Cooperative Multipolar System:

In Quest of a New World Order

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Preface and acknoledgements

Biljana Vankovska and Toni Mileski

This volume is the outcome of what might seem, at first glance, to be an ordinary academic conference. *Cooperative Multipolar System: In Quest of a New World Order* was held on October 3–4, 2024, organized by the Global Changes Center (GCC), the youngest research center at the Faculty of Philosophy. The Chamber of Emigrants from Macedonia eventually joined as a supporting institution, following a formal agreement with the Faculty. Yet, this gathering was far from conventional. It was designed as an intellectual intervention to engage with the evolving global order and challenge the one-dimensional narratives that dominate academic and political discourse in Macedonia.

The event sought to introduce an alternative perspective in a country where academic conferences often reinforce exclusively Western-centric paradigms. The world is undergoing an irreversible shift toward multipolarity, yet much of the Macedonian academic and political landscape remains anchored in outdated frameworks. While Macedonia remains entangled in the complexities of EU accession and external geopolitical pressures, the broader global order is being redefined. The key question is no longer whether multipolarity will emerge, but rather what form it will take: confrontational or cooperative?

Our preference was clear from the outset. The conference title reflects an aspiration for a cooperative multipolar system—one based on dialogue, mutual respect, and new approaches to global governance, rather than conflict and division. However, we approached the subject with both optimism and realism, fully aware that the forces shaping the international order could lead to unpredictable and potentially dangerous outcomes. As scholars, our role is not only to analyse but also to contribute to the shaping of a more just and stable world—one rooted in knowledge, ethical responsibility, and humanism.

From the beginning, we anticipated skepticism, even resistance. The Macedonian academic community has long suffered from intellectual isolation, not only due to financial constraints but also because of self-imposed conceptual limitations. Recognizing this, we sought to

bring the world to Skopje rather than wait for an invitation to join existing global debates.

We reached out to internationally renowned scholars whose work has shaped contemporary discussions on global order and multipolarity. Many traveled great distances to participate, demonstrating an extraordinary commitment to intellectual exchange and alternative perspectives. For a brief moment, Skopje became a focal point for urgent debates on geopolitics, peace, and international cooperation. More than just an academic gathering, the conference was a public intellectual intervention—an effort to challenge prevailing narratives not only in Macedonia but worldwide.

Despite the conference's significance, institutional support was minimal. It is worth emphasizing that the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University provided an initial grant, without which the event would not have been possible to organize. Expressing our gratitude for recognizing the significance of this conference, we would also like to extend special appreciation for the vision of the Rector, Prof. Dr. Biljana Angelova. She highlighted several key points during the conference preparations. With her permission, we would like to note a few that we deem very important: "The University is the custodian of knowledge, the space where new ideas are cultivated and critical thinking is encouraged. In a multipolar world, its role becomes even more crucial. Universities may be platforms for global dialogue. In a multipolar world, where different regions and cultures assert their perspectives and interests, the need for dialogue has never been more urgent. Universities are places where diverse voices can come together—where knowledge is not only shared but also contested and enriched through debate. By fostering cross-cultural exchanges, universities can help bridge divides and create a more inclusive global discourse. The challenges we face today—be they geopolitical tensions, wars, climate change, etc.—require global solutions. By pushing the frontiers of science and technology, collaborating across borders, and encouraging interdisciplinary approaches, universities contribute to national development as well as to the global pool of knowledge."

The Faculty of Philosophy largely distanced itself from the event, citing bureaucratic regulations that masked deeper intellectual discomfort. According to existing rules, research centers like CGC are expected to be self-sustaining, reliant on external sponsorships and donations. In

practice, this meant that the burden of organizing a major international conference fell on a small group of dedicated scholars, without institutional backing. Yet, where institutions failed, the public responded differently. While many doors remained closed at the official level, ordinary citizens—through grassroots donations and expressions of solidarity—demonstrated a far greater appreciation for intellectual openness than many of those officially tasked with fostering academic inquiry. This experience reaffirmed a deeper truth: transformative initiatives often begin outside formal institutions, driven by those willing to challenge complacency and mediocrity.

On this occasion, we would like to express our deep gratitude for the understanding and support we received from the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Skopje. It is worth emphasizing that this support was extended by Ambassador H.E. Zhang Zuo. Although his mandate ended before the start of the conference, we were honored to have the opening address delivered by the Charge D'Affairs of the Embassy. H.E. Xu Lei conveyed several important messages to the participants, some of which are particularly worth highlighting: "Currently, significant changes in the world have entered a phase of rapid evolution, the world is moving ever closer towards greater multipolarity and economic globalization. We see faster evolution of the global governance system and international order, rapid rise of emerging markets and developing countries, and greater adjustments in global power configuration. We believe that all countries, regardless of size or strength, should have equal rights and opportunities. They should participate equally in the multipolarization process. International affairs should be handled through consultation, and the world's future should be jointly governed by all countries, rather than monopolizing international affairs by a few major countries or dividing countries into different levels based on their strength and status. All countries should act within the international system, with the United Nations at its core, strengthen cooperation in global governance, and jointly adhere to the principles of the UN Charter. China always regards Europe as an important pole in the process of multipolarization. In response to global challenges, we advocate transcending conflict and confrontation through peaceful development, replacing absolute security with common security, choosing win-win outcomes over zero-sum games, preventing clash of civilizations through exchang-

es and mutual learning, and preserving the planet Earth through green development. We will work with all countries toward an open, inclusive, clean and beautiful world of lasting peace, universal security and shared prosperity... we need to uphold the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and promote the construction of a new type of international relations. This year marks the 70th anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Today, the Ukrainian crisis and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remain protracted, while regional and global deficits in peace and security continue to grow. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence reject the strong bullying the weak, align with the common expectations for a more just and equitable international order, and reflect a new type of international relations founded on mutual respect, fairness, justice, and win-win cooperation."

As the Chairs of the Program and the Organizing Committees, we take this opportunity to extend our gratitude to all our colleagues from the Global Changes Center who contributed to the successful realization of this event—an event that marked a new era in academic communication with the world. Our deepest appreciation, however, goes to our esteemed colleagues who travelled to Skopje or joined us online, enriching the discussion with their insights. Among the invited representatives of the diplomatic corps, all participants had the honour of hearing and engaging in a discussion with the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Skopje, H.E. Sergey Bazdnikin. Considering his intervention after the first panel, particularly significant, we highlight here several thought-provoking points: "We all live on one planet Earth and one of the guarantees of continuation, without exaggeration, of the very existence of human civilization is recognition of objective parameters and principles of the world order, development of mutually acceptable rules of interaction between states and associations of countries and their strict and consistent observance. But for this purpose, it is necessary to determine at what stage of humanity's development we are, what realities characterize it now and what trends will determine prospects of this development – at least for the foreseeable future. Indispensable condition for success in solving these global-scale tasks is intellectual honesty of researchers and experts, including rejection of propaganda clichés and sickeningly common images of the enemy… A few words about the way Russia approaches the issues on the conference agenda. We do not claim

in any way that we are absolutely right – however, recognizing the high level of knowledge and professional qualifications of the participants, I consider it important to share our vision of the processes taking place in international relations. Of course, limiting myself to the conference agenda. Let me say right away – we have never ever hidden anything on this matter. Our general position is explained in the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, approved by the President of Russia last March. This is an open multi-page document, translated into several languages and accessible to all interested parties – I am sure that many of you are familiar with it. The formation of a fair and sustainable world order is one of the priority tasks of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation. We proceed from the fact that a multipolar system, tendency towards a multipolar system – now – and for many years to come – is the reality of international relations – whether someone likes it or not. Possibility of dominance by one country or group of countries is becoming a thing of the past – faster and more definitely with every day. It is clear to those countries of the Global majority that confrontation and hegemony do not solve global problems – they only multiply them. The examples are all around us. The "collective West" attempts to restrain this objective process. However, it is impossible to reverse it. Changes that the modern world has entered into, are fundamental and irreversible. It is important to clarify here that a multipolar world order is not an artificial "multilateralism" that a number of countries of the "collective West" are now trying to promote. Despite its seeming similarity, "multilateralism" serves the so-called "rules-based order". These "rules" are dictated by Washington, sometimes by a number of European capitals. But interestingly – no one has ever seen them, they are not written down anywhere. They are invented, as they say, "on the fly" and imposed on the international community with one goal – to perpetuate the global hegemony of the West. To maintain its accelerated economic growth, to continue to appropriate foreign resources, to retain monopoly of the US dollar... It is important to note that countries that try to live by these rules or that are forced to live by them, create conditions in which they themselves risk one day become the object against which those very rules will be used. Feel the difference. "Multilateralism" is almost always directed against someone. Yesterday, for example, it was against the Soviet Union. Today – against "autocracies", which first and foremost

means Russia and China. A powerful toolkit is used – from financial and economic sanctions and information campaigns to direct military and political pressure, attempts to strategically defeat Russia, "cancel" Russian culture and history. Or they create alternative narrow formats of decision-making bypassing the UN… The multipolar world is a reality. The number of states advocating a just and truly free world order is growing. New centers of power and economic growth are emerging and getting stronger – these are, first of all, the BRICS members and those states that wish to join it and understand prospects of equal cooperation taking into account national interests."

The aftermath of the conference only reinforced the lesson of increasingly limited space for open debates and threats of canceling dissenting voices. The unjust dismissal of the CGC head (Prof. Vankovska) just two months later, under circumstances so absurd they scarcely deserve mention, signaled that the event was perceived as a threat. Not because it promoted any radical ideology, but because it dared to ask uncomfortable questions and introduce perspectives that did not conform to dominant narratives. Yet, this book stands as proof that even a small research center, supported by a determined academic community and engaged public, can produce work of global significance.

The diversity of perspectives in this volume mirrors the richness of the conference itself. Readers will find contributions from leading scholars and experienced practitioners, spanning multiple disciplines, regions, and ideological backgrounds. Some papers are deeply theoretical, grounded in rigorous academic analysis; others are informed by the practical experience of those engaged in diplomacy, peace activism, and policymaking. This range of perspectives is precisely what gives the book its value: it is not a singular statement but an ongoing conversation—a critical engagement with the possibilities and challenges of a multipolar world.

Importantly, this volume does not seek to impose a singular vision of multipolarity. Rather, it presents a broad spectrum of scholarly inquiries, examining the structural, strategic, and normative dimensions of the emerging global order. It highlights the competing forces at play—from persistent hegemonic tendencies to the potential for cooperative frameworks that transcend outdated power politics.

As the world moves beyond the unipolar and bipolar paradigms of the past, the need to construct a more inclusive and stable international order becomes increasingly urgent. Whether a cooperative multipolar system can serve as a viable alternative to hegemonic instability and competitive fragmentation remains an open question. What is clear, however, is that this debate must extend beyond mere power realignments. It must engage with fundamental questions of governance, security, economic justice, and the role of civil society in shaping global transformations.

This book is a contribution to that ongoing debate. It does not offer final answers but rather an invitation to think critically, to challenge assumptions, and to explore new ways of imagining a world order that is more just, sustainable, and attuned to the complexities of our time. If it succeeds in sparking further discussion and collaboration—both within Macedonia and in the broader global context—then it will have fulfilled its purpose.

The task of shaping the future is not the exclusive domain of politicians, diplomats, or even scholars. It belongs to all of us. And it begins with the courage to question, to imagine, and to act.

Biljana Vankovska, president of the Conference Program Committee
Toni Mileski, president of the Conference Organizational Committee

Introductory Notes

Cooperative Multipolar System: In Quest of a New World Order

Richard Sakwa

The United Nations-based Charter International System (CIS) was established in 1945 on the basis of the comity of nations. The Charter system is far from a world government, yet it establishes the norms and rules of how international politics should be conducted. On its basis there is now a ramified network of institutions, agencies, protocols and a substantive body of international law. The Charter system's combination of sovereignty and internationalism built on and learned from the successes and failures of earlier international systems (Westphalia 1648, Utrecht 1714, Vienna 1815 and Versailles 1919). It is on that basis that multipolarity can develop and thrive. In fact, the entire postwar system of international relations is based on this idea.

The creation of the Charter system came in the wake of the most devastating conflict in human history. The UN Charter sought to render war as an instrument of policy anachronistic, and various subsequent declarations and conventions, above all the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Genocide Convention of 1948, established the principles for a more humane and cooperative world order. The normative foundation of the new order was sovereign internationalism, enshrining respect for the sovereignty of member states (including certain limitations on interference in their domestic affairs), accompanied by the robust multilateralism enshrined in the Security Council and its five permanent members.

However, events developed in a rather different direction. Instead of the comity and cooperation envisaged by the Charter, conflict and hierarchy was imposed. Concurrent with the establishment of the Charter system, the major power of the day, the United States established its own model of world order, the Political West (the Atlantic power system, latterly dubbed the rules-based international order, RBIO, largely synonymous with the so-called liberal international order) based on democratic internationalism. This precept is antithetical to multipolarity, since it believes in a single model of modernity. In pursuit of its particular goals, it sought to reshape the entire globe in its image. The return of Donald

J. Trump to the White House in January 2025 removed the veil masking the raw power that lay behind the hegemony of the Political west, and the real distribution of power within that order. The curtain was drawn back, ending the era of double standards but exposing some rather harsh realities. This was particularly uncomfortable for the European legacy powers.

During Cold War I (1947-89), the Political West was constrained by the existence of another substantive model of world order, the Soviet bloc. With the collapse of the latter in 1989-91, the endemic problem of substitution, whereby the Political West claims the universalism properly belonging to the Charter system, was exacerbated. The system today is under unprecedented threat. The UN Security Council has become yet another platform for great power conflict rather than a forum for conflict resolution. Reform of the UN is very much on the agenda, but for this to be meaningful a reconfiguration within international politics is required. This is the aspiration of the nascent post-Western counter-hegemonic world order, the Political East. Its challenge is neo-revisionist: to counter the logic of Western hegemony at the level of international politics; but to support and reinforce Charter norms at the systemic level.

Instead of a spiral of history, in which the lessons of past failures bring about future achievements, the radicalisation of the Political West in the postcommunist era undermined even the achievements of the early postwar years. This can be expressed in terms of the tension between sovereign and democratic internationalism. The academic Gerry Simpson draws the same conclusion, describing the struggle between 'charter liberalism' and 'liberal anti-pluralism'. For him, the core of the post-1945 international system is the idea of 'charter liberalism', based on a pluralist representation of the international community. This is a 'procedure for organizing relations among diverse communities'. This stands in contrast to 'liberal anti-pluralism', described by Simpson as 'a liberalism that can be exclusive and illiberal in its effects', above all in its 'lack of tolerance for non-liberal regimes'. The latter is 'an evangelical version that views liberalism as a comprehensive doctrine or a social good worth promoting and the other more secular tradition emphasizing proceduralism and diversity' (Simpson 2001).

This division became sharper in the postcommunist era, as sovereign internationalism (charter liberalism in Simpson's terminology) was

challenged by the cosmopolitan universalism represented by the democratic internationalism advanced by the apparent victors of the Cold War. This can also be couched in terms of a fundamental tension between a monist view of international affairs, in which only one power system and set of ideas is correct, and thus all the others are axiomatically false and geopolitically disruptive. This Manichean view of international affairs was prevalent during Cold War I, but the existence of a Soviet bloc alternative was at least recognised (Diesen 2017). Although attended by propaganda campaigns and proxy wars throughout the Global South, diplomatic norms were at least respected, allowing the Cold War to be resolved peacefully.

In the postcommunist era, the US-led Atlantic power system rebranded itself as the liberal international order and thereby claimed for itself a universality that was inevitably contested by the other great powers. Pluralism in international politics was thereby diminished. The US had taken the lead in creating the post-war institutions of global governance, but ultimately the UN, the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organisation, and the whole ramified network of multilateral governance institutions belong to all of humanity rather than to any specific power system. The claims to universality by what also came to be known as the 'rules-based order' were perceived as a type of usurpation. Resistance to this usurpation later became the basis for a broader politics of resistance by Russia, China and many countries in the Global South. For Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes, 'the light that failed' after 1989 was the promise of democracy (Krastev and Holmes 2019). The broader failure was to imagine how the European security order could be reshaped, how a positive peace order could be built from Lisbon to Vladivostok, and how in the era of postcommunism a new politics of development, combining tradition with innovation, could be devised.

With its apparent 'victory' at the end of the Cold War, the US-led liberal international order became radicalized (Sakwa 2023). In the postcommunist years the Political West increasingly hermetic – inured to the concerns and arguments of outsiders. This was the natural corollary of the absence of a viable competitor, allowing the inherent character of the Political West as it had taken shape during the Cold War to develop to its full extent. This was hubristic, exposing a dark exclusivity and intolerance of other social orders and traditional life patterns (Pabst 2018). The

universalism was 'bound to fail', but it nevertheless shaped the period (Mearsheimer 2018, 2019).

The postcommunist era has been accompanied by the systematic denigration of diplomacy, with repeated cycles of expulsions and closing of diplomatic facilities. The prospects for the peaceful resolution of current conflicts are thereby rendered more problematic (Sakwa 2025). Worse, the Charter system is under unprecedented threat, above all because of attempts to 'privatise' its institutions; and when that fails, to marginalise them. Nevertheless, a counter-tendency in support of the 1945 system is in the making. Multipolarity is becoming a reality.

The meta-event of the current period is the ineluctable shift in the global economic centre of gravity from the Atlantic basin to the Asia-Pacific region, from the Political West to the Global South. In purchasing parity terms (PPP), China caught up with the US in 2014, although in nominal and per capita income terms still falls far short. India is one of the most rapidly developing countries in the world, along with what had earlier been called the Asian 'tigers' – including Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. They became manufacturing and commercial hubs, while Singapore retains its pre-eminence in financial services. In 2000, the G7 countries controlled 65 per cent of global GDP, but by 2022 this had fallen to around 40 per cent. The BRICS+ countries represent a slightly larger share when measured by purchasing power parity. The G7 countries make up 30.3% of global GDP in PPP terms, while the ten BRICS+ states represent 37 per cent, although the G7 remains ahead in nominal terms. In terms of population, the disparity is even more striking, with the BRICS nations home to over 46 per cent of the world's population, while the G7 accounts for less than ten per cent.

The Ukraine war brought into sharper focus the emergence of competing alignments, which in broad terms can be conceptualised as the US-led Political West against a nascent Political East. The Sino-Russian alignment is at the core of the latter, along with a host of non- and weakly-aligned powers in the Global South. A new era of multipolarity is evident, with a new constellation of actors in international politics. The Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, considered the Ukraine war a consequence of the West's failure to adjust to the changed realities. He argued that 'Today the world is living through the "multipolar moment". Shifting towards the multipolar world order is a natural part of power

rebalancing, which reflects objective changes in the world economy. Finance and geopolitics. The West waited longer than the others, yet it has also started to realise that this process is irreversible'. He noted the increasing role of regional associations, such as the Eurasian Economic Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, ASEAN, the African Union, CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean states), and others. In his view, 'BRICS has become a model of diplomacy. The UN should remain a forum for aligning the interests of all the countries' (O'Connor 2024).

This is precisely the agenda facing the world today, and explored in the contributions to this volume. A move towards sovereign internationalism allows the diversity of the human experience adequate expression while remaining committed to the multilateral resolution of common challenges. The shift to multipolarity entails a transformation of international politics away from endemic conflict towards the comity and cooperation envisaged by and reflected in the Charter system. This is the genuine new world order anticipated in 1945. It now lies upon the shoulders of this generation to ensure that this vision come to fruition.

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China and Cooperative Multipolarity

Weiwei Zhang

Why Multipolarity Matters

Multipolarity is of paramount importance because it represents the antithesis of an immoral, unjust, and outdated unipolar world order. Under unipolarity, nearly everything—from the dollar to trade, technology, and even climate change—has been weaponized. Sanctions, missile strikes, and colour revolutions have become routine tools of dominance, leading to wars, chaos, and untold human suffering for millions. This order must change—and it will.

With the rise of China, Russia, the expanding BRICS and other members of the Global South, a multipolar world order is rapidly emerging. This shift promises a more equitable and just global system, one that prioritizes cooperation over coercion and mutual respect over domination.

China's Transformative Role

Over the past 75 years of socialist construction, China has achieved unprecedented milestones. It has become the world's largest economy by purchasing power parity (since 2014), the largest industrial and manufacturing power, the largest trading nation, and home to the world's largest consumer market. Remarkably, China has accomplished the equivalent of an industrial revolution every decade since the 1980s. Today, it stands at the forefront of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, leveraging advancements in big data, artificial intelligence, and quantum technologies.

China is now the only country capable of providing goods, services, and expertise spanning all four Industrial Revolutions to the global community. This transformation has not only reshaped China but has also altered the global landscape irrevocably.

In this context, China launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has grown into the largest platform for international cooperation in human history. With over 150 countries participating in thousands

of projects, the BRI embodies the Chinese principle of "discussing together, building together, and benefiting together." This initiative lays a solid foundation for a multipolar world order, fostering connectivity and shared prosperity.

As a full-fledged independent pole in the global order, China is not merely a nation-state but a civilizational state. It boasts full sovereignty, a powerful defence capability, and immense economic, technological, cultural, and intellectual strength. Unlike the Western mantra of "divide and rule," China champions the motto "unite and prosper." This philosophy aligns with its vision of "a shared future for mankind," a stark contrast to the U.S. belief in "at the table or on the menu."

