat of bombardment, displacement, and uncertainty—this time with more sophisticated weaponry and a greater impact on other parts of the interdependent world. While there are other important developments taking place in the Global South, the discussion of world affairs has become defined by events in Europe. One could argue that a new Cold War is emerging, characterized by a new race in arms, space, and cyber-technology. In addition, another age-old race for land, resources, and influence proceeds at an accelerated pace. Once again, Africa, like the rest of the world, finds itself in a precarious position in an emerging global disorder.

However, this reality is not only driven by events in other parts of the world, but also by developments within the African continent. This article aims to provide an overview of the current challenges and opportunities for the continent within the context of the current geopolitical and economic crisis, which, at the time of this writing, have come to be defined by the Russo-Ukrainian war.

THE AFRICAN LANDSCAPE

Recently, the African peace and security landscape has been dominated by a rise in violent extremism in the West, East, North, and for the first time, Southern Africa. Additionally, a resurgence in violence is noticeable from armed groups in Central Africa, while an increase in *coup d'ëtats* and unconstitutional changes of government have only added to a growing sense of instability.

Military officers, emboldened to conduct coups, have done so in the full knowledge that they will be supported by regional and external actors with vested interests in regime change. With weak deterrence measures in place, all of this demonstrates the need for more effective policy frameworks and responses of the African Union (AU) and the international community. Since 2010, there have been 40 coups and attempted coups across Africa—half of which occurred in West Africa and the Sahel alone. Since 2019, West Africa has experienced six coups in Gabon, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, and two in Mali. In addition to the recent spate of coups, there have been serious constitutional disputes in Ethiopia, Algeria, Guinea, Mali, and Kenya, all of which have had destabilizing effects.

Photo: Guliver Image

"Since 2010, there have been 40 coups and attempted coups across Africa"

In the case of Ethiopia, the dispute has contributed to prolonged armed clashes. However, in order to completely understand the issues of insecurity in Africa, it is important to discuss the structural causes that underpin these developments.

Africa's evolution from a pre-industrial, agrarian society into a twenty-first-century society has not yet fully materialized. This is largely due to exploitation by foreign powers, which often impeded the continent's ability to profit from its own natural and human resources. Between 1800 and 1960, colonialism, within the ambit of

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imperialism, provided the impetus for the industrialization of Europe, leading to the systematic exploitation of Africa's natural resources through a violent and prolonged process of subjugation and extraction.

The population of Africa is growing exponentially and urbanizing rapidly. The number of people living in Sub-Saharan Africa totals around one billion. According to 2022 data published by the World Bank, 50 percent of the region's population will be under the age of 25 by 2050. Neither exponential population growth nor rapid urbanization should pose insurmountable challenges to Africa, mainly due to its abundant natural resources and land mass, both of which can accommodate its growing population. Africa is also home to 60 percent of all arable land in the world and presents an important sector for investment, which demonstrates that food security should not be a challenge. However, the majority of African countries remain incapable of transforming their economies from subsistence to commercial agriculture and exploiting their natural resources through industrialization. These shortcomings have resulted in persistent poverty, growing unemployment, and widening inequality—problems that will be exacerbated with future population growth. This reality reflects on the structural factors driving instability, conflict, and war, while threatening the future of Africa and the world.

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Upon gaining independence in the 1960s, Africa's liberators found themselves inheriting states fashioned along colonial patterns of exploitation. This provided fertile ground for corrupt, kleptocratic, and predatory elites to fester—of which former President of Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, DRC) Mobutu Sese Seko and the so-called Central African Emperor Jean-Bédel Bokassa are well-known representatives. However, colonial devastation also inadvertently resulted in the birth of Africa's iconic liberators like the former presidents of Tanzania and Ghana, Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah. The liberators and kleptocrats of Africa equally found themselves in the middle of a global Cold War characterized by ideological clientelism, and tied to a global economic order from which it was difficult to extricate. Consequently, Africa was not shaped by its indigenous governance systems, but its colonial legacy and the Cold-War ideological patronage paradigm. The end of the Cold War in 1989 coincided with the dismantling of the dominant one-party system and its hasty replacement with multiparty democracy. History will judge whether—and under what socio-economic conditions—such a rapid transformation could succeed. However, in this transformation, Africa swung between success and failure for three decades. Other than some genuine democrats emerging, many autocrats and kleptocrats remained in power by "democratic means" and with the support of their allies, whose interests they were willing to serve. To some extent, postcolonial Africa is still defined by its relationship with former colonial powers, which continues to drive elitist and divisive politics of today.

Africa's evolution from a pre-industrial, agrarian society into a twenty-first-century society has not yet fully materialized. This is largely due to exploitation by foreign powers, which often impeded the continent's ability to profit from its own natural and human resources.

Today, Africa is in the midst of a global pandemic, which has fueled additional crises in healthcare and the economy while exacerbating the security and humanitarian situations. Social and political conflict is on the rise throughout Africa. Several countries that are unable to fully control their sovereign territories are witnessing a rise in radicalized insurgencies in the Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, Northern Mozambique, and the Horn of Africa. Human, drug, and arms trafficking continue to provide an important source of revenue for insurgent groups and other organized crime rings, with West Africa serving as a hotspot. The resurgence of the M23 armed group in eastern DRC has once again contributed to instability and displacement in that region.

Poor governance, intertwined with weak security establishments of these countries, has contributed to a rapid shift towards the utilization of private military and security companies. Such companies include the Russian-based Wagner Group in the Central African Republic, Mali, Sudan, and Libya, and the South African-based Dyck Advisory Group, which operates mostly in Mozambique. A crucial point of concern is the difficulty to regulate the activities of private military companies and hold them accountable for any human rights violations. An additional challenge is the fact that the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) have neither signed nor ratified the UN International Convention Against the Recruitment, Use, Financing, and Training of Mercenaries—a matter of both bitter irony and incredible convenience for the permanent UNSC member states, in which some of these companies are based. Private military companies

often act as an extension of their host country's interests in Africa, actively competing for space and influence. In addition, the protagonists of conflict in Africa understand the global divide well, and do not hesitate to exploit such conditions for political and economic gain. External powers are also competing to resolve Africa's challenges, and in so doing provide political, military, and economic support to particular local actors of their choosing. This certainly creates the impression that a new global war is again being fought on African soil.

Neither exponential population growth nor rapid urbanization should pose insurmountable challenges to Africa, mainly due to its abundant natural resources and land mass, both of which can accommodate its growing population.

However, a discussion on the state and development of Africa should not be dominated by its challenges alone. It is important to steer clear of a purely afro-pessimistic lens and also acknowledge that Africa has made huge progress in many areas. It transformed the Organization of African Unity, the body that oversaw the liberation of Africa, into the AU. This was particularly important for the promotion of peace and security on the continent. It enabled the organization to move from a position of non-interference to one of non-indifference, which now offers crucial opportunities for intervention in various conflicts on the continent. The AU—together with the Regional Economic Communities and Regional Mechanisms—has been tasked with ensuring peace and stability, good governance, and the economic transformation of the continent. Three decades of building these institutions, and implementing their programs to attain their respective mandates, have yielded satisfactory results.

In responding to the scourge of insurgencies on the continent, African states have organized themselves into *ad hoc* security arrangements—albeit supported by the AU—mandated to militarily reduce the threat level emanating from insurgent groups. These are the Regional Cooperation Initiative, created with the aim to eliminate the Lord's Resistance Army; the Multinational Joint Task Force, formed by a group of West African states to respond to Boko Haram; and the G5 Sahel Joint Force, founded in 2017 to respond to the expansion of extremists in the region. Similarly, the AU Mission in Somalia became one of the first peacekeeping operations with a counterterrorism mandate. While the impact of multiple operations has yielded mixed results, it illustrates important examples of African-led security arrangements.

Building on this success, it is important to emphasize the work that is still needed to address the structural causes of these conflicts. Such work is rooted in transforming the economies of most African countries—from subsistence toward commercial agriculture—and beneficiating natural resources through industrialization. In the absence of this transformation, exponential population growth, coupled with rapid urbanization, will present a threat to peace and stability.

Postcolonial Africa is still defined by its relationship with former colonial powers, which continues to drive elitist and divisive politics of today.

THE GLOBAL SPILLOVER

In this context, Africa is forced to respond to the current political and economic crises that are unfolding in Europe and the United States. Furthermore, increasing tensions between China and the United States and an increasingly compromised system of multilateral governance only add fuel to the fire. This new global war, characterized by a new race in arms, space, and the cyber domain is happening during a global health pandemic, climate crisis, rise in terrorism, and growing xenophobia. We are at an historic juncture of our civilization's evolution, when our very survival as a species is threatened. It is at this very moment that the states with substantial military and economic power should be leading the world in pooling the intellectual and financial capital (as well as our collective natural resources) to build a new world order based, not on a philosophy of mutually assured destruction, but on one of mutually assured development!

The Russo-Ukrainian war threatens to cause long-term economic, social, political, and military destabilization of the global community. In Africa, as in many other parts of the world, the impact of the war has been felt through inflation, the agricultural sector, and the gas industry. For the continent, it has presented both opportunities and challenges. Because of low fertilizer supply, on whose imports from Russia and Ukraine some East African states depend, the continent is seeing reduced harvests coupled with a rise in wheat prices. The impact on food security could exacerbate an already fragile socio-economic situation in the context of the ongoing Ethiopian conflict. The conflict has also magnified Europe's need to diversify its energy sources. Sub-Saharan Africa has been identified as a potential source of liquefied natural gas—specifically Somalia, Angola, DRC, and Mozambique. While this may be seen as an investment opportunity, previous experiences have shown otherwise, with Mozambique incurring heavy debt before making any real profits from gas exploration projects. It is therefore

crucial for African leaders to ensure that all deals reflect both strong sustainability for the communities in resource-rich areas and the protection of the environment. For example, Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan has put forward a partnership with European gas companies to facilitate exports to Europe in an effort to sustainably secure new markets.

Another sector of the extractive industry, which has become of increasing interest to European nations, relates to the raw materials needed to power the batteries of electric vehicles. The electric alternative is featured high up on the policy agenda of various multilateral forums, under the banner of 'responding to climate change,' and driven largely by the Global North. In some cases, these climate change policies do not share the same benefits for the Global South, which will be footing the bill for reducing carbon emissions through the production of more electric vehicles—after the European Parliament outlawed the sale of new cars using gasoline or diesel by 2035. The pressure to move the entire automotive industry to battery power means that the minerals that go into the batteries will have to be mined out of Africa on a massive scale. This speaks volumes about the renewed drainage of Africa's resources. Such lob-sided arrangements ignore environmental risks, create socioeconomic problems for African communities, and promote resource extraction, as opposed to a much-needed industrialization of Africa. This is not to downplay the importance and impact of climate change, but instead to emphasize the importance of having an approach of balanced benefits for the Global North and South.

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The growing crisis around Ukraine, tensions in the South China Sea and Taiwan, and the recently published America Competes Act, all point to a deepening division between China and the United States. This tension has the potential to play out as a competition for influence in various African states. Such a scenario already includes other interests represented by Turkey, Israel, Russia, the UAE, France, and multinational corporations. Ideally, one may hope that the threats to our common future posed by health, climate, and social crises will create a platform for greater cooperation and less competition. In the meantime, the danger of the continent being dragged into an emerging global cold war should be of great concern to the African people and their leaders. A failure to recognize this danger might result in Africa being denied the opportunity to stay on its current development trajectory—however slow and unsteady it might seem in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. An interruption of Africa's development today would undoubtedly leave lasting and devastating consequences.

African leaders owe it to their people to act in their best interests and avoid accepting external impulses aimed at exploitation and short-term gain. Neither Africa's people, nor its leaders, should become pawns in this new world disorder.

Retaining Independence

African leaders owe it to their people to act in their best interests and avoid accepting external impulses aimed at exploitation and short-term gain. We need to retain our dignity and shape our destiny through African solutions to African challenges. Neither Africa's people, nor its leaders, should become pawns in this new world disorder. While the position of non-alignment may no longer be feasible given the sustained influence of external powers on the continent, this part of African history remains an important source of inspiration from a time when the Soviet Union and the United States created a similar volatile environment. It speaks of retaining a form of independence while taking positions on matters of global concern. Speaking at a planning meeting for the 1970 conference of the Non-Aligned Movement, Julius Nyerere explained that the movement was "an important new international development which the Big Powers could not ignore. The Conference was saying, in fact, that a Third Force existed in the world—a group of sovereign states which insisted upon making their own judgements on world issues in accordance with their own aspirations, needs, and circumstances." In navigating this new cold war, Africa would do well to reflect on the wisdom of its past in order to move ahead.

The World Order in Crisis

Mark Lyall Grant

IN May 2022, George Soros suggested that Russia's invasion of Ukraine might be the start of World War III. I think that this is an exaggerated fear, but the invasion has certainly highlighted the fact that the current world order is under very serious threat.

It is worth recalling what Western countries mean by the rules-based international order. In the 1940s and 1950s, the victors of World War II—in practice, primarily the United States and the United Kingdom—founded new multilateral organizations, such as the United Nations, NATO, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (the precursor to the WTO), the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. They also established regulatory regimes and standards for almost all international transactions from telecommunications and civil aviation to the environment and disarmament. Both the institutions and the norms were designed to reflect a liberal vision, based on Western values of open trade, the rule of law, and human rights. This international system was underpinned by American leadership and a brand of liberal, free trade economics that became known as the 'Washington Consensus.'

Throughout the 40-odd years of the Cold War, the Soviet Union stayed somewhat aloof from this international order, unwilling to participate fully, but unable to seriously challenge it. Instead, it preferred to operate bilaterally when it was in its interest to do so, such as in nuclear arms limitation talks with the United States.

Then, in 1989, the end of the Cold War ushered in a 20-year golden era for the liberal international order. Eastern Europe became free and democratic. The UN Security Council had a new lease of life, mandating a large number of peacekeeping missions around

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Photo: Guliver Image

The author representing the UK in the UN Security Council

the world, aimed at tackling conflicts. Similarly, the International Criminal Court (ICC) was established, as was the Human Rights Council. Women's rights and LGBT rights were advanced; the Arms Trade Treaty was broadly agreed upon and conventions on chemical weapons and cluster munitions were signed. In addition, concepts such as Responsibility to Protect (R2P) and humanitarian intervention were proposed.

It is striking that every single one of these institutional and normative initiatives came from the West; and all of them went in a more liberal, rights-based direction.

Of course, there was still some resistance at various points. During my tenure as British Ambassador to the United Nations in New York, we used to say that the UN was divided into the A and B teams: activists and blockers. The activists, led by the Western powers, wanted to use the multilateral system to get things done, while the blockers largely wanted to defend the status quo.

From about 2010, a more systematic pushback against the liberal international order became noticeable. An informal coalition formed of conservative Islamic countries, Russia, China, some prominent non-aligned states,

and even the Holy See and some right-wing American NGOs. The initial focus of this pushback was on LGBT rights, but it soon began to affect women's rights too, and then civil and political rights more generally. By 2015, we had the absurd sight of Russian President Vladimir Putin claiming to be the 'defender of family values.'

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There were a number of factors that stimulated this pushback:

The military interventions in Iraq and Libya undoubtedly played a part. Some nations felt that the West had exploited concepts such as 'humanitarian intervention' and R2P to encroach on sovereignty; and were trying to impose unrealistic democratic and human rights standards, even regime change, on developing countries;

At the same time, the financial crisis of 2008 undermined the Global South's faith in capitalism and the competence of Western leaders to manage the effects of globalization. The Washington Consensus, which had long served as the gold standard on economic reform, was collapsing before our eyes;

More fundamentally still, geopolitical shifts—particularly the rise of China—weakened international support for the previous liberal order. China's brand of 'market authoritarianism' became more widely admired and occasionally imitated.

One symptom of this pushback was the arrival of new institutions, which were not initiated by the West—the BRICS grouping of emerging powers, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and the Belt and Road Initiative. Many of these alternatives were inspired by China—and, significantly, none included the United States.

China's dramatic economic rise certainly increased its right and ability to help set the international agenda, and the West has undoubtedly been slow in finding ways to accommodate these geopolitical shifts. But Chinese President Xi Jinping's ambitions have grown over the last few years from simply seeking a bigger role in the existing international governance system to becoming the pole of attraction for a somewhat different system, based on very different values to the international order that the West had become used to since World War II. China's increasing regional assertiveness in recent years—towards Hong Kong, Taiwan, the South China sea, and even India—reflects Xi's confidence that the old order is changing and that old norms can be challenged and sometimes ignored.

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 was already the most flagrant breach of international law in this century. However, what the world has seen in Ukraine since February 24th, 2022, makes a complete mockery of the rules-based order.

It is not just China that is taking advantage of this shift. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 was already the most flagrant breach of international law in this century. However, what the world has seen in Ukraine since February 24th, 2022, makes a complete mockery of the rules-based order. At the same time, it has highlighted the failings of the multilateral governance system, as the United Nations has been seen to be helpless in the face of the Russian aggression. Further afield, Iran (as well as China) has begun taking hostages as political bargaining chips; Saudi Arabia (as well as Russia) has assassinated political dissidents; Assad has used chemical weapons in Syria, and Myanmar has committed genocide against the Rohingya minority—all significant violations of longstanding international rules or norms, most of which have not led to serious repercussions for the perpetrators.

At the same time, we have seen greater authoritarianism in every region of the world, in countries as diverse as Egypt, Thailand, Turkey, Brazil, the Philippines, Hungary, and India. Indeed, Freedom House has documented 16 consecutive years of democratic decline, with 75 percent of the world's population now living in countries that are becoming less democratic than they were.

And significantly, during this critical period, the liberal order's traditional champion, the United States, has done little to defend or promote it. U.S. President Donald Trump of course did not believe in the rules-based order at all, arguing that it worked against American interests. He took a number of policy steps that actively undermined multilateralism, including pulling the United States out of the Paris Climate Agreement, the Iran nuclear deal, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. But even under President Biden, America looks increasingly polarized and inward looking, with many countries seeing the chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 as a sign of waning

American leadership. A recent survey suggested that as few as 20 to 30 percent of Americans believed their country was going in the right direction, whereas the same figure in China about their own country was between 70 and 80 percent.

The COVID crisis has exacerbated many of these trends. It has led to a resurgence in economic and political nationalism, an increased use of state power, with many individual freedoms curtailed even in the most liberal European countries. Together, these and other trends have reduced faith in international organizations—with the World Health Organization proving no more effective in tackling the pandemic than the UN Security Council has been in preventing Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The COVID crisis has led to a resurgence in economic and political nationalism, an increased use of state power, with many individual freedoms curtailed even in the most liberal European countries. Together, these and other trends have reduced faith in international organizations.

The international order that has done so much to prevent a World War III—and facilitated increased global prosperity over the last 75 years—is now under serious threat, without any clarity about what might take its place. Far from the 'end of history,' as Francis Fukuyama put it 30 years ago, we are entering a period of considerable uncertainty in which the ultimate triumph of democratic politics and liberal economics cannot be taken for granted.

There is, however, some hope for the current world order. Nearly three quarters of the world's sovereign countries voted at the UN against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Admittedly, that three quarters represents less than half the world's population. Still, a majority of countries have populations of less than 10 million—all the more reason to recognize the risks that a breakdown of the rules-based international order would bring. Many small states dread a return of a 'law of the jungle' environment, where might is right.

The West's strong response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine has undoubtedly pushed Russia closer to China. But the Russia-China relationship seems more a temporary alignment than a deep or sustainable alliance. China has offered Russia some rhetorical support in face of its invasion of Ukraine, even though it appears that Putin did not warn China's President Xi Jinping of his intentions in advance. Given its own attachment to the principles of territorial integrity and non-interference, China was not willing to vote in support of Russia at the UN and has not (so far at least) provided Russia with any meaningful practical support, let alone weapons systems. Whereas a quick Russian military victory might have been welcomed in Beijing, this long drawn-out conflict, with the strong and united Western response that it has provoked, is proving much less appealing for China, not least in the context of its own ambitions for Taiwan.

Despite Russia's catastrophic military performance and its brutal violation of many of the rules of warfare in Ukraine Moscow has still not breached other key international taboos, such as using nuclear or chemical weapons. This suggests that some aspects of the international order still continue to exert restraint, even on Russia.

It is worth noting too that, despite Russia's catastrophic military performance and its brutal violation of many of the rules of warfare in Ukraine—some of which undoubtedly constitute war crimes—Moscow has still not breached other key international taboos, such as using nuclear or chemical weapons, as some commentators thought that it might. This suggests that some aspects of the international order still continue to exert restraint, even on Russia.

Likewise, although North Korea and Iran have tested the very limits of international constraints on nuclear weapons, they have not felt able to ignore them completely.

More fundamentally, the West still dominates the most important soft power tools. Europe and America might look weak and divided, but their GDP per capita is still three or four times that of China. Tellingly, these remain the regions of the world where many people from other countries want to live—as the migration flows continue to show. You do not have to be an advocate of Friedrich Hegel's theory of inevitable human progression towards greater freedom to believe that the way countries like China, Russia and other autocratic states treat their citizens is not sustainable over the longer term.

But if the West attaches importance to a liberal international order and the democratic values of freedom and justice that underpin it, then it will have to use all of its political and diplomatic skills to defend that order—while at the same time working to reshape and adapt the liberal order to the shifting geopolitics of the twenty-first century. Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan—not to mention Vietnam and Cuba—have all shown that this cannot be achieved by military force. It can only be achieved by the force of superior ideas and positive example.

The Nation State in Peril?

The sovereign nation state is the essential building block of the current international order. The multilateral governance system, headed by the United Nations, is inter-governmental and depends on the willing participation of individual countries. The first step of each new independent state is to apply to join the UN. The crisis of the world order discussed above has both been provoked by, and has stimulated, a resurgence of nationalism and a demonstration of the power of the nation state. But, ironically, the crisis has occurred at a time when the nation state finds itself under huge strategic strain.

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The concept of individual sovereign nation states forming the bedrock of international interaction, and thus the context for modern diplomacy and international governance, dates from the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. It is therefore less than 400 years old—a relatively short period in historical terms. Many commentators have argued that the twentieth century process of decolonization, followed by the breakup of the Soviet Union, signaled the end of empires and the flourishing of the nation state concept. But the huge increase in the number of sovereign countries—from about 50 in 1945 to 193 today—could just as easily be seen as a sign of its weakness. Most 'new' countries of the last decades such as Timor Leste, South Sudan, or the former Soviet republics, are breakaways from previously existing larger countries. The same is true of all the prospective or aspirant states, such as Kosovo, Somaliland, and Palestine.

Consider for a moment some of the external and internal pressures on today's nation states and their governments. Firstly, *regionalism*. Countries are increasingly banding together with their neighbors to bolster their security, increase their international clout or more effectively to tackle cross-border challenges. Yet such regional groupings involve, at the very least, a dilution of individual countries' sovereignty. The European Union is by far the most developed of such supranational organizations—and the consequent loss of national sovereignty was a key factor in the United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU in 2016. But every region in the world is developing or strengthening its own multinational structures, whether that be the African Union in Africa, or ASEAN in Southeast Asia.

At the same time as this trend towards regionalism, there is an increasing drive in the opposite direction, towards *localism*. Many communities want more decisions to be taken at levels below that of central government, closer to the people. At one extreme, this has led to full scale independence movements in Scotland, Tigray, and Catalonia. But the trend towards greater local autonomy exists globally—look at the enduring tensions between central and regional authority in, say, India or the United States. A striking statistic which highlights this tension is that California has sued the federal government in Washington more than 100 times in the last three years!

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Multinational corporations arguably pose an even greater threat to national governments. By definition, they operate beyond national borders. And, in terms of capitalization, the biggest tech companies are now richer than most countries, with four of them—Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet, and Amazon—ranked in the top 20 richest entities in the world. Moreover, they are not *just* richer. In an era when data is power, these companies collect more data on individuals than many governments. And in a world where capital is mobile, governments find it very difficult to tax the companies on profits made in their respective countries.

If multinational companies pose a threat to the economic autonomy of national governments, the Internet, and increasingly artificial intelligence, poses a more political one. There was a time, not long ago, when governments would expect to be 'the first to know.' No longer. Now, more autocratic governments struggle to control the spread of information, while more liberal governments find themselves vulnerable to misinformation campaigns and political agendas promoted on social media platforms. Moreover, the internet has facilitated a challenge to one of the core traditional attributes of a sovereign state—its monopoly of currency. *Cryptocurrencies* are specifically designed to evade the oversight of, and regulation by, national governments. Some countries, like India and China, have tried to ban the use of cryptocurrencies altogether. Others, like El Salvador and Panama, have gone in the opposite direction and accepted crypto as legal tender. In either case, it poses a major risk to the governments' ability to control their financial economy.

These last two pressures in particular—multinational corporations and the internet—are relatively new ones for nation states to grapple with. But there are other, much older, challenges that have become more acute in recent years. *Religion* is one of these. All major religions are (and always have been), by definition, transnational, but so-called 'political Islam' in particular, more loudly prioritizes the Muslim Ummah above the nation state. At the height of its power in 2016, the Islamic State group attracted adherents from 85 different countries to come to Iraq and Syria and fight for its cause.

Aggressors have often justified their actions by claiming to be coming to the defense of their nationals overseas, just as the Kremlin today claims that the invasion of Ukraine is justified because Russia is defending the interests of Russian speakers in the Donbas.

Migration is another pressure on the nation state, which has a long history. Aggressors have often justified their actions by claiming to be coming to the defense of their nationals overseas, just as the Kremlin today claims that the invasion of Ukraine is justified because Russia is defending the interests of Russian speakers in the Donbas. But we are now in a particularly active period of mass movements across borders, as people flee conflict and persecution, or simply search for a better life. These increased migration flows have already had significant political consequences in Europe and the United States. With population growth now almost entirely taking place in the global South, this pressure can only increase.

A combination of these different pressures has contributed to the existence of a number of fragile or failed states, such as Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or Lebanon. In all of these countries, the other traditional attribute of a nation state—its monopoly of power—has already been eroded, as independent militias become more powerful than the national armed forces.

It is one thing to identify these multiple pressures on today's nation states, but are there any alternative building blocks to a different international governing structure? Fiction has offered some theoretically possible examples: a unified world government, as HG Wells posited in his 1940 book *The New World Order*. Less optimistically, George Orwell's *1984* envisioned three huge competing regional groupings (Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia) permanently at war with each other. Others have suggested that rapid urbanization will lead to a return of a governance system based on rival city-states, such as existed for hundreds of years in Italy. Or even a complete breakdown of society into post-apocalyptic tribal units—a common theme of Hollywood films.

None of these alternatives currently looks very likely. A more common argument is the reverse: that we are entering a period of even greater nationalism, where adherence to the nation state takes priority over wider cooperation. President Trump's slogans 'Make America Great Again' and 'America First' were populist expressions of that sentiment. And Ukraine's heroic and determined defense of its newly regained national sovereignty against a much stronger enemy surely demonstrates the enduring power of the nation state, rather than its imminent collapse.

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That might indeed prove to be the case. The alternative theory, however—that we are experiencing the last violent spasms of the nation state era—should not be entirely discounted. Certainly, I think that it would be unwise to assume that the current system of international governance, based as it is on the interaction between individual sovereign countries, will inevitably continue unchanged into the next century.