The Rise of New Poles

The emergence of new poles—such as China, Russia, India, Brazil, Iran, Turkey, and the expanding BRICS and Global South—marks a decisive shift toward multipolarity. While these nations may have internal differences, they share a common objective: to establish a world order based on peace, development, justice, mutual respect, and common prosperity. Many of these nations identify themselves as civilizational states or communities, rooted in deep cultural and moral traditions that reject Western moral lecturing and impositions.

These rising civilizational states or communities are challenging the liberal unipolar order, transforming the global system from a vertical hierarchy—with the West atop—to a horizontal one, where the West and the rest stand as equals in wealth, power, and ideas. For instance, over the past decade, China alone has contributed more to global economic growth than the G7 nations combined (38% vs. 25%).

The U.S. weaponization of the dollar, particularly through sanctions against Russia, has accelerated the decline of the unipolar economic order. Non-Western countries are increasingly abandoning the dollar in international trade. For example, 95% of Sino-Russian trade is now conducted in local currencies, and nations like India, Brazil, Iran, Turkey, and Indonesia are promoting similar arrangements.

From Divide and Rule to Unite and Prosper

Historically, Western powers have pursued a strategy of "divide and rule," a legacy of colonialism. In contrast, China, drawing from its civilizational ethos, advocates "unite and prosper." This principle is exemplified by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which has garnered widespread support across the globe. China believes this approach serves not only its interests but also those of the broader international community.

As Washington's political power and moral authority decline both domestically and internationally, non-Western nations are increasingly drawing inspiration from their own cultural and civilizational roots. This trend reflects a growing desire to distinguish themselves from the discredited American liberal model and its unipolar hegemony.

China's rise is not merely the ascent of an ordinary nation but that of a sui generis entity—a civilizational state. It represents the amalgamation of the world's oldest continuous civilization with a vast modern state. This unique model challenges Western assumptions about democracy, governance, and human rights, offering an alternative vision of modernization and modernity in the 21st century. My conceptualization of China as a civilizational state seeks to dispel the misperception of China as a Communist state on the "wrong side of history," as former U.S. President Bill Clinton once remarked. It also distinguishes China from the conventional view, such as that of American Sinologist Lucian Pye, who described China as a "civilization pretending to be a nation-state." In contrast, I argue that China is both modern and uniquely civilizational, enriching—if not redefining—what modernization means today.

Toward a Horizontal World Order

The concept of the civilizational state has gained traction beyond academia. Major non-Western powers like Russia and India now openly identify themselves as civilizational states, and even some Western leaders have endorsed the idea. As The Economist noted, the term is "in vogue," with nations like the U.S., Turkey, and the EU also being considered potential candidates.

This trend reflects a broader movement beyond traditional nation-states toward formation of civilizational communities. These communities resist the impositions of the so-called "universal values," asserting their unique cultural and moral standards.

While the rising civilizational states of Eurasia define themselves in opposition to the liberal West, the West itself is grappling with an identity crisis. The liberal West's claim to universal values has been undermined by its own internal contradictions and the global backlash against its unipolar hegemony. As Portuguese political scientist Bruno Maçães argues, the "liberal West" is now dead, having caused "a global rootlessness."

In the medium to long term, the global order will become increasingly horizontal, with the West and the rest standing as equals in wealth, power, and ideas. This shift will likely give rise to more civilizational communities or states and to a win-win cooperative multipolarity, each contributing to a shared set of common values—such as peace, humanity, international solidarity, and the vision of one human community.

It is hoped that the Western-defined "universal values" will gradually be replaced by these common values endorsed by the entire international community and we must all work together to advance this noble endeavour for the benefit of all mankind.

Part One
Global Crises and Systemic Shifts: Rethinking the Multipolar Response

Crisis of Western Imperialism, Opportunity for World Majority

Radhika Desai

Introduction

Unsurprisingly, the inauguration of a new Trump administration was followed by a flurry of stories about how it was imperilling, if not ending, the multilateral international order founded at the 1944 Bretton woods conference. The Atlantic Council, for instance, noted that, while the first Trump presidency had been 'more benign than what had been feared at the time', particularly in relation to the two flagship institutions, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, one must forgo the temptation to expect a similarly positive outcome this time around: 'Compared to 2016 … the geopolitical rivalry between the United States, China, and other autocracies [sic] has become more intense. Trump has already announced plans for new tariffs on China, and Beijing has halted exports of some rare minerals in retaliation to US chip restrictions. As a result, the next US-China trade dispute could be much larger in scope.' (Mühleisen 2024).

Certainly, the newly inaugurated US President seemed to relish showering allies and enemies alike with executive orders, promises and threats with gay abandon. Most violated received rules, laws and institutions, domestic and foreign, not to mention any sense of moral decency, with his proposal to turn Gaza into a 'Mediterranean Riviera' topping the obscenity charts. Certainly, he has a freer hand than he did in 2017: there is no Republican establishment to worry about. And certainly, the US ruling class is more united behind him than last time: even the few corporate CEOs that had opposed him as late as the 2024 campaign were coming around to him.

However, the narrative of Trump imperilling or even ending the multilateral international order is wrong for at least two reasons. First, the US-led West has been undermining it for decades. Trump's first presidency was also alight with discussions on the same theme and then too, most attributed to him a crisis that even then predated his presidency. Indeed, talk of the 'crisis of multilateralism', like that about 'deglo-

balization', the world trade slowdown and the inability of the WTO to advance the freer trade agenda date back to before Trump's first term and Brexit to the first decade of the twenty first century when, moreover, Clinton, the 'globalization president', was replaced by George Bush Jr, who preferred to frame his foreign policy in the unilateralist discourse of 'empire' and had already slapped steel and aluminium tariffs on China.

Secondly, calling it a crisis of multilateralism is a misnomer. It is a crisis of imperialism by multilateralism we refer to the practice of nations, usually all or a very large number, coming together to pursue common goals, creating institutions and practices in the process, on the basis of equality, cooperating and mutual benefit. Imperialism refers to the opposite: one or one set of powerful countries imposing a set of institutions and practices that one-sidedly favour them on the rest of the world. While the US-led West is certainly finding it harder and harder to live with the multilateral institutions and practices created at the end of the Second World War, and is attacking them, the cause of these attacks is a reduction in their imperial power. Meanwhile, other countries, countries that the West can decreasingly subordinate, tiring of the West being unable to deal with them on the basis of equality, cooperation and mutual benefit, are moving ahead and creating new multilateral institutions and, in that sense, multilateralism is not in crisis, it is thriving.

I use the term 'US-led West' to refer to the imperialist core of the world economy whose power peaked in 1914. It has been declining since, though sometimes this decline has been markedly reversed, such as the 1980s and 1990s, when US-led imperialism was able to impose a punishing debt crisis and ruinous economic retardation on the Third World for daring, in the previous decade, to assert its interests, whether by raising commodity prices or by demanding a New International Economic Order.

Perhaps the most important fact about this US-led imperial core of the world economy is how little it has expanded since it peaked in 1914. If we consider the following map of countries imposing sanctions on Russia since the start of Russian military operations in Ukraine in February 2022 – the closest proxy we have for the imperial world today, we can see how little the imperialist world has expanded since 1914.

The West vs The World Majority

FIGURE 1.1 The capitalist world.

Notwithstanding post-war rhetoric of the West about how much it yearns for the development of the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa and those of Latin America, apart from the frontline states of South Korea and Taiwan province, whose relative prosperity and stabilization was necessary to maintain the imperialist position against its stiffest challenge, Communism, and the subordination of the post-Communist East European economies as suppliers of cheap labour to the western core of the European Union, hardly any other countries have joined it.

The Neoliberal Acceleration of Imperial Decline

In the new century, the US-led West's imperial control, in decline since 1914, was slipping away at an accelerated pace thanks to a widening scissor between two developments. First, there was the deterioration of the imperial world's own economic performance over the past many decades when it adopted neoliberal policies. Though advertised as guaranteed to restore the productive dynamism of their economies amid the

crisis of 'stagflation' of the 1970s, neoliberalism only served the interests of their giant corporations and the rich while imposing a gruelling growth and investment slowdown, raising unemployment, stagnating wages and reorienting these economies away from productive to financial activity. While inflation was quelled by draconian repression of labour at home and producers in the Third World, the problem of growth and investment was never resolved and, not surprisingly, the decades since 1980 have famously been dubbed the 'Long Downturn' (Brenner 1998) from which the economies of capitalism's imperial homelands have never recovered.

Secondly, there is the rise, pre-eminently of China, and to a lesser extent other members of the BRICS+ and other challengers, thanks chiefly to the fact that they have not been following neoliberal policies or following them to a much less acute extent (Desai 2013b), and thanks to increasing cooperation among them and between them and the rest of the world with whom they constitute what the Russians have taken to calling the World Majority (Karaganov et al 2023). To be sure, not all countries of the World Majority are doing well, and some countries have done well in some periods and badly in others. They key has been, however, that good economic performance has been due to the adoption of egalitarian and productively oriented economic policy and the avoidance, rejection or dilution of neoliberalism, while bad economic performance has been due to its more wholehearted adoption.

The imperialist world has reacted not, as its rhetoric about the development of the rest of the world might lead the naïve to expect, by welcoming this change and re-defining its role in the world through a recognition of the diminution of its relative power, but by fighting it with sanctions, protectionism, populism, 'friend-shoring', 'de-risking, dividing the world into two opposed camps, trade wars, technology wars, and wars pure and simple. All this is justified, indeed, ideologically reinforced, by calling the countries that have dared to develop 'authoritarian'.

This is the process that us destroying the very institutions the US-led West claims to have fashioned after the Second World War and championed since, whether by weaponizing the dollar system, imposing unilateral sanctions, undermining the institutional core of the World Trade Organization, its Dispute Settlement Mechanism, refusing the reform the IMF and the World Bank to reflect the changed balance of economic power in the world, or today, by weaponizing the trade system

via Trump's new tariff wars, not to mention the upending of something as basic as national sovereignty with his talk about 'buying' Greenland and 'taking over' the Panama Canal and making Canada the 51st state. The US-led West has also tried to use these institutions to one-sidedly advance their agenda, such as when bending the IMF's rules, for instance those against lending to a country at war, to permit it to lend to Ukraine and when they put key UN agencies under the control of their corporations and NGOs. *This imperialist fightback is the real threat to multilateralism.*

The Post War Compromise between Multilateralism and Imperialism

So why is the crisis of imperialism being mislabelled one of multilateralism? The answer is as simple as it is important: the institutions of international economic governance created at the end of the Second World War, at Bretton Woods and beyond, were a *compromise* between the declining but still strong forces of imperialism and the rising anti-imperialist forces of the Communist and Third Worlds.

Such multilateralism as was achieved in the architecture of post-war international governance was thanks to the latter, which insisted on the democratic and inclusive principles of the system, such as sovereign equality, non-aggression, peaceful settlement of international disputes, collective security and non-interference in domestic affairs, as well as on the right to develop. The efforts of the imperialist countries were directed against this multilateralism to preserve as much of their power as they could in a number of ways. One was to compromise new multilateral institutions, for instance, by instituting GDP-weighted votes and the US veto in the IMF and the World Bank. Another was to set up competing organizations, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization that were at once elite institutions giving the imperialist powers an autonomous platform for international action against the international democracy represented by the United Nations and instruments for the assertion of US supremacy among the imperialist powers (Nazemroaya 2012). Finally, there was the US push for a sort of supranational liberalism – essentially a set of rules designed to open up the rest of the world economy to US corporations as markets, investment outlets and sources of inputs and labour. In the circumstances that prevailed at the end of the Second

World War, however, this drive was thwarted not just by the existence of a vast communist bloc but also by the imperative of stabilising capitalist economies through statist and other illiberal measures so that economic breakdown did not increase the already great attraction to communism among the working classes of the major capitalist economies and of keeping the newly independent countries in the capitalist camp (Block 1977).

Notwithstanding this compromise, and notwithstanding the fundamentally anti-multilateral position of the US-led West throughout this period, the imperialist countries have long sought to make a virtue of necessity and sought to portray the multilateralism that was forced on them due to the decline of their power and the assertion of their former colonies and semi-colonies as something they championed. Essentially, they have been dressing up their imperialist inclinations and actions in multilateral guise.

The scenario we face today is the accelerating diminution in the power of imperialism, which impels the historically imperialist countries to attack multilateralism more strenuously and more openly than ever chiefly because even the imperial elements they inserted into postwar international governance are no longer capable of defending their imperial privileges while very the rise of new centres of productive and political power around the world, led by China, is making imperial privilege impossible to sustain.

Trump's election and actions since taking office are better seen as symptoms of that crisis rather than its causes in any sense. Trump cannot resolve that crisis, only express it, including through the proliferation of his often impossible, frequently self-contradictory and nearly always self-destructive announcements and initiatives. They just show a US administration flailing about, unable to either accept and tolerate its new, unpalatable position in that order or to redress it (Desai 2025).

Meanwhile, far from being in crisis, multilateralism, the practice of international *negotiation* among a large number of the world's countries, if not all of them, to conclude common agreements on the basis of cooperation, equality and *mutual benefit*, is actually thriving. The World Majority, having tired of waiting for the imperialist West in its current dangerously petulant huff to demonstrate its much-touted multilateralism, is getting down to the business of negotiating a still-expanding set

of alternative institutions – whether of trade or credit or investment or payments. And there is more to come as BRICs+ cooperation accelerates.

It is high time we woke up to the real content of the crisis.

The Bretton Woods Moment

The structures of international economic governance birthed after the Second World War were the vector sum of opposed forces and opposed principles.

On the one hand, was the US. It had sought to replace Britain as 'the managing segment of the world economy' since the early twentieth century when it sensed the waning of British power. Having botched its attempt to do so after the First World War and, according to its own leading intellectuals got a second chance with the Second World War, it came to the negotiations on post-war international governance at Bretton Woods and elsewhere seeking supranational rules, essentially world laws, with itself masquerading as a world state (these ambitions, I have argued, are the true origin of the theory of US hegemony, not any real state of affairs waiting to be theorised, see Desai 2013). The US aimed to transform the rest of the world into the equivalent of domestic territory, making national states redundant, fusing the world's economies into a seamless whole for the benefit of US corporations, including by diminishing its allies' empires. As Karl Polanyi put it in a remarkably insightful article of 1945, the US wished to return to the pre-1914 system of 'Universal Capitalism'. However, he also pointed out, that world had collapsed once and for all in the Thirty Years' Crisis of 1914-1945 and the world was objectively inclined towards planned economies and sought multilaterally derived international rules and norms that would enable and foster them (Polanyi 1945). So, the US drive to supranationalism was faced with an uphill struggle from the start.

To be sure, it had impressive assets. To achieve its objectives, the US deployed the extraordinary dominance that it had acquired over the world economy in the exceptional circumstances created by the two World Wars. During them, it was the only ally which, while suffering no war damage, expanded its economy and loan portfolio as never before as suppliers of war material and credit to its allies. This sordid fact has

since been dressed up and celebrated as the US being the 'Arsenal of Democracy'.

The US economy has posted its highest growth rates during the two world wars, with the second world war doubling the size of the US economy in 6 years from 1939 to 1945, something it would not do again for another 22 years, even though they were the years of the 'golden age of growth'. It is no wonder that the US economy remains so reliant on wars and military spending for what meagre growth it can manage to this day.

On the other hand, was the rest of the world, which was far more vulnerable. There were, firstly, the US's war-torn allies, as vulnerable to economic collapse as to the charms of communism in an age when Uncle Joe was more popular than Uncle Sam, both at home and in their sprawling empires. There was the Soviet Union and Eastern European communist countries, with their planned economies, soon to be joined by China. And finally, there were the semi-colonial and colonial countries of Latin America or much of West Asia, and the soon-to-be-independent colonies in Asia and Africa, all demanding industrialization and development.

None of these could withstand the sort of liberal economy the US sought to create without suffering economic damage and subordination and had no intention of doing so.

What was at stake in the struggle between the US and the rest becomes intelligible only if we understand it as an ongoing clash between these two principles of US supranationalism sometimes helped by its 'allies' and sometimes hindered by them, and the multilateralism of the rest of the world.

The Problem with Supranationalism

The best way to understand US supranationalism is to understand it as a *'cosmopolitan'* world economy. The German mercantilist Friedrich List (1841/1856) used the term 'cosmopolitan' in the mid-nineteenth to describe the sort of world order envisaged by the then dominant capitalist country, Britain. It was an order designed for the benefit of British capital, a world *opened up* to absorb its excess commodities and capital and to supply it with cheap commodities and labour. This cosmopolitan order was justified in the name of the twin Ricardian fictions of the harmony

of free markets and the beneficence of free trade based on 'comparative advantage' (Semmel 1993: 20-21), through in practice it was opened up through colonial and semi-colonial imperial control.

To this, List opposed the *international* world economy, divided into nation states because he understood, as well as many others, including the US's own Alexander Hamilton, mercantilists like Henry Carey as well as Marx, Keynes and today's developmental state thinkers, that in a world in which some nations have already industrialised, and therefore can command world markets, the only way for further industrialization in new nations, the only way for them to escape the fate of being subordinated to the dominant capitalist countries, of being their hewers of wood and drawers of water, is through state intervention using some or all of the entire slew of policies – infant industry protection, industrial policy, directed credit, export promotion, subsidies, tariffs and capital controls among others. While such state directed industrialization projects may fail – indeed, as we can see from the record of post-war attempts to develop in the Third World, failure has been frequent – while there is absolutely no guarantee that they will succeed, no development is possible without it.

This was as true in the late nineteenth century, when Germany, the US and Japan industrialised, as it was soon thereafter, when the Soviet Union did and as it was again in the mid and late twentieth century when European countries and Japan recovered and later when South Korea and Taiwan province industrialised. It is just as true today, as we can see from China's industrialization. The equal and opposite illustration is provided by the economic disasters visited on those that accepted Western neoliberal prescriptions, with or without structural adjustment programmes.

The suppression of this truth has been the overriding ideological mission of the West.

If the ruling ideas of any society are the ideas of the ruling classes, ideas that serve their interests and maintain their power, then the ruling ideas about the world order would, understandably, tend to be those of the dominant powers, there being no world state. They also tend to be useful in perpetuating their dominance, in particular by mystifying the real sources of national wealth and power.

Geopolitical Economy

I proposed geopolitical economy as a critical way of understanding world affairs, which is capable of cutting through this mystification. Geopolitical Economy begins with an understanding of capitalism as contradictory value production, as against much of what passes for 'Western Marxism' and 'Marxist economics' that, *inter alia* reject value analysis as a failure and do not consider capitalism contradictory (see Desai 2017 and Desai 2020). The contradictions of capitalism mean that, contrary to the myth of the self-regulating market economy, capitalism always requires the state to manage its contradictions, both domestically and internationally. Indeed, the operation of the contradictions of capitalism on the international plane necessitate that the world is divided into nation states and that they are ordered in a contested hierarchy in which imperialist countries seek to create and secure their imperial dominance and the countries over which such domination is attempted resist, more and less successfully.

This understanding runs counter not only to the dominant mainstream understandings which are no more than imperial ideology, but also to that of most Western Marxists and Marxist economists who co not consider nation states to be an essential social cleavage created by capitalist exploitation, just like classes. It is this failure of understanding that has made so many Marxist scholars writing about international affairs to fall prey to the cosmopolitan ideologies of 'free trade', 'US hegemony' or 'empire' and 'globalization' (Rosenberg 1994, Panitch and Gindin 2004).

However, for Marx the two were equally essential divisions within capitalism. As he put it during the debates on Free trade, 'If the Free-traders cannot understand how one nation can grow rich at the expense of another, we need not wonder, these same gentlemen also refuse to understand how within one country one class can enrich itself at the expense of another' (Marx 1848/1976: 464-5).

Moreover, as is clear from his notes on Carey and Bastiat at the end of the *Grundrisse*, Marx believed that the 'grandest terrain' on which the contradictions of capitalism appear was the international plane, that of 'the world market' (for a fuller discussion see Desai 2021a). And there, he believed, they appeared 'in their grandest development, as the

relations of producing nations'. Not only does this require Marxists to understand international relations of a world shaped by capitalism as expressions, developments, emerging from the core contradictions of capitalism (on which see Desai 2021b).

Marx's use of the term 'producing nations' is also very interesting. It indicates that, while the modern world may be dominated by capitalist countries, not all the countries of this world may be capitalist. There may be precapitalist nations involved in relations with them and, eventually, socialist ones too. Indeed, while the world may be dominated by capitalist states, it cannot be made up exclusively of such states. Structurally, given that capitalism is contradictory and must impose the costs of resolving its contradictions on other peoples and territories, it cannot be. Historically, it is born in pre-capitalist societies which it cannot and will not entirely transform into purely capitalist societies both because of its own contradictions and because, as Engels said to Conrad Schmidt, the tendency to imagine that 'capitalist production [can be] everywhere completely established, society reduced to the modern classes of landowners, capitalists (industrialists and merchants) and workers – all intermediate stages, however, having been got rid of' is wrong. 'This does not exist even in England and never will exist – we shall not let it get so far as that.', meaning that revolutionaries like them not wait for the horrors of pure capitalism to emerge (Engels 1895).

As Marx points out in his discussion of Carey, 'the relations of producing nations' of the time took the form of 'the international relations which produce English domination on the world market'. More generally, they take the form of the domination of the developed and industrialised powers over others, as also of collaborative or conflictual relationships among the industrialised powers. Marx also appreciates the importance of Carey's recognition that contesting this dominance is, ultimately, about pursing successful development and industrialization. This puts Marx alongside Carey, Hamilton, List and many others who recognised the centrality the role of the state in development.

Thus, imperialist domination and resistance to it through successful development constitutes the dialectical motor that drives forward the 'relations of producing nations' as long as capitalism is dominant. This understanding, shared by Marx and by later Marxists was dubbed by Trotsky 'Uneven and combined development' in his *History of the*

Russian Revolution (1934). This dialectical process, not the spread of markets or the domination of a succession of 'hegemonic' powers, have led to the spread of productive capacity beyond the north-west corner of Europe where capitalism originated.

This dialectic, between imperialism, which is, at its core, the denial of development, and anti-imperialism, which is, at its core, the pursuit of development, is the governing dialectic of the world of capitalism. In this dialectic, the dominant imperialist nations seek to impose a *complementarity* between their own high value production of technologically sophisticated goods and the low value production of the subordinated world and the latter's efforts to refuse such subordination and establish a *similarity* of productive structures by pursuing state-directed 'combined' development.

The crisis of imperialism, which is miscalled a crisis of multilateralism, has erupted because, in the contest between them, the anti-imperialist side has historically prevailed, slowly but also steadily, making the world ever more multipolar since about 1870 when the first industrial challengers to Britain's dominance industrialised. Of course, these challengers could still be capitalist chiefly because there was still room for the imperialist expansion necessary for successful capitalist development. However, since capitalism is nothing if not contradictory, the resulting imperialist competition, in which, as Lenin observed in 1916, 'For the first time the world is completely divided up, so that in the future only redivision is possible, i.e., territories can only pass from one "owner" to another, instead of passing as ownerless territory to an owner' (Lenin 1916), culminated not only in the First World War which was about nothing if not the 'redivision' of the world among imperial powers, but the veritable Thirty Years' Crisis of 1914 to 1945, including also the Great Depression and the Second World War that was umbilically tied to the First.

That the contradictions of the 'relations of producing nations' under capitalism were pregnant with precisely such catastrophic wars was widely canvassed at the time, though liberal views like Norman Agnell's (1909), that war was 'irrational' and costly and would not pay and so would not happen reigned supreme right down to the eve of the First World War. However, not only did Marx anticipate the possibility of a 'world war' in which writings on the Paris Commune and the Fran-

co-Prussian war of 1870, pointing out that the emancipation of working people 'is not accomplished anywhere within the national boundaries. The class war within French society turns into a world war, in which the nations confront one another. Accomplishment begins only at the moment when, through the world war, the proletariat is pushed to the fore of the people that dominates the world market, to the forefront in England'. Contrary to widespread assumptions that socialist revolution would involve only classes engaged in war, if at all, only of the civil sort, here Marx clearly anticipated that the path to socialist emancipation would take the form of both civil and international war.

Moreover, as early as 1887 Engels predicted the outbreak and consequences of an inter-capitalist and -imperialist world war with eerie accuracy. Witness to 'the systematic development of mutual oneupmanship in armaments' among the major powers of a now multipolar world competing for colonies, he felt that its 'climax and … its inevitable fruit' could involve

> a world war … of an extent and violence hitherto unimagined. Eight to ten million soldiers will be at each other's throats and in the process they will strip Europe barer than a swarm of locusts. The depredations of the Thirty Years' War compressed into three to four years and extended over the entire continent; famine, disease, the universal lapse into barbarism, both of the armies and the people, in the wake of acute misery; irretrievable dislocation of our artificial system of trade, industry and credit, ending in universal bankruptcy; collapse of the old states and their conventional political wisdom to the point where crowns will roll into the gutters by the dozen, and no one will be around to pick them up; the absolute impossibility of foreseeing how it will all end and who will emerge as victor from the battle. (Engels 1887)

Unfortunately, when such a world war did occur, the 'universal exhaustion and the creation of the conditions for the ultimate victory of the working class' which Engels saw as the only silver lining to this grim scenario, remained confined to Russia.

How to Lionise a Senile Capitalism: Four Ways

Even so, while it did not mark the end of capitalism and imperialism, the Thirty Years' Crisis that the First World War's outbreak did inaugurate the beginning of their end. It is important to insist on this point because after the demise of the Soviet Union the idea that socialism is bound to fail and capitalism to go on forever has become a settled opinion. Nothing is more important today than to challenge it.

Not only had imperialism, without which capitalism cannot survive or thrive, reached a peak from which it had to decline, with the narrowing of options for it, capitalism had to decline too. Though we cannot elaborate on this latter aspect further here (but see Desai 2023, 37-39), Marx had long foreseen that, once it reached its monopoly phase, as it inevitably must be given that monopoly is the end result of competition, capitalism would have exhausted all historically progressive potential it ever had and would become ripe for socialism. So, it was no historical accident that the first socialist revolution occurred as this phase climaxed in the maturing of its contradictions on the 'grandest terrain where they appear' and 'in their grandest development', the plane of international relations. And there was more. A revolutionary wave swept across Europe and even lapped at North American shores at the end of the First World War and the second major revolution against capitalism and imperialism, the Chinese Revolution, occurred at the close of the crisis period.

Our understanding of what happened after this crisis period and by implication our appreciation of the significance of this cataclysmic crisis is distorted because four interrelated narratives have emerged to obscure the enormity of the Thirty Years' Crisis for capitalism and imperialism. Only by correcting these narratives can we return to the facts on which our understanding of the present moment must rest.

The first and most important narrative is that capitalism acquired a new lease of life in the 'golden age' of growth, belying fears about its imminent end during the Thirty Years Crisis. And indeed, in addition to Marx's nineteenth century anticipations, many twentieth century thinkers such as Keynes or Polanyi had hoped and others like Hayek had feared that capitalism was about to give way to something far more socialistic. These anticipations were soon dismissed and the postwar 'golden age' of growth is Exhibit A in making this case. However, this

golden age of growth applies to the whole world. Not only did it contain fast and stably growing communist economies stretching from Prague to Pyongyang and the vast majority of the world's people and peoples in the Third World embarking on distinctly left leaning projects of national autonomous development, even in the First World of the core capitalist and imperialist countries, the historical conjuncture had forced a massive reform of capitalism in the form of Keynesian welfare state that ringed capitalism around with regulation and taxation and vastly expanded the consumption capacity of domestic working classes if only to compensate for the loss of colonial markets (Desai 2015).

So, the growth of the 'golden age' cannot be attributed primarily to capitalism but to its overthrow in the Communist world and to its considerable modification in the core capitalist countries and the developing world. This point is further reinforced when we consider that when the underlying capitalism of the core capitalist world issued, as it had to, in crisis by the 1970s and these countries chose the neoliberal path – of rolling back the 'socialistic' reforms and freeing capital from the regulation, taxation and social obligations that had been imposed on it – rather than regaining its productive vigour, it has only malingered in still-unended 'Long Downturn'. Restoring freedom to an already senile capitalism is not going to revive it.

The second narrative, engendered in particular by the work of Charles Kindleberger (1973, see also Desai 2013, 128-30), sought to normalise the historic enormity of the Thirty Years' Crisis by treating it as an 'interregnum' as the world transitioned from the tutelage of one leading power, namely the UK, to that of another, namely the US, an idea that was fundamentally a way of dressing up US ruling elites to emulate UK style world dominance as a theory (Desai 2013a, 124-152). Later, the far more erudite and authoritative World Systems writers, such as Immanual Wallerstein (1974, 1969, 1980) and Giovanni Arrighi (1994) would this idea by stretching back the idea of hegemony further back to the Dutch in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the Italian city states before that. A similar move was made with theories of so-called globalization. When they emerged in the 1990s, they were assailed by critics pointing out that the world economy had been far more interconnected and, therefore, 'globalized' before 1914 than it was in the 1990s when so many were prattling on about 'globalization'. The advocates of

'globalization', who, in their turn, were only amplifying the discourses emanating from the Clinton administration (Desai 2013a, 198-205), were hardly going to be deterred by mere facts and took refuge in the idea that there had been 'waves' of globalization, with one culminating in 1914, and after the 'interregnum' of Thirty Years' crisis and statist post war decades, there was now another. Needless to say, to call the integration of the world economy before 1914 a 'wave of globalization' was simply to erase the history of colonialism and imperialism.

The narrative of 'US hegemony' being the latest in a succession was also connected with the narrative that, notwithstanding the catastrophic crisis from which imperialism emerged so weakened thanks to the exhaustion of war, the loss of colonies and of imperial reach, somehow, with the United States taking the lead, the power of the imperialist countries was greater in the post-war period than ever before. This narrative too was mistaken: as I have argued, in reality, notwithstanding the zeal with which US ruling elites have pursued the goal of world dominance since the early 20th century, in an emulation of the UK's world dominance that had been witnessed until recently, they did not succeed and could not have. As we have already seen, the world had become multipolar well before then. Moreover, the Thirty Year's crisis introduced new types of powers, socialist ones, with whom the US had had to contend. That is why, despite lowering its sights from the scale of the UK's dominance – since there was never any chance of the US acquiring an empire of the size of the British, its ruling elites settled for making the dollar the world's money – the US never succeeded. The simple facts were that sterling was not a national but an imperial currency, able to supply the world with liquidity by exporting the surpluses extracted from its non-settler colonies to Europe, the US and its settler colonies (Desai 2013, Hudson and Desai XXX and Desai 2018), the US could never do that. Supplying the world with liquidity by running deficits was subject to the Triffin Dilemma: the higher the deficits the lower the attractiveness of the dollar. This had already produced a crisis of the dollar by the early 1960s and, after a decade during which all other expedients were exhausted, the dollar went off gold. Since then, what looks like continuous dollar dominance has, in fact, been the result of a series of expansions of dollar-dominated financial activity which, by

increasing financial demand for the dollar, has sought to counteract the Triffin Dilemma.

So, rather than US hegemony, we have witnessed the age of Cold War bi-polarity followed, after the USSR's demise occurred for entirely internal reasons (Kotz 1997) having nothing to do with the superiority of capitalism or liberal democracy, nor with the efficacy of US or Western pressure, by the briefest of moments of so-called 'unipolarity' – it was more a matter of appearances than realities – after which, already by the early twenty-first century, the US was battling the challenge of socialist China and, after the 2008 financial crisis, talk of multipolarity became more widely heard.

Finally, contrary to the idea that the demise of the Soviet Union marked the end of the hopes for socialism, as the title of an excellent book (Martinez 2020) contesting that view has it, paraphrasing Churchill, the end of the Soviet Union was not the end of socialism, it was not the beginning of the end of socialism but, rather, it was the end of the beginning of socialism. It was, of course, setback to the advance of socialism. However, while it lasted, the Soviet Union had inspired and aided many other socialisms, pre-eminently the Chinese (Cheng and Yang 2020), even playing a critical role in protecting it from nuclear attack in its early decades. Even though it was far from expansionist, and had become, thanks to the imperatives of its own survival, 'basically conservative… . . [seeking] to maintain the worldwide status quo" (Mandel 1983, 28; emphasis in the original), the inability of capitalism to offer anything remotely resembling satisfactory social and human development to the overwhelming majority of the world meant that, independent revolutions against capitalism and imperialism kept erupting. They forced the USSR to confront an "agonizing choice." Should it let "these forces develop as independent political centres of world politics, with the potential to become a rival revolutionary centre . . . or . . . 'recuperate' them through the distribution of controlled economic and military assistance" (Mandel 1983, 40; emphasis in the original)? On addition, amid the otherwise unfortunate Sino-Soviet split, the two major socialist powers competed with one another to extend the influence of their respective socialisms (Friedman 2015) and, of course, of socialism in general.

This narrative of the demise of the socialist experiment also assumes, wrongly, that China has become capitalist: on the contrary, its

successes on the manufacturing, growth, ecological, cultural and social fronts are all down to its socialism (Martinez 2023). As capitalism and imperialism enter a senile, miserly and violent dotage, more and more of the world will be confronted with taking one or another type of non-capitalist road and, undoubtedly, hundreds of flowers of nationally distinct socialist experiments can be expected to bloom.

The Crisis of Imperialism

With the interpretation of the history of the last century and more thus clarified, we are better able to understand the current crisis not as a crisis of multilateralism but one of imperialism. The geopolitical economy of the postwar system of international economic governance was the result of the compromise between US's supranational or cosmopolitan or imperial approach and the rest of the world's multilateralism aiming to accommodate their need to breach liberal principles in the interests of recovery, socialism and development. The principal parameters of the outcome of this clash can be briefly listed.

At Bretton Woods and thereafter, the US desire to reconstruct a liberal world order of the pre-1914 sort could not be fulfilled. Instead, it had to had to accept the creation of the United Nations and, though it corrupted its one nation one vote with the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council consisting of the 'big powers', it could not confine membership of this elite group to imperial powers alone: thanks to their critical, indeed indispensable, contribution to winning the Second World War, the Security Council had to include the Soviet Union and China (then Taiwan province and only since 1978 the People's Republic) among these 5 permanent members. Unhappy about this, the US, having already initiated the Cold War as part of its larger imperial project in which Communism was its strongest adversary (Desai and Heller 2019), took over processes already in train among major European countries – Britain, France and the Benelux countries – to forestall renewed German expansionism to establish first the North Atlantic Treaty and, once the Korean War necessitated common military action, the formation of NATO in 1951. Unable to act while the Soviet Union existed, since 1991 it has come out in its true light as an imperialist organization that has always had an uneasy relationship with the United

Nations in which anti-imperialist forces were preponderant and at least capable of a veto even in the Security Council.

At Bretton Woods, though the US used its war-wrought power to prevent any alternative to the dollar, such as 'bancor' issued by a multilateral International Clearing Union proposed by Keynes (Desai 2009), from being realised and left the world with no alternative to the US dollar as world money, the US had to agree to continue backing it with gold at the going rate of $35 per oz. Worse, it had to curb its zeal for supranational liberalism and accept both capital controls and trade restrictions, without which its capitalist allies could prove vulnerable to economic breakdown and communism. The US also could not prevent the multilateralist ITO from being agreed, not least because it had to balance the interests of opening up the developing world with diminishing the empires of its allies. Though Congress failed to ratify it, the fallback GATT agreement operated on a multilateral, not supranational, basis thanks to the needs of European recovery and thereafter thanks to an increasingly organised Third World. So certain rights of development – to use protection, employ industrial policy – which went athwart liberal principles had to be accepted in the GATT. They were further expanded in GATT's Tokyo Round of trade negotiations of the 1970s and were also incorporated into the WTO. Without this, China's accession into the organization in 2000 would not have been possible.

The US scored its biggest victories with the IMF and the World Bank, securing vetoes for itself in their design, though they would remain relatively obscure until their heyday in the 1980s and 1990s when became the most prominent international governance organization thanks to their role as bailiffs for Western private creditors amid the Third World Debt crisis and the enforcers of development-retarding neoliberal policies. However, the communist world remained outside these institutions, regarding them, not unreasonably, as 'branches of Wall Street' (Block 1977).

While we cannot examine the evolution of these institutions in any detail, we may note that the Third World push for multilateralism culminated in the demands for a New International Economic Order and many of its proposal were realised in the Tokyo Round of GATT negotiations. The 1980s and particularly the 1990s witnessed a short-lived phase when US supranationalism appeared triumphant. However,

the period remained brief with talk BRICS and multipolarity emerging in the 2000s and 2010s respectively. The WTO, though launched with much fanfare as the flagship of US-led efforts to impose a supranational neoliberal regime on the world, then dubbed 'globalization', it remained primarily multilateral rather then supranational. And the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, another supranational neoliberal and globalization pipedream that would have turned the whole world borderless for US and Western corporations, was never agreed.

So, what is today called the crisis of multilateralism is, in reality, a crisis of imperialism which, in our time, has taken the form of US supranationalist cosmopolitan neoliberalism, effectively an effort to erase borders and therefore any attempt by societies to protect and develop themselves in the only way this has been possible since the earliest days of capitalism. That crisis has been long in the making and has reached something of a climax today. Though the crisis today takes violent and conflictual forms, thanks largely to the refusal of the US and its allies to understand and accept their fate with good grace, it is also allowing true multilateralism to emerge from under the vain attempt to impose cosmopolitan supranationalism. China, Russia and other countries opposed to the predations of US and Western imperialism are moving forward in true multilateralist fashion to set up institutions for international governance that are based on the principles of mutual benefit and serve their peaceful and developmental purposes.

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Democratic Global Governance with UN Reforms: Toward the Future Multipolar World

Jan Oberg

”There are those that look at things the way they are, and ask why?
I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?”
George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)
Irish playwright, critic, polemicist and political activist,
Nobel Literature Prize laureate 1925.

Introduction - Why science must focus on possible and better futures

This is written in Sweden, in a Europe where the risk of war—most likely a conventional war between NATO and Russia—has increased markedly. We live in a time characterised by failure to solve humanity’s most urgent, existential problems, such as reducing poverty and militarism and stopping what is euphemistically called climate change, i.e. global environmental warming and rampant destruction of our environment.

Thus, it can be argued that, measured on essential criteria, the global system is approaching limits beyond which there will be no return. In an extreme scenario, the use of nuclear weapons would imply both omnicide (of human beings) and ecocide (of Nature). It is, therefore, no wonder that many people turn a blind eye to reality, delve into entertainment, focus on their identity and appearance, and go about their ”near” everyday activities feeling helpless or depressed at what they watch on the news (if they have not dropped the news completely).

While psychologically very understandable, this is devastating for every type of democracy and for the prospects of saving the world or, at least, changing it somewhat for the better. However, this reaction of hopelessness and resignation - resigning from the larger dimensions of humanity into the culture of ”me,” the world of play and games, pleasurable escapist activities, etc. - is exactly where society’s power players would like their citizens to be. Elites can make decisions to their own benefit more easily if their citizenry has given up engaging in society and the larger world.

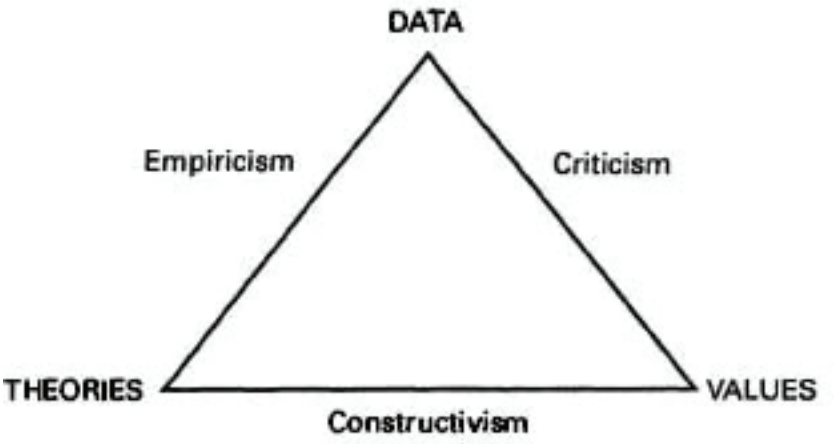
I don't want to sound moralistic, but in my view, this is *not* a choice for an intellectual or a genuinely devoted change-maker. I would argue that it's a professional duty to use the imagination and outline *constructive "futures"* and strategies to realise them, put them out for debate and avoid both criticism-only and defeatism.

There are various reasons behind this standpoint.

A peace researcher must be inspired by Gandhi's Constructive Program and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Beloved Community - that is, the necessity of constructive thinking - or, as it is often phrased: plant a tree even if the world may end tomorrow - or, light a candle rather than curse the darkness.

Changing the world, big or small, cannot be fuelled by only empirical knowledge of what is wrong or critiquing what's being done wrongly. It can only be the result of constructive thinking, of a vision - of something we work *for* and not only by working against something.

The pioneer of peace and future studies, Johan Galtung (1930-2024 and one of my mentors) saw this as an integral part of the scientific investigation. Thus, what we do in social science in general and peace and future studies in particular is an interplay between three things - Data, Theory and Values, thus:



The classical—but limited—science process involves developing hypotheses about how the world works, testing them using consistent methods, and concluding what can be said about the world with reliabil-

ity and validity. This is the main paradigm of natural science, but it is woefully insufficient for social science.

George Bernard Shaw: *"There are those that look at things the way they are, and ask why?".* In social science, we must acknowledge that we are investigating something that we ourselves are, in a fundamental sense, part of. That means being very aware of our values and how they influence our interpretations. There is no perfectly objective truth possible - objectivity is nothing but inter-/ or multi-subjectivity: Something *can* be confirmed with the same quality methods employed by a number of scientists who come to the same conclusion about how the world works. If just one comes to another result with the same methodology, the theory cannot be confirmed. But it can still be discussed and lead to new, refining research.

This is where the similarities between peace research and another goal-oriented science, medicine, become clear. A good doctor makes a knowledge- and experience-based diagnosis but does not leave the patient with a prognosis to the effect that the patient will soon be dead. An absolutely essential element in medicine is to answer the fundamental question: Given what we know, what can be done to create health and prevent a fallback to the disease? That is treatment or therapy *vis-a-vis* the individual, and - in a similar manner - peace and future research produces exactly that type of future thinking, visions - simply new concepts and good ideas - at a higher level: How to create a better world and devise scenarios and strategies on how to realise them despite - and beyond - the present crisis situation.

People in power are not afraid of criticism; they live in a world of criticism from peers, the media and the citizens. What we can assume that they are afraid of is that there exist much better ideas and strategies than their own and that millions of people shall begin to do two things: 1) Ask themselves: Why did I not think of that? and 2) Decide to mobilise people for change with a positive vision based on the conviction that that is much healthier for me than becoming more and more frustrated by only criticising the present.