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The Global Order's Crisis of Legitimacy

Judah Grunstein

FROM the September 11th, 2001 attacks and the 2008 global financial crisis, to the Arab Uprisings in 2011 and the populist wave in Western democracies that reached its apogee in 2016, the past 20 years have had no shortage of history-changing events with global implications. Most recently, the coronavirus pandemic has had a radical impact on global affairs and will continue to do so for years to come. To this list must now be added the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

If all of these events seem to define a clear "before and after" moment for the course of history—to say nothing of international affairs—their true significance will be debated by analysts and historians for years to come. Were they the causes of abrupt shifts in the course of events or symptoms of underlying forces that were already at work? Do they mark clear-cut beginnings and endings of historical periods? And were they discrete events or interconnected in ways that will become increasingly clear over time?

At first glance, the answers to these questions might seem more evident in some cases than others. The attacks on September 11th, for instance, seemed to clearly mark the end of the post-Cold War period characterized by what has become known as America's "unipolar moment." On closer inspection, however, the dividing line between before and after becomes less clear. The American response to the 2001 attacks radically altered the relationship between American power and the world in which that power was projected in ways that eventually depleted U.S. hegemony. Yet, this process played out over the course of many years. The demonstration of American military power and its global reach in the immediate post-9/11 period represented an expansion of U.S. hegemony more than an apogee.

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Photo: Guliver Image

Manifestations of the Arab Spring in Libya

Similarly, the global financial crisis, the Arab Spring, and the twin shocks of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump as U.S. President all seem to belong to different historical periods than what immediately preceded them. The world has again emerged from the coronavirus pandemic radically altered, both at the level of individual societies and in the ways they interact. But if these events all mark distinct eras, this blurs the value and even the meaning of such distinctions, given their close chronological proximity. In terms of causal factors, all of these events seem to be closely related to each other, as well as to the American response to the events of September 11th—with the pandemic being the only exception. This suggests that these events were symptoms of deeper underlying shifts in world affairs as much as the cause of them.

Moreover, the "event-centric" approach to history suffers from an inherent myopia to trends and developments that, though they accumulate over time, have no less an impact than the kinds of "lightning strikes" that make global headlines. China's rise clearly tops the list in this category. Still, the erosion of the Washington Consensus—first in South America and then more broadly—warrants a mention,

as does the advent of technological platforms that have simultaneously made the world smaller and humanity's horizons wider. And looming behind and above all these developments is the accelerating climate crisis.

The Challenged Rules

Russia's invasion of Ukraine shares many of the characteristics of the other events mentioned above, but with one major distinction: it is a direct challenge to the United Nations Charter, or more specifically, its ban on wars of aggression. As such, it represents a reaffirmation of what French philosopher Raymond Aron, in his 1962 book *Peace and War*, argued is the ultimate prerogative of the nation state—the resort to war as a means of achieving political ends. The existence of this prerogative, he argued, is the fundamental feature distinguishing relations between actors in what he called a political order and those in an international order. In the former, political differences are resolved without recourse to armed force. In the latter, force remains an available option, albeit more or less legitimate depending on the circumstances in which it is used.

The U.S.-led military interventions in Kosovo, Iraq, and Libya have all figured prominently in Russia's justification of its invasion of Ukraine, and in many ways rightly so. The first two were launched without a Security Council resolution and the last one stretched the authorizing resolution's mandate beyond recognition.

Aron emphasized that the fundamental unit or entity of a political order can be as small as the nation-state or as large as a global governing body or empire. What makes it a political order, as opposed to an international one, is the existence of a single, unitary authority, above which there is no appeal, to serve as the final arbiter of political differences.

Of course, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is not the only recent breach of the UN Charter's prohibition on the use of military force outside the purpose of self-defense and without the authorization of the UN Security Council. Indeed, the U.S.-led military interventions in Kosovo, Iraq, and Libya have all figured prominently in Russia's justification of its invasion of Ukraine, and in many ways rightly so. The first two were launched without a Security Council resolution and the last one stretched the authorizing resolution's mandate beyond recognition.

Yet many features distinguish them significantly from the war in Ukraine. The justifications for the Kosovo and Libya interventions were based on the Responsibility to Protect framework, even if the latter subsequently became a regime change operation. The invasion of Iraq comes closer to being a direct parallel, as an illegal war for which the ostensible grounds—to prevent a purported emerging threat—were subsequently revealed to be a cynical and opportunistic justification based on false claims. In this sense, there is some merit to the argument that a direct line connects the American invasion of Iraq and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The declarations by Russian President Vladimir Putin and other Russian officials calling into question the fundamental existence of a distinctly Ukrainian identity make clear that the geopolitical project of conquering Ukraine is accompanied by an ideological and socio-cultural project that meets the definition of genocide.

Nevertheless, if the legal foundations of the two wars are equally specious, their conduct and aims are clearly distinguishable. The U.S. military sought to minimize loss of civilian life during the initial invasion and subsequent counterinsurgency in Iraq, and it returned sovereignty to a legitimate Iraqi government as quickly as possible. Though the United States continued to exercise outsized influence in Baghdad, what began as a puppet government quickly outgrew Washington's tutelage. And there was never any ambition of conquest or territorial annexation.

By contrast, the Russian military's brutality in Ukraine, including deliberately targeting the civilian population and committing atrocities that almost certainly qualify as war crimes, has shocked the world's sensibilities. Meanwhile, Russia's stated strategic objectives amount to an erasure of Ukrainian sovereignty that will by many standards equal territorial conquest, on top of what was already accomplished through the 2014 annexation of Crimea. Indeed, Moscow's recognition of the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk are already steps in that direction. Moreover, the declarations by Russian President Vladimir Putin and other Russian officials calling into question the fundamental existence of a distinctly Ukrainian identity make clear that the geopolitical project of conquering Ukraine is accompanied by an ideological and socio-cultural project that meets the definition of genocide.

For these reasons, while the debates over the other cornerstone events of the past 20 years revolve around whether or not they mark the end of a historical period, the question immediately raised

by Russia's war of aggression is whether it will mark the end of the current global order. That order, often called the liberal international order, grew out of the U.S.-led Cold War effort to promote liberal markets and liberal democracy among the camp it led—in opposition to the Soviet bloc's insistence on controlled economies and one-party states with no freedom of expression. While it included states across the entire globe during the Cold War, that order only became truly global after the Cold War ended.

The Challenged Order

Though characterized as the liberal international order—or, alternatively, the rules-based international order—critics have often pointed out that it has been neither liberal nor rules-based, nor for that matter terribly ordered. Both during and after the Cold War, the United States counted among its close partners and allies many dictatorships and illiberal regimes. And while the UN system and the multilateral institutions it supports seek to promote the adherence to the rules on which it is based, in practice that adherence has been spotty—particularly by nations with the power to ignore the rules, as in the case of America's use of military force since the end of the Cold War.

Though characterized as the liberal international order—or, alternatively, the rules-based international order—critics have often pointed out that it has been neither liberal nor rules-based, nor for that matter terribly ordered.

Nevertheless, to the extent that liberalism greatly expanded in the several decades following the end of the Cold War; and to the extent that the world accepted—however uneasily in places—the so-called Pax Americana, in which the security backstop of the U.S. military's global reach guaranteed stability; it is reasonable to describe the period between 1991 and today as a liberal international order. And to the extent that the UN Charter's prohibition on wars of aggression was baked into that order, it is reasonable to argue that this period represents the highwater mark of efforts to achieve what Aron might describe as a political order of global dimensions.

By this reading, it is tempting to argue that, by returning interstate war to the heart of Europe, Putin is indeed challenging the foundations of the liberal international order in ways that make the war in Ukraine existential, not only for Europe but for the global order more broadly. After all, if his war of territorial conquest not only goes unpunished, but succeeds, it will open the floodgates for other revisionist powers—most notably China, but the list does not end there—to do the same. In such circumstances, and in light of the economic dislocations that have emerged to punish Russia for its aggression, it is hard to even conceptualize how an order that pretends to be global in dimension would survive.

But on closer inspection, the war in Ukraine, like the other events of the past 20 years, becomes more difficult to classify than it seems. While it represents a paradigm-altering discontinuity with what has come before in important ways, in others it simply makes aspects of the global order and the processes that undergird it more visible. So, if the defeat of Putin's neo-imperial ambitions is necessary to keep the current global order alive, it will not be sufficient—absent a much deeper and broader reconsideration of that order's shortcomings.

The socio-cultural narrative of globalization offered a rosy picture of a "global middle class" that would begin to share as much in common across national borders as its members did with their compatriots. This was seen in the West as mainly a one-way street, with the liberal values of tolerance flowing from the Global North to the South and amplifying the liberalizing impact of trade and prosperity on political participation.

Here it is helpful to distinguish between the processes of globalization and the narratives—both politico-economic and socio-cultural—that can be thought of as its superstructure. These narratives, though largely constructed in the developed West, served a similar and useful purpose across the developed and developing worlds to both explain and justify the adoption of the policies that made globalization possible, but also to soften them.

Globalization as a Narrative

As a narrative of political economy, globalization was portrayed as a process of trade liberalization that—in combination with free market policies to shrink the size and role of the state in national economies—would create and distribute wealth and prosperity across and within the world's nations more effectively. It also posited a direct and mechanical relationship between rising levels of prosperity due to neoliberal economic policies and the spread of political liberalization in previously illiberal or authoritarian states. As previously impoverished people became wealthier, the argument went, their expectations for effective governance—and intolerance for ineptitude—would rise, as would their demands for expanded citizen participation in political decisionmaking.

The socio-cultural narrative of globalization offered a similarly rosy picture of the emergence of a "global middle class" that, through liberalized trade and travel, would begin to share as much in common across national borders as its members did with their compatriots. This cross-pollination of ideas and cultural influences was seen in the West as mainly a one-way street, with the liberal values of tolerance flowing from the Global North to the South and amplifying the liberalizing impact of trade and prosperity on political participation. Any circulation in the opposite direction was imagined mainly in the form of novelties that would add variety to everyday life—a twenty-first-century spice trade, only in cultural influences.

Driven mainly by an aspiring middle class that had a taste of prosperity's promise but remained frustrated in fully achieving it by entrenched and corrupt local elites, the Arab Spring seemed to be globalization's proof of concept.

Despite its critics, globalization's narrative superstructure proved to be remarkably effective at mobilizing both elite and popular opinion in the first decade of the new millennium. And in many ways, justifiably so, as liberalized trade was successful at creating wealth and redistributing it among nations to an unprecedented extent. Within countries, too, the direct and indirect results of globalization helped catalyze dramatic reductions in poverty and the emergence of a small but significant middle class in countries where none had previously existed. The emergence of a global cosmopolitan elite led to speculation about the possibilities of a planetary culture in the makings.

The Arab Spring in 2011 represented the highwater mark of popular faith in the globalization narrative as an accurate description of the practice and impact of globalization's processes. Coming just a generation after the last great wave of democratization following the end of the Cold War, it was reasonable to see the series of mass protests to overturn the Middle East's sclerotic dictatorships as vindication of that narrative. Driven mainly by an aspiring middle class that had a taste of prosperity's promise but remained frustrated in fully achieving it by entrenched and corrupt local elites, the protests seemed to be globalization's proof of concept.

In South America, too, a decade of prosperity fueled by Chinese demand for commodities had helped to both consolidate democracy and reduce inequality. Even in China, a decisive move toward economic liberalization—and even a widened space for political expression—seemed to be taking shape.

Five years later, of course, the picture looked very different. Instead of ushering in a democratic era in the Middle East, the Arab uprisings marked the beginning of a period of conflict and instability, whose social and political repercussions were felt across Europe and the United States. Perhaps more surprisingly for Western elites, similar massive social protest movements spread to Europe immediately after the Arab Spring, in the form of the Indignados, and then to the United States, as the Occupy movement.

Russia's revanchism under Putin, culminating in the 2014 annexation of Crimea and subsequent military intervention in eastern Ukraine, served as a wakeup call for those who had imagined that armed territorial conquest was a historical artefact of the twentieth century.

BACKLASH

Before long, it was no longer possible in elite discussions of the global economy, whether in the World Economic Forum panels in Davos or the pages of *The Economist*, to ignore income inequality within developed economies as a major factor driving the popular backlash against globalization. That backlash would later manifest itself in the populist wave in Europe, Brexit in the UK, and Trump's election as president in the United States. In the developing economies that had so greatly benefited from globalization, it became clear that many of its most important achievements—poverty reduction and the emergence of a middle class—were not only fragile, but easily reversible.

At the time, too, there was already much talk of the "return of geopolitics," evident in China's increasingly authoritarian turn domestically and its assertive turn abroad under President Xi Jinping. Hope for a "responsible stakeholder" scenario, in which China's integration with the global economy "domesticated" Beijing as a global power, dimmed. Instead, it became clear that, rather than being shaped by the rules-based international order, Beijing was intent on reshaping its rules to China's advantage.

But most prominently, Russia's revanchism under Putin, culminating in the 2014 annexation of Crimea and subsequent military intervention in eastern Ukraine, served as a wakeup call for those who had imagined that armed territorial conquest was a historical artefact of the twentieth century. Under these new circumstances, in which old-fashioned power politics and strategic competition among the great powers began to dominate global affairs, the utopian aspirations of the globalization narrative began to seem hopelessly naïve.

While it is tempting to think that the liberal international order might have stood a better chance absent Putin's revanchism and Xi's ambition, to do so would be to ignore the degree to which the globalization narrative ignored the real impact of globalization on local communities. It is not that globalization did not work out as planned. It is that the narrative of globalization obscured how its practice was still structured according to Putin's retrograde, classical vision of imperial wars, only carried out by private sector actors or, in many cases, by public-private partnerships. If the war in Ukraine represents a meaningful change, then, it is about reasserting the centrality of the state and territorial sovereignty in these violent practices.

While it is tempting to think that the liberal international order might have stood a better chance absent Putin's revanchism and Xi's ambition, to do so would be to ignore the degree to which the globalization narrative ignored the real impact of globalization on local communities.

Perhaps the easiest way to illustrate this point is a simple thought experiment: if the global corporate mining sector were a country, in what ways would its practices over the past 20 years meaningfully differ from Putin's war in Ukraine?

Both target resisting communities with organized violence on a massive scale. Both involve large-scale and wanton destruction of the environment, rendering the territories in which they operate unlivable. Both threaten, whether by design or unintended consequence, to disrupt cultural transmission in ways that are comparable to genocide. Both are illegal under international law—whether the UN Charter and associated conventions or international treaties—and often, in the case of mining, under national laws requiring prior consent of local communities.

Such a comparison might seem to be hyperbole. But in the case of Russia, the link between mining and Putin's state-sanctioned violence is direct, in the form of the Wagner Group, the Russian mercenary outfit that is considered a state proxy. Its activities in the Middle East and Africa are consistently portrayed as part of Putin's efforts to expand Russian influence in regions that have historically been dominated by Europe and the United States. But once implanted in a given territory, Wagner's principal efforts have focused on securing access to lucrative extractive operations. While the comparable links between Western mining firms and their associated national governments are perhaps less direct, one needs only to scratch the surface to find them.

Of course, the mining and extractive sector is particularly egregious in its practices. But as sociologist Saskia Sassen compellingly argued in her 2014 book *Expulsions*, the displacement it causes has disturbing parallels in other processes of globalization. These include the lending practices that led to the global financial crisis, its massive waves of foreclosures and homelessness in America, or the EU's austerity programs imposed in the wake of the mid-2010s debt crises that triggered massive emigration from Greece and Spain. To these we can add the political and economic conditions driving many migrants from their homes in Central America and Africa—conditions for which Western firms and governments are often directly or indirectly responsible.

The model that promised so much not only had no answers for localized political violence, displacement, and inequalities within and between societies, it contributed in many ways to fueling those problems. Globalization as a narrative, if not necessarily as a system of economic relationships, had run out of potency.

Initially distanced geographically from these violent practices on the ground, and shaped by the neoliberal ideology that underpinned it, it is hardly surprising that the utopian narrative of globalization sanitized its practices for so long. Though detached from reality, it was, after all, a useful narrative. But if, as the French philosopher Jacques Rancière wrote, "the real must be fictionalized in order to be thought," the fictionalized version of globalization allowed us to think of a world that did not exist, even as the signs of morbidity were everywhere to be seen.

As signs of morbidity moved back from the periphery to the center—in the process, revealing just how short-sighted the assumption that such influences would travel only in the opposite direction really was—the narrative grew so detached from reality that it became counterproductive. Strong states veered toward illiberalism, weak states toward chaos. In the end, the model that promised so much not only had no answers for localized political violence, displacement, and inequalities within and between societies, it contributed in many ways to fueling those problems. Globalization as a narrative, if not necessarily as a system of economic relationships, had run out of potency.

CONFRONTING THE FAILURES

In this light, the war in Ukraine and the global fallout in its wake can be seen as a distillation of all the major crises confronting the global order. But it would be a mistake to blame the war on

"the return of geopolitics" that culminated in Russia's invasion. Instead, it would be more accurate and more useful as a theoretical framework to say that Putin's war of aggression has made visible similar practices as well as the crisis of the system that preceded the war by geopoliticizing them.

This is not to draw a false equivalency between Putin's neo-imperial aims and those of globalization's diverse and disparate actors. Nor is it meant to deny the many benefits and advantages that globalization generated. Moreover, the utopian vision of globalization is normatively preferable to a colonial framework of armed aggression and territorial conquest.

The utopian vision of globalization is normatively preferable to a colonial framework of armed aggression and territorial conquest. But framing the war in Ukraine as a battle between good and evil, or between democracy and authoritarianism, without confronting the failings of globalization is dangerous.

But framing the war in Ukraine as a battle between good and evil, or between democracy and authoritarianism, without confronting the failings of globalization is dangerous. Because fundamentally the war in Ukraine is a battle between self-determination and domination, and by this framing, much of the world will see great similarities between Putin's neo-imperialist project and their own experience of globalization as a neocolonial project.

As a result, to believe that defeating Putin will be sufficient to shore up the foundering global order means running the risk that his vision could win out, even if he himself fails. To begin with, the West is not out of the woods in terms of its own reckoning with illiberal, identarian, sovereigntist movements of the sort that feed nationalist ambitions and often lead to conflict, both within and between states.

Beyond that lies the challenge, more daunting in many ways, of competing with the power and influence of China. With its lack of concern for liberalism and its emphasis on transactional mercantilism, China fits more comfortably ideologically with globalization as it is currently practiced. But if the past five years are any indication, the result of that competition could very well be to move the West closer to China's model of protected markets and state-based industrial policy than the reverse.

More importantly, to portray the current challenge as a contest with Putin's Russia and Xi's China ignores the fundamental ways in which the crisis confronting the global order is a crisis of legitimacy: how to provide public goods to populations across societies in a just, equitable, and sustainable way. Here, too, the burden of finding an answer to that question is as incumbent on the West as it is elsewhere.

In finding that answer, it is important to remember that this crisis of legitimacy varies in its characteristics depending upon where it is viewed from and through which lens. Problems of the "periphery" can be lost in translation when analyzed from the perspective of the developed "center." And technocratic policy papers written from a bird's-eye view based on aggregate statistics can be both correct in theory and irrelevant in practice.

The West has a long history of lecturing the Global South on issues such as "good governance" and corruption, while ignoring the ways in which it is both far from exemplary on either count at home as well as complicit in feeding those problems abroad.

The West has a long history of lecturing the Global South on issues such as "good governance" and corruption, while ignoring the ways in which it is both far from exemplary on either count at home as well as complicit in feeding those problems abroad. So, any attempt to address this crisis will require listening to an expanded range of voices, both horizontally among societies and vertically within them.

It would also be a mistake to simply return to the outdated shibboleths of the past to guide us in finding the best way forward. The Washington Consensus' insistence on shrinking the size of the state and its involvement in national economies might make sense from a macroeconomic perspective. It might have been effective at a time when China's rise served as an engine of growth for resource-based developing economies in South America and Africa.

But at a time when that engine has run out of steam—leaving societies across the Global South to face existential crises due to the economic fallout of the pandemic and the rising cost of food, fuel, and other necessities—austerity will only amplify the global wave of social protest and political instability that is now gathering. Those protests had already begun to appear before the pandemic, from Algeria and Lebanon to Ecuador, Chile, and Colombia. But social distancing measures in response to the pandemic served to put them on pause, even as the pandemic only intensified the factors driving them.

In the meantime, governmental responses to the pandemic demonstrated

what state intervention can achieve in times of existential crisis. However, they also underscored the inequalities and injustices that shape determinations of when and where it is to be deployed. The West's vaccine nationalism over the course of 2021, in particular, will be an enduring obstacle to building trust among the developing world, to which it is now appealing for support in condemning and isolating Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, and in defense of the global order. A failure to facilitate the urgently needed responses to those same nations' current financial crises, and the resulting humanitarian crises, could prove fatal.

Any effort to reengage popular opinion within and among societies to the benefits of globalization and the current global order will require a new narrative.

Changing the Narrative

One thing is certain. Any effort to reengage popular opinion within and among societies to the benefits of globalization and the current global order will require a new narrative. For while realists look to power and interests as motivating state behavior, and social scientists demand data to solve the world's problems, the foundations of human societies are built upon common narratives. These narratives always only approximate reality, and often they are fictions. But they are the fictionalized accounts through which we think and understand the world, in order to act upon it.

To its credit, globalization as a utopian narrative and project aspired to offer an answer on how to advance the development of just, equitable, and sustainable societies. In fairness, the question itself is as old as human history, an eternal quest for the just society that can never be perfectly attained, but only ever serve as a beacon to guide us onward. The easy response today, and one that seems to be gaining in momentum, would be for the West to turn inward, focusing its efforts on defending its economic interests against Russian and Chinese incursions, while seeking to shore up its eroding democratic foundations as best it can.

Much harder, but worthier an effort, would be to engage with the world from a position of generosity, but also humility. The West has much to offer to the world, but also much to learn from it. Any global order, of necessity, will be built on relationships of power. But unless the West offers a vision of how power should operate—not just in relations between nations, but also between the processes of globalization and the people it affects—that differs substantively from that of Russia and China, the global order it is seeking to defend will never be secure or stable.

A New Economic Cold War?

The Future of the Global Economy after the War in Ukraine

Alexander Libman

THE ripples created by the war in Ukraine go far beyond Eastern Europe. Now, six months after the Russian invasion started, one can see fundamental changes occur in the basic structure of the global economy. Many of these changes follow the trends that had already started before the war, but the war—and the subsequent broad array of economic sanctions against one of the world's largest economies—seems to have accelerated the passage of time, leading to much faster changes than one could have expected in January 2022. The idea of a new competition of systems pre-dates the war: since the mid-2010s, many observers believed that the future of the world economy will be determined by the competition between the United States and China. The war, however, has heavily influenced the outlook of the emerging competition and facilitated the transition of the global economy towards a state of open rivalry between the authoritarian powers and the West.

The World Before

Thirty years ago, the end of the Cold War left many analysts mesmerized by the promises of globalization. During that period, globalization was seen as much more than a simple opening of national economies and speedy growth of trade and investment. For many, it marked the end of the nation state as a key actor in the world order. New, non-governmental actors (including multinational corporations, global banks, or global cities) were set to determine the rules of the game in the long run. The states had to adapt to this new reality by increasing their attractiveness for mobile capital. This was a challenge for democracies, with voters becoming powerless—regardless

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"The emerging competition of systems is going to be a rivalry of market economies"

of their preferences, global competition forced their governments to constantly stive to improve the investment climate for transnational business. Yet the challenge for autocracies was much bigger. With their corrupt bureaucracies and unpredictable politicians, authoritarian states hardly had any chance of success in this highly competitive world with corporations voting with their feet in search for best locations for investment. The only alternative for these states was to introduce some version of the rule of law. China was probably the most successful example of this attempt at adaptation, turning itself into a magnet for foreign direct investments due to cheap labor and relatively stable business environment. Traditional authoritarian regimes with closed borders and omnipresent governmental control, however, were clearly among the losers of globalization.

In the early 2000s, it became clear that the hopes for a disappearance of the nation state and pacified authoritarianism were vastly exaggerated. On the contrary, autocracies had learned not only how to adapt to the global economy but how to use it to maximize their power within their borders and beyond. Global trade, investment, and capital flows did not weaken the power

of authoritarian regimes but rather became vehicles of such power. State-owned multinationals turned out to be just as important in the global economy as private transnational corporations. Again, China was the most prominent example of this trend. After years of focusing on becoming an attractive location for foreign companies, the People's Republic itself became a global source of investment flows. China frequently went to countries that Western multinationals would not, which served as an important medium of expanding the Chinese sphere of influence. Russia behaved in a similar way in post-Soviet Eurasia. In the early 2000s, Anatoliy Chubays, one of the architects of the Russian economic transition (in exile as of 2022), hoped that Russia would become a 'liberal empire,' exercising its influence not through military might but economic power.

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Furthermore, many autocracies showed that traditional attributes of dictatorship—restrictions on cross-border mobility, massive censorship or repression—are not needed to ensure the stability of authoritarian rule. In fact, globalization can be manipulated to become a source of valuable means for maintaining autocracies. Many autocracies became fully integrated into the global web of financial flows: Russia and China are again highly prominent examples. Russian authoritarianism of the first decade of the 2000s demonstrates very well how the free global economy can even reward autocrats for strengthening their power. In the first decade of its rule, Putin's regime massively reduced foreign debt and pursued a highly prudent budgetary policy. The ultimate goal was to reduce Russia's dependencies on foreign centers of power, which somewhat paid off in the 2010s, when Russia was in a much better shape to resist foreign sanctions than it would have been even a decade and a half earlier. However, for mobile capital, good macroeconomic fundamentals were yet another reason to invest in Russia.

In the 2010s, the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) made the power ambitions of authoritarian regimes even more visible. With this project, China launched a program that essentially suggested a further intensification of globalization. In practice, this meant the opening of new areas of the world to China, many of which were less integrated into the global web of economic ties. It also meant creating new transportation infrastructure and increasing global connectivity. At its core, the BRI has been based on using economic instruments free of any ideological or normative commitments. This is precisely what globalization was supposed to be based upon. However, in many countries where BRI activities take place, China's pragmatic approach has backfired, pushing these nations into debt traps. At the same time, this ensures a much stronger, and possibly even leading position of China in the world.

The trade war that the Trump administration waged against China failed in weakening Chinese influence. Instead, it was perceived in China as an American attempt to limit China's ability to benefit from its economic success of the last decade—achieved among other things by playing by the U.S.-made rules of globalization.

Such developments presented the West with a difficult dilemma. Combatting the use of free trade and investment as vehicles of power for authoritarian leaders would inevitably be associated with introducing restrictions on the global economy that democratic states have created and profited from. If one subscribes to the idea of free competition, one cannot simply prohibit companies from a particular country from engaging in it and becoming successful. The substantial economic benefits created by globalization would then disappear. Thus, the West had to keep the global economy open and authoritarian power centers like China part of it. At the same time, it needed to prevent these authoritarian centers from using their economic position to amass political influence.

As of 2022, the West has not really found a solution to this dilemma. As a response to the Chinese-led BRI, multiple other initiatives have emerged including the Japanese Partnership for Quality Infrastructure and the EU Connecting Europe and Asia Strategy**.** These initiatives have emphasized the idea of connectivity of large spaces, but at the same time highlighted the need for upholding common standards and rules—unlike the BRI, which continues to be based on pure economic pragmatism. This created a paradoxical situation of co-existence of multiple connectivity strategies, all claiming to break traditional boundaries and integrate spaces. On the other hand, they are all becoming tools of competition between great powers. And, quite frankly, the BRI remained much more attractive than its European alternative, where the promise of common rules and values was not backed

by financial means. The United States, which started its New Silk Road project even before the Chinese BRI, utterly failed in its endeavor.

The trade war that the Trump administration waged against China also failed in weakening Chinese influence. Instead, it was perceived in China as an American attempt to limit China's ability to benefit from its economic success of the last decade—achieved among other things by playing by the U.S.-made rules of globalization. This somewhat reasonable perception contributed to the processes that started to unravel after the beginning of the Ukraine war.