The idea that There Is No Alternative (TINA) - and therefore also only one narrative - is what politicians adore and cultivate on their way to authoritarianism. Democracy, in contrast, recognises that The Are Only Alternatives (TAOA) - and many possible narratives. TINA people

see only the past and present. TAOA people see various possible and desirable futures.

That illustrates why research on peace and research on futures are so intimately connected—they are two sides of the same coin. Peace is about envisioning a future that is fundamentally different from the present, with its armament, militarism, warfare, social inequality, and far too much violence against other peoples, genders, cultures, and Mother Earth. Peace is about how we can realise (hidden) potentials that are now being violently abused by the dark forces of the present.

In other words, we are grappling with this issue: What kind of (academic) thinking promotes democracy, vibrant societal dialogues and strategies for constructive change - what serves to create ”critical mass” for nonviolent revolutionary change for the betterment of humankind - and before it is too late? What can liberate our minds from the dystopian, repressive past and present and free our minds for the future?

This is probably where the traditionalist, positivist empirical science advocate would break in and say: No way! You cannot call it *science* if there is no empirical evidence - and you cannot produce empirical evidence about the future, because - simply put - it does not exist yet and cannot be measured by any method. My answer is: *”That’s outdated thinking by which you only focus on the past and the present, dear colleague! We cannot change the past. And we cannot change the present before we know where we want to go. So how do you see the possible futures?”*

As social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1943) argued “there is nothing as practical as a good theory.” Good theories - and theories are nothing but ordered clusters of hypotheses - about the future are extremely practical. Science simply can not leave the question, “What to do?” to politicians, who tend to be neither practical nor theoretical but stuck in the short-term present. Instead, *as part of the research process,* we must produce ideas and strategies beyond the present—expand the time and space horizons—and *change the empirical reality* until it fits our *values* of what is desirable, given what our empirical work has yielded.

George Bernard Shaw: ”*I dream of things that never were, and ask why not?”.* That may sound like turning science on its head. Most social scientists were told during their education that we must revise our theory and its hypotheses in the light of our results until our theory fits reality.

That, however, can never lead to change, only to confirmation of what is - and what is wrong. That is what in Galtung's brilliantly simple model above is called *"constructivism."* Neglecting that is to just hand over social science to be (mis)used by people in power and signal that they, better than people in the know, can create a better world. That sort of thinking may have had some - empirical - value and relevance decades ago when creative, visionary politicians indeed did exist, but today's general Western leadership exhibits no such qualities. For many, it seems that even thinking four election years ahead is too challenging…

One critical aspect of the constructivist approach is that it changes the discourse. When we present criticism of what there is, we operate within the discourse of the present; we re-act to something we do not like - say over-armament or threats of war. Arguing against that will always take place *within the paradigm and the discourse* of those we criticise. It is a fundamentally defensive strategy. If, instead, you argue, "Why do you not avoid war by taking the following constructive steps towards conflict-resolution?" - you set the agenda, shape the discourse, and put the advocate of the negative present—of the war—in a defensive mode.

Another critically important aspect of this constructivist approach is that it offers much more *positive energy.* It can operate on empathy and good will, keeping people hopeful. It also does not imply an attack on anyone. People can work *for* something for as long as it may take, but human beings tend to give up if they only fight *against* somebody or something and do not "win" relatively quickly; that is when they say: This is impossible, I give up. Or they continue struggling but are increasingly driven by anger and even hatred.

This may be a classical psychological observation - but there is at least one basic philosophical addition I'd like to make: Remember, that until we have tried to create that better world, we do not *know* what is possible and what is not. That is why it is too easy for traditionalists to just kill good ideas with - Oh, isn't that unrealistic? Are you not too idealist/romantic/naive…?

When those words are uttered, it's quite likely that something exciting, new and perhaps even correct has been said or done. The beauty of constructivism is that it invites intellectual and practical experimentation. It is no coincidence that Gandhi's most well-known book is entitled,

”My *Experiments* With Truth.” In what follows below, I make a modest attempt at practising what has now been preached.

Democracy

Popularly speaking, democracy is often equated with “government *of* the people, *by* the people, *for* the people,” as famously articulated by US President Abraham Lincoln. He did not say democracy because that word does not exist in any US foundation document. Jack Matlock (2024), the last US ambassador to the Soviet Union, argues that:

> *”The fact is, the United States is not a democracy. That word does not occur in any of our foundation documents. It is not in the Declaration of Independence, or in the Constitution, or in the pledge of allegiance (“to the flag of the United States of America and the republic for which it stands,”) or in the oath of office every federal official takes.*
> *The United States is a republic which at present is controlled by an oligarchy. It is also becoming more authoritarian. The separation of powers among the three branches of government, essential to avoid autocracy, is deeply eroded.”*

So, the leader of the democratic, free Western world is not (even) a democracy. Despite that - probably surprising to a few - democracy is a core feature of Western society, normally understood as *representative* parliament – i.e. in free elections, citizens vote for people to represent their interests in a parliament consisting of parties of which some form the government and some the opposition. It must be added that democracy requires a reasonable level of knowledge and information that is freely available. For instance, while India is often cited as the world’s biggest democracy, 26% of the population (287 million people) is still illiterate. So the “world’s largest democracy” also has the world’s largest population who can’t read and write. In comparison, China’s illiterate

citizens make up about 3% and that country is regularly called a dictatorship by the West.

Furthermore, in a society where the persons running for office are – or have to be – extremely wealthy to pay for their campaigns and where large corporations make multi-million dollar contributions to certain candidates (presumably not out of altruism), falls outside a reasonable definition of democracy – even though they may also not be dictatorships; there are many stations in-between the two. Whatever merits democracy can be said to have, it is not that easy to distinguish between the democracy propaganda and true democracy. More about that below.

Are young people giving up parliamentary democracy? When I was in my high school years – a few decades ago – and wanted to contribute to changing society for the better, the most natural - and finest - thing to do was to join a political party. Not so today. My students in peace studies around the world often ask me at the end of a course when it is time to say goodbye whether I can help them somehow in making their career. Their career dreams may be to work for the UN, for human rights and the environment, start their own NGO with a peace profile or set up their own consultancy firm for a better world.

Significantly, over all these years, only one student asked me what I thought about contributing to peace and development by becoming a politician. As is well-known, people today engage in social issues mainly through civil society and the use of social media and protests as their primary tools. This is good from most perspectives and holds fascinating prospects for de facto global citizenship and action, but it also does something to the old type of representative democracy populated by parties as they still make up the system's main decision-makers.

When we talk about global crises, people think much more of the environment, identity issues or warfare than of democracy being in crisis. I think Western democracy is in fundamental crisis for at least the following reasons.

The crisis of democracy - selected points

1. The state is being challenged from below and from above.

Democracy is tied to the state, to "my country" where I go and vote, and not to the world society. But the state is getting weaker due to pressures from both below and above. It's often stated that global problems can only be solved by supra-national co-operation but those issues are discussed in various interest and regional associations and ad hoc forums. There exist no democratic decision-making mechanisms at the global level.

2. Society's economic issues dominate

The primary cluster of issues discussed in democracies is the economy, and that threatens to reduce democracy to the politics of the wallet. The pervasive focus on the economy signifies a) that national democratic politics conducted in parliament's functions to try to mitigate the effects of the economic globalisation that is roaring ahead, and b) that most of society's problems and challenges are managed through economic parameters, the market. Or, rather, the marketisation/commodification of virtually everything. One may question whether in Western (neo) liberal societies, the market is more of a decision-maker than democracy itself.

3. Materialism over life values

Parliamentary democracy's obsession with - capitalist - economics makes it uninteresting or unviable for those who believe that democratic debate should also deal with values, ethics, and concepts such as justice and peace. Over the last 2-3 decades, democracies have phased out every quality of intellectualism and philosophy – even public discussions of visions of a better future society citizens may want to prioritise.

4. A time horizon far too short

The perspective of 4 years – from one election to the next – is, of course, hopelessly inadequate in a world that is haunted by complex problems, the solutions of which would require that we all operated with time horizons of, say, 10-25 years, or more. The visionary politician who

has a long-term vision simply doesn't fit and can hardly be found in today's Western parliaments.

5. National parliaments less and less important

Less and less of what decides the future of our countries is decided by national parliaments. Instead, the real binding decisions that influence our lives and those of our children are taken by larger, more distant and elite-based structures such as Wall Street, NATO, the EU, the IMF, banks, stock market manipulations, etc. When they have made up their deals, national parliaments have to cope with how to adapt and adjust to the global framework conditions.

6. Global economy and military but only national democracy

The most globalising sectors of our societies are the corporate world (think, for instance, of the global economy/market, exchange rates, borrowing, trade, investments, finance, infrastructure, global sourcing, etc.) and the military (think of weapons production, weapons exports, bases, interventionism, war planning, doctrines, long-range-missiles, satellites, navigation systems, anti-submarine warfare, regional and global wars, and nuclear annihilation).

The elites in those two spheres of society think globally. They see the world as one system in which to operate. While the nation-state—their own country—may be important to them, it is not their primary, chosen perspective in time and space. Therefore, democracy's perhaps biggest problem is that we don't even have the embryo of a global democracy that can match these two powerful actors.

7. Politicians must choose between getting elected and speaking the truth

Candidates in democratic election campaigns can't be honest even if they want to. Any candidate has to promise "gold and green forests" about how much better we will live and consume in the future if only we vote for her or his party. Someone who hopes to make a political career can't tell the voting citizenry that we must also take some painful steps and give up some activities to save the planet for future generations.

Power is about promises - whether kept or not after election day - and there is, therefore, very little ”gold” and ”green forests” left.

To a dangerously large extent, democracy now rests on pulling the wool over the citizes’ eyes when it comes to the state of the world and what it would take to solve, deeply and broadly, say the environmental problems.

In addition, democracy is a very slow decision-making process in a world where complex solutions are urgently needed.

8. Politics becomes public relations which replaces knowledge

Politics is increasingly seen and practised as a game, pragmatic navigation, positioning, and horse trading. In general, reforms, laws and political standpoints are marketed and sold to the citizens as if they were commodities. For that, you need short, punchy soundbites, spin doctors and marketing campaigns, whereas traditional public dialogues and debates throughout society are too time-consuming and imply a meeting between elites and masses (and could lead to a change in what decision-makers have already decided over and above their citizens’ heads).

Media developments are resulting in shorter and shorter statements. Everything must be expressed within a maximum of, say, 30 seconds, and the concentration span is decreasing. Deliver the essence in 30 seconds, or we lose our viewers! In terms of public education and furthering democratic debates, it’s a vicious circle.

This leads to *personal positioning rather than perspectives of substance.* As a politician, you don’t have to *know* much about the complexities of, say, the Middle East or Ukraine; it has become more important to be able to take sides—good guys versus bad guys. Narratives, which are often incredibly simplistic, are frequently imported from a power centre abroad, such as Washington or Brussels.

So, instead of publicly educational dialogues (exploring issues) and debates (allowing various standpoints to meet and be backed up by arguments), citizens are fed the typical sports match-like televised confrontations: Our policies are better than yours! And the one who is most eloquent, deceives more smartly or is nicely dressed ”wins” the confidence and the votes.

Thanks to modern communication and media demands, the time available for knowledge-based political decision-making has been re-

duced enormously during the last 20-30 years. This impacts the quality of most decisions negatively.

And like all coins, this coin has a second side: Corporations and their brands increasingly mix and melt into politics. For instance, the Edelman Trust Barometer for 2024 states that

> *"With politics top of mind for consumers, they see brand actions through a political lens: nearly 8 in 10 consumers feel brands are doing things they consider political or politically motivated. But consumers do not want brands to shy away from politics. In fact, they expect brands to address key issues like climate change, fair pay, reskilling, public health, and diversity, seeing their action as pivotal to societal progress. And 71 per cent of global respondents say brands must take a stance on issues when under pressure, while only 12 per cent say that brands must avoid taking a position."*

In recent times, we have seen how corporations express/brand themselves as anti-Russian and pro-Ukrainian - while they lie very low when it comes to positioning themselves vis-a-vis Israel's genocide on Palestinians.

To summarise, while Western society's *political* sphere becomes more commercial and market/marketing-oriented, the *economic* sphere—corporations and their brands—seems to become more political. These long-term trends may further undermine the 'classical' theory and practice of democracy.

Closely related to these two sides of this coin - that cannot, however, have three sides - is that money *influences and corrupts politics*. In almost all constitutional democracies, citizens and corporations can donate money to election campaigns and political parties. The point hardly needs elaboration, also not right after the US elections in the autumn of 2024. And it is all stated succinctly in Greg Palast's book *"The Best Democracy Money Can Buy"*.

9. Politics as a calling versus a career path

Once, politics had a focus on aiming to promote a particular future development, and ideological differences between parties were

visible. Today's politics has become more of a profession, a career option; you take some years in politics and then go on to corporate business board rooms or whatever that may give you fame and funds.

People with a burning passion for some social issue choose not to become politicians but instead join NGOs, blog, do social media or become entrepreneurs. As my students mentioned above have taught me. Politics, rather, attracts people *without* such passion – except perhaps for personal privileges, limousines, and frequent 1st class travels paid by taxpayers. And, not to forget, for the attraction to power.

This means that politics no longer attracts the visionary leader, the charismatic personality type who can inspire the young, those for whom politics should be made. With the standard exception stated – and there *are* individual exceptions to the above – most politicians lack humour (at least on-stage), charisma, enthusiasm, personality and vision – combining to make democratic activities and debates utterly boring most of the time.

10. Democracy is about voting but not about selecting

Most people rightly believe that democracy is distinguished by the citizens voting for some person or party and laws or voting yes or no to some alternatives set up by the political elites (also called referendum). But democracy's fundamental idea is not to vote on an issue set up in advance by people we do not know. Democracy is - should be - to contribute to establishing the agenda in the first place.

Democracy is also not to decide between only two alternatives, like: Shall Switzerland remain a neutral country in the future? Yes or No! Ideally, it would be to develop a broader spectrum (moulded and changed by public education and debate) of which, say, neutrality is only one option/alternative among several.

Genuine democracy is about setting agendas. It's not about voting yes or no to somebody's pre-determined and more or less cunning agenda and candidates.

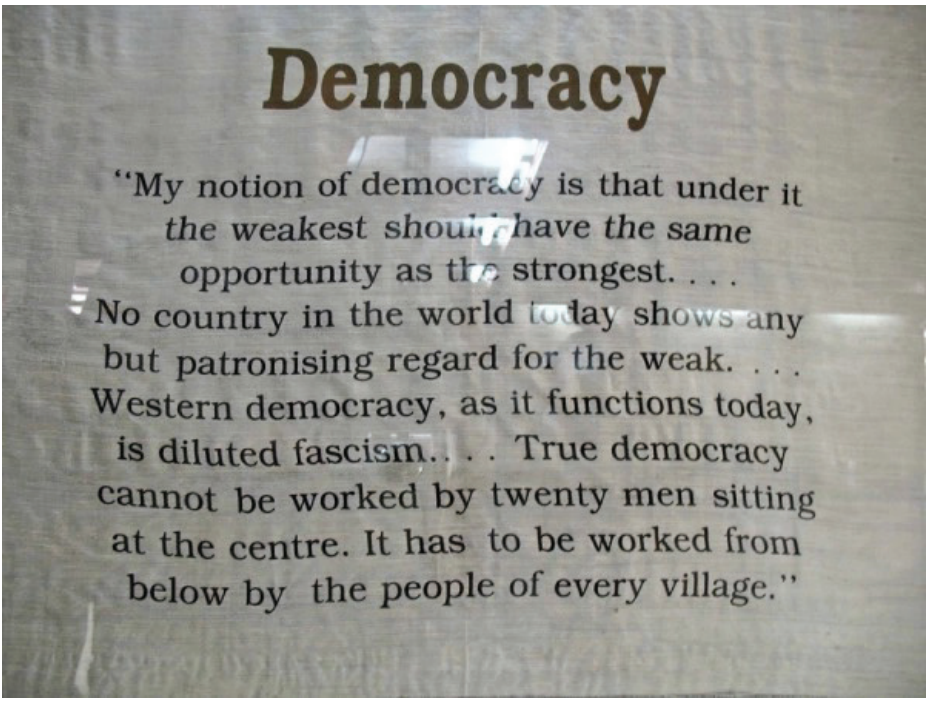
You could, perhaps, summarise it all by saying that democracy is no longer *lived*, it is being *performed*. It's become a ritual without much ethos.

11. Citizens' sense of not getting through to decision-makers

The sentiments expressed by an increasing proportion of citizens in the Western world is that it is extremely difficult to "get through" to the people who make decisions on the top. That is, frankly, my own experience over the decades, too.

Compared with a few decades ago, these top decision-makers also seem to feel it less important to be in direct dialogue with their constituencies. While before, it was a duty to send answers back to a citizen in an envelope, they no longer receive even an email or other response when writing to their representatives or ministers. The political system has its gatekeepers, and even if you send constructive proposals or research reports to politicians, it is naive to expect a reply, acknowledgement of receipt or a word of thank you. The same, by the way, applies to attempts at communicating with the media world.

In summary, I find it difficult to disagree with Gandhi's radical criticism almost a hundred years ago:



Mohandas K. Gandhi's famous statement

In one of his last interviews, French existentialist philosopher *Jean-Paul Sartre* (1905-1980) said that every time a citizen votes, s/he gives away power. That statement points to the essential, classical distinction between *representative* democracy and *direct* democracy. In the first, the voter delegates to someone else who has convinced/seduced her or him to take care of citizens' interests.

We know this generally leads to false promises and considerable disappointment with politics. In the second, citizens take issues into their own hands—which, of course, has disadvantages and encompasses a whole series of other problems, not the least of which is how to organise it. That said, without a vibrant, active, and educated citizenship, genuine democracy becomes impossible.

Least bad but far from good enough

In summary, while democracy perhaps still remains the least bad system, we should take care not to equate that statement with democracy being good enough. Comparing Western democracy with authoritarian regimes over time does not prove its quality or perfection. Every good system can and should be improved—i.e., we need *to democratise democracy* to simplify it a bit. At least some elements of it ought to be taken to higher levels—globalising democracy to democratise the globe and its outdated Westphalian-national(ist) decision-making procedures.

Secondly, Western democracies will have to accept and respect that there can be non-Western models of democracy and that these are not necessarily un- or anti-democratic and should not necessarily be fought. No system should become universal. We are all better off with unity in diversity, also when it comes to democratic governance.

Complacency in this matter could easily and rapidly lead the West towards the authoritarianism that it maintains that it is the antidote to. Such indicators are already flourishing…

UN reform and global governance

The United Nations, the world's single most important peace-visionary organisation, turns 80 on October 24, 2025. Since its establishment in 1986, TFF has been focused on promoting Article 1 of the UN

Charter, which states that *peace shall be brought about by peaceful means.* That is a Gandhian inspiration. As he said "the means are the goals in the making." You can *not* use destructive means to achieve constructive goals.

Regrettably, people often accuse the UN of being too expensive, too bureaucratic, too ineffective, too corrupt, or too this and that. Here is why this author considers such statements intellectually poor - and dangerous too:

First, as Norwegian *Trygve Lie,* the UN's first Secretary-General, stated, the UN will never become stronger or better than its member states want it to be (see more Ravndal 2023). Sadly, they are still far more nationalist than globalist. Lie's words are still spot-on correct. They simply mean that *it is the member states (some more than others) that behave internationally and in their UN policies in ways that weaken the world organisation and its norms, undermine its power and role, and marginalise its operations*.

Secondly, those who say that the world could just as well close down the "outdated" UN just don't consider how small its budget is and how impossible it would be to make the world a better place with so few funds, given the destructive forces that are pitted against the UN and its norms by the world's MIMACs - Military-Industrial-Media-Academic Complexes. The *UN regular budget* for 2024 is USD 3.59 billion, nearly USD 300 million more than the previous year's budget (UN 2023). This budget supports the core functions of the UN Secretariat *and* includes funding for various operations, including peacebuilding efforts. The total annual expenditures of all its member agencies (such as WHO, UNICEF, etc.) are US$50-60 billion.

Now, compare that with the costs of *global militarism:* Today, the UN members spend the highest-ever total global sum on military expenditures, US$2400 billion. This means that world military expenditures are 666 *times* larger than the UN's regular basic budget, including peacekeeping and about 40 *times* larger than the sum of all the - good - things the UN and its family organisations do. What fires can you prevent or extinguish if militarist pyromaniacs have 40 *times* more resources at their disposal to start new fires? Admittedly, this is a rhetorical question, but it makes an existentially important point: *The world's priorities are*

absurd, if not perverse, and there are still virtually no discussions of these priorities.

Most people seem to accept that this unimaginable waste of humanity's resources is the price to pay for what is euphemistically called 'security'. However, as of writing this at the end of 2024, warfare is looming large, at least in Europe, and virtually all countries worldwide plan to increase their military expenditures.

Thirdly, whether intended or not, these critics implicitly say: We'd rather have a world run by the US Empire (and a few others) than by the UN. This is a dangerous way of thinking that totally undermines international law and the extremely important UN Charter – the most Gandhian document the world's governments have ever signed.

It deserves to be pointed out that at this particular moment of global and UN history, there are reasons to be extremely concerned about the very future of the United Nations in the light of US President Donald Trump's attitude to the UN and the people he has appointed to manage the UN policy of the US. See Thalif Deen's *"US Envoy-in-Waiting Blasts UN as Corrupt – & Threatens Funding Cut"* at the Inter Press Sevice of November 29, 2024.

This is definitely *not* the time to criticise "the UN" as such, at least not without also presenting visionary reform proposals and proposals for global governance. There is no doubt that saving humankind and our common global future goes through the United Nations and its Charter norms – not as the only change-maker but as the most central.

It is certainly true that the UN must be reformed. But as we show below, *governments and people, including the media and politicians, need to reform their attitudes and policies regarding the UN much more*.

When we give it a more profound thought, this issue is part of a much larger process of democratising decision-making beyond the national and regional level *and begin to think of global governance in completely new, future-adapted ways*.

If and when humankind develops something far better than the UN, we may switch to that and close down the UN as we know it today. But not a second before that has happened.

And that new institution shall not be located in the member state that has harmed the UN the most. But until that moment, let's make the present UN stronger so it can eventually do what it was intended to: Serve the

common good and abolish war - and make peace by peaceful - civilised - means, thus making the use of collective violence the absolutely last resort.

”We, the people” must work on that from below since “They, the governments” have consistently violated that tremendously important Article 1 and the entire normative framework embedded in the UN Charter. And continues to do so!

Below, please find a series of proposals for global democracy and a strong UN. Some will surely find proposals such as these ”unrealistic” or ”romantic.” That’s what many also thought and said when it was suggested that slavery should be abolished, when Europeans protested the deployment of nuclear intermediate-range missiles in the 1980s and did get rid of them, when it was predicted that the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact would soon dissolve and the Berlin Wall come down…or when people started campaigning to reduce smoking tobacco…

Let us first focus on democracy in relation to the United Nations. It deserves emphasis that there are many problems pertaining to democracy and the *global system* (we avoid calling it ’the international community’ since inter-national is an outdated term, the US has misused it for the Western world only, and ’community’ de facto doesn’t exist in these times where the West is self-isolating through rampant militarism and confrontational policies).

First, democracy itself is a complicated term and what philosophers call an *essentially contested concept*. But this is not the place to write a treatise on what democracy is philosophically.

Second, what to do with the fact that democracy, although perhaps being the least bad theory so far, is considered “pseudo” and ineffective and is systematically circumvented by a number of power elites in the Western world (and Japan)?

Third, it is a Western-biased concept that is most often taken to imply only elements such as a multi-party system, equality before the law, free speech, free elections and a set of social institutions such as parliaments and the free press. Thus, many considered the Soviet Union a dictatorship because it has one party and the United States a democracy because

it has two parties. However, true democracy is also about a special political culture that naturally seeks to incorporate non-majorities.

Fourth, while democratisation is desirable, how do we avoid, on the one hand, the politico-cultural imperialism of universalising a deeply Western definition and concept/theory and, on the other, the cultural particularism in which any system or dictator is permitted to call a society democratic with reference to local values and interpretations?

Fifth, there is no democracy at the international level, no institutions that resemble those of the nation-states; therefore, we will have to build on the only globally-oriented institution that *can* be reformed in the direction of a multi-cultural democratic institution at the supranational level: the U.N. But the UN itself must be democratised, and it must come to embody, sooner rather than later, a democratised world order. It is time to take *"we, the peoples"* seriously and look into which peoples should be given a say in world – and UN – affairs. The catchword here, of course, is *popular sovereignty,* i.e., a systematic acknowledgement of the principle that sovereignty resides with the world's peoples, with global citizenry.

Sixth, as pointed out by Gandhi, democracies are based on regress to violence (armies, state repression, prisons, courts, capital punishment, etc.) to uphold their order. And all democracies, with exceptions such as Costa Rica, Iceland and perhaps a few more, profit/benefit from arms exports and they support, more often than not, political interventionism and nuclearism. In other words, Western democracy and Western militarism are deeply intertwined - although it is still empirically true that democracies usually don't go to (military) war with other countries they consider democratic - which does not exclude that economic warfare can be pursued.

Seventh, the same could be said about the attitudes in most democracies about the relationship between society and Nature. Modern democracies' complete, general entanglement in capitalism entails environmental destruction. The democratic world, not communism or dictatorships, chops

down rain forests and kills species, languages, and "primitive" cultures, and it has done so for centuries.

Fortunately, the environment and socio-economic (mal)development serve more convincingly than any other problem as arguments for restructuring existing international organisations, creating new ones, and changing the meaning of government politics to encompass the regional and global levels. This is what *eco-politics* is about.

Today, the United Nations is totally unable to deal effectively with this civilisational challenge. The fact that *sustainable development* is a concept that has come to stay points to the necessity of establishing an entirely new organisation within the United Nations. Additionally, the environmental agenda is the one that, more than others, seem to reflect the common interest of all humankind.

The Board of the Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research, TFF, in Sweden published TFF Statement # V entitled *A United Nations of the Future. What 'We, the Peoples' and Governments Can Do to Help the U.N. Help Ourselves* (1991). In it, we suggested radical reforms in peacekeeping, development and environment and democratisation of the U.N. itself and of the world community.

Here follow some of the proposals - revised, re-phrased and updated where necessary:

- **The UN Security Council must be reformed and the veto power be restricted.**

The exceptionally strong influence of the five permanent Security Council members is incompatible with any conceptualisation of global democracy. Likewise, its composition does not reflect the global society and its dynamic changes.

Perhaps there should be no permanent Security Council members - and certainly not those that are the most highly armed, war-fighting and nuclear states? Perhaps there ought to be a Security Council with no permanent members but a Council where membership changes at intervals so that, over time, all member states have taken their turn at the Security Council?

The veto power of the permanent members of the Security Council (SC) ought to disappear or its use restricted to certain areas

and situations. Instead of the veto power, the SC could work with a double majority among the permanent members and among the elected members. Whatever we prefer, we can no longer ignore the need for a comprehensive reform of the Security Council, its membership criteria, and modes of operation.

We believe that a gradual fading away of the veto power is not only desirable but also possible. Furthermore, it is important to strengthen the remunerative, peaceful and democratic powers of the Secretary-General and a new leadership structure as well as the General Assembly in the future rather than relying on the negative power of the veto. Hence:

- **The UN needs a stronger Secretary-General and a new leadership organisation.**

The provisions for the functions of the Secretary-General (particularly Articles 99 and 100) are, in fact, the only concession made in the Charter to supranationality. However, to fulfil all the requirements of a Secretary-General laid down in the Charter and practices developed since then, not to mention the personal qualities demanded, a superhuman personality is required.

Collective leadership in the top echelon is now a necessity. It could consist of five: the Secretary-General him- or herself, the three deputies – for peace and security, economic, environmental and social matters and for administration and management. The fifth would be a new deputy in charge of relations with the public, the non-governmental and the private sector.

- **The General Assembly should be invigorated.**

The General Assembly (GA) may have the most important role in the future in raising political awareness on global issues. It could sponsor Special Sessions to communicate the facts, evaluations, and urgency to a broader audience.

The GA's legislative authority needs to be binding and linked to actions decided upon simultaneously (as well as their financing). It has to be a consensus decision, and there need to be legally binding conventions. The November 1950 *"United Action for Peace" Resolution* provided that the General Assembly would meet to recommend collective

measures in situations when the Security Council was unable to address a breach of peace or an act of aggression.

• The UN needs new constituencies

The United Nations is, in fact, the United Governments. It is beyond doubt true that a number of governments are de facto "non-people organisations" (NPOs), whereas many civil society organisations, or so-called NGOs, are genuine People's Organisations (PO) but have no access to the "We, the People" UN and its various forums. (Regrettably, there is also an increasing percentage of NGOs that, due to financing and leadership, could more precisely be referred to as *Near*-Governmental Organisations).

So, new actors should be brought into the picture in various ways and with guarantees that they are truly independent of states and governments. We suggest the following categories: a) international organisations, b) transnational organisations, in which people represent causes or worldwide issues but not parties or countries, such as various movements and initiatives, c) minorities and indigenous peoples, d) refugees and displaced persons, e) children and youth under 18 years of age and f) transnational corporations.

• Establish links and consultative processes between all these NGOs and all UN bodies - and using hearings

Consultative status, direct participation in commissions and agencies, an elaborate system of *hearings* throughout the UN system, sounding of analyses and proposals and inviting statements, commissioning fact-finding, research, etc., with these organisations – are all measures that exemplify how much-needed democratisation combined with the collection of knowledge and innovative perspectives - *can* be implemented even if step-by-step.

Effectively tapping non-governmental resources would enrich the UN tremendously and transform it into a much more dynamic body perceived by citizens worldwide as *relevant* to them.

• A Citizens Chamber or Second Assembly must be developed.

One can only sympathise with the often proposed Second Chamber or "parallel structure." It would probably be wise to introduce it

gradually and to establish first which constituencies it should have (see above) and how to elect them.

• **Direct election of UN representatives.**

Today, Ministries of Foreign Affairs appoint their country's UN Ambassador and staff. Citizens have no chance to influence who will represent them—"We, the peoples." This creates a sense of distance. However, nothing in the statutes of the United Nations forbids any member from appointing their representatives by direct election, but obliging them to do so would hardly be possible today.

For other bodies than the General Assembly such as for agencies and the proposed Second Chamber of non-governmental actors, citizens should be given the opportunity to vote for candidates.

• **The United Nations must be "sold" efficiently as a global media**

More or less important news - combined with sport, entertainment, debates, etc - reaches the world 24/7, either in the traditional ways or through social media. But the United Nations has no similar structure with commercials, educational programs, debates, entertainment, no campaigns, no reports and no debates and analyses *that reach us daily.*

The UN is much too much at the mercy of the Western mainstream press.

Most UN documents and even public information materials appear anything but stimulating to ordinary citizens. We live in the age of global, digital, multi-channelled communication, and the UN must develop a creative media competence and worldwide daily presence as well as find sufficient funds to reach into our living rooms - at least to the same degree public service broadcasters, CNN, BBC or CGTN do. The UN Department of Global Communications does a lot of good things, but it will need resources to reach the level of the mentioned media, to distinguish itself in the future as the go-to source for world news, events, trends and discussion of them.

And, now, what can the member governments do?

• **Members must integrate UN norms and long-term goals into their national decision-making and give up some of their sovereignty.**

Obviously, the nation-state is losing influence over transnational actors and the environment. Governments should acknowledge that while they give up some sovereignty now, they will later reap the benefits of cooperation, early solutions to problems, and order instead of chaos. Taking others into account, thinking globally and cooperating in new ways is the sine qua non of survival for all.

The commitment of member governments can be seen from two angles: They can be encouraged to improve their policies and ensure that they align with decisions they have supported in New York. A more stern mechanism may also exist, namely, suspending members who repeatedly violate UN Charter norms, resolutions, and other decisions. The length of the suspension period should depend on the seriousness of their violations. That said, it may not be wise to permanently exclude any member.

• Members should develop true self-defence and new security policies.

Any national moves towards purely defensive military and/or civilian postures and doctrines would solve – automatically – a number of serious problems that would otherwise be dumped on the Secretary-General or settled through naked force in the battlefield.

The author has outlined such a possible system in a longer, detailed analysis published in 2023 by China Investment, entitled *"Towards a new peace and security thinking for the multi-polar, cooperative and peaceful world."*

It argues for putting peace first and then securing it through defensive military and/or civilian defence measures that do not lead to arms races and threat perceptions and build on concepts such as human security from the local to the global, common security, prioritising civilian early conflict warning and mediation as well as conflict-resolution and a series of other constructive ideas. The fundamental idea of human civilian rather than national military security was developed by Johan Galtung and the author back in 1978.

• Members should allow for direct UN service.

Each member, through national law-making, ought to make it possible for any citizen otherwise eligible for military service to seek recruitment with the United Nations for military and civilian peacekeeping on an equal basis with national conscription.

• Members should refer more conflicts to the United Nations.

Past analyses showed that only around 32% of all disputes involving military operations and fighting were referred to the UN during the 1980s, the lowest share since 1945 (see Vayrynen 1985). Although data for today are difficult to come by, one must doubt that the level is higher today.

Right now the truth is that never before have there been so many armed conflicts across the globe (see Uppsala University 2024). Imagine that the whole range of ecological conflicts developing these years would also be referred to the UN.

Or imagine that the war in Ukraine and the underlying NATO-Russia conflict had been referred to the UN already in 2014, and UN peacekeepers had been deployed to southeastern Ukraine years before the Russian invasion commenced.

At the same time, a recent study by the *Carnegie Endowment for Peace* (2024) summarises:

”The quantitative data show that UN peacekeeping “has a large, positive and statistically significant effect on reducing violence of all sorts.” The findings are so strong that there is no question that peacekeeping reduces deaths, sexual violence, refugee flows, and the likelihood of the recurrence of conflict. Where there are peacekeeping missions, lasting peace agreements are more likely. In short, UN peacekeeping is extremely effective at bringing peace. Moreover, interstate wars have declined overall since World War II, in part because states have often chosen to work through the Security Council to resolve interstate conflict.”

Therefore, there is all the more reason to argue for the world to use the UN more —*the* organisation with the longest accumulated experience in peacekeeping and peacebuilding. NATO shows no such results.

• Members should re-affirm their Charter obligations and develop common-sense coalitions

This applies particularly to those relating to the non-use of force and the peaceful settlement of disputes, respect for the spirit and letter of the Charter combined with a firm commitment to make available all kinds of civilian and military peacekeeping forces as well as all expertise relating to non-violent, peaceful conflict resolution.

There is a need for a "new, common-sense coalition" consisting mainly of middle-size and non-aligned countries determined to use the UN machinery effectively. Common sense coalitions will be needed not only in the field of peacemaking but also in creating genuine, globally sustainable development and ecological security. The UN is no substitute for governmental action.

It is noteworthy that China is the only one among the UN heavyweight members which often and consistently emphasises the important role of the UN.

- **Increase the UN budget substantially and share the burden of the future UN budget more equally.**

No member should be allowed to exert political pressure within the organisation because of the size of its financial contribution. No member should contribute more than, say, 10% of its budget. Sharing in relation to the size of the population and/or GNP may be the easiest, with compensation for the poorest, i.e., resembling some kind of progressive taxation or tiered membership fees.

There is no doubt that, unfortunately, the UN is a heavy bureaucracy that needs to be streamlined and operate more efficiently. But there is also no doubt it is pitifully under-financed (as we have pointed out above). The entire staff of about 50,000 is equivalent to 1/8 of the world's military researchers and engineers or half of the people employed in the British rail sector.

We doubt the bureaucratic problem within the UN is *that* much worse than in most other large organisations, say, NATO, the EU or the Pentagon. Evidently, it should be rationalised and better coordinated, and deep cuts should be made in extravagant salaries, per diem, and travel costs.

Having said that, the UN will need resources many times what it receives today to be an effective actor in the future world community. It is a shame for the world's governments that the UN is constantly forced to live close to bankruptcy and that leading members ignore honouring the deadline for payments.

There are at least two ways in which the United Nations could supplement its budget: One, members could earmark a certain minimum percentage of personal income and consumption taxes or GDP. It would

make much more sense than the idea to set off 2-3% of GDP for the military, irrespective of any threat assessment.

Two, the United Nations and its organisations could raise funds from not-for-profit foundations, small and big private donors worldwide. Undoubtedly, many citizens would be more happy to see their tax money end up at the UN than as contributions to their government's militarism and warfare. The criteria must, of course, be that no formal or informal strings be attached.

- **Member parliaments should establish multidisciplinary monetary UN committees.**

They should be staffed with experts, politicians, public servants, and representatives of movements, minorities, refugees, children, and youth. They should be charged with raising issues, presenting proposals, holding hearings, etc.

Each such national committee would monitor their nation's policies and programs for the UN and its agencies and help create a much wider public consciousness on world affairs. It should carry out "global impact assessments" of national decision-making, preferably in cooperation with UN agencies and regional bodies.

It could also facilitate better national and regional coordination of UN activities. While governments often demand "improved coordination" of the UN, they themselves have created a loose system and often fail to coordinate their own policies in different forums within the UN system.

- **Set up UN "embassies" in member states with transnationally recruited teams.**

They could operate together with the United Nations associations and monitor security, development and environmental policies and actions and report back to regional organisations, UN agencies and central UN bodies on these matters. Naturally, they should place their advice and analyses at the disposal of governmental and non-governmental groups and associations, as well as explain UN affairs to the media.

In other words, they would serve as "go-betweens" in each country, with consultative and observer status and no more. They would make the presence of the UN and its norm system felt locally and balance the

governments' representatives to the UN. This is an obvious solution to the problem of the very low worldwide profile of the UN.

It is essential that these bodies monitor the degree to which national decision-making is aligned with decisions the countries have endorsed at various UN bodies. While they may not be able to prevent a country from going to war and violating a series of Charter provisions and resolutions, they would still make a point and contribute to other bodies whose role is to hold decision-makers accountable according to international law.

• We should revise the UN Charter so it gives appropriate attention to environmental issues.

The Charter does not mention environmental problems or ecological balance at all. Peace is understood as non-war between governments and not as harmony between Nature and human beings.
Few would dispute today that the two are intimately linked and that peace with Nature is existentially important.

• An Environmental Security Council (ESC) must be set up and given very comprehensive authority and peaceful enforcement capacity.

It will have to have very extensive non-violent powers but operate in a manner totally different from the present Security Council. It should deal with all matters related to issues such as global warming, ozone layer depletion, pollution, waste, ecological assessment (also of consumerism in rich countries), clean water and air, urbanisation, transport systems and infrastructure. Further it should decide global environmental standards and depletion quotas of threatened resources and energy sources.

• A Declaration of Human and Governmental Duties and Obligations.

The United Nations, its Charter, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are "anthropocentric," placing the individual at the centre of all concerns. The UN should strive to establish a normative framework that integrates humankind and Nature.
Even if we cherish and care for Nature and its bio-diversity in consideration for human beings or believe that Nature has rights and values in and of itself, we shall not be able to solve the environmental problems

- climate change - and learn to live in sustainable ways *without a concept of human duties and obligations vis-a-vis Nature*.

Gandhi's succinct argument that there can be no rights without duties is as simple as profound. It is time that the United Nations, in cooperation with all relevant constituencies, begin the work of drafting a *"Universal Declaration of Human and Governmental Duties and Obligations"*. The Earth Charter can deliver some of the inspiration for such an endeavour.[1]

More about this dimension here - and see Note 1.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujIQBB9aarU&list=PLYF0JPfanRdzMRORJokjTmzZWXIP9juG0&index=96 and here in an earlier article kindly published by China Investment: https://transnational.live/2023/07/23/towards-a-new-peace-and-security-thinking-for-the-multi-polar-cooperative-and-peaceful-world/

• Demilitarization of the common heritage and protection of parts of the earth.

The Environmental Security Council (ESC) should cooperate with the existing Security Council about demilitarising humanity's common heritage and developing a global governance over the parts of the earth not now under national sovereign control: outer space, Antarctica and the high seas. Closely related to that is the implementation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, or the Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty, of January 2021. Nuclear weapons are based on the philosophy of terrorism and are part of the 'balance of terror.' Were they ever used, the consequences for humans and for the environment/Nature could amount to omnicide and ecocide.

• The Trusteeship Council could be revitalised.

Today it is virtually without tasks and could be given authority over the common heritage areas, resources and culture. The modalities for such a new, much larger role for the Trusteeship Council should be investigated and proposals made. If territories, resources and various

[1] What follows from that point in the article was written in 1991 when I served as a visiting professor at the International Christian University, ICU, in Tokyo. See Oberg (1991) and some parts of it at https://transnational.live/2018/12/10/at-70-a-few-problems-with-the-human-rights-concept/.

objects could, either permanently or for limited periods of time, be entrusted to the United Nations, it would solve many problems and reduce environmental damage.

- **UN protection and management of humankind's most important resources and species.**

We think here of resources such as oil, rain forests and resources threatened by depletion that could be protected and managed by the Trusteeship Council. Depending on the circumstances, the Council would cooperate with the ESC and perhaps the SC. Setting depletion quotas for resources and reduction standards for threatened species should become the prerogative of this part of the UN system.

- **A UN ecological security monitoring agency and regional eco-security commissions are needed.**

The first step would be to coordinate existing institutions worldwide. For the first time, the word "regional" would not mean political or geographical but biological or ecological regions. Governments and many other actors would cooperate in new bio- or eco-regional patterns, often crisscrossing other types of boundaries. The commissions would report directly to the Secretary-General.

In lieu of a conclusion

Global democracy is much broader than what pertains to national democracies and the globalisation of democracy discussed above. The UN that we have focused on is not the only, albeit the most important, supra-national organisation; let us think also of all the rising regional organisations and various types of governmental groups such as NATO, ASEAN, SCO and BRICS+ where ministers or heads of state meet, discuss and issue a resolution most often without the slightest anchoring among the people they purport to represent and often with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) petitioning indoors or demonstrating outdoors.

There is a very long way to go. It's fairly easy to continue proposing reforms and putting them up for reflection and global dialogue. If multi-national and multi-cultural *future workshops*—a method for generating constructive ideas and visions of the possible futures associated with Austrian future researcher Robert Jungk—were to become frequent

events worldwide, only humanity's collective imagination would set the limits.

Outside the elite circles that mastermind the present trends, which point toward a partial or complete global breakdown, there is boundless creativity under the sky. The world will be looking intensely for good ideas about global governance and peace – after nationalism, militarism, racism and imperialism, as well as other constructs of lesser minds have declined too.