THE WAR

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how unstable international economic ties are and how easily they can break in times of global emergencies. Moreover, it showed how costly excessive dependencies on foreign value chains can be for a country. In 2020 and 2021, calls for greater economic self-reliance of the West—at least in sectors like medical products—became commonplace in most countries. However, the Russian war in Ukraine added a whole new dimension to this discussion. The Russian war effort has resulted in major ruptures in supply chains. However, a more important factor turned out to be massive economic sanctions imposed by the West against Russia. Never before has a country of this size and economic importance been subjected to such wide-ranging sanctions. Furthermore, this has never happened so quickly, and least of all to an economy so integrated with the rest of the world. Many things that one would have considered unthinkable prior to the war suddenly became reality. Sanctions, of course, created additional ruptures in supply chains, sometimes in an entirely unpredictable manner. At the time of this of writing, all these events seem to be making a global economic recession inevitable. However, this has led to other indirect consequences, which will make a heavy impact on the global economy in the years ahead.

To understand these consequences, one needs to address a very important issue that is frequently forgotten in European and American discussions about the war in Ukraine. In the eyes of the Europeans, the war has been perceived as an unprecedented event. If one had to describe the way European political elites and societies look at the war, the following sentence would be particularly fitting: not once in the last 70 years has one country invaded another in such an open and direct fashion. Indeed, since World War II, there had been no wars aiming at acquisition of territories in Europe. From this point of view, the war has been perceived as a fundamental breach of the post-World War II order in Europe, which justified unprecedented sanctions.

In other parts of the world, however, the perception of the war has been different. For the elites and peoples in Asia, Africa, or Latin America it has been equally clear that Russia invaded Ukraine and is waging a brutal war there. But these elites and peoples have not perceived the war as an unprecedented event totally alien to the world order as it exists today. This is not surprising. Wars have been commonplace outside Europe in the last decades. Actually, even in Europe, people in the Western Balkans and the Caucasus would certainly disagree with the statement that no wars were fought in the last 70 years on the European continent. It would be difficult to explain to Azerbaijanis and Armenians why their brief war over Karabakh was so fundamentally different from the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The list of wars and border skirmishes fought in the Middle East—including those started by the United States—Latin America, or Africa is long; and for nations in East or South Asia, war remains an available tool of foreign policy. Outside Europe, or perhaps more narrowly defined Western and Central Europe, it was not unusual to start wars under wrong pretexts. In fact, the United States did so several times over the last couple of decades—most notably in Iraq. This is very important when it comes to understanding different perceptions of the Ukraine war, as for example, in the Middle East. In other words, unlike Europeans, people in other parts of the world would place the war in Ukraine in a long sequence of military conflicts. While the Ukraine war may be bigger or more destructive than many recent wars, it is not perceived as a qualitatively different event.

Unlike Europeans, people in other parts of the world would place the war in Ukraine in a long sequence of military conflicts. While the Ukraine war may be bigger or more destructive than many recent wars, it is not perceived as a qualitatively different event.

This observation should not be perceived as a normative judgment about the war in Ukraine. I am simply presenting an empirical observation that one needs to take into account in order to understand the world's reaction to the war.

Since the war does not appear as an unprecedented event outside the West, the reaction to the economic sanctions imposed against Russia has also been different. Put simply, the main lesson of the first months of 2022 for autocratic leaders was the following: the West can impose severe sanctions, essentially isolating a country if a non-Western state pursues a policy the West does not like. The boundary where the

policies that deserve sanctions start is blurry in the eyes of many non-Western leaders. For example, would having a different opinion on climate policy and trade expansion do the trick, or would suppressing an opposition movement suffice? In the past, non-Western autocrats believed—and rightfully so—that the West would refrain from major economic sanctions against big countries. First, because of large economic costs, and second, because these sanctions would take away the leverage the West has in the long run. It is known that sanctions work only if there are intensive economic ties between the country imposing the sanctions and its target—a phenomenon that American political scientist Daniel Drezner calls 'the sanctions paradox.' Now, non-Western autocrats know: the West will not hesitate to use its 'nuclear options' in economic relations to punish non-Western states. Again, had non-Western countries perceived the war in Ukraine as unprecedented, their reaction would have been different. For many of them, this war is just another crisis, albeit a rather big one.

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These fears are fueled by the fact that there is intensive debate in the West about economic, political, and social ties with authoritarian non-Western states. In Germany, for example, China is no longer perceived as an ultimately reliable economic partner. There are many voices calling upon the country's leadership and lawmakers to reconsider and constrain various forms of cooperation with China—ranging from economics to science and education. In the United States, China is clearly perceived as an economic and political rival. And in the West, interestingly enough, the discussion about the appropriate boundaries of sanctions is also present. While China has not engaged in a war of aggression, it is brutally suppressing ethnic minorities. Should this be a reason to impose far-reaching sanctions? How about women's rights, which are clearly being violated in Saudi Arabia? What about collaboration with extreme Islamist groups? An economic nuclear bomb was used once against Russia; should one use it again against other authoritarian regimes?

Because of this, non-Western authoritarian states now seem to seriously consider an option they did not really focus on before: cutting their existing dependencies on the West and creating additional channels for implementing financial and trade transactions. This includes greater autarky in value chains, greater reliance on non-Western currencies in international trade, or alternative payment systems—which ensure that possible SWIFT sanctions will not have a devastating effect. It means that concerns about regime security make autocrats more prepared to give away some of the benefits that globalization has brought them.

What seems to be shaping up is a fragmentation in economic areas, where each of the fragments will be centered around one regional hegemon. These fragmented parts will likely avoid intensive economic ties with each other and instead compete for influence and power.

This also means that for many states, which have in the last decade benefitted from cooperation with authoritarian centers like China, the time has possibly come to make a choice: either they rely on cooperation with China or the West. In the past, while Russia as an authoritarian center insisted on exclusive economic spheres of influence, China on the other hand used flexible cooperation arrangements, emphasizing its willingness to engage in mutually beneficial cooperation. But now the situation is likely to change. As a result, in addition to the aforementioned 'competition of connectivity,' we will likely witness an even more fundamental transformation of the global economy in the coming years. What seems to be shaping up is a fragmentation in economic areas, where each of the fragments will be centered around one regional hegemon. These fragmented parts will likely avoid intensive economic ties with each other and instead compete for influence and power.

The globalization process, in which democracies and autocracies participated prior to 2022, relied on a set of expectations of individual actors. Democratic countries, while unhappy about having to compete with autocracies, believed that the latter would never make policy choices leading to catastrophic consequences—like an outright war in Europe. Autocratic countries assumed that democracies were too interested in globalization to massively restrict free flows of capital and goods, regardless of political developments. The Ukraine war showed that both autocracies and democracies were wrong in their expectations. The West did not expect Putin's regime to start an aggressive war so openly. Now, Westerners are open to the idea that other autocracies at least are capable of doing the same if it suits them—having speculated about a Chinese attack on Taiwan for a few months.

Russia did not expect the West to react with such harsh and resolute sanctions. But now all authoritarian regimes are questioning whether they can rely on the implicit commitment of the West to maintain the institutions of globalization. Essentially, there is a sense of a mutual loss of trust, or at the very least predictability, which will make it extremely difficult to define new rules of the global economic game.

Competition of Market Economies

As of now, one can only speculate about how this new world of competing economic areas will look like. Still, some elements of the emerging competition between systems are becoming clearer. For starters, this new competition of systems will be different from the one the world experienced during the Cold War. This is true in at least in one very important dimension: all power centers of the global economy will embrace the idea of the market economy. Even Putin claims that Russia's response to economic sanctions is going to be 'economic freedom'—though there are doubts about how serious his claims are. It is also not a competition of fundamentally different economic models. Instead, it is a competition of variations of the market economy.

The situation is unprecedented. During the old Cold War, two competing economic blocs were distinctly different and organized based on very different principles. As we know today, there are fundamental flaws in how planned economies work. They are unable to effectively accumulate and process knowledge, and thus lead to regular occurrences of suboptimal decisions and failures to provide proper incentives for key economic agents. Thus, it is fair to say that the economy of the Communist camp suffered from structural disproportions from the very beginning, which eventually led to its demise. Similarly, an attempt to partially revive the idea of an 'alternative order to global capitalism'—the Bolivarian Socialism in Latin America—lasted only as long as the oil price was high and ultimately drove Venezuela, as the main protagonist of this approach, into a catastrophic recession. In a nutshell, we know that in the long run market economies will always be able to out-compete planned economies.

In the new cold war, we look at competition of market economies, which are all capable of adapting. Even in authoritarian state-capitalist economies, private initiative and creativity play a very important role—making these economies much more resilient to external shocks. Therefore, predictions about the future of the competition between systems are less clear.

What then are going to be the important aspects of success (or failure) in the stated competition? One is certainly rooted in technological progress. In the past, we were firmly convinced that democracies have a substantial advantage in terms of their innovative capacity. Today, however, we are not so sure. German academics David Karpa, Torben Klarl, and Michael Rochlitz offer an interesting perspective on this point. They argue that we need to differentiate between fundamental innovations that create entirely new products and technologies, and incremental improvements on the existing technologies. In the modern world, the former may depend on creativity and freedom—making it a field where democracies hold the advantage over autocracies. The latter, however, massively depends on the strength of artificial intelligence and availability of big data—which is where autocracies, unconcerned about protecting personal data, have the upper hand. China's transformation into a digital authoritarian state is happening before our eyes. Whether the comparative advantage in fundamental or incremental innovations is going to be more important in the future competition, remains to be seen.

Democracies may be more reliable partners but cooperation with democracies requires subscribing to a large catalogue of norms and criteria. Autocracies are more flexible and less demanding but also less reliable and can easily choose to revise their own obligations if it suits them.

Another question is the issue of regulation and flexibility. In democratic states, governments typically create sophisticated set of rules constraining economic actors because of social pressure. Authoritarian regimes certainly need to think about societal reactions too but to a lesser extent than democracies. This enables authoritarian states to create conditions for more unconstrained capitalism than democratic states do. We have observed it in China in the past; but even in countries like North Korea: as soon as the government starts refraining from excessive intervention, wild capitalism blossoms. At the same time—and this is an essential challenge—authoritarian states cannot credibly commit to maintaining market capitalism they themselves created. On the contrary, as soon as the market economy starts producing substantial rents, the redistributive appetites of the regime and various interest groups are likely to increase. This discourages private business, both domestic and foreign.

This also applies to international (economic) relations. Democracies may be more reliable partners but cooperation with democracies requires subscribing to a large catalogue of norms and criteria. Autocracies are

more flexible and less demanding but also less reliable and can easily choose to revise their own obligations if it suits them. In the last few decades, facing this trade-off, many countries have decided in favor of autocracies like China.

Democracies can try to become more pragmatic in international economic relations. Faced with the war in Ukraine, the German Minister of Economy Robert Habeck from the Green party—the party that promoted a 'values-oriented' approach to foreign policy—did not hesitate to go to Qatar and negotiate an alternative gas supply. I am, however, not certain whether democracies can become that flexible even if they wanted to. Democracies always face domestic pressures, which especially in the modern and highly connected world make it extremely difficult to cooperate with regimes that blatantly violate human rights. While atrocities by authoritarian regimes happening far away could have gone unnoticed in the past, today this is increasingly impossible to hide from the domestic public. In the eyes of authoritarian regimes, this contributes to their perception of democracies as states one cannot rely upon. No matter what high-level democratic representatives say or promise, the pressure of public opinion can always force them to reverse their position.

This new competition of systems is going to be a rivalry of market economies, which increases the likelihood of seeing flexible and adaptable economic systems on both sides.

Therefore, the emerging competition of systems is an open-ended process. It is essential to refrain from automatically adopting the conclusions drawn from old competitions and projecting them onto the new one.

Multilayered Division

Regardless of how the war in Ukraine will develop, the world is entering a new period of economic rivalry. Authoritarian power centers and the West will try to develop their own economic blocs and prevent excessive dependencies on one another. Western sanctions leave Russia no choice but to enter a highly unequal economic partnership with China. But for many other countries in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, or Latin America, the time to make a choice may come soon.

Importantly, for many countries the choice of economic allegiances will not necessarily be in correlation with their political system. This is something that we were able to see in the first Cold War, when India as a democracy maintained excellent relations with the USSR. Similarly, many dictatorships received the backing of the United States. Such configurations of alliances can emerge in the modern world as well. While India or large Latin American countries may be democratic, they might not necessarily be willing to place themselves in the 'Western' camp.

This new competition of systems is going to be a rivalry of market economies, which increases the likelihood of seeing flexible and adaptable economic systems on both sides. While long-term economic growth and success was typically associated with open societies and political freedom in the past, we cannot be sure how things will develop in the future. One also cannot be sure of how the competition will transform the competitors themselves, including their political and economic systems. It is very likely that the societies of the West will turn into something that will no longer resemble the societies that flourished in the last decades. The painful rediscovery of hard security in the German political discourse is a good example of this transformation. But the scope and the direction of it remain unclear.

The outcomes of the emerging competition cannot be determined with certainty. One thing is for sure though: any decline of global economic ties will inevitably make each and every nation in the world poorer than it was in the world of flourishing globalization.

The outcomes of the emerging competition cannot be determined with certainty. One thing is for sure though: any decline of global economic ties will inevitably make each and every nation in the world poorer than it was in the world of flourishing globalization. Some countries or social groups will suffer less than others. But generally speaking, sustaining high pace of economic growth without an open global economy will hardly be feasible. This means that the world is entering an era of lower prosperity, higher instability, and prolonged uncertainty. The deeper the new divisions run, the stronger the negative effects are going to be.

STRATEGIC CHOICES FOR SMALL STATES

THE UKRAINE WAR AND THE WESTERN BALKANS

Dejan Jović

IRRESPECTIVE of its final outcome, the war in Ukraine is likely to shape the global order for the foreseeable future. Major international wars do that and this one is no exception. It involves more than just Russia and Ukraine. As explained by all parties involved, this conflict is about political and security control over territories that matter to both the West and East—a concept that despite seeming obsolete, never truly went away. The conflict in Ukraine is also about what we prioritize in international politics.

Those who argue that security comes first and stands above all else might have a point—just as they did in the case of Yugoslav wars of the 1990s and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq following the September 11th attacks. On the other hand, those who argue that authoritarian regimes are the main generators of international conflicts, can also exploit this case to reinforce their point. Liberal democracies apparently do not fight wars with each other. However, the question remains: how many liberal democracies are there in the post-communist, and especially post-Soviet, space?

The Ukraine war once again warns us against relying merely on hopes and wishful thinking. It reinforces the need for the international community to act preventively and take threats seriously. It is also a war of conflicting "official memories" and narratives about the past—which all sides use to portray their history as the more tragic one. Past grievances become preludes to conflicts that sometimes escalate into full-fledged wars.

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Photo: Guliver Image

Staying west of trouble: a clear view of military affiliations in the Balkans

History matters and so does geography. Where is the border of the West, if there is one at all? What is a legitimate expectation for our own zone of influence, if there should be any? Depending on its outcome, the war in Ukraine has a potential to shape the borders between the West and East in Europe. It might create a new map of Europe, which will either be united under its common values, socio-political practices, and institutions; or divided into its Western and Eastern parts. The continent could become even more fragmented, should differences within the EU become more visible and endanger the achievements of the enlargement policy. Although Brussels is not its direct participant, this war is about the future of the EU itself.

CONSEQUENCES FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS

Through all these aspects, the Ukraine war also continues to influence the political landscape of the Western Balkans. In formal terms, this region is not part of the EU. However, it is linked to it as a nearly inseparable appendix. Brussels expects the Balkans to act as if it were already in the EU, which entails following the EU's lead on foreign and security policy despite having little to no say in it. Originally

conceived as a "waiting room" for membership in the EU, the Western Balkans was meant to be a temporary entity. It was meant to be—to borrow an old Marxist phrase—a "transitory phase" between the old historical Balkans and a new reality in which the EU would complete its enlargement, turning the region into "Southeast Europe." The Western Balkans was thus to disappear in the process of "Europeanization," which is another name for "de-Balkanization."

Such a process would require a combination of regime-change and soft transformation, utilizing both sticks and carrots. Let's leave aside the "benevolent Empire" aspect of this process for a moment, and assume that such a transformation would also be welcomed and desired by the largest segments of the Western Balkan populations. This desire might also be strengthened by the fear that the alternatives are much worse. The war in Ukraine is likely to reinforce the desire for joining the organizations and networks that act as security providers. We see this in the case of countries like Sweden and Finland, both of which have long histories of neutrality that abruptly ended when they applied to join NATO in 2022. In the Western Balkans, the countries that are already in NATO feel more secure than those that are not: namely Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. Still, this too can change under certain circumstances. Should NATO decide it needs to go to war over Ukraine—or if Russia acts directly against any NATO member state—those who are in NATO will be directly affected, whereas those outside of it might escape some of the immediate consequences. As is normally the case in any war, the conflict in Ukraine presents us with many unknowns.

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The vision of a peaceful and liberal-democratic Europe in which a war was unthinkable was first seriously challenged by the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s. At the end of the Cold War, this region decided to move in a radically opposite direction to that envisioned by advocates of European integration based on liberal-democratic values. The introduction of democracy in the Yugoslav republics in 1990 did not result in the enhancement of liberalism. Instead, it brought about ethnodemocracy, which treated minorities—both ethnic and political—as a threat that needs to be eliminated. Democracy, if not liberal—and based on autonomy and pluralism—but rather quantitative, may indeed result in a war. The Yugoslav wars brought with themselves a renewal of antiliberal, extremist ideologies and practices, which resulted in ethnic cleansing, ethnic engineering, genocidal policies, massive violations of human rights, and tragic deaths of more than 130,000 Europeans from the Western Balkans. It served as an ideological birthplace for the revival of extreme nationalism in many other places in former Eastern (and to some extent Western) Europe. The political class in the Western Balkans was the main culprit for this turn of events, but not the only one. The reunification of Germany in 1990 had already been the first major success of nationalism, based on the notion that one nation should be united into one state. Brexit was the last such success in Europe, based on the idea that supranational associations such as the EU have no intrinsic value and should be abandoned when and if a nation so desires.

Between 1990 and 2022, there were several other challenges to the concept of a united, liberal, democratic, open, and peaceful Europe. The return of security issues to the global center stage following the attacks on September 11th, 2001, issued a warning about the emerging threat to liberal democracy. There were many signals that an array of diverse grievances lingered around the world. More importantly, there were even more political actors willing to use force to resolve them. The wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, the failure of the Arab Spring, as well as the persistency of authoritarian and illiberal regimes in most post-Soviet states, only testify to this fact.

Some of these signals came from Western Balkan countries too. The assassination of Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Đinđić in 2003, the 2004 Albanian attacks on the Serb minority in Kosovo, disintegrative trends and secessionism in Montenegro in 2006 and Kosovo in 2008, and political instabilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, all presented additional obstacles to Europeanization and liberalization in the region.

Popularity of authoritarian leaders in Turkey, China, and Russia was reflected in similar trends that challenged liberal democracy in North Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro. The concept of stabilitocracy was used to describe these new trends, characterized by what Serbian political scientist Nebojša Vladisavljević calls "the rise of authoritarianism," and his compatriot Milan Podunavac the "new Despotism." The 2008 global financial crisis and the 2015 migration crisis have also had negative effects on the vision of a new liberal Europe. So did the "Trump effect" and similar events in the UK once the Brexiters gained the upper hand.

Then there was the first Ukrainian crisis caused by the annexation of Crimea in 2014. This was the first direct conflict between the policy of further EU enlargement and Russia's opposition to it. By reacting the way it did, Russia practically drew a new eastern border of the EU. It placed an obstacle to an

open-ended border of the European project, which was based on the notion that every nation that wanted to become part of the project, could eventually do it by joining the Union. This, of course, was based on the condition that the aspirant nation reforms and accepts European "common values." The project that in its essence contained the idea of universal values and a liberal notion of market expansion (that led to political expansion) had met a barrier. After 2014, the EU was no longer a "Europe Unfinished." Instead, it was forced to cease thinking of itself as a global project. The EU could either accept the new borders of its influence and try to reshape the project by making it more geopolitical, or enter an open conflict with Russia.

This is what linked the Ukrainian situation of 2014 with that of the Yugoslav turmoil in the 1990s. Both became hurdles for Europe in its intentions to expand. This expansion was not primarily territorial, although it had a territorial dimension. It was an expansion of the "European way of life," its set of "common values," and its political architecture based on what Westerners consider democracy. In other words, regular change of government through reasonably free and fair elections, political pluralism, free and critical media, open borders, and cooperation with others on foreign policy. All these elements were, however, problematic to Vladimir Putin, whose rise to power is closely linked with NATO's attack on Serbia (and Montenegro) in 1999.

As of 2008, no Russian intervention abroad went without a mention of the West's unilateral military intervention (a.k.a. war) in Kosovo. Thus, Kosovo became a mythical beginning, a point from which Russia decided to "wake up" and react.

Putin came to power at least in part in response to the weakness of Boris Yeltsin's Russia. He faced the sense of humiliation and exclusion from important decisionmaking in international politics. This grim view of their country's position was shared by many Russians, including the significant actors in the "deep state," of whom Putin is representative. Therefore, he continues to use the "Kosovo factor" in his interventionist foreign policy episodes. Those who carefully analyzed not only his foreign policy speeches but also the interventions that followed, could see how important the 1999 Kosovo War was—not because of Serbia (and Kosovo) but because of Russia's ambition to be treated and recognized as a great power. Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in 2008, strongly supported by the United States and equally strongly opposed by Russia and China, turned this dispute into a key source of rift between the West and East. As of 2008, no Russian intervention abroad went without a mention of the West's unilateral military intervention (a.k.a. war) in Kosovo. Thus, Kosovo became a mythical beginning, a point from which Russia decided to "wake up" and react. It was the signifier of a desire to change the international order, end the "unipolar moment," and make way for a multipolar order.

By 2008 however, Russian options in the Western Balkans were already very limited. NATO had already expanded to Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria, in addition to its much earlier inclusion of Greece and Turkey. In 2008, Albania and Croatia recognized the independence of Kosovo and joined the alliance a year later. With Montenegro and North Macedonia acquiring NATO membership in more recent years, the Western Balkans shrank to only two countries from the Russian point of view: Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Russia was unable to stop this trend, which significantly reduced its influence in Southeast Europe. In Bosnia and Herzegovina—which is not a NATO member state due to opposition by the Serb-dominated Republic of Srpska—Western influence is channeled through the position of the High Representative and EUFOR's Althea operation. Although the West has intensified its rhetoric against "external actors" and their "malign influence" in the region, Russian influence is in real terms more limited than ever. As Norwegian political scientist Ivar Neumann once said: "we all remember when Russia was a great power—it had tanks in Berlin, now they are in Crimea." Or similarly, as Dimitar Bechev explained in his seminal 2017 book *Rival Power: Russia's Influence in Southeast Europe*, Russia became a "spoiler power" and a "weak power" in the Western Balkans. The most it can do is slow down and occasionally disturb Western influence.

This weakness of the Russian position in the Western Balkans was best demonstrated when Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov was prevented from visiting Belgrade in June 2022, due to NATO's control over the airspace of all countries that border Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Still, Russia remains an important symbolic power, especially among Serbs, who are also the most EU-sceptic of all Western Balkan nations. The reality of being surrounded by NATO, an enemy that bombed it in 1999—and has since expanded from 15 to 30 members—feeds frustrations and the sense of insecurity in Serbia. Belgrade declared military neutrality in 2007 and has since pursued a foreign policy of equidistance between the East and West. Serbia's "four-pillars of foreign

policy"—conceptualized before its sitting President Aleksandar Vučić came to power in 2012—involves good relations and strategic reliance on friendship with the United States, the EU, Russia, and China. Serbia, which now remembers the times of Yugoslav non-alignment with some nostalgia, bases its strategic thinking on a hope for a global balance of power, and tries to benefit from this position. But following the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, this foreign policy orientation requires significant diplomatic skills, bordering on the impossible. In addition, Serbia faces a looming danger of renewed stigmatization, having not yet fully recovered from the consequences of the previous fall from grace due to its role in the wars of the 1990s. While it was legitimate to build friendship with Russia before 2022, this is now politically dangerous and nearly impossible to do without a major risk of sanctions from, and confrontation with, the West.

For both the new and old East and West, the Western Balkans is still symbolically important, although neither has a clear plan on how to fully integrate it into their structures.

Russia's war in Ukraine—and its 2014 intervention in Crimea—could be at least partially explained by the sense of frustration over the successful expansion of NATO in the Western Balkans. Paradoxically, the EU almost completely stopped its enlargement plans for the region, leaving it in a limbo, with no clear membership perspective for the foreseeable future. What was meant to be a temporary project, now looks like a permanent situation, and the Western Balkans is no longer in any meaningful way knocking on the doors of the EU. From a Russian perspective though, NATO is what matters, not the EU. Russia is talking the language of hard power, not of common values and democratic transformation. And the West is now talking about a special status for the Western Balkans—embodied in Emmanuel Macron's idea of a European Political Community, or former Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta's proposal for a European Confederation. Either way, none of these visions involve a full membership for the Western Balkans in the EU any time soon.

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE?

The future of the Western Balkans, much like the future of Europe, will be significantly affected by the outcome of the war in Ukraine. That war is now turning into much more than just a war between two states, increasingly shaping up as a major confrontation between the West and Russia, which may include other actors in the future. For both the new and old East and West, the Western Balkans is still symbolically important, although neither has a clear plan on how to fully integrate it into their structures. The West wants to see the region as fully aligned against Russia and applies political pressure towards all of its states to achieve full compliance with the sanctions against Moscow. Serbia and the Republic of Srpska (the Bosnian Serb entity) are the only obstacles to this unity as the sole remaining advocates of neutrality and non-alignment. Serbia has a strong domestic reason for this: the memory of NATO's 1999 bombing campaign against Serbia is still fresh in the minds of the public, which considers American support for the independence of Kosovo (called Kosovo and Metohija in the Serbian-speaking territories) as an unacceptable act of intrusion into the sovereignty and territorial integrity of their own country.

EU member states today act as problem-makers rather than problem-solvers when it comes to the Western Balkan candidate states. This harms the confidence in and lowers the popularity of the EU.

There is an issue of national pride and nationalism, which considers Kosovo a central element of Serbian national identity, as explained in Filip Ejdus's book entitled *Crisis and Ontological Insecurity: Serbia's Anxiety over Kosovo's Secession* (2020). Just like many others in the Western Balkans, Serbs are deeply disappointed by the EU's hesitation when it comes to membership for the region's countries. They are worried that neighboring EU member states might use their veto-power to force them to make unacceptable and unpopular concessions. Several such attempts have been made in recent years by EU member states against EU candidates. Examples include the Greek insistence on Macedonia's name change, Slovenian conditioning of Croatia to agree to an arbitration over the maritime border in the Adriatic, and now the Bulgarian request regarding North Macedonia's history textbooks and the status of the Bulgarian minority. EU member states today act as problem-makers rather than problem-solvers when it comes to the Western Balkan candidate states. This harms the confidence in and lowers the popularity of the EU, not only in Serbia but in other countries of the region too.