Why not let thousands of flowers bloom for humanity's better future already so we can rationally prepare for a future that is still eminently possible and can be developed only through global democratic dialogue?

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Increasing Global Transformative Capacities vs. Inertia of the Irrational

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Facing a dramatic crisis, colored by an increasing number of violent conflicts, ecological calamities, sharp social inequalities, erosion of democracy and the rise of authoritarian tendencies, the question of global transformative capacities is crucial. The paper indicates several possible directions of increasing transformative energies. Perceiving knowledge as a location of resistance, the paper suggests that enhancing our diagnostic capacities, transcending positivism and including insights of different cultures is one possible path, examining the assumption of revitalizing the idea of global civil society, considering the Global South as a location of reimaging a New World Order are other. The paper concludes that the Quest for energies of change has to be based on bold dreams, bold critical insights and bold actions based on thinking and linking in place of "coping, shopping, and doping" (Streeck 2016).

In a particularly complex moment, heavily marked by dramatic uncertainties that seem to exceed the capacities for constructive choices, solutions, i.e. for an effective collective "STOP" being uttered to the eco-economic, political, social irrationalities, above all to all the ongoing wars, the word "Quest" in the title of our Conference signifies a great challenge.

-*The Quest,* amidst an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness, is nevertheless a persistent need and responsibility to seek answers, transcending accumulated despair, ineffective solidarity, and actively respond to the urgency created by the fact that the survival of the human species is endangered by the profound global crisis, reducing already many human beings to living the unlivable, "enduring suffering beyond words", to an exile and dehumanization in the current world order caught in a spiral of violent social, inter-state, geopolitical and transnational conflicts. The global crisis is often defined as (albeit politically and socially decontextualized) polycrisis (Tooze 2022), a simultaneous crisis in interacting sectors of social, political, economic life that are not reducible to each other, or a crisis of capitalism. However, having in mind its overwhelming complexity, accumulated fallacies, growing

threat to survival and the lack of transformative answers it is in fact both capitalism and the human species in crisis.

- *The Quest* is to be pursued in a moment when the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity – axes of peace – are under severe attacks.[1] Among else, unaccountable power structures, national and transnational, gaps created by transforming norms of international law into self-serving rules of the powerful, the incoherence between the moralizing rhetoric and practical omission of deeds, the celebration of greed and acceptance of surging inequalities destroying societies as communities, have contributed to the erosion of the noted principles and drastically endangered world peace. In spite of all the marches, petitions, demonstrations, mediation efforts, initiatives of UN and ICC, we are witnessing, by and large, a hoarse, powerless voice of peace in the face of the wars in Ukraine, and Gaza, Lebanon, as well as in Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, Congo, and elsewhere. (According to the UN, at this moment, the current number of conflicts (59) is the highest since World War II (UN Press 2023).[2] Furthermore, the Quest for cooperative NWO is challenged by a new cycle of unprecedented militarization, the systematic nurturing of the image of the antagonistic, threatening Other, by the insistence on the finality of the dividing lines between the forces of light and darkness, by shattering the elementary foundations for dialogues beginning and ending to assert life as the highest value.[3]

-*The Quest* is to be pursued within an impasse, created by profound accumulated contradictions of global neoliberal capitalism, aspiring to the total subjugation of citizens (by classical and digital means), unprecedented arrogance of power that is producing fragmentation, canceling moderating, corrective mechanisms, transformative energies that the very survival of capitalism requires. The unprotected and uncared for citizens, workers, exposed to brainwashing media have become part of a global mass of individuals lacking the capacity to recognize own interests/needs, recognize allies and act collectively (Streeck 2016).

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1 Jean Baudrillard (2009, p. 65) asserts that today freedom is being transformed into "indifference without illusions". We can add that brotherhood has not turned into "radical empathy", but is also colored by indifference, while equality has lost its link with redistribution and sank into "diseases of despair and/or misguided anger.

2 Also, according to Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), the new data show record number of armed conflicts.

3 Obviously "the intelligence of Good" is lacking. Baudrillard, op. cit.. p.23.

- *The Quest* is to be sought despite the pressing consequences of lost opportunities, the last being the end of the Cold war and the chance to move toward a world order based on cooperation and dialogue, respect for diversity and the Common good, i.e. the chance of moving toward stable world peace (peaceful co-existence), instead of sliding toward a Third World War. Looking at the inertia and depth of the historical betrayal following the end of Cold war, the lost opportunity for the world to finally add and subtract its brilliance and lunacy productively, and leave behind the logic of confrontation, we are confronted with the following question: how can the void between the present betrayals and the possible future transformative opportunities be transcended, how can the inertia of irrationality be surpassed and the energy of creativity mobilized? How can the wisdom of Common good penetrate the walls of power of the greedy minority? The difficulty of finding the answer is underlined by the shocking realizations that suffered traumas, (colonization, WW1, WW2, Holocaust, Hiroshima), i.e. the numerous past experiences of vast destruction have not led to "Never Again" becoming and imperative of humankind. Chapter after chapter of brutal violence and war are opening. Thus, *the Quest* for transformative energies, moderating, insightful actors, seems to be the decisive challenge.

Quest for transformative global energies

The formidable Quest for transformative energies, forces includes, among others, enhancing diagnostic capacities, revitalizing the idea of global civil society, and taking seriously the existing New Global South.

a. **Efforts to enhance our diagnostic capacity**

Quest for knowledge Enhancing diagnostic capacities is part of the quest for knowledge and the awareness that humbleness is a required companion, because, on the one hand, "like climbers on a mountain, the higher we go the further away we see that our ignorance stretches" (Grayling 2021, p. 374), and on the other, today's truths may turn out to be tomorrow's illusions.

In spite of this fact, that Grayling warns that the "sheer extent of ignorance revealed to us by our giant strides in knowledge suggests that we are only at the beginning of a journey, (for) we are still bedeviled

by too much primitivism in our thinking and feeling: we still go to war, quarrel among ourselves, believe nonsense, waste our short lives on trivialities" (*ibid*), the journey must continue. Efforts must be made to extend, refine knowledge as a form of resistance to the epistemological injustices, injustices of simplifications, of neglecting, exiled historical experiences and insights of Others, to the imposition of myths[4] as universal truths, and thus a precondition, as Escobar points out, of resisting social injustices. Furthermore, extending, linking different worlds of knowledge, as well as reaffirming multi-disciplinarity in the broadest sense, from archeological forensics to the "singing philosophy", and recognizing different sources of knowledge (intuitive, spiritual, affective) a whole well of accumulated knowledge can become a pool of enriching insights, a foundation for transformative synthesis, creating a path of transcending the TINA (There Is No Alternative) trap, the entropy that is proclaimed as the triumphant "end of history". In other words, such a journey contributes to replacement of the reign of the Western cosmovision by *pluriversum*. According to Walter Mignolo (2000), for instance, the Western modern cosmovision is a myth that has been narrated as unique and universal … a local history with a global design. For S. Chattopadhyay (2024), pluriversum speaks of a world intersecting beyond the hegemonic logic, a world of dialogue and cooperation. She distinguishes between multipolarity and pluriversality. A multipolar world is predicated on power differentials between nation, seeking control of resources and influence. In terms of the rules of the game it does not change much the framework of the unipolar world, increasing only the number of contenders for power primacy. There is a need for recognition of many worlds in one world. As A. Q. Escobar refers to "the reality constituted by many kinds of world" (2016) and the different types of knowledge, the space for seeking, creating mobilizing alternatives could be fruitfully extended. [5]

4 See also: Magnolo, 2000.

5 In her article, Amaya Querejazu Escobar argues for the recognition of the knowledge of indigenous peoples, depicts the Andean perspective, which "affirms that knowledge is not only rational but also affective, emotional, bodily, mystic and can have origin in experience, memory and suffering as well as in the possibility of changing the point of view." In other words, to paraphrase Sabelo J. Ndlowu-Gatsheni, there are many interrelated worlds of knowing, whose contributions have to be "re-membered and re-humanized".

In that context, it is imperative to actively incorporate the substantial number of scientific discoveries (archeology, anthropology, etc.) made in the new readings of world history that affirm beyond doubt that that the evolution of human societies cannot be arranged according to linear stages of development, that there is no single pattern of organizing human life nor a hierarchy dividing the patterns into superior and inferior, and that respecting diversity and contributions of the many requires replacing the domination of dualistic thinking by relational thinking. Graeber and Wengrow (2011) demonstrate with ample empirical evidence, why all significant forms of human progress before the twentieth century cannot be attributed only to the 'white race' (p. 17), why human societies cannot be "arranged according to stages of development" (p. 8), and why contributions to social thought, including "indigenous critique" (p. 5) of the Western civilization have to be taken seriously. Many worlds are interrelated and the more this is recognized, the more "other possible ways of being in the world" (Escobar 2016) can be sought. When this is ignored, it logically leads at some point, to the noted conclusion that Fukuyama made after the end of the Cold War and the triumph of neoliberal capitalism - the end of history. A triumphant conclusion that may lead to an apocalyptical outcome.

Beyond the noted, efforts of enhancing diagnostic capacities encompass a rereading of own history, a "precise reconnaissance of the present" (A. Gramsci), an understanding of the inner workings of the world order (W. Robinson), and efforts for a multicultural, multidisciplinary synthesis. Together they may contribute to creating and recovering many existing, ongoing critical analyses from their digital enclaves.

- Rereading own history particularly for the countries of the global periphery, is part of an emancipatory effort. It presupposes exploring and understanding the structural shadows of the past that take part in perpetuating disfigured, mal-development, and extend the residing on the periphery in spite of liberation from the colonial, imperial rule, and modernizing efforts, into an inescapable fate. In other words, it is an effort to recognize the processes of *longue durée* that perpetuate internal divisions, conflicts, submissions to the external "civilizing forces", and require systematic, collective engagement to be transformed. Rereading means both confronting the externally imposed deep traumas, sufferings, but it also means becoming aware of internally made wrong

turns, choices and decisions. Therefore, it entails developing healing mechanisms, striving for self-discovery beyond prevailing stereotypes, and rehabilitating the experience of own fruitful principles and practices of community building, economic functioning, of relating to others, to nature The creative bridges that link nuanced and accurate remembering can strengthen the internal pillars and forces of autonomy, transcending the option of submission and mechanical imitation of formulas of development.

- A precise reconnaissance of the really existing present, means dealing with the consequences of the transformation of the state and society in the transnationalized global order which has diminished their capacity to provide protection to the citizens; the state serves the needs of capital and not its citizens, while fragmented society does not provide the sense of community, giving rise to "runaway individualism" (each for himself), reducing solidarity and the capacity to recognize fellow victimized (the case of antagonism towards migrants by the local workers, for instance). Reconnaissance means dealing with the economic and political foundations of the rising inequality and the reduction of citizens to frustrated consumers; the irresponsible celebration of greed and egotism, i.e. the collective amnesia of the Common good. Reaffirming, the need, existential rationality, value of the Common good, public interest, solidarity/fraternity[6] may lead to recovering a degree of self-confidence of the citizens, to developing new social mechanisms for defending society from it turning into a conglomeration of lonely, powerless human beings, at the mercy of the greed[7] of the transnational (oligarchic) class and profoundly alienating consequences of new technologies (robotization and AI). New technologies which are not only replacing human beings in a number of professional locations, taking decision on their own, but

6 Frantz Fanon has articulated this profound connection of solidarity and brotherhood by the concept of *radical empathy,* defined as a politics of recognition and solidarity with communities beyond one's own immediate experience, in order to transcend differences, and enduring patterns of discrimination. See in: Christopher (2021, 191-195).

7 In 1952, several years after the end of World War II, Bertrand Russell (1968, p.84) warned that the world needs to avoid "cruelty, envy, greed, competitiveness, search for irrational subjective certainty, and what Freudians call the death wish" – i.e. the things that brought it to the brink of catastrophe. The heights greed, cruelty, competitiveness and the death wish have reached at our age, underlie the tragic inertia of human irrationality.

gaining the power of manipulating human consciousness, needs and behavior. In other words, they have the potential of taking the position of submission, powerlessness, and fragmentation to a dystopian level.[8]

- Understanding the inner workings of the present neoliberal World order requires deciphering the new forms, locations, structures of transnational power, its social, economic, political, ecological consequences, contradictions and vulnerabilities. This requires shedding light on interconnections of the local and global, legal and illegal, the "seen and unseen",[9] democratic and authoritarian strands, i.e. focusing on the locations and flows, "multiple nodes of power, multiple constructs of privilege. (Nordstrom 2007, p. 207). The growing divide between the new transnational class, a minority privileged materially and politically beyond comprehension, and the Rest "coping", unable to identify and reach the new locations of power and resist their capacity to devour the community, and erase the rights of workers, minorities, migrants, poor is a particularly dramatic predicament that requires a loud articulation within the ongoing diagnosis. So does the question concerning the aspiration of the present hegemon, U.S., to perpetuality, because it considers itself as being the embodiment of a superior liberal order that provides global stability and prosperity (Ikenberry 2005), the only power suited to lead the world from now to eternity. The aspirations for a hegemonic position that is to last indefinitely because U.S. is superior, indispensable have become the basis of transforming international law into ad hoc self-serving rules, the unprecedented degree of applying double standards, the basis of unaccountable control and surveillance, militarization

8 Yanis Varoufakis (2024) points out that AI is not only a commodity, but a means of producing behavioral modification. According to him that is the most dangerous aspect of the advancements in the AI technology, i.e. its growing capacity to manipulate human behavior, thoughts and needs.

9 Carolyn Nordstrom (2007, p. 208) warns that "People can see only what they have the conceptual tools to see. That makes the unseen a powerful tool of both hegemony and resistance: seeing *is* powe*r*."

and numerous, in terms of numbers and forms, of violent interventions, regime change that have resulted in prolonged instability.[10]

b. **The strategy to revitalize the idea of a global civil society** is based on the need to limit, disrupt, weaken the existing national and transnational power structures benefiting a tiny privileged minority, an arrogant minority that can ignore, marginalize for instance the effect of 40 million people protesting around the world against the then pending intervention in Iraq in 2003. The need is based also on the existence of a number of important social movements (some of them with huge number of members, f. e. The *Via Campesina* peasant movement consisting of 250 million farmers from 70 nations, or Latin American indigenous peoples movements, or the international network of Global Greens), and groups, the abundance of initiatives emerging at the local level, and the spaces of solidarity they have all created. Their limits are however also sharp: in spite of networking, the predominant fragmentation of efforts, insufficient interconnectivity, lack of sustained alliances to counter the global system of power based on the interlinking of the military-intelligence, financial, corporative oligarchic, media, political complex. Thinking through a strategy of an increasingly effective networking and

10 Interestingly enough, all those that speak of the U. S. as the indispensible nation due to its liberal principles, economic power, the capacity to secure global stability and prosperity, set aside the internal problems the U.S. is confronted with: rising poverty, lowering of life expectancy, inequality, lack of Medicare for the whole population, racial discrimination. Bernie Sanders (2004) argues: "We are the wealthiest nation on Earth. There is no rational reason as to why we are not the healthiest nation on Earth. We should be leading the world in terms of life expectancy, disease prevention, low infant and maternal mortality, quality of life and human happiness. Sadly study after study show just the opposite. …The United States cannot continue to be the only wealthy nation that does not provide universal healthcare. Working-class Americans live far shorter lives that the rich. Too many Americans are struggling with intense anxiety and 'diseases of despair'." The reason, according to Sanders, lies in the political and economic crisis created by the unprecedented level of corporate greed. One would expect a necessary coherence between the external and internal, not to forget the more than 750 military bases around the world, illegal, violent coups, change of regimes (from M. Mossadegh in Iran, P. Lumumba, in Congo, S. Allende, in Chile, M. Gaddafi, in Libya ...) it organized, radically shifting the fate of these societies, military interventions without abiding the norms of IL, UN Charter, heavily investing in weapons, i.e. nurturing the highest military expenditure. Concerning internal problems, the UN index of happiness of nations is an indicator, for U.S is not at the head of the list. In fact, it is not ranking among the first 10; it was ranked 23 both in 2023 and 2004. (*Axios* 2023; *World Population Review*, 2024).

coalition making[11] is necessary, as well as organizing simultaneous, global actions demonstrating the vulnerabilities of structural power and unwavering visibility of the GCS.

c. **Taking seriously the really existing New Global South[12]**

The emergence of the New Global South on the global scene is generated by the accumulated grievances of the advancement made by a number of developing countries, and the crisis of the unipolar world system, i.e. the tense transition to multi-polarity. Those that celebrate the (re)emergence of the GS, perceive it as sufficiently coherent and radical transformative global force unified in its search for a just World Order. Others criticize it from two political spectrums. Some (J.Nye, C. R. Mohan) either consider it as an impossible, incoherent concept, attempting to place more than ½ of humanity into a single bucket, to artificially homogenize the non-Western world, or as an Anti Western movement, servicing Chinese and Russian geopolitical interest. Criticism from the other side of the spectrum – the left, perceive it at as being not a transformative force, but an attempt to better only the position of the privileged national elites in the existing global structures of power and preserve the status quo, the neoliberal capitalist World order.

What these types of critical observations disregard is the question how coherent can Global South be at this stage of chaos, entropy, disfiguring historical wounds, runaway irrationality. Obviously the Global South cannot be approached as a self-evident, harmonious given; it is not, as E. Hagan and S. Patrick point out, a rigid grouping but an organizing principle to guide reimagining a more just World Order.

The global South is incoherent, geographically economically, in terms of the size of the territories and population, and the relations with the West, in terms of internal regimes, the reproduction of the South within the South. For that reason, J. Comaroff (2012) notes that Global South is "a polythetic category, its member sharing one or more – but not all, or even most – of a diverse set of features." However, one common

11 Speaking of coalition building, considerations should be given whether it should aim towards including the progressive parts of the ruling elites, as well.

12 This part of the article is based on the research I have done for the project at the Johannesburg New South Institute, under the working title "Controversies Concerning the Global South" and headed by Dr. Jelena Vidojevic.

denominator is recognizable, the need to problematize dominant global relations of power, and the desire of the "global majority" to be adequately represented and to take part in the decisions "about how to live together", i.e. in decisions shaping global governance. In other words, GS is a persistence both of the "wretched", discriminated, exiled and the marginalized to attempt to speak the language of effective resistance to the dominant geometry of power.

The Global South as a redistributive effort, process, organizing principle, has to be addressed, within the really existing framework, context, and its transformative threads, seeds, recognized and supported as a Quest, within all its really existing incoherencies and limitations. Because, in spite of all the incoherencies, spaces of a parallel reality are emerging, new institutions are being created,[13] new initiatives of cooperation are launched, in the field of finances, infrastructure building, security, climate change, etc. with the aim of providing greater degree of autonomy and protection against punitive measures (sanctions, for example) of the U.S. and its western allies. Therefore, it should be approached from an angle of "emancipatory realism", meaning, investing efforts to distinguish threads of alternative thinking and acting, of the "global majority", amidst inconsistencies, tensions and rivalries.

The current global crisis has created the space for the intellectuals, civil society, progressive elites of the Global South to demonstrate the possibility of extending the possibilities for a cooperative, more just and diversity respecting world order. A possibility to approach the world as not belonging to anyone, i.e. belonging to all, is present as is the possibility of increasing the respect for the existential significance of radical empathy and peaceful coexistence, vs. greed/indifference, and antagonistic rivalry, wars. A possibility is visible, but it needs to be chosen and persistently pursued through dialogue and solidarity, it needs to be appropriated by social energies of transformation in order not to disappear into the well of lost historical opportunities.

13 In his book *Post-Western World, How Emerging Powers Are Remaking Global Order*, O. Stuenkel (2016) has made an inventory of the new institutions that have emerged, among else, BRICS and its various working groups, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Asian Infrastructure Bank, the New Development Bank, China international payment system, Free Trade Area of the Asia, Pacific, Silk road Fund, etc.

Conclusion

The Quest for energies of change has to be based on bold dreams, bold critical insights and bold actions based on thinking and linking in place of "coping, shopping, and doping". Visions of bold actions are the center of the riddle, challenge, the dramatic need, requiring the quest for serious informed imagination and dedication. Thus, the main task is how to create/connect various locations of transformative energies, emerging dots of counter-hegemonic power able to articulate an effective *No* to the irrational tide that combines economic, technological, political moral coercion and eliminates existentially rational alternatives. At this dramatic moment, the Quest, the urgent elementary need is to stop the ongoing carnages, the atrocities of war, the danger of planetary annihilation. The vulnerabilities of the extreme power possessing an unprecedented reach has to be deciphered, and the many positive, life enhancing efforts have to be linked into an alliance/coalition for radical solidarity and human brilliance in the NOW. That is a path leading from the irrational, antagonistically divided World Order to a New Cooperative World Order under the banner: "... never admire might, or hate the enemy or despise sufferers." (Weill 1939 quoted by Fuentes 2006, p. 302).

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The Ideological Grounds of Diplomacy and the 21st Century

Vladimir F. Pryakhin

The Mind of Ideology

Contemporary scientific inquiry still offers few definitive answers to the question: "Does a diplomat need an ideology?" This uncertainty largely stems from the absence of universally accepted definitions for crucial concepts such as ideology, patriotism, religion, morality, law, property, and family.