To counter the sense of helplessness while waiting for other countries' decision, Serbia, North Macedonia, and Albania formed an informal coordination on economic, transportation, and certain legal and political issues. This mechanism was named the Open Balkan, formerly known as "Mini-Schengen." Other three countries of the region, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Kosovo (which remains only partially

recognized) have so far failed to join, for various reasons. The Open Balkan is an attempt to enhance regional cooperation while waiting for EU membership. It helped to improve all three bilateral relationships in the Belgrade-Tirana-Skopje triangle. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine presents a challenge to this format. Two of the countries of the Open Balkan are members of NATO, whereas Serbia reaffirms its intention to remain neutral. And if there is no consensus on such a major foreign policy issue among all three states, what then lies ahead for the initiative? In addition, while North Macedonia and Albania recognize the independence of Kosovo, Serbia claims it will never follow that line—not even for the sake of joining the EU.

If the West wins by helping Ukraine end the war in its favor, Russian ambitions to once again become a global power will be crushed. Should this materialize, one cannot be sure whether this would mean more EU or less Europe and more U.S. in Europe.

The war in Ukraine is already affecting the relationship between the region's countries. If the war continues—as many expect it to—the pressure on Serbia and Bosnia (especially the Republic of Srpska) will only grow. At the same time, this gamble might pay off for Serbia if it manages to present itself as a useful potential mediator, or if Russia emerges victorious in Ukraine. However, these are big "ifs." And even if this happens, a collapse of Western hegemony in the region is unlikely to follow as a consequence, as the West would want to consolidate its hold on the territories it currently controls. An empowered Russia would in such a case present a much more realistic threat to the West than it does now. This would in turn result in more, not less, involvement of the collective West in the Western Balkans, including more pressure on Serbia to abandon its neutrality.

If the West wins by helping Ukraine end the war in its favor, Russian ambitions to once again become a global power will be crushed. Should this materialize, one cannot be sure whether this would mean more EU—which could finally achieve its long-term vision of becoming a de facto hegemon on the European continent—or less Europe and more U.S. in Europe. One should remember that the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s ended only when the United States got involved, and not because of the EU's autonomous action. Against the backdrop of its success in the Balkans, the United States came back to Europe in 1995 and found a reason to keep NATO alive. At the same time, this was an EU failure. Hence, a victory of the West might bring an end to the EU's dream of a greater "strategic autonomy"—at least on security issues. Presently, the United States and China appear to be the main benefactors of the Russo-European conflict. While things can change relatively quickly in any war of this magnitude, it looks as if the Western Balkans does not have much to hope for, regardless of the outcome.

Presently, the United States and China appear to be the main benefactors of the Russo-European conflict. While things can change relatively quickly in any war of this magnitude, it looks as if the Western Balkans does not have much to hope for, regardless of the outcome.

Leaders in the Western Balkans now face a question: can they do anything with regards to the war in Ukraine that would improve the positions of their own countries? Wars are always tragic events and the main objective of foreign policy is to prevent them. However, they shape the international order and define certain time periods. Those dissatisfied with their position in the global order before the war might thus hope to improve their status and enhance power in its aftermath. Most Western Balkan states take a revisionist angle, with all of them somewhat dissatisfied with the results of the previous war in the 1990s. Some may therefore want to seize this opportunity to tip the scales in their favor. This can be done through the forging of firm alliances with the West, or perhaps by remaining neutral and hoping that this was the right choice. Both strategies appear risky, for they both entail a war that can possibly be avoided.

Still, there are elements that could be utilized by Western Balkan states in making their own strategy. First, the war in Ukraine is the first European war in more than a century not to directly involve Western Balkan countries. Unlike the two Balkan wars (1912-1913), both World wars, and the Yugoslav wars, the Ukraine war has so far been "somebody else's war." Many of the region's citizens remember the conflicts of the 1990s, which allows them to make connections with their own suffering and war-time experience. This keeps the desire to stay away from this conflict alive. The policy of military neutrality is thus not unpopular. Just as it is not unpopular to treat membership in NATO as an important shield for one's own safety at a time of a major conflict. But as one could see from the example of Hungary's recent parliamentary elections, any direct involvement in the war is highly undesirable.

The key objective of the countries of the Western Balkans is thus not to

get involved in the conflict that they consider not to be their own. In addition, the region might benefit from the new "mental mapping" that is being created in Europe. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the border between "us" and "them" (i.e. the West and the rest) has been drawn in Ukraine in the minds of many Europeans. And if the border of this new Europe is there, it is no longer in the Balkans. The Balkans is thus no longer a borderland, a frontier in a "clash of civilizations," as it used to be described during the 1990s. First, the war in Ukraine is not about civilizations or religions. It is not being fought between Christians and Muslims or even between Catholics and Orthodox Christians, which discredits the idea itself. Second, if the border between Europe and the new East was created in Ukraine, the entire Western Balkans clearly belongs to the West, whether it wants to or not.

It appears that whereas the United States understands the need to expand NATO quickly and while it can, the EU hesitates to enlarge. The main obstacles for further expansion of the EU today come from its member states, not from Russia, the United States, or the Western Balkans.

The real question is how the present situation should be best exploited to make the region feel that they belong to the West. This question should be directed at the West. In this relationship, the West acts as a subject, the one that initiates and makes decisions, such as, for example, whether a country should join the EU or not. The Western Balkan region is defined by the EU. The Union introduced a key element of its identity in the transformative process of Europeanization, which should eventually end in full membership in the EU.

Nevertheless, it appears that whereas the United States understands the need to expand NATO quickly and while it can, the EU hesitates to enlarge. The main obstacles for further expansion of the EU today come from its member states, not from Russia, the United States, or the Western Balkans. The EU appears to be held hostage by its own past. It acts as a prisoner of its own liberal rhetoric of the 1990s, unable to move on and adapt to the world of strategic and geopolitical considerations, and security-and-identity-based politics.

By hesitating on the issue of enlargement, the EU leaves the Western Balkans in limbo, increasing uncertainties over the long-term. The unfulfilled promises feed anti-Western—or at least anti-European—sentiments. In a situation in which it became difficult to turn these sentiments into openly pro-Russian political decisions, there is an ongoing search for new alternatives. One of them is for the countries of the region to rely on themselves, either through cooperation or by pursuing local balances of power. The other is to more directly rely on the United States, which in the 1990s served as a provider of both security and insecurity. The third is to try to do business with China, hoping that it could replace Russia's symbolic role as the main alternative to the West. Finally, the last option is to anticipate a shift of global proportions, which would replace the current international order based on Western hegemony. This, if successful, would fuel the revisionist hopes of the dissatisfied states.

The border between "us" and "them" (i.e. the West and the rest) has been drawn in Ukraine in the minds of many Europeans. And if the border of this new Europe is there, it is no longer in the Balkans.

The war in Ukraine—now increasingly looking like a prolonged war—will shape the answers to at least some of these dilemmas by eliminating some options and making others more (or less) likely.

HUMAN SECURITY

VIRTUOUS, PRACTICAL, URGENT, AND NECESSARY

Jonathan Granoff

HUMANITY is making itself an endangered species. Change is needed. Human security is the direct, accurate and needed framework to generate that change. Continuing without a paradigm change will surely lead to disaster.

This essay is not framed by the daily news cycle perspective but rather seeks to help set a clear north star for international coordination and focus necessary for human survival. We know that the statement, "all men are created equal," was not an empirical description. When the third President of the United States Thomas Jefferson penned it, men without property, women, indigenous people, and people who had been shipped to North America in slavery were not included. But its implicit guiding principle has become the guide for governance and its significance of immeasurable value. Human security is similarly valuable and needed. Although not noticed yet by the public, in the most sober diplomatic international forums and institutions this need for change is recognized.

Human security does not propose eliminating nations and militaries. For example, military force in defense of the territorial integrity and safety of the people of Ukraine is clearly necessary. However, a disproportionate emphasis on nationalism expressed through military power is not adequate to solve the growing list of global threats that impact everyone's daily lives.

EXPENDITURES, DOCTRINES, AND SECURITY

The purpose of all our nations is to meet the needs of how people actually live in their daily lives and to achieve that requires organizational arrangements arising from guiding principles that are grounded in today's science and the values inherent in universal human rights. The ideas that worked fine in the seventeenth century, when the creation of the modern nation emerged to end Europe's violent social upheavals, have produced a horse and buggy road inadequate for the challenges of today. That road does not necessarily include human rights and the insights of science.

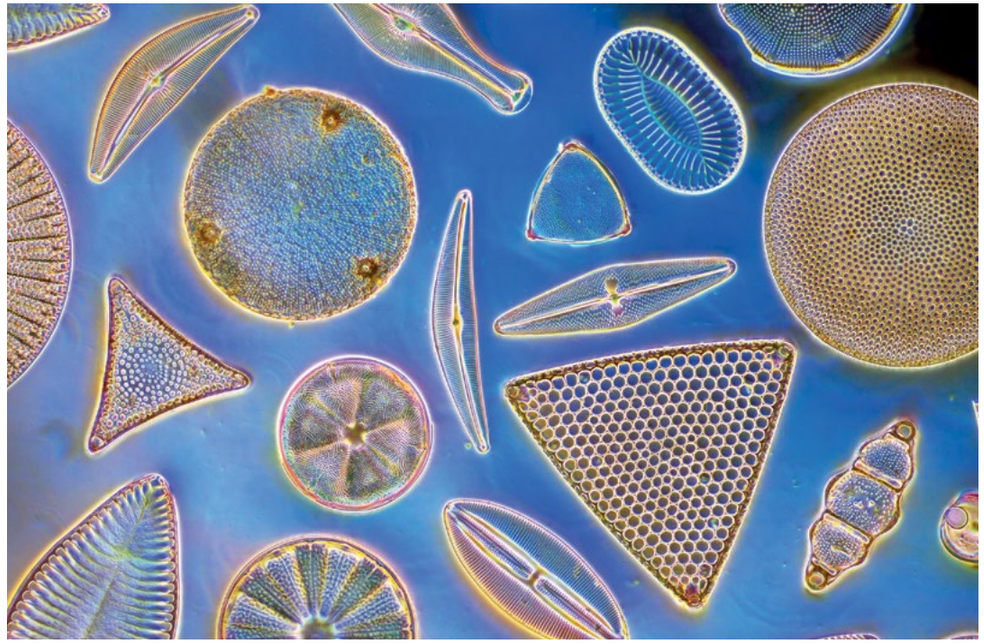

Photo: Guliver Image

Phytoplankton, a "third lung for the human family"

No matter how much is spent on weaponry or how much an economy of a nation grows, if its people are unhealthy, insecure in their livelihoods, persons, or property, security and well-being will evade them.

Today, as never before in human history, the regenerative processes of the natural world are at severe risk. Humanity's impact on the natural world is increasing and accelerating. It is a fact not understood well by the public; we are living in the Anthropocene.

Nations are spending obscene amounts of intellectual, social, and economic capital on expanding arsenals, building new and more destructive weapons of mass destruction, and thereby institutionalizing adversity based on an inadequate approach to achieving security. We need a new direction.

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Human security is the necessary framework for preventing pandemics, protecting the climate, rainforests, the health of the oceans, water, and topsoil, stopping the destruction of species and impairing the web of life we call biodiversity. Focusing security primarily on people is what is needed to eliminate the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons. It is also about achieving an equitable secure global financial system that does not destroy the regenerative miraculous processes of nature. These challenges require nations to cooperate and minimize adversity. They require a change in thinking and policies grounded in human security. This change requires enlivened vision.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stated in his Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech of December, 10th, 1964: "I refuse to accept the cynical notion that nation after nation must spiral down a militaristic stairway into the hell of nuclear annihilation[...] I have the audacity to believe that people everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality, and freedom for their spirits." Even today, his profound words resonate and call us to pursue policies that provide human security.

But whose words are guiding the policies of the most powerful nations in their aspiration to fulfill the first duty of every state and make their citizens safe and secure? Perhaps the fourth-century admonition of the Roman general Vegetius Renatus, in his landmark treatise *Epitoma Rei Militaris*: "if you want peace, prepare for war." This ancient text guides budgets, strategies, and distorts geopolitics into institutionalized adversity, a view that has led us to the profligacy of military expenditures that hover around $2 trillion yearly.

Since the nations of the world committed to fulfill the Millennium Development Goals, more than $32 trillion has been spent in the pursuit of security by military means. Chapter V Article 26 of the United Nations Charter directs the Security Council to address this distortion of values:

> In order to promote the establishment and maintenance of international peace and security with the least diversion for armaments of the world's human and economic resources, the Security Council shall be responsible for formulating, with the assistance of the Military Staff Committee referred to in Article to in Article 47, plans to be submitted to the Members of the United Nations for the establishment of a system for the regulation of armaments.

The UN Security Council has not fulfilled this directive, military expenditures keep increasing, profoundly disturbing new technologies of killing are being invented, and war itself is being pursued. All the while the threat of nuclear annihilation continues to be the preferred expression of maintaining global security by the five permanent members of the Security Council. Ironically, they simultaneously and collectively proclaim that a nuclear war cannot be won and thus must never be fought. This incoherence is both morally indefensible and dangerous.

No matter how much is spent on weaponry or how much an economy of a nation grows, if its people are unhealthy, insecure in their livelihoods, persons, or property, security and well-being will evade them.

These expenditures, based on cycles of fear and adversity in derogation of trust and cooperation, are reinforced by values that place national identity before our common humanity.

There are certainly appropriate defensive roles for militaries and proportionate budgets would evidence them, but today's conduct demonstrates a profound distortion of values. As U.S. President Joe Biden once said, "Don't tell me what you value. Show me your budget, and I'll tell you what you value."

The WMD Paradox

The most dangerous and illogical expenditures are for nuclear weapons. Nine nations possess over 13,000 nuclear weapons. If one percent of these devices were to explode, millions of tons of soot would be released into the stratosphere, causing such climate disruption that modern civilization, or possibly any civilization, would terminate from lack of agricultural capacity. In other words, starvation on an unprecedented massive scale would impact every person and every nation, including the one that launched the weapons first.

All nations with the weapons are currently either modernizing or expanding their arsenals, or both, at enormous expense. The hypocrisy of the states with nuclear weapons asserting that they are pursuing strategic stability to keep the planet safe is contradicted by their actual expenditures designed to obtain military advantage. This nuclear weapons venture represents in the words of Dr. King: "So much of our modern life can be summarized in that arresting dictum of the poet Thoreau: 'Improved means to an unimproved end.'"

Let's look at the situation through another lens. Suppose the Biological Weapons Convention said that no nation can use smallpox or polio as a weapon but that nine nations could use the plague as a weapon to ensure planetary peace and stability. The absurdity of this proposition underscores the daily life of all of us living beneath

a sword held over all our heads by a handful of men committed to pursuing national security by placing the future of humanity in a state of perpetual risk. As of this moment, they refuse to even pledge not to use nuclear weapons first. Such a condition in the words of late U.S. Senator Alan Cranston is unworthy of civilization.

This unworthy pursuit represents a paradox. The more the weapons are perfected the less security is obtained. Worse, they institutionalize adversity making the behavior of nations unable to sufficiently cooperate to meet the needs of their citizens.

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The Unignorable Facts

We are living in a precarious peace based on illusions of power and unsustainable practices. Our manner of pursuing security is unrealistic.

Here is some sobering realism. Humanity has wiped out 60 percent of mammals, birds, fish, and reptiles since 1970. We are causing species extinctions at over 100 times the evolutionary base rate. Deforestation has wiped out 8 percent of the Amazon rainforest since 2000. That is 513,016 square kilometers—the same size as France.

The last decade was the hottest decade since record-keeping began 140 years ago. Earth Has Lost 28 trillion tons of ice since the mid-1990s. In 2017, a single piece of ice the size of Delaware broke off from Antarctica's Larsen Ice Shelf. Continuing to neglect learning to live in harmony with the natural world is patently unrealistic.

Since 2000, the global CO2 average has increased by 12 percent. The atmospheric burden of CO2 is now comparable to where it was during the Mid-Pliocene Warm Period—around 3.6 million years ago. Extremes in weather, flooding, increased disparities of wealth, destruction of coastal habitats, and unexpected disasters will increase if we continue to heat the planet.

We are polluting the ocean with around 12.7 million tons of plastic a year. There are now 5.25 trillion macro and micro pieces of plastic in our ocean and 46,000 pieces in every square mile of ocean. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is around 1.6 million square kilometers—bigger than Texas. Plastic in the North Atlantic has tripled since the 1960s. Research published in May 2022 found the presence of microplastics in human blood.

Injuring the bio system of the oceans is soon going to impact human health dramatically.

Let us look at this one dynamic a bit closer as an example of how the relationship of modern humanity and the natural world must change and how states define and pursue security will have to change.

Ocean phytoplankton produces approximately two thirds of the planet's atmospheric oxygen through photosynthesis. It is fair to say that it is like a third lung for the human family and without it we would die. In other words, each of us could lose a lung and likely live, but if the phytoplankton dies humanity ends.

Also, phytoplankton provides food for several ocean creatures, such as whales, snails, and jellyfish. This makes this species the base of several ocean food webs. It floats in the top part of the ocean where sunlight shines through the water.

The health of the phytoplankton depends on a balance of acid and alkaline in the oceans and in oceanic health in general. For example, a substantial increase in ocean temperatures could disrupt the phytoplankton's photosynthesis process, which could impair its oxygen production. This would likely result in mass mortality in humans and animals. Some scientists predict this could happen within the next century.

Warmer water temperatures (as a result of global warming) slow phytoplankton's growth, because there is less mixing of warm surface water and cold water below, so there are fewer nutrients in the surface level warm water for the phytoplankton.

There are several credible scientific studies showing that as the climate warms, phytoplankton growth rates go down. Along with them, the amount of carbon dioxide these ocean plants consume go down too. That allows carbon dioxide to accumulate more rapidly in the atmosphere, which produces more warming.

This simple creature not only helps us breath. It is also a huge carbon absorber. Additionally, since plankton are so significant in so many food webs, fewer plankton will lead to fewer fish, which is a major food source for humans and other animals.

There is presently no international regime designed or capable of protecting this essential living system. No nation or even a group of nations is capable of protecting the health of the oceans. No nation or even a group of nations is capable of protecting us from pandemics. Like the air we breath, the oxygen we need, small viruses do not

recognize borders. Nature is not conforming to our ideas of how we should make ourselves secure.

History Matters

How did we get here? The creation of the modern state system arose to stop the carnage in Europe during the Thirty Years War, where Protestants and Catholics were slaughtering each other while debating who had the preferred definition of salvation as taught by Jesus. The ingenious invention of the modern state, based on the concept of state sovereignty and political control within borders, worked well enough to bring humanity into the modern age. The legal instruments that created the 1648 Peace of Westphalia changed the political architecture of the world. The new system ended the massive slaughters of European Catholics and Protestants fighting over definitions of Christianity and formed the basis of our modern sovereign state system.

Realistic policies arise when virtue and practicality coincide. When selfishness and fear guide and virtue is neglected, illusions become policies. Disaster ensues. When virtue and realism combine society flourishes.

That system must now function far more cooperatively to fulfill the vision of the United Nations multilateral system. But, because its frame of reference is essentially a horse and buggy road from the seventeenth century, it is not sufficient to enable the quick change needed to stop the rapid downward spiral arising from the modern technologies of war, commerce, and our daily lives. One can lead to a fast burn and nuclear annihilation, the other to a slow ecological burn. We need realism in our thinking and acting.

Is there a way to fulfill the United Nations' aspiration to ensure freedom from the "scourge of war," based on cooperation amongst nations, commonly expressed as multilateralism? Are there examples of rapid change for the better? What principles allowed that to happen? I propose two examples.

When U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev met in the historic summit at the height of the Cold War in Geneva in 1985, they confirmed that no one could win a nuclear war and, of similar import, pledged that neither the Soviet Union nor the United States would seek military advantage over the other. This pledge of common security, the principle of multilateralism that can bring realistic human security exemplified virtue in action.

When World War I ended, crushing reparations were leveled on Germany and brought the whirlwind of Nazism. When World War II ended, the Marshall Plan brought trading partners, security, democracy, and greater stability. In one instance the losers were further vanquished. In the second, the losers were helped to social, political, and economic well-being. Again, an example of virtue in action.

Realistic policies arise when virtue and practicality coincide. When selfishness and fear guide and virtue is neglected, illusions become policies. Disaster ensues. When virtue and realism combine society flourishes. There can be policies which are morally coherent but impractical. They cannot work. Nothing is more dangerous than the consistent pursuit of policies that are morally incoherent but alleged to be practical. Stability and security are obtained when moral coherence, virtue in action, and what is practical combine. That is what our moment in time compels us to realize. Cynical clinging to dysfunctional systems and ideas will not serve us well.

Stability and security are obtained when moral coherence, virtue in action, and what is practical combine.

The ancient Upanishads states: the world is one family. Today as never before in human history the admonition of the wise to see the human family as one and the practical necessity of new levels of cooperation coincide. No nation can fulfill its first duty to meet the well-being and security needs of its citizens without helping to build a global cooperative system to protect the regenerative processes of nature and relinquish the pursuit of security with a disproportionate emphasis on force and violence. Working together to obtain security goals through multilateral cooperation does not diminish sovereignty but are the very tools needed for sovereign states to fulfill their duties to keep their citizens safe and secure.

This change in perspective puts people first. Its expression amongst nations is common security. Its larger expression that includes states and individuals is human security.

Refocusing Security

Human security focuses on how people live and seeks first to meet their achievable real needs. These include ensuring a clean sustainable environment, useful education, secure jobs, fulfilling culture, stable communities, good health, nourishing food, and the flourishing that comes from freedom of worship, conscience, human rights, and the rule of law. These needs require safety in neighborhoods and a culture of peace. Meeting these needs enhances the dignity of each individual. In other words, human security refo-

cuses the pursuit of security from military nationalism and increased threats, violence, and fear to cooperation in meeting present actual real human needs. Today so many of the needs of people and the needs of their governing institutions, states and businesses require global cooperation because the threats before us cannot be adequately addressed at a national level.

There is no regime in place to adequately stop pollution of the oceans or the destruction of forests. Our very definition of security cannot ignore these facts any longer.

Human security refocuses the pursuit of security from military nationalism and increased threats, violence, and fear to cooperation in meeting present actual real human needs.

The myths of infinite growth in a finite planet and the myth that security can be found by increased militarism must be met with the realism of science in understanding our relationship with the natural world and an ever-increasing sense of gratitude for its bounty.

Change is needed quickly. Ideas that can generate that change are critically important. Human security is such an idea.

In 1994, Dr. Mahbub Ul Haq, head of the United Nations Development Programme addressed the question, "What happened to the peace dividend?" in a public forum held at the United Nations. Dr. Ul Haq spoke eloquently of the need for a fundamental transformation in the concept of security, which he described as "the security of people, not just of territory; the security of individuals, not just of nations; security through development, not through arms; security of all the people everywhere—in their homes, in their jobs, in their streets, in their communities and in their environment". This new interpretation, he explained, requires us to regard human security as "universal, global, and indivisible."

Human security starts with the premise that the reality of the natural world must be the foundation of our pursuit, rather than just focusing on human-made institutions. The institution of the state has become an idol, an end in itself, such that we protect it with weapons which if used will kill us all. The state is a tool to address real human needs rather than an end in itself. It is a human creation which means it can be molded to meet our needs.

Human security is the paradigm shift needed now. To disconnect the regenerative processes of the natural world from our economic system is not realistic. To focus security on the state rather than people is illogical. To fragment the approach to obtain security from sustainable development is dysfunctional. Security is a multifaceted right of all people and it involves all aspects of human activity. Just as our personal health involves how we sleep, eat, and interact with one another, just as our bodies are integrated systems, so is our security. Human Security is the integral principle called for today.

New Thinking

Presently the geo-political landscape is framed by notions of sovereignty. The planet and many present threats do not recognize national borders. Humans create these borders. We create nations to serve human needs—both physical and psychological. We create cities, counties, and regions to identify and meet our needs and we create institutions to address those needs. The basis, the legitimacy and stability of sovereign states, does not come from the bureaucracies or family heritage of leaders of states, but from the mandate of those who are governed. States express the moral and practical agency of people.

Today the requirements of that agency can only be met at a cooperative and global level in addressing the most pressing existential threats. Thus, global cooperation to meet the first requirement of every state to ensure the safety and well-being of its citizens is required. The state is an expression of an idea. It is a legal entity that we create, distinguishable from natural entities and systems. We do not create trees and forests, ants and ant colonies, or fish in schools. We do create states which are based on ideas expressed by words.

The planet can be understood as one integrated living system. Humanity can be understood as one species in a web of life. We require a new set of ideas in accord with this understanding.

Human Security is rooted in our best science and recognizes that human beings are social entities that require meaning and values in their endeavors. Humans need enabling environments to grow in our most ennobling values. Thus, policies to fulfill human security needs appropriately must be both practical and morally coherent. Moral coherence requires peaceful approaches amongst peoples and nations, and a proper recognition of the requirement of harmony of many cultures as well as many species.

Given how many endeavors have recently gone global, especially finance and commerce, bringing security into coherence with human needs is not only within reach: it is both morally compelling and practically necessary.

The fact that today there are severe tears in the fabric of the global community—that a regional war could escalate and that leaders are demonizing each other—does not alter one fact stated above nor should it detract the good, wise, and practical from pursuing what is needed. It just means we must be more diligent, faithful, and committed.

THE RISE OF EURASIA AND THE UKRAINE WAR

Irina Busygina

FOR at least two decades, policymakers and experts have been talking about the rise of Eurasia—a concept that has become one of the central themes in contemporary global and regional studies. Former Portuguese Secretary of State for European Affairs Bruno Maçães even ambitiously titled his 2018 book *The Dawn of Eurasia: On the Trail of the New World Order*. One of the main claims of the book was that Eurasia was key to a "new world order." Considering Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine, aren't such claims a step too far?

Indeed, it has become impossible over the recent decades to deny Eurasia's incredible achievements. Look at global cities, for example. This phenomenon, born in the Western world and originally used by sociologist Saskia Sassen to describe London and New York, has moved to Eurasia. Global cities in Eurasia have grown almost like mushrooms to now include Tokyo, Singapore, Seoul, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and others. Another critically important challenge for the accelerated development of huge Eurasian landmasses was connectivity. Here, a critical role is played by China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that is acknowledged as the most ambitious infrastructure undertaking of our time. Covering almost 70 countries by land and sea, it should profoundly affect every dimension of Eurasia, from shipping and agriculture, digital economy and tourism, to politics and culture. Finally, another proof of the rise of Eurasia—at least for those who profess realism in international relations—was the nearly simultaneous rise of the two major, albeit authoritarian, Eurasian powers: China and Russia. With the Russian and Chinese rise, realists celebrated "the return of the state" in geopolitics and international relations and, consequently, the decline of global governance, institutions that underpin it, and multilateral formats in general.

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Photo: Guliver Image

Unenticed by the Eurasian offer: Ukraine's Poroshenko seemingly ignores Lukashenko and Putin at a 2014 summit

Experts say, both China and Russia are already thinking in Eurasian terms: China through the BRI and Russia through its recently created Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Indeed, the BRI can be considered a symbol of a new phase in China's superpower ambitions—to remake the world economy and crown Beijing the new epicenter of globalization. However, the Russia-driven EAEU can hardly be considered a significant endeavor of Eurasian scale and can by no means be compared with the Chinese BRI.

There is, however, one more thing that Russia most recently brought to Eurasia and to the whole world: the war against Ukraine that started on February 24th, 2022. The current strategic landscape of Eurasia is now dominated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has fundamentally altered the global order with its implications felt on the geopolitical, security, economic, and humanitarian levels. At the same time, the war will have major implications for the political and security order in the Eurasian region. Is this war

also a sign of the rise of Eurasia, and a sign of Russia's rise? And if it is, do we really want it?

Over the last three decades, Russia has made concerted efforts to maintain political, security, and economic influence in the post-Soviet space. How will the war against Ukraine affect these efforts and what implications will it have for the wider Eurasian region?

WAS RUSSIA ON THE RISE?

In the international relations studies, the issue of "rising powers" has gained popularity about two decades ago, when countries such as China, Russia, Brazil, and Turkey began to be increasingly involved in world politics. The notion of "rising powers" relates to those countries that strive to increase their status in the system of international relations.

The BRI can be considered a symbol of a new phase in China's superpower ambitions—to remake the world economy and crown Beijing the new epicenter of globalization. However, the Russia-driven EAEU can hardly be considered a significant endeavor of Eurasian scale and can by no means be compared with the Chinese BRI.

By changing their status, these powers challenge and try to alter the existing balance of power on a global scale. Thus, the main strategic task of rising powers is multidimensional—the task of converting their "gross" advantages (territorial size, large economy, young population, various resources etc.) into long-term sustainable development and transitioning to a model based on sustainable domestic consumption, high-quality services, innovations, and high-value manufacturing. So far, the rising powers have been essentially playing catch-up, trying to close the development gap that exists between them and the advanced economies. Thus, the main challenge of rising powers was to reroute growth from a catching-up process into value-added, efficient growth.

The main implication of the aforementioned process is that rising powers must rely on domestic sources of development and growth as a foundation for their sustainable external rise. The problem arises, however, when their external ambitions do not match domestic sources. This is exactly what happened with Russia.

The Russian leadership has a specific understanding of the "rise" itself, which it equates with the recognition of the country's great power status. This status is meant to be rooted in the collective belief held by other states about a country's ranking in the international hierarchy. Status concerns have thus played a pivotal role in Russian foreign policy. However, unlike Brazil and Turkey, for example, Russia could not and would not be satisfied with the admission that it was "on the rise." Instead, it directly demanded great power status as a recognition of its exceptional position as an indispensable player in world affairs. In so doing, it completely ignored that a recognition of great power status would normally be based on valued attributes, such as military capabilities, economic wealth, culture, and socio-political organization. With the exception of military capabilities, Russia objectively did not meet any of these attributes.

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Thus emerged a most dangerous combination: a country that inherited a large patrimony of interests from the times when it was great and powerful but had a declining material capability to defend this patrimony. Such a country must rely on status to defend its interests and fiercely resist status deterioration. Russia does not have time to carry out domestic modernization and incrementally climb to the much-desired great power status, because the political regime's domestic stability is based on over-popularity of the country's president. This over-popularity is supported by constant and massive propaganda centered on Russian foreign policy success—for a lack of internal modernization success stories—and convincing the national audience that the country has "risen from its knees" to reclaim its rightful place as a great power. At the same time, the only available and tangible way to convince the outside world of the country's status is to use military capabilities. Therefore, such a country can be expected to actively participate in military conflicts around the world and generally follow a revisionist approach as a state primarily concerned with its own status above all other considerations. Even the Trump administration, which initially promised to improve relations with Russia and sympathized with Russian President Vladimir Putin in some ways, called Russia a "revisionist" power seeking to "undermine the legitimacy of democracies" in its 2017 National Security Strategy.

The post-Soviet space is the most favorable geography for Russia to assert its interests through conflicts and wars. At this moment, the war in Ukraine

occupies the central place of Russian revisionist strategy.

Russia's pre-war Ambitions in the post-Soviet Space

Russia was well known in the post-Soviet space as a "treaty activist." In fact, all the integration projects in the area—of which there were many—were Russian-driven and Russia-centered. However, the main problem with these projects was the inability of the leadership in Moscow to make credible commitments necessary to build a successful project of regional integration with the former Soviet republics. In other words, there was not enough mutual trust to advance integration, especially after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea. The common Soviet past, economic interdependence, and Russia's commitment to post-Soviet integration were thus insufficient for a successful process. In the absence of trust, Russia was more likely to be successful in using bilateral, as opposed to multilateral, mechanisms to dominate the post-Soviet region. In fact, the "bilateralization of relations" was one of the core principles of Russian foreign policy toward the post-Soviet states after 1991. While Moscow made official declarations about the importance of multilateral platforms, it preferred bilateral engagements that easily displayed great asymmetry between participants in Russia's favor.

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The Russian leadership has repeatedly declared that it considered multilateral cooperation to be unacceptably restrictive for Russia as a "great power." Indeed, Russia has employed its "bilateralization" approach by relying primarily on coercive tools such as manipulating the price of natural gas, imposing economic sanctions that target "disloyal" post-Soviet states, and using "frozen conflicts" to its own benefit.

Interestingly, the principle of relying on bilateralism was also one of the cornerstones of Russia's policy towards the European Union. Back in 2004, Russia's then Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov stated that one of the fundamental tenets of Russia's European policy was "the expansion of bilateral relations with individual EU countries." Russia sought to bilateralize both its deals and disputes with EU member states, trying to undermine solidarity within the EU and make Russia the stronger power. This was how Russia saw international politics: as a series of deals between great powers while the fate of smaller nations was to remain passive hostages of the decisions of major powers.

However, after Putin came to power, there were some indications that Russia was moving away from a traditional "imperial model" and towards promoting more pragmatic and equal relations with post-Soviet nations. But already in his second presidential term, Putin focused on pursuing "soft dominance" when it comes to Russia's neighbors. This was considered critical in achieving equality with the world's principal power centers like China, the EU, and the United States. As the Russian leadership saw it, the influence of these power centers in post-Soviet Eurasia was to be principally limited.

The strategy of "soft dominance" implied combining economic concessions and sanctions to limit Western influence. Generally speaking, the Russian soft dominance strategy has failed in maintaining Moscow's influence in its Eurasian near-abroad. That influence has been steadily declining, albeit unevenly across different sub-regions and sectors.

The strategy of "soft dominance" implied combining economic concessions and sanctions to limit Western influence. Then, as it became clear that the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was too weak an integration platform, Russia attempted to launch several integration projects with a smaller number of participants (e.g. the Eurasian Economic Community and the Customs Union).

Generally speaking, the Russian soft dominance strategy has failed in maintaining Moscow's influence in its Eurasian near-abroad. That influence has been steadily declining, albeit unevenly across different sub-regions and sectors. This was part of the multidimensional disintegration of the post-Soviet space. The level of economic interconnectedness of Russia with other post-Soviet states decreased, and the share of intra-CIS exchange in Russia's external trade indicated a steady decline.

This was critically important. Before 2014, Moscow mostly followed the commitments to respect the national sovereignty of post-Soviet states. Russia treated political incumbents with a combination of benefits and pressures, but without openly encroaching on the integrity and sovereignty of their nations. In other words, there were no de jure changes of the post-Soviet borders, which was the exact condition for maintaining "soft dominance." Smaller post-Soviet countries did not have much confidence in Russia, and actively explored the possibility of developing relations with other major powers. However, the default view was that the invariability of interstate borders was a threshold that

Russia would not cross. That changed with the 2014 annexation of Crimea.

UKRAINE AS RUSSIA'S "STUMBLING BLOCK"

In Fall 2011, as part of his pre-election promises, Vladimir Putin declared that he would bring ex-Soviet states into a "Eurasian Union" in his next term. According to Putin, Russia's goal was to establish a powerful, supranational union capable of becoming "one of the poles in a future multipolar world." Since then, the negotiations to form the Union incrementally developed through non-transparent bargains with potential members, most importantly Ukraine. Putin's former adviser Gleb Pavlovsky explained in early 2013 that the Eurasian Union was a very important project for Putin. However, Ukraine held the key to its success. Pavlovsky was sure that without Ukraine, Putin would lose all enthusiasm for it because this would render the project impossible.

In Spring 2013, Moscow made it crystal clear to the Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych that Ukraine must choose between the Eurasian Union project and the EU. Sometime later, Putin warned that if Ukraine concluded the Association Agreement with the EU, the Customs Union countries would have to think about safeguards. In fact, Moscow openly threatened to launch a trade war against Ukraine to dissuade it from signing the Association Agreement. Yanukovych realized the seriousness of this threat and postponed the signing of the EU trade pact in November 2013, but immediately encountered a serious domestic problem—massive public protests, now known as EuroMaidan, erupted in Kiev. The protests kept on going for quite some time and eventually led to the Crimean crisis. What followed was the change of government in Kiev, the escape of Yanukovych to Russia, the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by the Russian Federation, and the emergence of pro-Russian separatist regions in eastern Ukraine.

The 2014 Ukrainian crisis put an end to Moscow's hopes that Ukraine would "enter Russia's orbit," irrespective of what terms Russia was willing to offer.

The 2014 Ukrainian crisis put an end to Moscow's hopes that Ukraine would "enter Russia's orbit," irrespective of what terms Russia was willing to offer. Moreover, since 2014, the inconsistency between Russia's regional and global agendas has become more apparent. The annexation of Crimea presented a direct challenge to the system of prevailing international rules and expectations.

With Ukraine, strategically the most important country for Russia, Putin has profoundly miscalculated. This was not so surprising, given that the Ukrainian state after 2014 received much criticism by both Russian and Western experts. Experts have pointed (and rightly so) to the weak capacity of the central government in Kiev, which led to state capture by regional oligarchs, the fragmentation of political space, permanent political and economic instability, bad economic policy, and high corruption. Another reason for Moscow's miscalculations on Ukraine was the idea that Russia basically never made mistakes in foreign policy, and that it is the country's foreign policy that serves as the main proof of Putin and Russia's greatness.

The Russian experts and politicians that relied on such ideas did not consider the differences that existed between Ukraine and Russia, no matter how clearly visible they might have been since the Orange Revolution of 2004. Indeed, Ukraine differed very much from the other post-Soviet countries. While these differences were not surprising to anyone that tried to compare Ukraine with Central Asian nations, this was really striking when it came to comparisons with neighboring Russia and Belarus.

There are several dimensions of these differences at which we could look. One is the change of political leadership that has routinely—and regularly—occurred in Ukraine since its independence. This never happened in Belarus, a country that was frequently dubbed "the last dictatorship in Europe." The situation in Russia was not much better. Vladimir Putin has been running the country almost without interruption since 2000—even retaining the position of prime minister during the brief presidency of Dmitry Medvedev. The second dimension relates to the vibrant civil society and political engagement of Ukrainian citizens. This ability to stand up to the authorities in organized and coordinated ways was repeatedly demonstrated by Ukrainian society, but not by Russian and Belarusian societies. This is not to say that there were no protests in Russia and Belarus—there certainly were—but they did not lead to political change. Today, in times of war and harsh repression by the central government, they are virtually eliminated in both Russia and Belarus. In Ukraine, by contrast, since 2000, society has twice demonstrated the ability to generate major political change.

It should be added that the Russian leadership was very sensitive to the export of democratic "impulses" from neighboring states. In the post-Soviet space this has come to be known as "the export of color revolutions." These revolutions, especially the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, were widely perceived as major international setbacks for Putin's Russia. The Ukrainian events greatly alarmed Russian elites.

THE IMPACT OF THE WAR

Shortly after the peak of the 2014 Ukrainian crisis—and because of the looming threat of international isolation as a result—Moscow sharply intensified

its efforts to create the EAEU. It succeeded in involving smaller countries in a common multilateral agreement and obtaining their consent at precisely the right moment. However, the price that Moscow had to pay for their consent involved significant economic and social concessions. Since its creation in 2015, the EAEU has made little progress toward deeper integration, and no progress in expanding membership.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine—following the Kremlin's recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk "People's Republics" and the de facto termination of the Minsk agreements—has come as a shock not only to European countries, but also to post-Soviet nations. From the first day of the war, the leaders of former Soviet republics have closely followed not only the theater of military operations, but also the Kremlin's official rhetoric. For instance, Putin's argument about Ukraine being an anomaly and an artificial state created by Vladimir Lenin, could also be applied to other post-Soviet republics: all of them were established in their current form by Soviet leaders in the early Soviet period.

The position of Kazakhstan, the largest Central Asian nation, seems particularly important as it had the longest record of participation in Russia-driven integration projects. Generally, the quintessence of Kazakhstan's position after the war could be summed up in the words of Kazakh Deputy Foreign Minister Roman Vasilenko, who said that Kazakhstan would not want to be behind a new "Iron curtain" together with Russia. Nur-Sultan has also promised Europe not to help Russia evade sanctions.

Russia did not lose in the competition for post-Soviet Eurasia with other external powers. It excluded itself from that competition.

Crucially, Kazakhstan has not recognized the independence of the so-called people's republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. Furthermore, Kazakhstan has sent humanitarian assistance to Ukraine.

Kazakhstani citizens have publicly voiced their displeasure over the invasion. But the single most prominent and serious indication of Kazakhstan's unease over the war in Ukraine was the decision to cancel the country's annual Victory Day parade on May 9th, 2022.

The rapprochement of Kazakhstan and other post-Soviet states with Western nations and China is inevitable. Russia did not lose in the competition for post-Soviet Eurasia with other external powers. It excluded itself from that competition. Competition in international relations implies a strong sense of mutual recognition among a group of competing states. It also involves a basic understanding regarding the institutions (rules) that

structure competition. It is necessary to set limits to the possibilities of violence. Contrary to this logic, Russia proposed a game without commitments, where rules are replaced by provocations and violence. Even if Russia does not end up suffering a military defeat, the ultimate dissolution of the post-Soviet space around Russia will happen anyway. Russia's decisions are unambiguously pushing the country toward geopolitical isolation, with Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenka remaining the only ally of Vladimir Putin in the region.

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IRREVERSIBLE DISINTEGRATION?

Nobody denies the tremendous achievements brought on by the rise of Eurasia. Intuitively, one can assume that the benefits of such growth cannot be equally distributed across Eurasia's vast geography. And indeed, the flipside of this growth is becoming evident through rising inequality both between and within Eurasian nations. However, these negative manifestations do not contradict or undermine the very idea of a Eurasian rise. But the Ukraine war does. Moreover, the war undermines the idea that Eurasia holds the key to the new world order.

This is a non-trivial matter to think about while trying to rationalize Russian foreign policy. Whether the Russian leadership had a clear understanding of the strategic implications of the war they started against a neighboring sovereign country remains an open question. Russian experts now claim that the world order that emerged after the end of the Cold War no longer exists. It will hardly be possible to return to it later, even if the Russians and Ukrainians were to reach a compromise at some point. Another Russian claim is that Russia is not alone, but a leader of the non-Western camp that challenges the "old" liberal order. That type of relationship is based on the right of the stronger to act unilaterally, tamper with other nations' sovereignty, and disregard commitments, institutions, and rules. It can hardly be considered an order, because an order implies a stable and structured pattern of relations among states. Such a pattern is by default unattainable without norms, institutions, and at least some degree of trust. Post-Soviet Eurasia, or more precisely, its irreversible disintegration, serves as compelling evidence of what Russia is doing: sowing chaos instead of order. Nothing worse could have happened to the concept of the Eurasian rise.

Is Kazakhstan's Multi-Vector Foreign Policy Threatened?

Zhanibek Arynov

The year 2022 can arguably be considered one of the most challenging periods in Kazakhstan's modern history, both in terms of domestic political turbulence and international geopolitical uncertainty. In January 2022, the country experienced the bloodiest unrest since gaining its independence in 1991, which ended with the intervention of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which Moscow labeled a 'peacekeeping mission.' Moreover, Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24th, 2022, has put extra pressure on Kazakhstan. On the one hand, Kazakhstan remains one of the very few 'strategic partners' for Moscow at this moment in time. On the other, it also feels threatened by Russia's aggressive attempt to reshape the outcomes created by the collapse of the Soviet Union. The critical situation in which the country found itself made observers question the future of Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy, arguing that the new geopolitical reality would make Kazakhstan largely dependent on Russia. How is Kazakhstan responding to this new challenge, and what is the future of its multi-vector foreign policy? This essay addresses these questions. It argues that not only have these developments not eliminated Kazakhstan's "multi-vectorisms," but have instead made its contours even more visible.

Multi-vectorism Questioned?

The concept of multi-vectorism has always been at the heart of Kazakhstan's foreign policy. By implementing a multi-vector foreign policy, the country has been able to diversify its external relations and successfully maneuver between different, and often competing, interests of external players for its own benefit. Consequently, despite being a landlocked country with a challenging geopolitical environment, Kazakhstan today has advanced relations with all major powers. However, this multi-vectorism and ability to balance between great powers became severely challenged in 2022.

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Photo: Guliver Imagea

Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan's booming capital

In January 2022, the country went through the most violent political turbulence in its modern history, which had critical foreign policy implications. On January 2nd, mass protests broke out over a sudden sharp increase in liquefied gas prices in Kazakhstan's Western town of Zhanaozen. Peaceful protests quickly spread to other parts of the country, and were later hijacked by violent groups, mainly in the southern parts of the country. Kazakhstan's President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev described the situation as 'provocations from within and without,' and unprecedentedly appealed to the CSTO for assistance in order to stabilize the situation. Surprisingly, the CSTO, which previously twice refused Kyrgyzstan (2010) and Armenia's (2020) pleas for intervention, agreed to send its 'peacekeeping mission' to Kazakhstan.

The speed of the intervention was equally surprising: the first CSTO troops arrived in Kazakhstan on January 7th, and the mission was fully withdrawn by January 19th. The intervention by the Russia-led security organization into the country's domestic issues sparked discontent among the population. It was perceived to make the government personally 'indebted' to Putin. As a result, this stoked fears that the entire country would be at risk of 'loss of sovereignty' to Russia. Similarly, international commentators were quick to claim that the CSTO intervention marked the end of Kazakhstan's multi-vectorism, and that the country's complete dependence on Russia—or rather Tokayev's dependence on Putin—was almost inevitable.

Kazakhstan remains one of the very few 'strategic partners' for Moscow at this moment in time. It also feels threatened by Russia's aggressive attempt to reshape the outcomes created by the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24th further facilitated such speculations. During the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the former president of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev managed to stay relatively neutral. On the one hand, Kazakhstan refused to recognize the change of Ukraine's borders. On the other, it treated Russia's actions with 'understanding.' However, with new president Tokayev and his alleged personal 'indebtedness' to Putin, it was not clear to what extent he would be able to at least preserve such neutrality. However, recent events have demonstrated that not only has multi-vectorism in Kazakhstan's foreign policy not diminished but has instead acquired even more visible contours.

RUSSIA PRESSURES, KAZAKHSTAN HOLDS OUT

At first glance, Kazakhstan's official reaction to Russia's war in Ukraine is hardly different from that in 2014. The basic line is simple: Kazakhstan supports neither Russia, nor Ukraine, but peace. It respects the territorial integrity of Ukraine and recognizes only those decisions made by the UN. But still, it abstained from voting on the UN resolution that condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Kazakhstan says it will not become a tool to circumvent anti-Russian sanctions, but on the other hand claims to want to expand economic cooperation with Russia within the EAEU.

At the same time, one can observe that despite the official narrative of neutrality on the international stage, the Kazakh government is acting more decisively at home compared to 2014. For instance, Kazakh authorities quickly and firmly react to any expressions of support towards Russia's aggression in Ukraine, including fining and arresting people who publicly demonstrate the letter 'Z'—a symbol of Russia's war in Ukraine. Similarly, in March 2022, Kazakh authorities uncharacteristically allowed public rallies in support of Ukraine. But all other attempts to organize similar rallies have been prevented since then. Finally, Kazakh authorities decided not to interfere with the self-organized civil activists, who collect humanitarian aid for Ukraine. Tons of humanitarian aid are being sent on a regular basis. Moreover, the government itself provided official aid to "the people of Ukraine" as well. But the culmination of the story was President Tokayev's speech at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in June 2022. Sitting next to Vladimir Putin on the same stage, he called the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics "quasi-state entities" and stated that Kazakhstan will not recognize their independence. This was arguably the most explicit statement regarding Russia's war in Ukraine made by any Central Asian head of state since 2014.

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Such 'neutrality' does not go without consequences for Kazakhstan. The Russian government is irritated by the behavior of its 'ally' and uses different tools to put pressure on the Kazakh government to extract some sort of symbolic support from it. From a diplomatic angle, for instance, Russia was reported to threaten certain countries ahead of the vote to suspend Russia from the UN Human Rights Council in April 2022 by claiming that abstention and non-participation in the vote would be considered an unfriendly gesture. As a result, Kazakhstan, which had abstained from the previous UN vote in March, decided in favor of supporting Russia's position this time. From the economic angle, Russia has repeatedly suspended the operation of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), a critical pipeline for Kazakhstan, which carries almost 80 percent of the country's total oil exports through Russia to Europe. Although official reasons were related to 'damage caused by weather,' 'World War II mines,' or 'environmental issues,' the common interpretation has been that the CPC is being used as a pressure tool against Kazakhstan. Finally, Moscow seems

to have initiated an information campaign against Kazakhstan. Well-known Russian politicians and journalists regularly attack the Kazakh government for its 'neutral' position, obliquely questioning its statehood and national borders. Moreover, it is interesting to observe that anonymous Telegram channels are used to attack Kazakhstan and spread misinformation, most of which is related to the conditions of ethnic Russians in the country. While it is difficult to identify who is behind such channels with absolute certainty, these are very often based in Russia, appeal to Russian audiences, and are picked up and further circulated by the Russian media.

Moscow seems to have initiated an information campaign against Kazakhstan. Well-known Russian politicians and journalists regularly attack the Kazakh government for its 'neutral' position, obliquely questioning its statehood and national borders.

In spite of such pressure from Moscow, Kazakhstan appears determined to continue with its pursuit of multi-vector foreign policy. There are at least three powerful factors that make multi-vectorism inevitable—or perhaps even more relevant than ever—for Kazakhstan. First of all, it is the international environment (i.e. other state actors on the international stage) that does not want to see Kazakhstan become more pro-Russian. This specifically pertains to China, a traditional counterbalance to Russia in the Central Asian region. However, this is also about Turkey, with which Kazakhstan has intensified contacts, especially in the military sector. Even Western actors appear willing to put aside the events of January 2022 in Kazakhstan, reaffirming their readiness to continue cooperation with the country. Special attention should also be paid to other Central Asian countries, which have been trying to increase regional cooperation (and coordination) especially in relation to external powers. As a result, Kazakhstan has a number of alternatives that can counterbalance Russia in its foreign policy. Secondly, Kazakhstan has seen a significant increase in domestic opposition to closer relations with Russia. This opposition has become very vocal since January 2022 and has grown in its size and potential. Now, these trends cannot be neglected by the government anymore. This domestic group serves as yet another powerful mechanism to prevent a pro-Russian shift in the country's foreign policy. Finally, President Tokayev, who helped lay the foundation of Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy in the early 1990s, is too experienced not to understand all the consequences of abandoning multi-vectorism in favor of Russia.

As a consequence, instead of the predicted shift towards Russia, the Kazakh government has rediscovered its multi-vector foreign policy. This rediscovered multi-vectorism, however, does not imply Kazakhstan's anti-Russian drift. Kazakhstan will continue to speak of Russia as a close ally and strategic partner and will not be downscaling its political, economic, and cultural ties with Moscow at any expense. We saw this during president Tokayev's visit to Sochi in August 2022. Kazakhstan's multi-vectorism implies that the government has become more decisive in talking to third countries without looking back to Russia, and in initiating and joining the projects that exclude Russia's participation. First and foremost, it relates to Kazakhstan's hard attempts at diversifying its transport routes. Of course, this requires time, meticulous negotiations, financial resources, technological capacity, and assistance from third countries. But the geopolitical consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine are here to stay for a long time, and the Kazakh leadership clearly understands this. Therefore, the political decision has already been made, and Kazakhstan will be firmly moving in this direction despite any hurdles and Moscow's pressure. In other words, the rediscovered multi-vectorism implies that, in the case of Kazakhstan, not all roads now lead to Moscow. Some of them still do, but increasingly less so.

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The Emerging Potential of the Middle Corridor

Faridun Sattarov

INTERNATIONAL transport routes are crucial for international trade, to state the obvious. They generate future economic growth, and help countries gain access and expand into existing and emerging markets across a region or the globe. What we invest in international transport routes is often worth what comes out of them, as the history of industrialization tells us.

Currently, there are three main inland transport routes connecting Asia and Europe: the Northern Corridor (through Russia), the Southern Corridor (through Iran), and the Middle Corridor (through Central Asia and South Caucasus). The unavoidable spillover effects of the ongoing military conflict in Ukraine have brought to the fore issues of the safety of freight traffic along the Northern Corridor, while cargo transportation along the Southern Corridor is problematic due to sanctions against Iran in the crisis-prone Middle East, thus increasing the significance of the Middle Corridor, which runs through Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, the Caucasus, and further into Europe.

The Corridor in the Middle

The Middle Corridor is a convenient shorthand for the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR). It starts from Southeast Asia and China, runs through Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, the Black Sea, and continues onward into Europe.

As an international transport infrastructure project, the TITR set sail in November 2013, when the heads of rail companies of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia signed an agreement establishing the Coordination Committee for the development of the TITR. In the following years, a few other national companies joined the TITR, eventually leading to the establishment of the International Association "Trans-Caspian International Transport Route" in December 2016.

Source: adycontainer.com

The Middle Corridor

The Middle Corridor is also part of the implementation of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is expected to determine the direction of development of transport connectivity throughout the region in the years to come. To date, the BRI has been a powerful driver of the development of existing and emerging Eurasian transport routes.

Sitting at a crossroads between the East and West, the Middle Corridor countries of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia possess an immense, but somewhat untapped potential, not only in terms of connecting Asia and Europe, but also in terms of opening up and expanding their bourgeoning markets into the global trade.

The Middle Corridor offers an alternative route that bypasses Russia. However, today it can only match

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5 percent of the capacity of Russia's northern route. This means that the countries of the Middle Corridor and other interested parties should invest billions of dollars to enhance the corridor's capacity and turn it into the main transport route. A step in that direction was made on March 31st, 2022 when the governments of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey—perhaps prompted by the events in Ukraine—signed a declaration "emphasizing the importance of steps to strengthen the transit potential of the signatory states."

The Middle Corridor offers an alternative route that bypasses Russia. However, today it can only match 5 percent of the capacity of Russia's northern route.

FOR THE BENEFIT OF KAZAKHSTAN

Cargo dispatched from the Chinese city of Urumqi enters Kazakhstan through the border town of Dostyk and the Altynkol railway station, further following the northern and southern railway lines of Kazakhstan to reach the ports of Aktau and Quryq on the country's Caspian coastline. Such branching of the railways into northern and southern parts suggests that the implementation of the Middle Corridor project is important for Kazakhstan not only in order to facilitate the transit of Chinese goods, but also to link some of the inland Kazakh cities with the Middle Corridor route—which would benefit the export of goods produced domestically. The significance of the Middle Corridor for landlocked Kazakhstan cannot be overstated.

According to estimates, Kazakhstan has invested about $35 billion in the development of transport infrastructure over the last 15 years, resulting in 2,000 kilometers of railways, 19,500 kilometers of automobile roads, 15 airports, and the improvement of ports on its Caspian Sea coastline. Much of the investment has been part of the Nurly Zhol (translated as "Bright Path") stimulus investment program initiated by Kazakhstan's first President Nursultan Nazarbayev in 2014. Another $20 billion worth of investment package has been announced by sitting President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev until 2025.

Kazakhstan has also been successful in attracting investment from international development institutions. They are currently financing 32 projects in Kazakhstan, a figure which accounts for 34 percent of all projects moving forward in the country. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is particularly active in financing infrastructure projects in Kazakhstan, having been supporting 17 projects with a total value of $2.7 billion.