In the early 1990s, following the collapse of the USSR, a prevailing notion emerged in Russia that social life and diplomacy should be entirely stripped of ideology. Some influential scholars even went so far as to claim that ideology had altogether ceased to exist. This nihilistic rejection of ideology was a direct reaction to decades of ideological confusion. In the post-World War II USSR, what was labeled as "ideology" was not seen as a genuine system of ideas but rather as distorted political propaganda. One prominent example of this pseudo-ideology was the anti-scientific assertion during the 1960s regarding the so-called "third stage of the general crisis of capitalism" – a claim that stood in stark contradiction to the objective realities of global politics and the world economy.

The eventual debunking of such misleading narratives led many in Russia and the post-Soviet space to equate ideology with deception and manipulation—a "dirty word" that had lost its original meaning. Yet, much like energy, ideology is an objective and inescapable facet of human existence. It does not simply vanish but endures, constantly transforming in response to historical circumstances. Ironically, the effort to purge society of ideology has resulted in the rise of an entirely different guiding principle: consumerism and its extreme variant, hyper-consumerism. Notably, two figures from opposite ends of the political spectrum—Al Gore and Fidel Castro—have both decried this phenomenon, arguing that its impact is even more destructive than fascism (Паршев 2016).

For the purposes of this study, we adopt the classical definition of ideology as articulated by Antoine-Louis-Claude Destutt de Tracy (1754–1836), the French philosopher, politician, and economist credited

with coining the term. Destutt de Tracy defined "ideology" as the general patterns by which ideas are derived from sensory experience, linking these patterns to grammar, logic, pedagogy, both private and public morality (or the art of living in society), education, and legislation—what he described as the education of adults. As he himself stated, "We cannot go astray in all these sciences unless we lose sight of the fundamental observations on which they are based" (Destutt 1817, 213).

Thus, ideology constitutes a comprehensive system of political, legal, moral, religious, aesthetic, and philosophical ideas that shapes our understanding and evaluation of reality. Beyond being a mere collection of abstract notions, ideology wields tangible power in influencing historical processes. In the words of the esteemed French humanist Victor Hugo, "No army can resist the power of ideas whose time has come."

In our current era, it is more urgent than ever to reexamine and refine these classical notions of ideological values and their practical manifestations, particularly as they relate to diplomacy. Understanding and harnessing the power of ideology in the diplomatic sphere is not simply an academic exercise—it is essential for our collective future.

Ideology and Diplomacy

At the very core of a diplomat's worldview lies an unwavering commitment to duty and country—an embodiment of true patriotism. Consider the legendary Roman envoy Mucius Scaevola, who, in a display of steadfast resolve against overwhelmingly superior foes, burned his own hand to demonstrate Rome's determination. This dramatic episode encapsulates the inherent connection between patriotism and the strict adherence to service discipline and institutional protocols that defines diplomatic work.

Yet history is replete with instances where diplomats' personal ethics or professional judgment have come into conflict with official directives. In such cases, many have chosen to resign or seek reassignment rather than compromise their deeply held principles. This pattern is evident within the Russian diplomatic service as well, where numerous diplomats—including senior officials—have historically opted for conscientious objection over blind compliance.

These examples highlight the delicate balance that must be maintained between institutional obedience and personal conscience—a tension that lies at the heart of diplomatic ethics and practice. While diplomats, as state servants, are obliged to implement government directives, their patriotism—rooted in love for their homeland—must also evolve in tandem with shifting ideological paradigms. Genuine patriotism embraces this love without transforming into nationalism. When loyalty to one's nation devolves into hostility toward others, it fosters division and conflict—a development entirely antithetical to diplomatic principles. Nationalism, with its emphasis on exclusion rather than mutual understanding, has no place in the diplomat's ethos. Even more dangerous is when such sentiments escalate into a belief in ethnic or civilizational superiority—a mindset that transcends nationalism and veers into the dangerous territory of Nazism, an ideology founded on racial hierarchy and xenophobia.

Nazism is not only a moral abomination; it is a direct affront to the very principles of diplomacy. By propagating hate and supremacy, it undermines the global interconnectedness necessary for international cooperation and peaceful relations—the core mission of the diplomatic profession.

The Specificity of Our Time

A diplomat's mission extends far beyond merely safeguarding national interests; it calls for the active pursuit of compromise even amid the most polarized conflicts. The timeless adage, "While diplomats talk, the guns stay silent," testifies to diplomacy's indispensable role as a bulwark against destruction. Today, this responsibility is magnified by unprecedented challenges: the convergence of nano-, bio-, info-, and cognitive sciences (NBIC), revolutionary leaps in military technology, and the existential risks posed by advanced weaponry. Reflecting this urgency, Andrey Gromyko—who served as Soviet Foreign Minister for 27 years—famously remarked, "In our era, it is better to negotiate for a decade than to fight for ten minutes."

However, the call for international cooperation arises not solely from military threats. Since the mid-20th century, humanity has been beset by a cascade of global crises—climate collapse, resource deple-

tion, and runaway technological advancement—that transcend national borders and threaten the very survival of civilization. These issues are not transient but rather symptoms of a fundamental qualitative leap in historical momentum, driven by the exponential acceleration of progress over the past 150 years.

Nobel laureate Enrico Fermi once posed a haunting question: if the universe teems with potential life, why does humanity remain isolated? His implicit conclusion—that advanced civilizations might self-destruct upon reaching critical technological thresholds—remains disturbingly plausible. Moreover, pivotal milestones in human space exploration have often coincided with geopolitical flashpoints: Yuri Gagarin's pioneering manned spaceflight in 1961 preceded the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962; the launch of the Hubble Telescope in 1990 occurred amid escalating Cold War tensions; and today's ambitions for lunar and Martian exploration unfold alongside crises such as that in Ukraine. These striking parallels suggest an intricate link between rapid technological advances and political instability.

Astrophysicist Carl Sagan famously compressed the 13.8-billion-year history of the cosmos into a single calendar year, showing that Homo sapiens emerged in the final hour of December 31, with all modern innovations—the Internet, artificial intelligence, smartphones—appearing in the last second. In this compressed timeline, Generation Z (born 2003–2024) inhabits a world that is far more alien to them than their early-20th-century predecessors were to the contemporaries of Jesus Christ. This breakneck pace of change underscores both humanity's boundless ingenuity and its profound vulnerability.

Yet, catastrophe is not inevitable. Nobel Prize-winning chemist Ilya Prigogine's bifurcation theory posits that systems teetering on the brink of collapse can instead evolve into new, adaptive forms (Prigogine and Stengers, 1984). For humanity, such evolution demands a radical ideological shift—one that places collective survival above zero-sum competition. Soviet dissident Andrey Sakharov, often regarded as the father of the thermonuclear bomb, was a pioneer of this vision. He advocated for a convergence of capitalist and socialist systems as a means to avert annihilation. Despite the ostracism he faced for his beliefs, Sakharov's moral clarity remains a shining example of the resolve re-

quired in an era when unchecked nationalism can mutate into Nazism and technological progress outstrips our ethical frameworks.

Diplomacy, rooted in genuine patriotism yet tempered by a commitment to global solidarity, remains our most effective safeguard against the existential silence that Fermi warned of. The choice is stark and unequivocal: transcend parochial divisions or risk perishing by them.

The Triad of Worldview: Faith, Religion, and Science

Recognizing that humanity is on a self-destructive trajectory is not enough. Although many view this path as an immutable law, our survival demands an optimistic counter-narrative—a cohesive framework of actionable goals designed to transcend chaos. This vision, championed by Soviet dissident and physicist Andrei Sakharov, calls for a survival-oriented worldview that can heal our fractured ideological landscape.

Every worldview rests on three interdependent pillars: personal faith (spirituality), institutionalized religion (organized doctrine), and rational knowledge (scientific inquiry). Historically, a balance among these three has underpinned societal stability. Modern hindsight justly condemns the persecution of figures such as Galileo, Campanella, and Bruno—actions driven not by innate cruelty but by the desperate efforts of church and state to maintain order amid burgeoning scientific dissent. Today, however, the balance has shifted to an opposite extreme.

Global society now faces a lopsided paradigm: scientific progress has eclipsed both faith and religion, destabilizing the traditional triad. Christianity, in particular, has been emblematic of this collapse. In Europe, major denominations are hemorrhaging followers—over 50% of Germans disaffiliated from leading Christian groups in 2023. Even the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), as noted by philosopher S.E. Grechishnikov, is undergoing a systemic decline; once-vibrant congregations now find their churches empty, and key services like Christmas see ever-dwindling attendance. Paradoxically, new churches are springing up as mere symbols of tradition, yet they often lack genuine congregants.

This crisis is not confined to Christianity alone. The post-USSR ideological vacuum has spurred a resurgence of Islam, which in turn has given rise to competing radicalisms. As Daoud Feirahi of Tehran University observes, “Secular authoritarianism and religious extremism

now duel for dominance"—a schism exploited by those who weaponize faith for their own ends. Although Islam's emphasis on equality and piety echoes Marxist ideals of social justice, such parallels do not immunize it from the broader secularizing forces that have already undermined Christianity. As scientific advancement permeates the Global South, Islam, too, will confront similar challenges.

Despite the decay of traditional institutions, humanity's intrinsic longing for meaning endures. A 2023 survey at Moscow City Pedagogical University found that 76% of students reject organized religion, yet affirm a belief in "something beyond"—a sentiment reminiscent of Europe's ietsism (from the Dutch "something-ism"). This amorphous spirituality, free from dogma, reflects an emerging consensus: even as established religious structures crumble, the sacred remains alive.

Historically, periods of reformation—such as Luther's challenge to Catholic orthodoxy or the Enlightenment's synthesis of reason and belief—have restored balance among faith, religion, and science. In today's world, existential threats like climate collapse, nuclear proliferation, and the ethical dilemmas of artificial intelligence demand a reformation on an unprecedented scale—not mere doctrinal adjustments but a universal survival ethos.

This vision finds its roots in the tradition of Russian Cosmism as developed by thinkers such as Tsiolkovsky, Vernadsky, Chizhevsky, and Fedorov. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, these pioneers reimagined humanity's role from being limited to Earth-bound factions to becoming stewards of the cosmos. They championed space exploration, introduced the concept of the noosphere (a planetary mind), and even envisioned technological immortality. Their integrated synthesis of science, spirituality, and collectivism offers a blueprint for Sakharov's survival worldview—a model in which progress is harnessed for the benefit of humanity as a whole, rather than for narrow national or creedal interests.

Thus, the current crisis of faith should not be seen as a death knell but rather as a catalyst for transformation. As institutional religions falter, the Cosmist imperative—to unite science, spirituality, and global solidarity—becomes ever more urgent. The alternative, as Fermi ominously suggested, is silence and oblivion.

Nikolay Fedorov's Worldview: A Diplomatic Alternative to Wars and the Arms Race

Russian Cosmism as a Diplomatic Worldview

As Alexander Gorchakov, the eminent 19th-century Russian diplomat, once observed, diplomacy represents the highest expression of human culture. This elevated vision underscores diplomacy's potential as a force for peace, cooperation, and the collective survival of humanity. A key intellectual contribution to this vision comes from Nikolai Fedorovich Fedorov, a philosopher and archivist within the Russian Foreign Service, whose ideas laid the groundwork for a transformative approach to diplomacy.

Drawing upon his work at the Moscow Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Fedorov developed a philosophical framework now known as Russian cosmism. This worldview, which fuses religious spirituality with scientific rationality, offered an alternative to the destructive impulses of war and the militarization of technology. Fedorov's vision proposed that scientific endeavors be redirected from military applications toward peaceful pursuits designed to secure the survival and flourishing of humanity—a principle that remains deeply relevant to modern diplomatic practice.

Diplomacy as a Tool for Collective Survival

At the heart of Fedorov's thought was his ambitious project, *How to Turn Weapons of Destruction into Instruments of Salvation*. This proposal called for transforming military production capacities into mechanisms for harnessing natural resources and enhancing global well-being. Fedorov's influence was evident in Russia's proactive leadership during the first international disarmament conferences held in The Hague in 1899 and 1907—pivotal events that sought to rein in arms proliferation and that have since become landmarks in diplomatic history.

Modern diplomacy increasingly faces security challenges that mirror Fedorov's early concerns. The proliferation of advanced technologies—from cyber capabilities to artificial intelligence—demands renewed international cooperation to prevent their militarization. Diplo-

matic initiatives such as arms control treaties, confidence-building measures, and collaborative frameworks for regulating emerging technologies resonate strongly with Fedorov's call to prioritize human survival over narrow national competition.

Cosmism and the Ethical Foundations of Diplomacy

Fedorov's concept of the "Common Cause" asserted that humanity's shared destiny must transcend political, cultural, and ideological divisions. This principle aligns seamlessly with contemporary diplomatic efforts to address existential risks such as climate change, nuclear proliferation, and global health threats. His steadfast belief that scientific progress should serve the collective survival of mankind rather than facilitate its destruction parallels today's multilateral emphasis on sustainable development and conflict prevention.

Diplomacy in a Technologically Interconnected World

The renewed interest in Fedorov's ideas emerges at a time of rapid breakthroughs in biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and space exploration. Although his notion of *patrophication*—the scientific resurrection of ancestors—may seem speculative, its core ethical premise remains vitally important: technological progress must be guided by humanitarian principles. In diplomatic terms, this means advocating for international governance frameworks that ensure equitable access to technological benefits while rigorously preventing their misuse for destructive ends.

The challenge for contemporary diplomacy, then, lies in crafting international agreements that embody these principles. Forums such as the United Nations, the G20, and various regional organizations are increasingly emphasizing cooperative approaches to manage emerging technological frontiers. In this context, Fedorov's vision of converting potential instruments of destruction into tools of global cooperation serves as a crucial philosophical anchor.

Toward a Diplomatic Cosmism

Ultimately, Fedorov's intellectual legacy underscores the immense potential of diplomacy as a vehicle for fostering a truly cosmopolitan worldview. By elevating shared human interests above narrow geopolitical rivalries, today's diplomats can contribute to establishing a more peaceful and sustainable global order. The principles of Russian cosmism remind us that when diplomacy is steered by ethical considerations and scientific rationality, it becomes a formidable instrument for addressing humanity's most pressing challenges.

Diplomacyat its core, seeks to bridge divides, foster understanding, and cultivate peace in a world often fractured by differences. A question often raised is whether a diplomat must personally adhere to a religious faith. The answer lies in the principle of freedom of conscience. Just as every individual has the right to their beliefs, so too does a diplomat. This respect for personal conviction is reflected in the practice of opening multi-confessional diplomatic forums with a moment of prayer or reflection, allowing participants to center themselves in their own traditions or beliefs.

The role of diplomacy in fostering inter-civilizational and interfaith dialogue cannot be overstated. Shared faith and mutual respect for religious values have historically been powerful forces for unity, transcending borders and cultures. Yet, in today's world, acts of intolerance are increasingly exploited to sow division, fueling interreligious, interethnic, and political conflicts. Diplomacy must rise to this challenge, promoting tolerance and understanding as antidotes to discord.

No single state or organization can tackle the global challenges facing humanity alone. The disintegration of societies, the rise of rival blocs, and the erosion of shared values demand collective action. Governments, civil societies, and individuals of goodwill must unite to champion tolerance, peace, and harmony. In this endeavor, the integrative and creative potential of the world's religious traditions and institutions is indispensable. They offer moral frameworks and networks of trust that can bridge divides and inspire cooperation.

Yet, the current state of religious diplomacy leaves much to be desired. Since the late 1990s, the World Council of Churches (WCC), an organization representing 352 Christian churches and approximately

400 million followers worldwide, has faced significant challenges. Its staff has dwindled from 350 to 143, with 131 based in Geneva. Financial constraints have forced the WCC to sell property, underscoring the need for renewed support for such vital institutions. This decline is particularly troubling given the growing need for interfaith dialogue in an increasingly polarized world.

Amid these challenges, a beacon of hope shines from the East. Kazakhstan's initiative to establish the *Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions* has emerged as a groundbreaking platform for interfaith dialogue. Since its inception in 2003, the Congress has brought together spiritual leaders to affirm that religions must work together, embracing tolerance and mutual understanding as essential tools for peaceful coexistence. The Declaration of the first Congress emphasized the importance of interreligious dialogue as a means to sustain peace and harmony among nations.

Held triennially, the Congress has evolved into a vital forum for addressing pressing global issues. The 7th Congress in 2022 outlined key objectives, including:

- Facilitating dialogue among representatives of diverse religions to share beliefs, practices, and perspectives;
- Exploring the role of religion in shaping modern society, culture, and politics;
- Highlighting aspects of religious teachings that promote peace, tolerance, and social justice;
- Addressing environmental challenges and urging followers to protect nature;
- Combating extremism and violence rooted in religious beliefs by fostering mutual understanding and respect;
- Enhancing collaboration among religious organizations to deliver humanitarian aid and support peacebuilding in conflict-affected regions.

Notably, the Congress has also tackled the relationship between religion and science. Religious leaders have expressed a willingness to explore how these two domains can complement each other, contributing to societal progress (Razdykova). This openness reflects a forward-looking approach that embraces both tradition and innovation.

In September 2025, Astana will host the 8th Congress under the theme "Dialogue of Religions: Synergy for the Future." The invitation extended to Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church underscores the event's significance. At a time of profound global transformation, the gathering of the world's most influential spiritual leaders offers a unique opportunity to issue a unified call for peace, moral renewal, and shared humanity.

In conclusion, diplomacy—and religious diplomacy in particular—remains a vital force for unity in a fragmented world. By fostering dialogue, promoting tolerance, and harnessing the moral authority of religious traditions, we can address the challenges of our time and build a future grounded in mutual respect and cooperation. The mission of diplomacy is not merely to manage differences but to transform them into opportunities for collective progress.

In an era marked by ever-increasing global interdependence, the diplomatic community can draw vital inspiration from Fedorov's "Common Cause" to navigate the complex realities of our time. Although his ideas were forged in a specific historical and cultural context, their insights into the role of diplomacy in securing our collective future through cooperation, innovation, and a shared purpose remain timeless.

Conclusion

At first glance, the debate over the need for a renewed creative worldview—and the tension between spirituality and consumerism—might seem like a purely academic exercise devoid of practical relevance. Yet in today's world, this issue has taken on critical, even fateful, significance.

Consumerism is rooted in the belief that life is finite, which drives the pursuit of maximum pleasure within a single lifetime—a credo epitomized by the demand for "everything, now!" In this framework, even children lose their intrinsic value, reduced to mere accessories for those who prioritize immediate gratification over long-term concerns. Alarmingly, for some, existential threats to humanity serve only as further incentive to accelerate consumption and seek ever-new forms of comfort and pleasure.

It is evident that neither consumerism nor the absence of spirituality can serve as guiding ideologies for humanity's survival. The dominance of such a mindset is partly responsible for the persistent failure to implement the United Nations' carefully crafted concepts of sustainable development.

Yet sustainable development remains our only viable alternative. The survival and harmonious progress of humanity are not optional—they are imperative. The alternative is a universal catastrophe, whether it comes in the form of global thermonuclear war, climate change, technological collapse, or sudden pandemics. Alarmingly, many scientists warn that such disasters may be closer than we imagine. The so-called "singularity point," when technological progress reaches its theoretical zenith, is projected to occur by mid-century, at which time the risk of catastrophic technological failures is expected to surge dramatically.

In the coming decades, humanity must identify and implement a development model that fosters peace, resolves conflicts, and mitigates social contradictions. Achieving this will require the adoption of a unifying worldview and a collaborative global framework.

Russian cosmists envisioned such a unifying process by proposing the idea of an "extra-temple liturgy"—a technological and universal complement to traditional religious practices. This concept envisions the establishment of laboratories dedicated to enhancing human longevity and even exploring the possibility of artificial resurrection. Such laboratories could be integrated within various religious institutions—be they churches, mosques, synagogues, or temples—thus aligning with a universal ideology of cosmism and paving the way for a more unified and spiritually grounded approach to global governance.

While the complexity of global governance is often seen as an insurmountable challenge, the institution designed to address it—the United Nations—already exists. To enhance its political representativeness and effectiveness, the UN could be reformed to include a chamber of deputies elected by universal suffrage on the basis of proportional representation.

Moreover, a council of experts comprising leading scientists from diverse disciplines should be established within the UN Security Council and Secretariat. These experts would provide impartial, competent insights into global security threats, maintain an ongoing dialogue with

higher UN bodies and the international community, and develop proposals to tackle urgent problems while instituting sustainable development mechanisms. With consensus among its key bodies, the decisions of this reformed United Nations would become binding. The looming threat of a universal catastrophe will likely galvanize the international community to reach agreement on these vital issues.

In both nature and society, extreme necessity is the catalyst for profound change. That necessity is approaching rapidly, and it is incumbent upon diplomats, policymakers, and global leaders to prepare without delay.

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Between Bandwagoning and Balancing: Hedging Macedonia's Future in an Era of Multipolarity

Toni Mileski

Introduction

Strategic hedging has become more pertinent in modern international relations, particularly for smaller states negotiating intricate geopolitical environments. Macedonia, a landlocked country and a nation located at the intersection of Southeast Europe, is in dire need of a strong strategic framework. Throughout its history, but also in the contemporary and modern era, Macedonia has encountered a multitude of obstacles, including regional instability and evolving alliances, which have necessitated the implementation of a variety of policies to protect its national interests. It's a question from the actual point of view: Does Macedonia successfully protect and advance its interests in perspective or threaten and call them into question?