The first major international discussion of Kazakhstan's strategy for the development of the Middle Corridor took place in Brussels on June 15th, 2022. The event was a significant first step toward establishing an EU-Central Asia cooperation in developing the multimodal transport infrastructure along the Middle Corridor. It attracted diplomats, policymakers, and transport and logistics professionals from across the Eurasian continent. As stated by Margulan Baimukhan, Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the EU:

Kazakhstan has invested about $35 billion in the development of transport infrastructure over the last 15 years, resulting in 2,000 kilometers of railways, 19,500 kilometers of automobile roads, 15 airports, and the improvement of ports on its Caspian Sea coastline.

> The central geographical location between Asia and Europe, continuous investment into infrastructure, transport and logistics assets since early years of independence, together with our openness to trade and cooperation, make Kazakhstan one of Eurasia's Largest Transit Hubs – always open to new partners, ideas and approaches that would revive the true spirit of the Silk Road.

For Kazakhstan, the task of setting the Middle Corridor on track is by no means an easy one. When it comes to connecting the inland routes of the Middle Corridor to the Caspian Sea, Kazakhstan may face competition from its neighbor Turkmenistan. The two countries may compete for the transit of cargo from China to the Caspian Sea, as well as for investment as part of the BRI. Nonetheless, Kazakhstan has a clear advantage over its neighbor, as it directly borders China in the East and the Caspian Sea in the West. The Kazakh port of Quryq is therefore an important connecting hub on the Caspian coastline.

AZERBAIJAN'S BALANCING ACT

Shipments leaving the Kazakh ports of Aktau and Quryq travel via the Caspian Sea and enter Azerbaijan through the port of Baku, claimed to be the largest and busiest of the entire Caspian shoreline.

Having chosen a course of non-alignment with any of the blocs, Azerbaijan aims for balance and neutrality in its foreign policy. Perhaps through its intensive development of defense capabilities, the country managed to end the 2020 Karabakh conflict in its favor, which could spell a new era for infrastructural development in the South Caucasus region. Clearing of transport corridors in the near future will increase the investment attractiveness of the region, which, of course, is

important for EU-Asia trade relations in the face of increased confrontation between Russia and the West.

The geopolitics of the South Caucasus is also changing. In the war against Armenia, Azerbaijan received significant assistance from Turkey, which is poised to strengthen its role among the Turkic-speaking nations. Consequently, Turkey was included in the process of the Karabakh settlement, which previously would have seemed rather unlikely given the monopoly of Russian "arbitration" in conflict resolution. Subsequent development of relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey led to the signing of the Shusha Declaration between the two countries in June 2021, which further increased the level of their bilateral military, political and economic integration. Notably, this allowed Turkey to gain a foothold in the region with the prospect of access to Central Asian countries.

Against the backdrop of the significant deterioration in relations with Russia, the EU's interest in Azerbaijan's energy projects may take on a new shape. Azerbaijan cannot replace Russian gas volumes, but Baku is quite capable of supporting southern European countries.

Azerbaijan has been pursuing a course of diversifying its economy in order to reduce dependence on the oil and gas industry while at the same time developing domestic production. According to official government figures, Azerbaijan's non-oil exports in 2021 amounted to $2.7 billion, which is 47.2 percent more than in 2020. They also estimate that by 2025 the share of the non-oil sector in the country's GDP will amount to 72.9 percent, with the oil sector dropping to 27.1 percent. This means that Baku will soon be searching for alternative suppliers and markets. The beneficiaries of the Middle Corridor, China, Turkey and the EU will most likely satisfy those needs.

As Azerbaijan's integration policy seems to be based on the principles of balancing and equidistance between the main power centers in the world, it is possible that the country will enter a strategic partnership with the EU in the near future. Against the backdrop of the significant deterioration in relations with Russia, the EU's interest in Azerbaijan's energy projects may take on a new shape. Of course, Azerbaijan cannot replace Russian gas volumes, but Baku is quite capable of supporting southern European countries, such as Italy, Greece, and Bulgaria.

European countries could appreciate the benefits of Azerbaijan's modern infrastructure, which combined with the anti-Russian sanctions, would amplify Azerbaijan's role as an international transport hub. By facilitating the transit of Turkmen gas to Europe in the coming years, Azerbaijan could play a role in the diversification of gas transit routes for the old continent. The existing Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway artery is thus an important segment of the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route.

The project of building a deep-water port in the Georgian town of Anaklia has emerged as a key factor to guarantee the country's appeal within the Middle Corridor.

TO THE PORTS OF GEORGIA

Georgia is where the Middle Corridor splits into land and sea routes. Cargo arriving in the Georgian capital of Tbilisi can be routed either to its Black Sea ports or, by land, to Kars, a city in north-eastern Turkey. The first option is more advantageous, insofar as the freight can be transported by sea directly to various Black Sea and Mediterranean Sea ports, therefore bypassing the longer ancillary land route to Europe through Turkey.

Georgia boasts of several ports on its Black Sea coast: Batumi, Poti, Kulevi, Supsa, Anaklia, and Sukhumi (although the last one belongs to the breakaway region of Abkhazia). Batumi and Poti are by far the largest in Georgia. Batumi, Kulevi, and Supsa also specialize in liquid oil cargo. Most of them are either leased to or owned by foreign companies: Batumi is being operated by the Kazakh state company KazTransOil, Poti by APM Terminals, a subsidiary of the Danish giant Maersk, and Kulevi by the State Oil Company of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SOCAR).

The project of building a deep-water port in the Georgian town of Anaklia has emerged as a key factor to guarantee the country's appeal within the Middle Corridor. As a deep-water port that allows for safe anchoring or docking of very large and heavy ships, Anaklia could accommodate large capacity vessels, and gain significant advantage over neighboring ports on the Black Sea coastline. Containerized cargo arriving in Anaklia by land could be transported onward to Europe through the Black Sea ports of Constanta in Romania and the ports of Burgas and Varna in Bulgaria. The cargo could also be shipped further through the Bosporus Strait to Mediterranean Sea ports.

The Anaklia Development Consortium (ADC) has characterized Anaklia as "a world class port complex for Georgia" and "a focal point of trade to and

from Central Asia and on the New Silk Road trade route between China and Europe." As the construction began in 2017, the project attracted the attention of Chinese firms keen to invest in the port, such as China Railway International Group and Shanghai Zhenhua Heavy Industries. However, in January 2020, the project agreement with the ADC was cancelled by the Georgian government amid concerns about a lack of funding and investment.

Despite stalling progress, the Anaklia project is about to be restarted. In April 2022, the Georgian government stated that several investors have expressed interest in the project, and plans to implement it are underway. Both the government and the investors may have been influenced by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, compelling them to find an alternative route bypassing the Russian northern route. On the other hand, a share of the cargo previously shipped through the Black Sea ports of Ukraine will also have to be rerouted, as those could become unavailable for years to come, if the miliary conflict drags on. This enticing new opportunity may finally give impetus to the Anaklia project.

Russia's Red Lines

One of the problems facing the Middle Corridor today is the lingering (geo)political influence of Russia, especially in the post-Soviet republics along the route. The key question is to what extent will Russia tolerate the creation of an alternative transport corridor to rival its own northern route, and how far it would go to interfere and block its further expansion.

Russia eagerly uses its energy supply and transit capabilities as a foreign policy leverage. The rising fuel prices in European countries today are a result of Russia's throttling of the flow of gas, on which the Europeans have come to depend over the years.

Russia eagerly uses its energy supply and transit capabilities as a foreign policy leverage, as seen in its response to the Western sanctions following the start of the war in Ukraine. The rising fuel prices in European countries today are a result of Russia's throttling of the flow of gas, on which the Europeans have come to depend over the years (though the dwindling of revenues from gas sales also hurts Russia as well). The drawn-out fighting means Europe will be on the lookout for alternative routes to lessen its dependence on Russia, including those for the transit of manufactured goods.

Earlier this August, Reuters reported on plans by Kazmunaygas, Kazakhstan's state oil firm, to begin sales of oil via the Azeri pipeline to bypass Russia. Hardly a day passed since the report, when the head of the Ministry of Energy of Kazakhstan, Bolat Akchulakov, denied information about Kazakhstan's intention to transport oil via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan route from autumn. Akchulakov explained that while such talks can be held at the level of national companies, these kinds of deals need to be agreed with the Ministry of Energy. Nevertheless, it is possible that Kazakhstan had to take its relations with Russia into consideration when making such a statement.

The enduring uncertainty surrounding the ongoing war in Ukraine, may push Russia to redraw its red lines concerning the proliferation of cargo traffic in Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

Russia's enduring influence in parts of the post-Soviet region is not surprising. Moscow plays a leading role in organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Eurasian Economic Union—all of which have several former soviet republics as its members. We should also factor in the significant amount of trade turnover between Russia and countries of the Middle Corridor, and last but not least, the geographical proximity that makes military incursion easy, should all else fail to reign with the recalcitrant ones. Think of Georgia, Crimea, and Ukraine proper.

The Road Less Taken

The feature of the Middle Corridor that makes it of concern to the Kremlin is that it bypasses Russia. Yet, if one would think outside the box for a moment, one could plausibly hypothesize that it is precisely this feature of the Middle Corridor that Russia might be hoping to exploit for purposes none other than evading sanctions.

While Europe is poised to slash its Russian oil imports, discounted Russian crude oil is finding bulk buyers elsewhere, like in India and Turkey. As Western countries have been moving away from Russia, *The Economist* writes, some other countries have been getting closer. The newspaper further speculates that some Western companies, obstructed by sanctions, may be using Turkey as a mediator to export to Russia. Certainly, in doing so, Russia and its partners do not have to rely on any segment of the Middle Corridor. Nonetheless, the enduring uncertainty surrounding the ongoing war in Ukraine, may push Russia to redraw its red lines concerning the proliferation of cargo traffic in Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

Russia redrawing its red lines and Europe's search for alternative routes creates a momentum to be seized by the Middle Corridor countries: particularly Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. However, even with geopolitical interests and opportunities falling into perfect alignment, the technical, financial, and legal problems also require solutions.

The Middle Corridor project could be nothing more than an attempt to revive the TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) project established back in 1993, particularly as these two routes very much overlap geographically. The TRACECA project appears to have suffered from divergent agendas of its member states. Consequently, if the Middle Corridor is to succeed, the Caspian and Central Asian states will need to ensure that any existing competition between them to attract cargo flows does not damage the prospects for the TITR. Over the past few years there has been increased effort to enhance relations between the Caspian and Central Asian states. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether the states of the region will be able to overcome any flaws in the TRACECA that TITR could inherit.

If the Middle Corridor is to succeed, the Caspian and Central Asian states will need to ensure that any existing competition between them to attract cargo flows does not damage the prospects for the TITR.

The key question, ultimately, is whether the hopes of regional players for cargo flows from China will come true, or will they simply become the owners of a "white elephant" in the current economic and political conditions? Only time can tell. For now, the Middle Corridor remains a promising premise, but one whose future is yet to be decided.

An Uneasy Collaboration or a Third Global Frontline?

Afghanistan and Central Asia's Emerging Quandaries

Mladen Mrdalj

IT was a hot day in Tashkent in late May 2022. A diplomat from the Afghan embassy expressed regrets for not being able to host our group of students from Boston. The reason? A Taliban delegation from Kabul was visiting. While disappointed that I would miss the opportunity to visit Afghanistan's embassy, knowing that the Taliban were so close felt somewhat unnerving yet also quite thought-provoking.

What is to be done with Afghanistan? What principles should guide our thinking about the country? Can we afford to reject the Taliban government until they adopt Western—or at least regional—human rights standards? Can we prioritize the human right not to starve to death over women's rights to education? Next, should the West passively observe Afghanistan's integration with the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), effectively helping extend the Chinese infrastructure web to the ports of the Indian Ocean and Beijing's two major allies: Pakistan and Iran? Should Russia and India do anything about it?

The aforementioned delegation was most likely preparing for the July 2022 international conference on Afghanistan, whose topic unsurprisingly revolved around the Taliban. The event hosted delegations from more than 30 countries including China, the United States, and Russia. It also featured high-level dignitaries from multilateral organization such as the UN.

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Photo: Guliver Image

Taliban fighters celebrate the first anniversary of their return to power

When Shavkat Mirziyoyev became President of Uzbekistan in late 2016, he reshaped the country's foreign policy. It became an instrument of tailoring Uzbekistan's neighborhood to suit the interests of a country that was starting to open both to the world and its own citizens—as opposed to hiding behind protective walls, destined for failure or passivity while following the lead of great powers.

When it comes to Afghanistan, this meant having to recognize the resilience of the Taliban, their regime's fragility, and the significance of American exhaustion. The initial contact with the Taliban was most likely established in late 2017, since the Taliban declined an invitation to participate in a March 2018 conference on Afghanistan in Tashkent. Around that time, Russia and the United States both acknowledged contacts with the Taliban. The Americans soon initiated talks, which resulted in the 2020 Doha Agreement. In the summer of 2018, Uzbekistan's Foreign Ministry reported its first official contact with

the fundamentalist group, after which another one followed in March 2019.

It seems that Russia's aggression against Ukraine and the acute U.S.-China crisis over Taiwan have overshadowed the effects of the American withdrawal from Afghanistan. However, these two processes are bringing back Afghanistan and its neighborhood to the forefront of global attention.

The war in Ukraine and the U.S.-led maritime coalition aimed at containing China represent two global frontlines, both of which are pushing Russia and China to search for a way out.

The war in Ukraine and the U.S.-led maritime coalition aimed at containing China represent two global frontlines, both of which are pushing Russia and China to search for a way out. Hence the doubling down on political, economic, infrastructure, and even cultural offensives in Central Asia—and even onwards to Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan. The goal is to construct an economically sustainable and politically predictable region in order to secure minerals, trade, and, perhaps most importantly, efficient transport routes.

How will Central Asia and this new Afghanistan fit in the new international disorder? Which countries and actors stand to profit ("investors") and which to lose ("hesitators") from a stable and open Afghanistan—even while its leadership underperforms on basic human rights?

Moreover, can the Taliban win the peace after winning the protracted war? Is it really so much harder to build a country than to sabotage it? Simply put, can the Taliban preserve their ideological purity and organizational unity once the singularity of purpose—defeating the occupiers and traitors—is lost? Now the challenges of management and ideology are producing disagreements about the ranking of their importance. The same is true when it comes to budgets, strategies, human resources, and theological interpretations required to tackle such challenges.

Bringing these two questions together, we ask how the "investors" and "hesitators" could interact with Afghanistan's present and future factions. What are the most likely scenarios? Do we have enough reason for hope or are we seeing the emergence of a "third global frontline"—manifested in the attempts of the United States and other "hesitators" to hamper Chinese expansion?

It's All about Diversification

The war in Ukraine and sanctions imposed on Russia have created significant transportation difficulties between Europe and Asia. Many companies have rerouted their goods to the more complicated "Middle Corridor," which passes through China, Central Asia, and the Caucasus, eventually linking to Turkey and Europe. The existence of an alternative route, although more complicated, illustrates the importance of transport route diversification.

This logic drives Uzbekistan's multivector foreign policy and that of other Central Asian countries, reducing dependency on Russian transport corridors. Geographical isolation is both a blessing and a curse. It is quite costly for major powers to reach the region and effectively police it, but it is also quite costly for the region's economies to reach global markets. After America's failure in Afghanistan and Russia's military setbacks in Ukraine, it is very hard to imagine China repeating the same mistakes. The sticks are too short and expensive, which compels great powers to rely on carrots in Central Asia.

Great powers are aware of this. The United States initiated a New Silk Road connecting India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia in 2011. At roughly the same time, the Ashgabat Agreement promoted the International North-South Transport Corridor, which today includes India, Pakistan, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia. This created a "vertical" multi-modal route, attaching Central Asian countries, which were already connected "horizontally." Russian transport companies successfully shipped goods to India using this route in 2022.

Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the BRI in Astana in 2013, thus symbolically underlining the importance of Kazakhstan and Central Asia for China's infrastructure project. The BRI's transport routes are numerous, but fall within six main corridors: two through Russia; one through Central Asia, Iran, and Turkey; and one through Pakistan. The remaining two traverse South Asia. In addition, a China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway is now under construction and will be the shortest route for transport from China to Europe and the Middle East.

Before the Taliban took over Afghanistan, Central Asian countries sought connection to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, aiming to reach global markets through Pakistan's Gwadar port. Otherwise, they would have had to travel through Turkmenistan and Iran to reach Turkey and Europe, or other markets through Iranian port of Bandar Abas. There was a glimmer of hope that the 1965 Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement would help shorten the route between Central Asia and Pakistan, yet squabbles between Afghanistan's government led by Ashraf Ghani and Pakistan over India's participation ended all hopes of such an outcome in 2020.

All these routes avoided Afghanistan. American analyst S. Frederick Starr opined that Afghanistan is not as important to Russia and China as it is for Central Asian countries. If the Taliban succeed in stabilizing Afghanistan, stable Central Asian states could use this development to diversify access to both Iranian and Pakistani ports. This includes the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) natural gas pipeline and the Central-South Asia Regional Electricity Market. Even Iran could end up using Afghan routes to establish a faster connection with China.

While many infrastructure projects may appear as a sign of rapidly developing regional connectivity, what drives them are fears and zero-sum games, rather than hopes and absolute gains.

In 2021 we observed the announcement of the Pakistan-Iran-Turkey corridor, building on the 2011 Ashgabat Agreement. In 2022, the first truck shipments linked Uzbekistan and India via Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, as India fears the prospect of dependence on Pakistan for connection with Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, it is investing in Iran's Chabahar port, a competitor to Pakistan's China-backed Gwadar.

While this many infrastructure projects may appear as a sign of rapidly developing regional connectivity, what drives them are fears and zero-sum games, rather than hopes and absolute gains.

"Investors" and "Hesitators"

Central Asian countries certainly stand to profit from a stable and regionally integrated Afghanistan, as well as diversified access to southern ports. For this to materialize, Uzbekistan has been cautiously spearheading the initiative. Several border incidents prompted joint exercises involving Russia in 2021 and Tajikistan during the summer of 2022. Uzbekistan's major trading partners are China, Russia, and Turkey, while diplomatic and commercial contacts with the United States have increased as of late. A large Uzbek minority in Afghanistan prompts Mirziyoyev to reiterate the need for an inclusive Afghanistan government. However, the Taliban remember the significant role their northern neighbors played in their 2001 defeat.

As a key transportation hub in Eurasia, Kazakhstan is a major hub of the BRI, long considered the "buckle on the belt," as the country accounts for approximately 70 percent of transit traffic passing from China to Europe and vice versa. At the same time, as part of Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy, the EU is the country's biggest trading partner. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have had frictions with Russia over the Ukraine war. Turkmenistan, as an almost completely isolated country, has shown significant interest in Afghanistan and natural gas exports to South Asia.

China has been developing ties with the Taliban since at least 2014. It needs the Taliban at minimum not to export violence to areas populated by China's Uyghurs. Beijing welcomes peaceful relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, while an Afghanistan open for Chinese investment would be an ideal scenario. The problem, however, lies in the Chinese tendency to avoid local labor. Moreover, cultural and ideological incompatibility may lead to violence, as was the case in Pakistan's Baluchistan. China even maintains a small military presence in Tajikistan.

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Turkey has been promoting a pan-Turkic cooperation involving Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. Its soft power, investment, and influence in the region are growing. Ankara seeks closer cooperation with Pakistan, where Turkish soft power is strongly felt. To all such efforts, Afghanistan is a linchpin. Turkey is advocating the recognition of the Taliban government. Turkish humanitarian services have been particularly abundant in Afghanistan, inheriting the positions of Turkish non-combat troops and their contacts with the Taliban. Still, Turkey's ambitions may clash with those of the Russians and Chinese. On the other hand, should Central Asian countries secure cheaper access to global markets—primarily through Iranian and Pakistani ports via Afghanistan—Turkey may soon learn that its brotherly embrace of Central Asian Turkic peoples has its limits.

Iran can benefit from a stable Afghanistan through economic and transport cooperation, as well as reduced pressure from Afghan refugee flows. Moreover, Iranians share the language and culture with many Afghans, but the religious divide in Afghanistan has traditionally placed Iran in the Shia Hazara camp against the Taliban, who are predominantly Pashtun Sunnis. Taliban treatment of Hazara should, and probably will, decide the quality of Afghanistan's relationship with Iran.

Pakistan's diplomats suspect that the U.S. military intentionally left large volumes of weapons in

Afghanistan. Coupled with horrific poverty and famine, the conditions for destabilization are already there. Moreover, Pakistan suspects that India is also plotting its own activities aimed at destabilizing Afghanistan. While many in Pakistan hope the Taliban can achieve stability, whether the Taliban will accept a common border as legitimate—and cut ties with the secessionist Pakistani Taliban—remains uncertain. The Afghan Taliban may even become less dependent on Pakistan by forging new international alliances.

Russia's war in Ukraine, threats about renewing the Soviet Union and frictions with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have significantly damaged the Russian image. Meanwhile, China has replaced Russia as the number one trading partner in the region.

Russia's economic clout in Central Asia is still felt, the Russian language remains the region's lingua franca, and Russian troops are present in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. However, Russia's war in Ukraine, threats about renewing the Soviet Union and frictions with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have significantly damaged the Russian image. Meanwhile, China has replaced Russia as the number one trading partner in the region. German analysts Sabine Fischer and Angela Stanzel think Russia yielded economic and political primacy to China in Afghanistan. One may even argue that Russia is slowly accepting Chinese primacy in Central Asia in exchange for support against Western sanctions. If true, threats by some Russian deputies and media figures against Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan may have been part of the arrangement to push Central Asia into China's embrace. Following the same logic, Russia should not destabilize Afghanistan and risk to alienate China, for it will continue to require Chinese, Iranian, and Turkish assistance in its efforts to escape Western sanctions.

Moving on to the actors with "mixed feelings" about stable and integrated Afghanistan, Qatar profited from Afghanistan's instability by imposing itself as a valuable mediator—primarily between the United States and the Taliban. Should its services on Afghanistan become obsolete, its importance in global diplomacy is certainly going to diminish.

The American withdrawal from Afghanistan presented U.S. leaders with a simple question: what now? Strategic rivalry with China and a partnership with India create roadblocks to a Chinese-dominated Afghanistan and Central Asia. A 2021 U.S. Congressional Report takes note of resistance in the Panjshir valley, though without much hope. In July 2022 the State Department stated the U.S. does "not support organized violent opposition" to the Taliban and "discourage[s] other powers" from doing anything remotely similar. Members of the Council on Foreign Relations Ian Johnson and Manjari Chatterjee Miller see either no role for the United States or slim chances the Taliban threat could bring the U.S. and China closer. Niva Yau of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, Jennifer Murtazashvili of the University of Pittsburgh, and Frederick Starr advocate joining Central Asian countries in their collaboration with the Taliban to avoid total dependence on China. The recent revival of the U.S.-Iran nuclear deal talks under the Biden administration may also be partly driven by this sentiment.

Russia should not destabilize Afghanistan and risk to alienate China, for it will continue to require Chinese, Iranian, and Turkish assistance in its efforts to escape Western sanctions.

India on the other hand is primarily driven by fears of Chinese-Pakistani dominance in the region. Therefore, India is establishing closer ties with the Afghan Taliban, Iran, the United States, and Russia. Ultimately, Indian leaders know an unstable or nationalistic Afghanistan means trouble for Pakistan.

Tajikistan is the only Central Asian "hesitator." Unlike Uzbekistan, Tajikistan rejects the Taliban and supports Panjshir resistance. Both countries demand fair representation of Tajiks and Uzbeks in Afghanistan's government. However, Tajikistan is under strong Chinese influence, which may ultimately force it to soften its policy on Afghanistan. This could backfire because of the simmering anti-Chinese sentiment across Central Asia.

Having taken a bird's eye view on the regional strategic landscape, let's zoom in on key actors in Afghanistan and cracks in the Taliban movement, which indicates potential fragmentation.

Taliban Political Structure

The Haqqani network, which consists of southeastern Pashtuns and the Quetta Council, mainly composed of the southern "Kandahari" Pashtuns, dominates the Taliban leadership and policymaking. However, since the fall of Kabul to the Taliban, contentions between these groups have been mounting.

Following the American invasion in 2001, the Taliban leadership regrouped in Quetta, the capital of the southern Baluchistan region in Pakistan. Quetta has been home to the Taliban senior leadership council, also known as the Quetta Shura, the main decisionmaking body and the ideological cornerstone of the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan.

Initially, the council consisted of ten members chaired by the Taliban's first supreme leader Mullah Omar, who had over time incorporated more senior leaders into the council.

The Haqqani network, on the other hand, is largely considered a Pakistani proxy in Afghanistan, though a 2012 West Point report finds it more autonomous. Its first leader was Jalaluddin Haqqani, a Mujahidden commander during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, wielding considerable power in Southeast Afghanistan. He joined the Taliban in 1995, expanding influence to Ghazni, Wardak, Logar, Kabul, Parwan, Kapisa, and Badakhshan. The Haqqani group is comprised of Miranshah Shura in Waziristan, northern Pakistan. The Shura partakes in criminal activities, including drug trafficking. Haqqanis held key commissions in Quetta Shura too. Sirajuddin Haqqani, Jaluliddin's son, is the acting minister of the Interior of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. His brother Anas is the leader of the Haqqani network.

The Taliban are only superficially feigning inclusivity while support from other [non-Pashtun] ethnic groups such as Hazara is really lacking. Moreover, most Tajiks, Hazara, and Uzbeks in Afghanistan do not support the Taliban.

Traditionally, Kandahari Taliban controlled the Southwestern provinces of Ghazni, Kandahar, Zabul, Helmand, and the North Ghor and Badghis. After gaining power in 2021, the Kandahari Taliban gained 16 positions in government, while the Haqqani Taliban won 12. Taliban leaders from other regions of Afghanistan were sidelined.

Taliban Internal Conflicts

Power struggles among the Taliban are not uncommon. For example, Gretchen Peters and Andrew Watkins of the U.S. Institute for Peace have written about Taliban infighting over drug trade and power, respectively.

After Mullah Muhammad Omar's death in 2013 many prominent members of the Taliban, such as Mullah Qayyum Zakir, the commander of Taliban military operations; Mullah Habibullah, a member of the Quetta Council; and Tayyab Agha, one of Mullah Muhammad Omar's assistants; had expressed their opposition to the appointment of Akhtar Mohammad Mansour as leader. Some even considered it a coup.

Internal conflicts resurfaced after the Taliban returned to power in August 2021. Already in September Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the cofounder of the Taliban, disappeared for several days after an argument with a member of the Council of Ministers (reportedly Khalilur Rahman Haqqani) in the presidential palace. Moreover, there were reports of shooting between fighters of the two sides on the media. While disagreements about the structure of the interim government have been one reason for conflict, strategy has been another. It seems Mullah Baradar prioritizes diplomacy and cooperation, but Haqqanis mainly place their trust in force.

There is more. Mawlawi Mahdi Mujahid was a Hazara Taliban commander in Bamyan province, but was removed from office in early 2022, apparently following a row over coal mining and girls' education, leading to a further escalation of tensions. Mahdi went to his hometown of Balkhab (Sarpul province), mobilizing followers to defend the rights of Hazara and other Shia Muslims. The Taliban special forces clashed with Mahdi's men and on August 26th, 2022, the Taliban reported he was killed while "trying to escape to Iran." Taliban spokesman called him "the leader of the rebels" in Sarpul province.

Mahdi's case shows that the Taliban are only superficially feigning inclusivity while support from other ethnic groups such as Hazara is really lacking. Moreover, most Tajiks, Hazara, and Uzbeks in Afghanistan do not support the Taliban. Put together, these three groups outnumber Pashtuns, thus challenging their political domination and keeping the door open for external meddling.

Even though there are a few non-Pashtun Taliban commanders, even minor disputes can escalate the fragmentation. For example, the Taliban clashed with their Uzbek commander from Faryab (Northwestern Afghanistan), Makhdoom Alam, whom they accused of abduction in early 2022. Alam's interrogation triggered demonstrations in Faryab accusing the Taliban of ethnic discrimination. Alam's deputy allegedly threatened to lower the Taliban flag from the security building if he was not released. *The Washington Post* reported Alam's cousins' view that power struggle was behind the arrest.

Taliban's Domestic Competitors

Following the Taliban return, it seemed the most serious resistance would replay in Panjshir, a valley neither the Soviets nor Taliban were able to capture from its Tajik defenders. However, in 2021, the Taliban managed to disperse the National Resistance Front (NRF) led by Ahmad Massoud, the son of legendary anti-Soviet and anti-Taliban commander Ahmad Shah Massoud. The NRF is now scattered across different provinces comprised of civilians—both men and women—and former army forces from different parts of the country that cannot

find any other chance of surviving under the Taliban regime. The fighters of the NRF are based mostly in Panjshir and the district of Andarab in the Baghlan province, and rely on any support they can squeeze out of Tajikistan.

Recently the NRF increased its activities against the Taliban, but Massoud and his foreign relations head Ali Maisam Nazary bitterly admit that Western support is virtually non-existent. The Movement created a council to bring former politicians and resistance forces under one umbrella. The Taliban accused Tajikistan of supporting the NRF. During the 76th session of the UN General Assembly, Tajikistan's president Emomali Rahman called for an inclusive government in Afghanistan where all ethnic groups, especially Tajiks, will be represented.

ISK and the Taliban have significant ideological differences. ISK finds Taliban peace negotiations with the West incompatible with Jihad. ISK aspires to globalize Jihad immediately, while the Taliban aim to stabilize Afghanistan first.

Osama bin Laden financially supported the Taliban while he was enjoying their hospitality in the 1990s. Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda fought alongside the Taliban. In late July 2022, a U.S. drone killed Ayman al-Zawahiri, bin Laden's successor, in Kabul. The presence of Al-Zawahiri in Kabul confirms that the Taliban maintain relations with Al-Qaeda. The Taliban accused Pakistan of opening skies for American drones, an activity largely halted by the recently ousted Pakistani Premier Imran Khan. This accusation casts a shadow on Pakistani-Taliban relations after Imran Khan's fall from power, but also raises a question whether this kill is part of a new American approach to the region or policy inertia.

The Islamic State of Khurasan (ISK), an affiliate of ISIS emerged in 2015 under the leadership of Hafiz Saeed Khan. Part of the membership was drafted from Taliban dissenters. Brutal clashes between ISK and Taliban followed, which even resulted in U.S. Forces helping the Taliban. However, according to Dr. Sajjan Gohel of the London School of Economics, the Haqqani Taliban, ISK, and other terrorist organizations in Pakistan have been cooperating with each other on a number of significant attacks between 2019 and 2021. Moreover, after gaining control of Kabul in 2021, the Taliban freed a large number of Al-Qaeda and Islamic State fighters from the Pul-e-Charkhi prison. ISK is active in eastern Afghanistan. According to a UN Security Council report, the number of ISK fighters increased from 2,200 to 4,000 after the Taliban's return to power, half being foreign jihadists.

Fundamentally, ISK and the Taliban have significant ideological differences: ISK is intolerant toward Shiites and has bombed Shia mosques after the Taliban takeover. ISK finds Taliban peace negotiations with the West incompatible with Jihad, regarding the Taliban as apostates. A 2021 U.S. Congressional report acknowledges ISK's extremism, especially its ability to attract the most radical Taliban. Some Taliban are also attracted to high salaries ISK provides. Between September and November 2021, the Taliban have called for the arrest and killing of alleged ISK fighters, particularly in Nangarhar. The presence of ISK is a major challenge to Afghanistan's stability. ISK aspires to globalize Jihad immediately, while the Taliban aim to stabilize Afghanistan first.

Uzbekistan expects to eliminate the IMU and for Afghan Uzbeks to participate in government. The Taliban expect recognition, economic cooperation, and aid, while keeping the IMU as both a bargaining chip and a threat.

Many smaller groups from the region found shelter in Afghanistan. Tehrik-e Taliban Tajikistan and Jamaat Ansarulla are Tajik groups targeting Tajikistan's government. The Taliban handed the administration of the five districts along the Tajik-Afghan border to Jamaat Ansarullah. Together with the Taliban they aim to prevent the return of Ahmad Massoud's anti-Taliban National Resistance Front. Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, an ideological mixture of Islamism and Pashtun nationalism, operates along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border they consider illegitimate. After the fall of Kabul, its leaders pledged allegiance to the Afghan Taliban. Sirajuddin Haqqani had mediated talks between Pakistan and TTP, including a failed cease fire.

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) emerged in the 1990s in Afghanistan. Although initially aspiring to overthrow Islam Karimov's government in Uzbekistan, the group splintered. Some pledged allegiance to the Islamic State while others remained close to the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. The IMU's position is gravely complicated in the framework of Uzbekistan's ongoing cooperative relationship with the Taliban. Uzbekistan expects to eliminate the IMU and for Afghan Uzbeks to participate in government. The Taliban expect recognition, economic cooperation, and aid, while keeping the IMU as both a bargaining chip and a threat. Attempting to hamper Uzbekistan's economic penetration of Afghanistan, ISK launched at least two rocket attacks on Uzbekistan's border from Afghanistan in the summer of 2022, provoking Taliban counterattacks on ISK.

IF YOU CAN'T BEAT 'EM, JOIN 'EM

The word "collaboration" reminds some of treason and others of trade and business transactions. The meaning is decided by the ultimate goal. The Taliban have expressed readiness to collaborate with neighbors in order to secure basic material needs of the population—and their position in power—while preserving their ideological purity. "Investor" countries' leaders have expressed readiness to collaborate with the Taliban in order to achieve economic progress and security for their peoples, inadvertently helping the Taliban's political standing.

Should the Taliban and their collaborators fail to secure Afghanistan's stability, "hesitators" may be tempted to support discord to sabotage their rivals. Stability cannot be won without minimal non-Pashtun participation in government, which would inevitably lead to more regional variation when it comes to women's rights, and the incapacitation of the most radical elements opposing cross-border business and infrastructure projects.

It is reasonable to expect that social collapse could turn the Taliban against each other, but uneven distribution of riches and power following the growth of cross-border economic cooperation could have the same effect. "Investors" must carefully plan their investments and coordinate activities to avoid provoking intra-Taliban envy.

Should "hesitators" find sabotage too risky or even counterproductive, they may quickly discover the wisdom of the idiom "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em." Instead of risking yet another defeat and alienation of Central Asian countries—let alone further destruction of Afghanistan—both the United States and India should promote regional connectivity and cross-border business development, even if this means prioritizing basic needs over other human rights in the short term.

A radical shift towards the first global cooperation amidst the horrors of Ukraine and angst over Taiwan could be a breath of hope for the world. Moreover, it would empower the region's countries vis-à-vis great powers by providing them with alternatives. The goal, ultimately, should be to avoid the eruption of conflict along a third global frontline around Afghanistan. This would preserve liberal economic trends in Central Asia, slowly importing them by rail and road to Afghanistan and beyond. Central Asia's illustrious intellectual history demonstrates how greater flows of goods increase flows of great ideas. Collaboration driven by such an aim means good business and it certainly is a good strategy.

KURDISTAN'S LONG STRUGGLE AGAINST EXTREMISM

Sirwan Barzani

The United States and its allies did not create Daesh by invading Iraq or not intervening militarily in Syria.

This simplistic viewpoint has created a mistaken belief that Daesh can be defeated whilst the United States ends the combat mission in Iraq. The driving force behind the decision is a feeling that American foreign policy towards the Middle East has exacerbated the region's problems and that U.S. interests are now best served by turning attentions elsewhere.

This is not true. Peshmerga and Coalition forces were only able to dismantle Daesh's caliphate because of American forces. Yet, despite significant setbacks, the group is far from defeated. Ending the combat mission will not kill off the group and doing so will cause American interests to suffer, emboldening Daesh and militia groups who will pounce on the gaps left by American forces, throwing the region—and American foreign policy—further into chaos.

The Peshmerga are growing deeply concerned that the group has started carrying out an increasing number of terrorist activities across the region in an attempt to rebuild its operating base. There are still a significant number of active Daesh fighters in Iraq, with many more in prison and refugee camps. Jihadis are provided with the ability to orchestrate attacks across the world when they are allowed to create stable operating environments. We have seen this in Afghanistan, in the Arabian Peninsula where the extremist group operates under the name Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and of course, with Daesh in Iraq and Syria.

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Photo: The Author's Twitter account

The author meeting with American officers in August 2022

PESHMERGA AND U.S. BRAVERY

Eight years ago, the Peshmerga were confronted by the gravest threat since the evil of Saddam Hussein's armies and chemical weapons. After the fall of Mosul, our unenviable task was to prevent the region from being overrun by the black-flagged columns of Daesh fighters who had defeated an Iraqi army numbering tens of thousands.

With the help of our allies in the American-led Global Coalition, our combined objectives were to regain lost territory, disrupt Daesh's networks, and counter the messaging in their propaganda. We faced an army of terror that was prepared to die without fear, kill without regret, and was confident it could overrun us.

When I first left the Peshmerga to pursue a career in the private sector, I informed senior officers that I would always be available to protect my country in times of need. In 2014, after Daesh seized Mosul, the Islamist group threatened to march on Erbil. In response, like many others, I answered the call of Kurdistan Region's

President Mahmoud Barzani for retired soldiers to re-join the frontline and take on Daesh.

My fellow Peshmerga soldiers and I gave the people of Erbil our word that we would defend the city. We fought back Daesh's onslaught with the courage of just a handful of fighters, without armored vehicles, taking back Gwer and Makhmour within a few hours. Peshmerga fighters put everything on the line because our people needed us. This fearlessness and bravery meant that my fellow soldiers fought and won against the odds, time and again. But we could not always do it alone. With U.S. air support, we ensured that Daesh's so-called caliphate did not reach the Kurdish capital.

There were many battles that were won because allied forces matched the bravery of the Peshmerga, providing sophisticated weaponry and air support to assist our efforts. The speed with which this coalition responded meant that we could eventually prevail. But the relative calm of today should not allow us to become complacent.

The Rise of Daesh

U.S. President Joe Biden is right to say that "a region that's coming together through diplomacy and cooperation—rather than coming apart through conflict—is less likely to give rise to violent extremism that threatens our homeland, or new wars that could place new burdens on U.S. military forces and their families."

There are two principal reasons for the current American malaise: exceptionalism and isolationism. American exceptionalism cemented U.S. hegemony in the years after the Cold War, but it is now leading to inertia. Hegemonic power is not permanent.

Yet, successive administrations have failed to develop a coherent policy to achieve that, and Kurds see few hopeful signs of improvement. By prematurely ending the combat mission in Iraq and seeking to turn its military into a body for training Iraqis—rather than a force to fight Daesh—the White House is failing to learn the lessons from the last two decades, ignoring both the radical ideology that inspires recruits around the world and underestimating what the Middle East—the birthplace of Islam—means to Daesh.

There are two principal reasons for the current American malaise: exceptionalism and isolationism.

American exceptionalism cemented U.S. hegemony in the years after the Cold War, but it is now leading to inertia. Hegemonic power is not permanent. Nothing on this planet is and American dominance in the 20-year period after the fall of the Berlin Wall is no different. Daesh came to prominence not by American action but by utilizing the free flow of weapons from Syria after the Arab Spring; capitalizing on ungoverned spaces; attracting fellow ideologues from the Middle East and beyond; speaking to a population sympathetic to their cause; harnessing the unleashed sectarianism in the wake of the invasion; and utilizing the global network of jihadis and ideologues.

Salafi jihadis see anyone who does not follow them as a legitimate target, Muslim or otherwise. The fight against Daesh, al-Qaeda and other extremists who claim to kill in God's name is global and it will sadly never end.

The groundwork for Daesh was forged long before the United States entered Iraq. Many senior Daesh figures were either jihadis who fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan or ex-Baathists, formerly aligned with Saddam Hussein. The networks forged on the battlefields of Afghanistan—and in Saddam's circle—were instrumental in the formation of Daesh.

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, as many as 90,000 Mujahideen fighters answered fatwas calling on all Muslim men to fight the Soviet Union. Many of those fighters went on to create al-Qaeda in Iraq, which later became Daesh. Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, al-Qaeda in Iraq's founder, wanted to utilize sectarianism to establish a caliphate in Iraq. His vision was not realized until 2014, when Daesh took vast swathes of territory in eastern Syria and northern Iraq.

A number of al-Zarqawi's mentors and followers learned their trade in Afghanistan with the Mujahideen. Both Abu Mohammad al-Maqdisi, who helped form al-Zarqawi's ideology, and Abu Ayyub al-Masri, a key figure in the creation of al-Qaeda in Iraq, fought alongside Bin Laden in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union. Similarly, driven by self-preservation and a combined hatred of the Shia-led government in Baghdad, many senior Daesh figures were former Baathists. Following the fall of Saddam, Baathists such as former Iraqi officers Fadel al-Hayali and Adnan al-Sweidawi became senior Daesh figures, with many more offering their services. Iraq's former Deputy Prime Minister, Hoshyar Zebari, said ex-Baathists working with Daesh provided the group with highly effective guidance on explosives, strategy, and planning.

The jihadis instrumental in the formation of Daesh were battle hardened and adept at exploiting their networks and attracting more followers to their cause. When jihadi leaders are removed from the field of combat, despite it being a major blow for Daesh, the Islamist group remains a potent threat. In part, this is because the Islamist leaders of tomorrow are being shaped on the battlefields in Iraq today. Daesh will fight until they have no one left. They do not negotiate. Despite Coalition forces removing Daesh from its territory—according to Peshmerga estimates—there are still over 7,000 Daesh fighters operating in Iraq today, each one forging networks that they will exploit elsewhere in years to come.

Leaders change. Groups acquire new names. But the violent ideology that drives them remains the same. The Daesh fighters who remain on the battlefield or in refugee camps and prisons keep that fire of hatred burning.

Salafi Jihadism

This is why the United States must stay engaged. Like a modern-day Hydra, you can chop one head off but the monster remains. The monster, in this case, is the ideology that binds Islamists and jihadis the world over.

Salafi jihadism—espoused by Daesh and other violent Islamist groups—offers Muslims a simplistic worldview, riddled with contradictions. The global jihadi movement is bound by a transnational politico-religious ideology, rooted in movements and ideas that have been circulating for decades. From the Muslim Brotherhood arming its members in the 1950s to the Islamist eruption in 1979—which saw jihadis flocking to Afghanistan in 1979, the Iranian revolution, and Islamist extremists laying siege to Islam's holiest site in Mecca—these events have provided foundations for this ideology to fester, make new connections, and grow.

Salafi jihadis see anyone who does not follow them as a legitimate target, Muslim or otherwise. Bin Laden and the September 11th attacks did not start this war and a hasty end to the American combat mission in Iraq will not end it. The fight against Daesh, al-Qaeda and other extremists who claim to kill in God's name is global and it will sadly never end.

Daesh and its ideological inheritors are unlikely to ever disappear. People like me have been battling Islamists for decades. Leaders change. Groups acquire new names. But the violent ideology that drives them remains the same. The Daesh fighters who remain on the battlefield or in refugee camps and prisons keep that fire of hatred burning. Equally, new Daesh affiliates are emerging in Asia and Africa, and our efforts in response require an international alliance that fights on the battlefield and in the minds of those at risk of radicalization. But the Middle East will remain their ideological home, a priority for their terrorist attacks and where the vast majority of their fighters are recruited.

In Syria, the civil war following the Arab Spring created unrest that provided an ideal jihadi playground. Not only was Daesh able to seize territory amidst the chaos, it also acquired assets such as oil reserves, which helped fund its campaign of terror, and the weaponry they needed to execute it. The Middle East is constantly in a state of flux, where a seemingly never-ending battle is played out between the forces of secularism, sectarianism, nationalism, and Islamism. These forces have never been more prominent than in the Arab Spring. Jihadis thrive in ungoverned spaces and if the United States had not invaded Iraq, the Arab Spring would have arrived there too. There should be no doubt, Saddam Hussein's reaction would have been forceful and bloody. I witnessed Saddam's barbarism firsthand. When I was just thirteen years old, he gave an order to kill my father for merely being a Kurd. His body was never given back to my family.

Jihadis thrive in ungoverned spaces and if the United States had not invaded Iraq, the Arab Spring would have arrived there too. There should be no doubt, Saddam Hussein's reaction would have been forceful and bloody.

Isolationism Creates Turmoil

The belief that American hegemony is omnipotent, and all other actors lack agency, has resulted in a growing consensus that the 2003 Iraq War created Daesh. This has contributed to a mistaken sense that American interests are now best served by isolationist instincts to end the combat mission to defeat ISIS in Iraq.

The botched withdrawal from Afghanistan, the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States, and American inaction in Syria created fears that America was permanently turning away from the world. For many, images of Afghans desperately attempting to flee the country signified the end of the era of U.S. global dominance. Similarly, the refusal from the United States to engage militarily in Syria, despite former President Barack Obama's clear red lines, gave the impression that Washington no longer had the stomach to make tough foreign policy decisions.

Both the manner of the withdrawal from Afghanistan and Obama's reticence in Syria gave America's adversaries a

view that they can act with impunity. President Biden, at the time of the Afghan withdrawal, signaled that the driving force behind the decision was to focus on the challenge posed by China and Russia. However, the manner of the exit—on top of American inaction in Syria—harmed America's ability to navigate this challenge, providing Putin with a belief that he could invade Ukraine without consequence. There will be similar repercussions for American interests if the United States were to pull troops from Iraq. Militia groups already operate with impunity, launching attacks against U.S. forces in Iraq. Operating in isolation from the police and security services, militias continue to command significant support throughout the country. Withdrawal from Iraq will leave a vacuum which they will fill alongside Daesh.

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There will be consequences for the Europeans too. Further turmoil in Iraq will lead to a fresh refugee crisis with Iraqis travelling to France, Germany, the UK, and elsewhere to escape a life of chaos. Waves of refugees into Europe have contributed to the rise of populism on the continent. I am a military man, not a political strategist, but the consequences to the world order from a fresh wave of populism are clear and obvious for all to see. This will be especially devastating for the minorities of Iraq—85 percent of which live in the Kurdistan Region—who will lose hope and head towards Europe.

Fighting Together

The Peshmerga will take nothing for granted. We remain vigilant and will continue our cooperation with the Coalition to make the world a safer place. But on top of the volume of still active Daesh fighters, we are growing increasingly concerned by jihadists using refugee camps to radicalize and plan future attacks in Iraq and Syria. Keeping them in jail in Iraq and Syria indefinitely is dangerous. They are organized and radicalized. The risk is that they escape and are free to re-join the battlefield here or travel to cities in the West and plan attacks there. According to our estimates, there are currently thousands of former Daesh fighters in camps in Iraq and Syria. Our coalition partners, including the UK, need to answer America's call and deal with former Daesh fighters held in Iraq and Syria.

American hegemony may be over, but the West's interests are still served by responding to calls from allies for assistance to deal with ongoing threats. We will continue our fight against Daesh no matter what, but Peshmerga fighters cannot defeat the group alone. The challenges are too deep and the environment in Iraq is still providing a fertile ground for violent Islamist groups to operate and recruit.

Across Iraq, there are active Daesh fighters in Kirkuk, Nineveh, Anbar, Diyala, and Salah Ad-din. Although the group does not hold the territory it once did—at its peak, the caliphate was the size of the UK—their ideology still permeates across much of Iraq. Despite the success of the Global Coalition against Daesh, of which the Peshmerga is a proud member, in liberating nearly eight million people, the group is only fragmented, and not defeated. There is a real threat that Daesh regroups in full, and in the interim, they have the capacity to launch attacks in the region and the West.

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Despite devastating defeats and the loss of its territory, Daesh continues its efforts. In March 2022, the movement announced a new leader, Abu al-Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurashi, and the group continues to attack prisons and free thousands of its members held in jails, as occurred in Hasaka in late January 2022. Experts estimate there have been over 100 attacks claimed by Daesh in Iraq in 2022. The Shia-Sunni conflict also continues to be a source of instability, with Daesh leveraging sectarianism to recruit Sunnis to their cause. The group will continue to do all they can to operate here, believing that it legitimizes their global terrorism.

The West should consider whether its current presence in Iraq and Kurdistan is strong enough to ensure Daesh remains under severe pressure and restrictions. It was recently announced that the United States is sending hundreds of troops to Somalia to help counter the extremist group al-Shabaab. An official warned that the al-Qaeda affiliate has gained strength there since the United States withdrew its troops. The decision to withdraw American combat troops from Iraq was announced in July 2021, with only 2,500 troops remaining in Iraq and the Kurdistan region, providing training, advice, and support for counter-ISIS operations. Given the number of attacks by Daesh in 2022, this is simply insufficient to counter such a dangerous threat. Daesh is part of a long tradition of extremist groups that share ideology and transnational networks spanning decades. The United States did not create Daesh, and its full

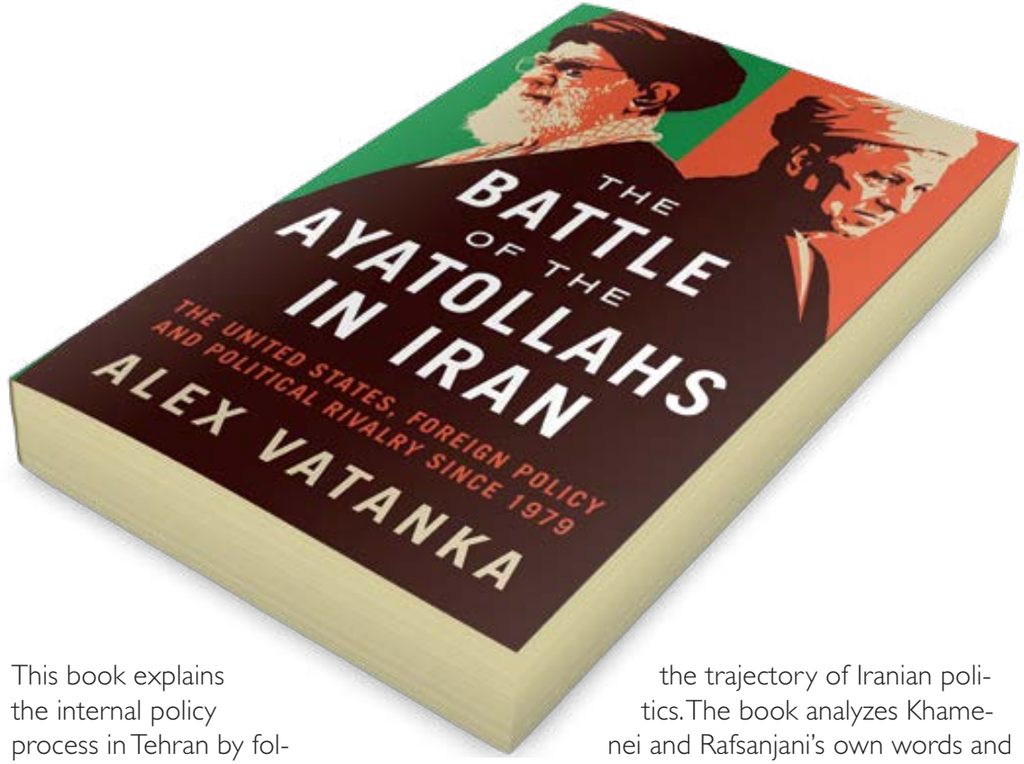
defeat cannot be achieved if Washington ends the combat mission in Iraq. Withdrawing will leave Iraq and Kurdistan open to more violence and influence from militias and make it exponentially easier for Daesh to grow in strength once again.

To allow Daesh to regroup would be a dangerous mistake. Peshmerga fighters will always battle to protect our homeland—and stand ready to fight Daesh hand to hand—but we cannot do it alone without the support of our friends in the West. The United States and the rest of the Western world must increase the military assistance, vehicles, and equipment that they are supplying to the Peshmerga. Generation after generation of Kurds have had to find courage and heroism in the face of mortal danger. Fortunately for Kurdistan and the world, we have so far prevailed against Daesh. But in the calm after the storm, we are seeing worrying signs of renewed activity. The international coalition must not give Daesh the space to rebuild.

The United States did not create Daesh, and its full defeat cannot be achieved if Washington ends the combat mission in Iraq.

The lesson to be drawn is clear. As long as Daesh continue to pose a serious threat, and the circumstances in Iraq are still fertile for jihadism, this mission is not over.

UNDERSTANDING THE FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA AND BEHAVIOR OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN IS A CRITICAL CHALLENGE FOR THE WORLD. BUT WHERE DO THE PRINCIPAL IRANIAN REGIME ACTORS COME FROM IN TERMS OF POLITICAL BACKGROUND, EXPERIENCES, AND INTERESTS? WHICH TYPES OF AMBITIONS OR POLICY CONFLICTS HAVE DOMINATED AND SHAPED FOREIGN POLICY DEBATES SINCE 1979?



This book explains the internal policy process in Tehran by following two regime personalities, Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader, and Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who before his death in January 2017 held some of the most powerful political positions in Iran. No two men have been more influential in dictating the regime's decision-making processes since 1979. Yet little is known about how their competing worldviews and interests, their key moments of dispute—both personal or policy-based—or their personal ambitions have informed the trajectory of Iranian politics. The book analyzes Khamenei and Rafsanjani's own words and writings—and accounts of them given by others—to reveal how the domestic policy contest has shaped Tehran's actions on the regional and international stage. Comprising primary and secondary Iranian sources—including untapped memoirs, newspaper reports, and Iranian electronic media and personal interviews—the book highlights the principal rivalries over the lifespan of the Islamic Republic and offers new insights into the present and future of Iranian foreign policy.

AMERICA AND IRAN'S TOUGH TANGO WITH THE GULF STATES

Alex Vatanka

SINCE the Biden Administration came to office, Washington has been full of reports that the United States and its Gulf allies are drifting apart. The core argument was that in order to deliver for the Democratic Party's grassroots base, U.S. President Joe Biden would seek to pursue a foreign policy that prioritized American values over American interests. In such a policy turn, Gulf States would be adversely impacted as the U.S.-Gulf relations are much more about common interests than common values—such as political democracy, the issue of human or labor rights, etc.

For a while, this rendering was close to the truth and particularly in regard to the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The leaders of both the UAE and Saudi Arabia were also viewed in the senior hierarchy of the Democratic Party as enablers of former President Donald Trump's agenda while he was in office. In other words, this was personal for some senior Democrats in Washington, including members of the U.S. Congress, making the trust deficit between the American policymakers and Gulf leaders undeniable.

On a public level, this trend has been—and to some extent continues to be—reinforced by the positions taken by key media outlets such as *The Washington Post* and the *Chicago Tribune*. In the case of the former, the paper has been relentless in maintaining that the United States cannot forgive or forget the role the Saudis played in the 2018 killing of the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

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Photo: Guliver Image

A damage control mission or another charm offensive?
(U.S. President Joe Biden meets Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman)

According to this line of argument, Washington should pressure the Gulf States to change, as opposed to seeking accommodation. One should not underestimate the role of the influential media in the United States to pressure the Biden Administration's policy toward the Gulf States.

That said, a handful of media, including the *Wall Street Journal*, have in recent months moved in the other direction and become more vocal in emphasizing the benefits to the American national security by improving relations with Gulf States.

Meanwhile, UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed (MBZ) and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) also kept a distance from President Biden. The Saudis in particular have been determined to make a public point that Riyadh can do without Washington. MBS first used a high-profile interview with *The Atlantic* to say that he "simply does not care" what President Biden thinks of him. MBS then reportedly met Biden's National Security Advisor, Jake Sullivan, at his seaside palace in beach shorts and shouted at him in the same meeting. Such optics, meaning perceived insults, are not encouraging, to say the least.

A number of events during the first six months of 2022 have pushed the Biden team to change course, which culminated in President Biden's July visit to Saudi Arabia. The policy has essentially become one of publicly (and loudly) reassuring the Gulf States that America values its relations with them and that there is no plan to downgrade ties. The lukewarm response by the Gulf States to American requests to ostracize Russia after its invasion of Ukraine was the first wake-up call for Washington.

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The dithering by the Gulf States was interpreted, and mostly correctly, that they no longer saw the United States as a guarantor of their security and are, therefore, reluctant to risk their national interests to appease Washington.

Then it was the steep increase in the price of oil that compelled the Biden team to again turn to Gulf States for help. But the Biden White House also gradually began to signal that it was willing to compromise over the concerns of the Gulf States, and have a two-way dialogue.

Most notably, while the United States has been unwilling, or perhaps unable, to give the Gulf States a say in the Iran nuclear talks in Vienna, Washington opted to at least provide vague assurances about its broader and strategic commitment to the security of the Gulf States.

Again, this messaging campaign was launched at a time when American newspaper editorials were full of anger against the Gulf States for their perceived unwillingness to help the United States reduce the global price of oil by curbing their own production.

As always, American policy toward the Gulf States is handled by several key agencies. It is CENTCOM that has been the most vocal in reassuring the Gulf States about its commitment to the region and its acceptance of Iran as a real threat to the security of the Gulf. The new head of CENTCOM, Erik Kurilla, not only went on a "listening tour" in the Gulf but has engaged in a media blitz to highlight threats posed by Iran.

His focus on the need for an "integrated air and missile defense system" against Iranian missiles and drones was believed to be the message that the Gulf States wanted to hear. Later, the senior U.S. delegation that arrived in the UAE on the occasion of the passing of Sheikh Khalifa, was another important step Washington took to send a signal of reassurance.

Meanwhile, the White House has used close political allies such as Senator Chris Coons—who is also on the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee—to articulate that even in the event of a new agreement with Tehran, the United States will continue to pressure Iran for its other activities, perceived as threatening by the Gulf States.

This Saudi rejection of Iran was strongest under Trump when Riyadh felt it had a solid backer in the White House. Biden becoming President was a key factor in pushing Riyadh to reconsider Iran's pleas for détente.

It is not, however, clear if the American policymakers appreciate the gravity of the disappointment among Gulf leaders for the perceived lack of U.S. response to Houthi missile attacks on the UAE and Saudi Arabia, which both countries blame on Iran. The other fact is that the American diplomatic track toward Iran is handled by a small team led by Robert Malley. He does not believe there is any bandwidth to pressure the Iranians on regional matters while the nuclear negotiations hang in the balance.

IRAN'S RESPONSE TO U.S. EFFORTS IN THE GULF

For Tehran, the latest dynamic in U.S.-Saudi relations is the most interesting as it is the most consequential for Iran. As Iran-Saudi détente is somewhat stalled, the Iranians pay close attention to how Washington can shape Riyadh's view on Iran.

The last five rounds of talks between Iranian and Saudi officials came after years of the Saudis ignoring Tehran's calls for better relations. This Saudi rejection of Iran was strongest under Trump when Riyadh felt it had a solid backer in the White House.

Biden becoming President was a key factor in pushing Riyadh to reconsider Iran's pleas for détente. That said, the Saudis remain skeptical in believing that Iran is interested only in a superficial process of détente and not a deeper engagement or compromise-making. For now, two issues remain in Iran's focus when it comes to Saudi Arabia: the war in Yemen, and the possibility of Riyadh joining the Abraham Accords.

On Yemen, the Iranian side shows no convincing desire to engage politically with Riyadh and pressure the Houthis for a lasting political settlement to the war in that country. Tehran's official line has been that the Saudis should focus on direct talks with the Houthis, where Iran has

no significant role to play. Needless to say, the Saudis see this as an Iranian ruse and unwillingness to be constructive about the Yemen war.

In most recent indirect signals, hardline pro-regime media have printed articles and interviews with commentators close to the regime in Tehran to send a new message: that if Riyadh genuinely wants to improve relations with Iran, it should stop using the Baghdad rounds of talks to focus on the Yemen war. While the Saudis see Yemen as a key item for discussion, the Iranian side still wants to keep it off the agenda.

Tehran maintains that it is not prepared to extend its dialogue with anyone—the United States or the Gulf States—to include "regional issues," which Iran calls its "red lines."

In fact, Tehran maintains that it is not prepared to extend its dialogue with anyone—the United States or the Gulf States—to include "regional issues," which Iran calls its "red lines."

The Iranians also believe that both the United States and Israel are pushing Riyadh behind the scenes to force Iran to accept that Iran-Saudi détente needs to include negotiations about Iran's regional agenda and actions. Accordingly, Tehran has watched closely for any signs of Saudi-Israeli efforts to establish diplomatic relations.

Recent reports indicate that a fund operated by Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law, is being used to invest Saudi money in projects in Israel. In the eyes of Tehran, such actions are considered as a possible backdoor Saudi recognition of Israel.

Reports of senior Israeli officials recently visiting Riyadh, and American efforts to create the grounds for Saudi-Israeli relations—as part of a Saudi-Egyptian-Israeli dialogue that involves Egypt handing over the islands of Tiran and Sanafir to Saudi Arabia without Israel objecting—are other signs that suggest to Tehran that a Saudi recognition of Israel is being vigorously pursued.

While this might not happen as long as King Salman is alive, the Iranians see it coming. But they are interestingly not making this issue into a deal-breaker as Tehran continues its rounds of talks with the Saudis.

In fact, Iran has not even made the issue of Israel into a deal-breaker when it comes to the UAE. Following the death of Sheikh Khalifa, Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian both issued what can only be classified as "warm" messages of condolences. Iranian leaders have rarely issued such statements of condolences for Gulf leaders, which is yet another sign that suggests that Tehran's pursuit of better ties with the UAE is sincere and the Iranians are willing to accept UAE-Israeli relations.

Overall, the pro-regime media in Iran have described the change in leadership in Abu Dhabi as "an opportunity for a greater thaw in Tehran-Abu Dhabi relations" as *Tehran Times* put it. Despite knowing full well that MBZ has been in charge of UAE's foreign policy for years, the Iranians still like to depict his formal ascendency to the UAE presidency as an opportunity.

It seems the Iranians want the UAE to allow space for more economic relations between the two countries, which probably means a bigger UAE commitment to ignoring American sanctions on Iran.

This underscores Tehran's desire for better ties. But the Iranian leaders seemingly want to see some positive counter-gestures from the UAE before taking any other major conciliatory steps. For example, as Iranian sources claim, that UAE has sent several invitations for Raisi to visit Abu Dhabi since December 2021.

Raisi is said to be interested but Iran wants to see the UAE first take steps toward a faster pace and deeper process of dialogue. Above all, it seems the Iranians want the UAE to allow space for more economic relations between the two countries, which, as one can assume, probably means a bigger UAE commitment to ignoring American sanctions on Iran.

Time will show what results Biden's July 2022 visit to Saudi Arabia will yield and whether the United States can maintain its position as the undisputed security guarantor of the Gulf States. Iran too will continue to nudge and seek ways to shape the calculations of the Gulf States. What is certain is that the Iranians do not think all is lost with the Gulf Arabs, even as the latter continue to build up relations with Iran's chief nemesis, Israel.

CHANGING THE GLOBAL CULTURE

Nabil Fahmy

IN recent years, analysts and practitioners have mostly focused on the ongoing geopolitical realignment, spending a sprinkle of energy on determining whether we live in a bipolar, unipolar, or multipolar world among other things. This discussion has often featured the roles of globalization and technology, resulting in widespread conclusions that they have redefined important concepts, including sovereignty and power.

Much of this is true, but these reasons alone are not paramount in explaining the disorder that the international community is facing in the twenty-first century. This was evident even before the ongoing Ukraine crisis and will continue long after its resolution. That is unless we seriously and strategically reassess the relevance of the world order and its functioning parameters.

Today in 2022, we essentially remain engaged in the world order established in the wake of World War II. The premise here is not that our reality today remained the same. The reality is demonstrating the opposite, which is a challenge in itself, and one of the reasons for widespread discord. However, more problematic is that concepts adopted in the middle of the last century have remained dominant in the minds of the powers that won World War II. Questionable concepts in a changing reality are not a recipe for stability and security.

One of the paramount leaders in the post-World War II era was the West, led by the United States conglomerating around NATO. The other, serving as its counterweight, was the Eastern bloc, led by the Soviet Union and its Warsaw Pact—mostly composed of Eastern European countries. The former embraced liberal democracies and market economies, and the latter relied

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Photo: Guliver Image

A more peaceful image of the Middle East

on centralized authority and socialist economic principles. Most importantly, the proclaimed goal of the new world order in mid 1940s, as stipulated in the United Nations Charter, was to prevent the outbreak of another world war.

Presumably to achieve this objective, the two most significant blocs established a balance of power between them and informally delineated areas of influence that the other should not cross. The United States had already adopted the Monroe Doctrine, which ruled out the possibility of competitive doctrines in the Americas. The Soviet Union basically considered any transgression into Eastern Europe a violation of its sphere of influence.

With the decline of European colonialism, the Non-Aligned Movement gradually created space for its members between these two blocs. And, these blocs continued to pursue their geopolitical competition in Europe and beyond on the basis of preserving a "balance of power," a concept which bizarrely enough, envisioned to achieve this through "mutually assured destruction." At the same time, even when competition heightened and intensified globally, they essentially tried not to directly confront each other in the

respectively defined zones of influence. The 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis is one of the most memorable cases in point.

However, balances of power are neither static nor permanent features. Even slight shifts might have direct implications for the sanctity of spheres of influence. The end of the Cold War in the late 1980s and the dissolution of the Soviet Union are substantial testimonies to this reality, which quickly resulted in a Western (or rather U.S.)-led, unipolar world.

Balances of power are neither static nor permanent features. Even slight shifts might have direct implications for the sanctity of spheres of influence. The end of the Cold War in the late 1980s and the dissolution of the Soviet Union are substantial testimonies to this reality.

By the 1980s at the latest, the concepts based on the immediate aftermath of World War II had become almost irrelevant. Nevertheless, they were not yet overcome by their original proponents. Thus, the two pillars of the established world order shifted to opportunistic policies, determining policies and shifting gears according to their reading of the available counterweight—be that the original blocs or emerging powers like China.

The recent tragic events in Ukraine were preceded by sustained and irresponsible encroachment by the West on Russia's perceived sphere of influence, as it continued to be rattled by the consequences of its defeat in the Cold War. Russia assiduously chose what is perceived to be the most opportune moment to use military force in Ukraine—a measure deserving of every condemnation—emboldened by American isolationism after the failures in Iraq and Afghanistan and the absence of European resolve. Comments by the U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin that America's newfound goal is to make Russia weak, are noteworthy. I recall being personally told by Russian President Vladimir Putin in February 2014 that the West had dealt with him in an undignified fashion—inferring sustained encroachment upon Russia's sphere of influence—and that he affirmed that he would regain Western and international respect.

In 2022, it is not an exaggeration to argue that the world is in a state of disorder. This is true because the global paradigm has changed, and the concepts adopted post-World War II are no longer functional. It appears that we have a schizophrenic world order with a multitude of players, very few of which can conclusively destroy the order and none of which can come up with a sustainable model on how a future order should look like.

In 2022, it is not an exaggeration to argue that the world is in a state of disorder. It appears that we have a schizophrenic world order with a multitude of players, very few of which can conclusively destroy the order and none of which can come up with a sustainable model on how a future order should look like.

Middle Eastern Disarray

Much of the same can be said of the Middle East. The region has seen a proliferation of crises and conflicts, and has long been host to intensive geopolitical competition between superpowers. For generations, it attracted considerable interest because of its energy resources. While conflicts continue, the Middle East is experiencing a major shift in the balance of power, with non-Arab states positioning themselves as the region's heavyweights. More specifically, Iran, Israel, and Turkey have been making significant strategic inroads at the expense of the majority in the region. Following global trends, each of the three non-Arab countries has aggressively carved out its own sphere of influence, and most of it on questionable historical premises.

Over the last half century, the global geopolitical paradigm has significantly changed. The emphasis has been increasingly placed on the rise of China, especially relative to the perceived decline of Russia and questionable validity of the EU as a bloc. Bot legitimate and illegitimate non-state actors have come into play, and the tools of statecraft and international relations have deteriorated.

The Middle East has been no different in this respect, mostly because of multiple overlapping deficiencies in the Arab world and an identity crisis throughout the region including amongst its non-Arab states.

The Arab world has long suffered from three deficiencies. First, a "future deficiency." Frequently overwhelmed with security emergencies, the Arab world is often fixated on immediate needs. As it moved from one crisis to another, this allowed little leeway when it came to future planning. Second, it has exhibited a "generic resistance to incremental change," leading to a static economic posture with occasional robust authoritarian outbursts. Third, the Arab world has a "security deficiency" vis-a-vis its non-Arab neighbors because of its overdependence on foreigners. Finally, the region as a whole, including Iran, Israel, and Turkey, suffers from an identity crisis. Within Arab nations, this is expressed

through constant struggle between national and sectarian identities.

The non-Arabs, on the other hand, cannot seem to reconcile with being part of the mostly Arab Middle East. Their additional dilemmas stem from uncertainties as to whether they should serve as surrogates for other regions, or perhaps act as regional mitigators that strive to tailor the region to their own interests.

Therefore, the main challenge was not about the changing geopolitical balance, as this was always inevitable considering longstanding regional practices. The geopolitical paradigm has changed despite decades of naysayers claiming the opposite. The turmoil was exacerbated by the continuation of Cold War-style geopolitical competition while the whole paradigm had changed.

What we need to forego are the concepts of "balance of power" and "spheres of influence" in favor of "balance of interests" and "collective conscience." This will enable the region to finally deal with issues of the twenty-first century. We strive towards a model that will reduce marginalization and inequality, leading to more fairness, inclusiveness, and tolerance.

Looking Forward

At this critical juncture in the twenty-first century, it is imperative to rethink the common good and reinvigorate the social conscience—essential to facing the ever-changing global and regional order.

Democratic orders are not necessarily perfectly liberal or, in fact, always consistent with liberal values. Equally true is that autocratic systems are not necessarily agnostic to values or immune to critical thinking—least of all the concept of the common good.

The intellectual elites regionally and globally seem to have rigidly restricted public policy choices to either "liberal" or "illiberal." On matters of governance, pundits have pushed this artificial and imprecise divide even further: to a choice between "democratic" and "autocratic" systems.

All such assumptions are, in my opinion, imperfect, if not blatantly wrong. Democratic orders are not necessarily perfectly liberal or, in fact, always consistent with liberal values. Equally true is that autocratic systems are not necessarily agnostic to values or immune to critical thinking—least of all the concept of the common good. Neither of the systems is exclusively liberal or illiberal. The basic difference between the two is in the width and intensity of their application, and equally importantly, forms of engagement with constituencies in shared governance.

Recent examples of domestic disturbances in the United States due to racial tensions, as well as populist trends with clear isolationist tendencies in European democracies, are cases in point. And even in less turbulent times, the interpretation of the term "liberal" varies even in democratic societies, because value systems can differ among democracies. The United States, most of what was formerly considered Western Europe, and India—all established democracies, even if imperfect—have different values and concepts of liberalism.

Restoring a sense of order in the global community is not about the success or failure of the liberal order, nor the efficacy of an illiberal versus a liberal one. All systems are being challenged domestically, regionally, and globally, and the paramount challenge of our time is to determine the reason for this simultaneous onslaught on social and governance systems.

Equally true is that autocratic systems, often lauded as symbols of stability, and societal (rather than individual) responsibility, have also had a stream of turbulence and revolutions over the contemporary history of nations. Thus, they cannot claim to be perfect islands of sustained stability in the wider context of time. Nor can they completely pretend to be agnostic to values of societies or aspirations of their constituents. Due to globalization, connectivity, and expanding transparency, even authoritarian systems have often justified their actions through what are normally the tools and expressions of liberal democratic systems. These include elections as expressions of public support and legislative actions to legitimize rules and procedures.

My salient conclusions from this are that restoring a sense of order in the global community is not about the success or failure of the liberal order, nor the efficacy of an illiberal versus a liberal one. All systems are being challenged domestically, regionally, and globally, and the paramount challenge of our time is to determine the reason for this simultaneous onslaught on social and governance systems.

Given that these challenges have not been restricted to particular political systems or even specific geographical theaters, one can argue that they have been challenged because they could not effectively respond to the material needs and identity aspirations of their populations. Policymaking circles, the marketplace, and even the social sphere, have increasingly become elitist,

ignoring a large segment of their societies who feel marginalized.

To deal with these challenges in an orderly fashion, domestic, regional, and global orders need reconsideration and recalibration. Public orders in the global community in particular—whether liberal or illiberal—have lost their "social conscience." Consequently, they are increasingly failing to establish and manage global and regional priorities. Meanwhile, they are also fueling domestic disparity and dysfunction. The systems need revamping, but even more importantly, we need to find more common ground on basic common values. Reinvigorating the social domain is, I believe, the greatest challenge we all face today.

Public orders in the global community in particular—whether liberal or illiberal—have lost their "social conscience." Consequently, they are increasingly failing to establish and manage global and regional priorities.

I am not associating myself with the argument that the choices we face are between liberal democratic values and authoritarian efficiency. The issue in my opinion by far exceeds this artificial dichotomy and goes much deeper. In essence, we should recognize from our practices that we have lost our "social conscience," regardless of whether our systems are democratic, autocratic, or something in between. We have all seen how pragmatic, *realpolitik* balance of power makes social values subservient to the objectives of those in positions of power.

A testimony to the absence of "social conscience" is the fact that we continue to justify lavish spending in our pursuit of security, meanwhile building the capacity to destroy each other many times over. By so doing, we are betting our futures and coexistence not only on the sustained and indefinite rationality of others, but also on the naive assumption that individuals and systems are indefinitely error-free.

To fuel and feed these erroneous assumptions, military expenditures have increased by 75 percent over the past 20 years, reaching astronomical levels of $1.822 trillion, according to a 2020 report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. This increase came at a time when even wealthier countries were suffering from a shortage of resources in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Security is, of course, important. However, excessive zeal in its pursuit at the expense of fundamental human needs is fuel for discontent and instability. Such abysmal prioritization raises questions about our "social conscience" in the political sense, besides shedding a dark shadow on our moral standards.

Another citation from our present-day reality that raises questions about the "social conscience" is the abhorrent concentration of wealth in the hands of the few. Namely, in the wealthiest countries such as the United States, the wealthiest one percent have acquired more wealth than the bottom 90 percent. Meanwhile, 10 percent of the global community were living below the poverty line in 2015, with wages of $1.90 a day. This remains true even after globalization lifted vast numbers of people out of poverty and greatly reduced the percentage of the poor from former levels of 36 percent. That being said, World Bank estimates indicate that the ramifications of COVID-19 caused between 40 and 60 million people to fall back under $1.90 a day in 2020.

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The meaning of the process of globalization is different from that of international cooperation. Yes, international cooperation is facilitated by the circumstances caused by globalization, but they are two different phenomena. Globalization is a process of unauthorized integration and interaction among constituencies globally. Therefore, one of its main characteristics is a growing interdependence of the global economy, cultures, and populations. The increased interaction on a global scale, especially with increased movement and exchanges of products, ideas, investment, technology, information, and even people, has created a global process within which the international community operates.

International cooperation is not a predetermined process, but a choice. It is a voluntary acceptance of global interaction for the benefit of the international community as a whole. To clarify, international cooperation is essential if we are to establish a collective "social conscience." States realize that they cannot solve problems on their own. Therefore, they need treaties, conventions, international organizations, and so on. These institutions and agreements can create arrangements where all states are better off than if they were to tackle issues alone. Moreover, it is up to the international community to decide that we need to cooperate to enhance our "social conscience" due to the setbacks of the twenty-first-century order and negative effects of globalization.

These arguments are not moralistic; nor are they necessarily in support of socialism or big government versus market economy. They do not represent a pushback against globalization, stages and phases of which are inevitable in bringing vast numbers of people out of poverty. The shallowness, if not absence, of "social conscience" is, in fact, not exclusive to economic or political systems, nor is it solely a function of wealth or poverty of nations and individuals. There are wonderful philanthropic examples, but they are only exceptions. Nor is this a naive moralist call for reawakening from an idealist.

Ironically, death, destruction, and devastation drove and energized our "social conscience" in the middle of the last century. Progress and material fulfilment seem to have driven us off course, numbing the senses and clouding the memory of the nation-state founders of the UN.

Regrettably, decades of public service have fueled cynicism at the expense of idealism in my mindset. However, this cynicism has not clouded my vision of what is right and wrong, nor has it weakened my concern for the common good. Individual and occasionally exclusive needs of particular constituencies have increasingly overwhelmed and overshadowed calls for societal or collective interests. Was this always the case, and can the situation be reversed, is an important question.

It is noteworthy that the UN—as the core intergovernmental organization of the post-World War II order—was established to safeguard the world from the scourge, devastation, and ravages of world wars. Its tenets were reached with *realpolitik* and global social context in play. The preamble of the UN Charter uses the phrase "We the people" to give context and texture to the pursuant charter goals and provisions. While respecting sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs of states, the charter is replete with references to "collective action." And, it is the collectiveness of the "social conscience" of the international community that was the springboard for most of the subsequent international legislation and other standards that have emerged over the last seven decades.

Ironically, death, destruction, and devastation drove and energized our "social conscience" in the middle of the last century. Progress and material fulfilment seem to have driven us off course, numbing the senses and clouding the memory of the nation-state founders of the UN. Hopefully, this will only be temporary.

To address this challenge, one must ask as to why did the international community lose its social conscience. In essence, the loss was an unintended consequence and ramification of glorious successes of individualism and singular goals. Without the drive, determination, ingenuity, and creativity, which is characteristic of high-achieving individuals and nations, much of the progress of the last century would not have occurred. However, this progress has frequently come at the expense of collectivity. The rebalancing between the genius and productivity of singular ambitions and that of collective interests is our greatest contemporary challenge, which will require societal changes.

With respect to the world order, it is imperative to regain our sense of "collectiveness" if we are to continue to reap the benefits of our individual assets and achievements.

With globalization, our collectivity has virtually grown much tighter and closer. This is, in my view, a positive aspect of globalization. Closeness and interdependence remove barriers, increasing the pace and scope of interaction. With the increased collectivity comes a much more naked level of transparency, with both its constructive and potentially challenging implications. This requires a greater capacity to find collective but not necessarily equal interests, in order for our diversity to remain a source of wealth and richness rather than of discord and adversity.

With respect to the world order, it is imperative to regain our sense of "collectiveness" if we are to continue to reap the benefits of our individual assets and achievements. A more acceptable balance between individual and collective pursuits needs to be developed. The choice is not between individualism or collectivism. Instead, it is about the balance between the two. In a globally networked, transparent global village, the paradigm is one where borders are sovereign but do not create insurmountable boundaries or obstacles.

To achieve this objective and develop complementary rules and procedures as we move forward, it is time to invite great minds to merge with experienced former practitioners and think outside the box. I very much encourage different disciplines, professions, and stakeholders in society to organize processes of creative thinking on how they best see us moving forward. While such thought processes would be useful, the objective here is not to search for technical solutions to problems of security, development, the environment, equal rights, and the like. In fact, numerous Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN exist as agreed targets of global aspirations—

albeit many of them remain unfulfilled. Consequently, a series of action-oriented measures have been suggested, if belatedly so. To achieve these goals and create a more comprehensive order, a new global culture with an invigorated "social conscience" factor needs to be developed.

The goal here is to determine how best to regenerate a wider understanding of the "common good" among our societies. It is about how to ensure that we as "peoples" appreciate and embrace collectiveness and determine that our decisions will increasingly have a greater "social conscience"—be that in relation to other communities, different strata in societies, or future generations. This is a larger goal, extending well into the future beyond envisioned priorities of the day. I also believe that it would greatly facilitate the fulfilment of the SDGs.

For this to become a truly global endeavor, I recommend that the UN Secretary General organizes a set of discussions under the organization's auspices. These discussions should start at the outset with groups of individuals in their personal capacity, in order avoid entanglement in governmental competition or bureaucracies. The level, composition of participants, and format should extend well beyond the traditional weekend brainstorming sessions we formerly used to hold. This will truly allow space for perspectives that relate to future challenges without ignoring present realities, with a special emphasis on collectiveness and common interests. Here the objective should be to raise the debate to a higher level in posture, recognition, and substance, and do so in a way that obliges our leaders and societies to respond and engage in the discussions—without them becoming hypothetical or theoretical.

Once a set of principles, goals, and measures are developed on how best to revive our "social conscience" with a greater sense of collectiveness, the UN Secretary General should undertake an intensive effort of quiet diplomacy. The top UN figure should do so both with governmental bodies and opinion-makers in order to create broader societal debate about these issues.

Subsequently, as a third step, these ideas and principles should be tabled for adoption collectively before the UN General Assembly or the Security Council, with concrete issues surrounding the topic discussed in depth in the respective international and regional bodies. I understand that the politics of the nation-state system today is not conducive to creative thinking. However, I believe that we cannot shy away from taking on substantive and ambitious efforts to re-establish our national, legal, and global order. To safeguard against falling back into the trap of accommodation based on the prevailing balance of power—which changes over time—these principles and ideas should be made formal parts of legislation on the national, regional, and global levels. This is a cumbersome but logical imperative. The rule of law has to be the prevailing practice to ensure the interests of all.

In essence, we are at an important juncture once again. In the middle of the twentieth century, devastating losses caused by world wars created collective awareness about the need to pull together and ensure that such tragic events do not happen again. In the twenty-first century, the time has come to raise our achievements to unprecedented levels and prevent the arrogance of power and greed from becoming the reason for humanity's self-destruction. Reinvigorating the social conscience and elevating collective perspectives are paramount for the success of such efforts.

It is time for the region to start engaging in the development of a new Middle Eastern architecture with three basic pillars. First, the resolution of present conflicts. Second, crisis management and disarmament. And third, tackling the region-wide socio-economic challenge.

Three Basic Pillars

With respect to the Middle East, the nation states need to treat each other equitably—be that in national political aspirations or socio-economic outcomes. While the goal of achieving absolute equality appears idealistic and unachievable, equitability, inclusiveness, and tolerance are realistic preconditions for stability and security.

Occupation of lands is untenable, with conflicts between Palestine and Israel extending over seven decades. With discrepancies in wealth being the largest they have ever been, excessive expenditure on armaments is understandable but intolerable—especially while basic healthcare services remain unavailable in time of need.

It is time for the region to start engaging in the development of a new Middle Eastern architecture with three basic pillars. First, the resolution of present conflicts. Second, crisis management and disarmament. And third, tackling the region-wide socio-economic challenge.

This will be a slow process and one that will take place over an extended period of time. In fact, it will probably also see regressions as any of the pillars face obstacles in the form of political tension. Nevertheless, for the sake of the region's security and stability, the Middle East must robustly deal with its ongoing conflicts by striving towards equitable resolutions. At the same time, the region must look towards the future with ambitious plans to create more sustainable realities. This can only be achieved with a collective approach and a balance of interest for everyone in the region.

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