The main objective of this paper is to examine Macedonia's historical backdrop regarding strategic behaviour in foreign politics, evaluate the shortcomings of prior endeavours, and suggest a novel conceptual framework that is consistent with the current geopolitical landscape. Our objective in conducting this research is to illuminate the vital significance of adaptive methods in maintaining national stability and resilience in an unpredictable world.

A hedging strategy in foreign policy refers to a country's approach of avoiding making a firm commitment to a particular alliance or partnership. It allows small states, but particularly middle powers, to manage uncertainties in the international system by maintaining relationships with multiple great powers. This strategic ambiguity helps states mitigate risks without directly challenging any major power, and it offers flexibility to shift alliances based on changes in the global power balance.

In terms of the applied theoretical frameworks, the paper is based on neoclassical realism and constructivism. The second theory is exceptionally applicable to Macedonia because, despite the bandwagoning with the US/NATO, relations with Greece during the name dispute were not balanced, nor with Bulgaria during the long period of pre-accession

negotiations for membership with the EU, i.e., the conditionality for starting membership negotiations with the need to change the country's constitution. In simple terms, constructivism will allow us to analyse how national identity (e.g., aspirations for European integration) and norms influence alignment strategies. Regarding the methods of analysis, the paper relies on qualitative methodology. Specifically, a case study with tracking of key events, qualitative content analysis, and historical analysis. The paper's goals are to come up with certain recommendations for achieving greater strategic autonomy in the era of systemic rivalry between great powers (USA and China) while facilitating and fulfilling the priority of EU membership.

Hedging, balancing, and bandwagoning: Theoretical Contours of Small-State Strategies in the Shadow of Power Asymmetry

The starting theoretical points, and main terms of analysis in this paper are hedging, balancing, and bandwagoning. In that context, small and medium-sized states dealing with a potential regional hegemon have a wider array of policy options than simply balancing and bandwagoning. Analysing the literature, and concrete regions and state engagement, Denny Roy (2005) identifies four mixed strategies. One prevalent strategy is hedging, which involves maintaining multiple strategic options to mitigate potential future security threats. Primarily, the term hedging is an economic category. It is a financial strategy that reduces the risk of loss from price variations. A speculator, who depends on their ability to foresee, receives the risk from the hedger. When exposed to unpredictable risk, hedging takes place and works in the other direction. It creates an equilibrium framework to internally counterbalance risk through opposing processes rather than attempting to control or alter the source of risk. The concept of hedging has been adopted by scholars in international relations to elucidate certain phenomena they encounter within the field that diverge from the anticipations set forth by classical theories. Structural realism suggests that in an anarchic international system, states confronted with the uncertainties stemming from the emergence of a great power typically face a critical decision. They must choose between aligning with the established power to counterbalance the rising power or opting to join forces with the rising power to create a coalition. Waltz claims

that "balance-of-power politics prevail where only two requirements are met: that the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive." (Wang, 2021, p.3). Kuik (2008) suggests that a small state's approach to a rising power is determined by the ruling elite's assessment of the rising power, specifically whether it presents an opportunity or a challenge to their objective of strengthening their domestic governance, rather than by the expansion of the great power's relative capabilities. Defining hedging, he states that a country pursues numerous policy options to mitigate risks in high-uncertainty, high-stakes situations. In practice, hedging involves five components: economic pragmatism at neutrality, indirect balancing and dominance-denial for power rejection, binding engagement and limited bandwagoning for power acceptance, and combining these options. Hedging means hoping for the best but preparing for the worst. (Kuik, 2008, pp.163-171)

Hedging, according to Evelyn Goh (2005, p. 2), is a collection of strategies designed to prevent (or prepare for contingencies in) a scenario in which states are unable to determine more straightforward alternatives, such as neutrality, bandwagoning, or balancing. Their reaction is to endeavour to preserve an equal distance from the big powers for as long as possible, therefore avoiding the necessity of selecting a definitive position. Some individuals prefer a more restrictive definition of hedging. The economic and political components of hedging are eliminated by Darren Lim and Zack Cooper. They emphasize the essential components of hedging, which are military alignment and the ambiguity of signals toward major powers. They define it as a category of behaviours that indicate uncertainty regarding the alignment of great power, necessitating that the state choose between the essential (but opposing) values of autonomy and alignment. The result is the ambiguity over the stance that a hedging state would choose in the event of a hypothetical confrontation between the great powers. This failure to explicitly identify with one side has advantages since it prevents the state from being targeted, entrapped, or abandoned by an opposing great power. However, it also rejects the security provided by the ally. (Lim and Cooper, 2015). This topic is further developed by Haacke (2019). He employs three indicators to determine hedging behaviour and also concentrates on the military arena. The initial category comprises the pronouncements, national security policies, and white papers that nations and their leaders

generate. The second is the "state's military capabilities enhancement (MCE) measures concerning force development and force employment," while the third, which is based on the work of Lim and Cooper, is the ambiguous signals regarding security alignment. Haacke defines hedging as a strategy that aims to create backup options for responding to risk by engaging with the potential threat in military, economic, and political areas and deterrence through a form of soft or indirect balancing. This approach is a compromise between balancing and bandwagoning.

Based on Roy's (2005) previously mentioned analysis, a second strategy involves engagement, in which a state employs inclusion and rewards to socialize a dissatisfied power into accepting the established rules and institutions of the existing international order. Balancing and bandwagoning represent the final two strategies. A state mitigates threats from a perceived potential adversary through internal measures, such as reallocating resources to enhance its defensive capabilities, or through external cooperation with another state that shares similar concerns about the adversary. Balancing can encompass varying degrees of intensity. In low-intensity balancing, the balancing state seeks to sustain a constructive relationship with the targeted state. In high-intensity balancing, the relationship between the balancing state and the targeted state is characterized by open adversarial dynamics, which preclude various forms of cooperation due to political tensions.

Clarifying the relationship between hedging and balancing is essential. Roy (2005, p. 306) categorizes hedging and balancing as strategies employed to counter-hegemonic domination; however, hedging is a broader strategy that may or may not encompass balancing. Balancing is one strategy that a government may utilize to maintain future strategic options. Some balancing is motivated by the desire to maintain a future option for potential necessity, though this is not universally applicable. Hedging indicates a current state of strategic uncertainty. Balancing may serve as a response to a specific and compelling threat, wherein hedging is not applicable.

In the literature of international relations, "bandwagoning" encompasses at least two distinct definitions. One strategy involves aligning with a threatening country to mitigate the risk of an attack from that entity. The alternative interpretation of bandwagoning refers to "aligning with the winning side" with the expectation of achieving economic benefits.

The second definition of bandwagoning as "aligning with the winning side" encompasses instances where a state seeks to cultivate or sustain a favourable relationship with a powerful nation, motivated by respect for that nation's power and influence, with the expectation that such a relationship will facilitate future economic opportunities. The recent expansion of NATO, through the analysis of Émile Lambert-Deslandes (2022), answers the following questions in the affirmative: Was it a case of "bandwagoning," where weaker states align with more powerful adversaries? Was it a calculated instance of "external balancing" where they formed a defensive alliance to deter opponents like Russia?

Furthermore, this definition of bandwagoning reveals a significant limitation: it lacks any reference to political alignment or security considerations, in contrast to the initial definition. (Roy, 2005, pp. 307). This approach is well described by Lorenzo Cladi & Andrea Locatelli (2012) in the example of the NATO alliance. The dilemma they analyse concerns small and medium-sized NATO member states (which coincides exceptionally with the example of Macedonia), although members of the military alliance become, due to the asymmetry of power within the alliance, caused by the benefits that the act of joining the stronger power can outweigh and undermine the negotiating positions within the allied countries. (Cladi & Locatelli, 2012, p. 281.)

Literature Review

A review of the scholarly literature shows that a large number of papers related to bandwagoning, hedging, and balancing refer to the countries of Central and East Asia. Most often, these analyses point to their positions in the context of the rivalry between the United States and China or some of the regional powers. For instance, Jaclyn Alexandra Kouleas (2023) argued that Saudi Arabia employs a hedging strategy by maintaining strong relationships with both the United States and China. This allows Saudi Arabia to benefit economically and politically from both without overly relying on one or the other. The strategy is particularly useful in times of shifting global power dynamics, such as the anticipated decline of U.S. influence and the rise of China. Wang Chong (2023) and Eby Johny (2024) analysed Nepal, as a landlocked country between two nuclear states. Nepal has adopted a non-alignment

foreign policy, hedging with both neighbours to seek economic and infrastructure development opportunities. However, India is concerned about Nepal's growing relations with China, viewing it as a threat to its interests. Nepal remains committed to on-alignment principles. Aleksander Korolev (2019), and Alfred Gerstl (2022) emphasize the examples of the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam. The articles explore the post-Cold War South China Sea region, revealing that under growing China-US competition, regional states transition from hedging to bandwagoning, highlighting the limitations of hedging as a luxury. Feng and Netkhunakorn (2024) have examined Thailand's hedging strategy in the context of strategic competition between China and the United States, which is both theoretical and practical.

Additionally, Pavel V. Shlykov (2023) examined the multifaceted nature of Turkey's foreign policy and its interactions with Russia during the 2010s and early 2020s as viewed via the strategic hedging concept. The concept of strategic hedging enables a more precise examination of Turkey's multidirectional foreign policy, which is not consistent with the classical models of behaviour that are typical of middle powers, particularly those that are involved in military-political alliances with the United States. The essay contends that Turkey has been attempting to integrate various forms of hedging and balancing as a result of a variety of domestic and international factors. Not only does this approach allow Turkey to maintain its strategic autonomy in international relations, but it also enhances it.

Using the conceptual backdrop of hedging, Koga (2018) demonstrates that Japan's foreign policy action has not been characterized by "hedging" about China. Rather, Japan's behaviour has been consistently connected with "balancing" against the dangers of China's ascent. Additionally, Japan's conduct toward the United States is perceived as bandwagoning. However, Japan initiated political initiatives to enhance its military capabilities, a process known as domestic balance, in the 2010s, when it lifted its political restrictions on military utilization. This behaviour also served to boost Japan's external balance with the United States and to highlight Japan's efforts to share alliance burdens.

According to Yuzhu (2022), the notion of hedging is more easily comprehended when it is analysed in the context of China-ASEAN relations, as it explains why ASEAN nations depend on China for their

economic needs but on the United States for their security. In the same direction, ASEAN nations are capable of declining the embrace of major powers when they use a hedging strategy. Consequently, China's ability to exert political influence in Southeast Asia through strong economic links is never successful, resulting in a lack of confidence.

The literature review revealed that there is not a single scientific publication that pertains to the Western Balkans area or any of its component states. This discrepancy is supported by its reasoning, which is oriented toward historical relationships with certain great or regional powers. Nevertheless, it is feasible to specify specific political activities in the realm of foreign policy that will serve as indicators of a strategy of bandwagoning, hedging, or balancing. By examining Macedonia's foreign policy conduct during the past three decades, we will endeavour to develop new research avenues and provide specific recommendations for the promotion of hedging as a viable alternative in international policy, especially in the era of rising multipolarity.

From Bandwagoning to Hedging: Macedonia's Possible Response to a Multipolar Global Order

An effective introduction to identifying potential avenues for the implementation of the hedging concept will be provided by the examination of the historical context of Macedonia's foreign policy positions during the past three decades. Of course, the concept's intricacy will not yield tangible solutions; rather, it can be a valuable instrument for predicting the potential positions of small states within the context of global geopolitical uncertainty. Also, the analytical approach can pinpoint the limitations of the bandwagoning notion and provide an answer to the question: Why does Macedonia continue to encounter significant obstacles despite its commitment to the Western alliance? The state is confronted with existential challenges that affect its fate. The analytical approach primarily concerns the positions and orientations of Macedonia's foreign policy activities through the prism of rivalry relations between the US/Western Allies and China. With notes that, China's worldwide influence, which had begun to emerge after 2013, was absent following the conclusion of the bipolar international system. Since 2013, China has expanded fast into a global player that can dominate "on land, in

outer space, and cyberspace," compete with the United States in science and technology, assert its dominance overseas, and impact international trade. China's rise has troubled the United States, which sees its world leadership as threatened by a country with a completely different system of government. (Zhong, 2021), (Mileski, T., Albrecht, E, Chytopoulou, E., 2022).

The Republic of Macedonia as a small state, due to its unique geopolitical and geostrategic position in Southeast Europe, established its national strategic orientation at the onset of the 1990s. This marks the era of independence and the establishment of the independent Republic of Macedonia, which was previously a constituent of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). In the referendum held on September 8, 1991, a significant majority, exceeding 95 percent of participating citizens, expressed support for the question regarding the establishment of an independent Macedonia with the potential to join a future union of sovereign states of Yugoslavia. The referendum followed a Declaration of Independence adopted by the inaugural multi-party Macedonian Parliament on January 25, 1991. The will of the people for an independent state was formally affirmed by a Declaration of Acceptance of the Referendum Results on September 18, 1991, in the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia. The subsequent crucial step in fortifying the state was the ratification of the new Constitution on November 17, 1991. The international legal subjectivity of the state was confirmed on April 8, 1993, when Macedonia was admitted as the 181st full member of the United Nations General Assembly by acclamation. (Veljanoski, 2017)

It was a period of the dissolution of the bipolar international system, signified by the demise of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact, and symbolically represented by the fall of the Berlin Wall, initiated a period of geopolitical transformation. Numerous scholars, including Krauthammer (1990), Freedman (1991), Carpenter (1991), Nye (1992), and Tuathail and Luke (1994), contended that the transition period signifies a shift from a bipolar to a unipolar world order dominated by a singular global power, the United States. According to Kenneth N. Waltz and Christopher Layne, this unipolar moment facilitates a more rapid transition to a multipolar system by fostering the emergence of new powerful nations and regions. (Layne, 2006). This analysis reveals that the unipolar moment ultimately precipitated the dissolution of the Socialist

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), which sought to establish equilibrium between the West and the East while promoting a movement of non-aligned nations.

The political determination to be an ally, of course, an act of bandwagoning with the US, is quite logical for that period. But far from the concept of hedging with the world's superpowers. Of course, China did not have the significance and rise that it manifests today, while the Russian Federation that emerged from the former Soviet Union was burdened with political turmoil and attempts at consolidation. Mowle and Sacko (2007) argued that unipolarity means that the United States does not need allies to ensure its security, but the United States nevertheless receives value from the existence of a pool of capable states whose equipment and training allow them to operate together. Unipolarity means that other states will be more likely to bandwagon with the United States than to balance against it. The culmination of this oriented foreign policy for ex-Yugoslavia states and Central and Eastern European states was supposed to be NATO membership.

In the Macedonian case, the first failure of bandwagoning as an orientation in Macedonia's foreign policy occurred in 2008 at the NATO summit in Bucharest. In April 2008, a meeting was convened to evaluate the aspirations of three Balkan countries—Croatia, Albania, and Macedonia—to become NATO members. It was evident that the US government and President George W. Bush provided substantial support. Bush explicitly declared that all participants in the US-Adriatic Charter must be new NATO members in his remarks before the meeting. Bush declared that "NATO will choose whether to extend an invitation to three Balkan nations—Albania, Croatia, and Macedonia—to become members of the Atlantic Alliance as one of the initial developments at the Summit. The United States is a big proponent of asking these states to become members of NATO. These nations have traversed the challenging path of change and established flourishing, liberated communities. They are now making substantial contributions to NATO missions, and their citizens are entitled to the security that NATO membership provides". As a result of the unresolved dispute, in 2008, Greece blocked Macedonia's NATO membership. It has also blocked the start of Macedonia's EU accession talks, despite several positive annual reports from the European Commission on the country's progress. Former Greek Prime Minister

Karamanlis on March 3, 2008, that progress has been slow on this issue. "No solution, no invitation," he said. Shortly after that, the Declaration of Strategic Partnership and Cooperation between the Republic of Macedonia and the United States of America was subsequently signed on May 8 in Washington, D.C. The Republic of Macedonia and the United States of America are dedicated to fortifying and expanding their strong friendship, which is founded on shared values, ambitions, and interests. The two nations want to fortify their strategic cooperation by collaborating more closely on commerce, people-to-people ties, and security. (*Declaration of Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Between the United States of America and the Republic of Macedonia*, n.d.). This kind of cooperation in 2022 grew into a strategic dialogue between the two countries. *A Forum on the Strategic Dialogue between the USA and North Macedonia - MAAA. (n.d.-b*).

The final resolution of the name dispute occurred 10 years later, with the signing of the Prespa Agreement on June 17, 2018. The agreement was assessed as imposed by the international community and accompanied by many inconsistencies, the biggest of which was the non-respect of the referendum as the highest decision-making act in democratic societies. After that process, Macedonia became the 30th member of NATO in 2020. (Mileski, 2024)

Prespa Agreement as (un)success of the strategy of bandwagoning

The analysis demonstrates the robust backing of Western leaders for the Macedonian vote as the ultimate resolution to the name conflict approaches. For instance, French President Macron conveyed his endorsement through video messages: "You should vote and determine if you support the amendment of the Constitution to enable the accord to be implemented. I am adamantly in favor of this deal and am certain that it is advantageous for Europe, the area, and you," said Macron. Also in that direction was German Chancellor Angela Merkel. She visited Macedonia and expressed her unwavering support for the country's endeavors to guarantee a successful vote on the historic "name" deal with Greece. The historic Prespa deal settles the long-standing name dispute with Greece and sets the path for Macedonia's membership in both NATO and the

European Union, according to US President Donald Trump in his first term in the White House, about the vote. (Mileski, 2024)

In the absence of unity and a weak or confused intent for EU growth in the Western Balkans, the Prespa Agreement was unable to become a successful diplomatic narrative. This conclusion is the result of two critical events that occurred within the past six years. In October 2019, French President Macron vetoed the commencement of EU membership discussions for Albania and Macedonia. This was the initial moment. It was cited as an urgent necessity to modify the process for EU enlargement with new candidate states. Juncker's comment is the most eloquent representation of Brussels' inconsistency. Jean-Claude Juncker, the former head of the European Commission, described the EU leaders' unwillingness to enter into membership discussions with Albania and North Macedonia as "a major historic error." (Gray, 2019)

However, the absurd name dispute with neighbouring Greece, which dates back to the very independence of the Macedonian state, still appears as an obstacle. Expecting admission to the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008, it becomes clear that the bandwagoning as a foreign policy orientation is not yielding results. The Greek veto is proof that despite Macedonia's strong commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration, it is not enough. A strong indicator that small states that have not yet joined the alliance will have difficulty establishing themselves and have an equal position with the other states that are already members. On the other hand, the asymmetrical relations between NATO/EU states also have an impact on enlargement policies.

Additionally, the situation is becoming complicated by the second coming of Trump as US president, who openly criticizes European allies for not being sufficiently committed to defence within the Alliance. Recently, French President Emmanuel Macron urged Europe to enhance its defence spending to diminish its reliance on the United States for security, particularly in light of President Donald Trump's return to power. In his speech to French military personnel at the Army Digital and Cyber Support Command in western France, Macron emphasized the necessity for Europe to respond to evolving threats and the changing priorities of US foreign policy, especially regarding Ukraine, referring to Trump's inauguration as a potential catalyst for a European strategic awakening. (Yahyai, 2025) Those statements are a confirmation of what Cladi and

Locatelli (2012) call the asymmetry of power within the alliance. An asymmetry that by 2020 had limited bandwagoning as a direction in Macedonian foreign policy, especially in the direction to open the negotiating process with the EU. Bulgarian vetoes and French proposals created a unique frame and challenged Macedonian identity, language, and culture.

Bandwagoning's Limits: Macedonia's China Dilemma

The concept of bandwagoning in foreign policy greatly limits the possibilities for implementing hedging strategies. Relations with China are the best indicator of this. Specifically, regarding China, foreign policy orientation, which was based on strong bandwagoning with the US/EU, limited any possible deepening of various ways of cooperation. As a result of that orientation, and because of the inconsistent foreign policy orientation of the political elites in Macedonia, on 27 January 1999, Taiwan was recognized as an independent state. After losing Portugal as one of its only two diplomatic footholds in Europe 24 years ago, Macedonia became Taiwan's 28th diplomatic partner and second ally in Europe. The Macedonian leadership anticipated that Taiwan would provide US$235 million in government-to-government aid and US$1 billion in commercial investments in the second half of 1999. Immediately after recognition, Xu Yuehe, the PRC ambassador to Skopje, issued a last warning on 31 January, declaring that China was prepared to cut diplomatic ties and re-evaluate its support for the extension of the UNPREDEP's mandate if Macedonia did not promptly alter its decision. Furthermore, Beijing warned Skopje to relinquish any illusions of maintaining parallel relations with both regions of the split China. On 8 February 1999, the Macedonian government confirmed diplomatic ties with the ROC, easing confusion. However, China suspended relations with Macedonia, citing violation of the Joint Communique and Macedonia's commitment to Taiwan as inalienable. The Macedonian leadership downplayed the likelihood of China's potential UN veto, with the expectation that China, as a big power, would not obstruct the extension of the UN peacekeeping forces' mandate (due to expire on 28 February 1999). Beijing rejected a Security Council resolution on 25 February 1999 that would have extended UNPREDEP's term until 31 August 1999. Upon its effective

prevention of the spread of conflict from Bosnia into Macedonia, the 1,100-member peacekeeping force was returned to its base. Macedonia was placed in a highly vulnerable situation as a result of UNPREDEP's withdrawal, which was precipitated by the rising ethnic war in Kosovo. (Tubilewicz, 2004).

The UN mission was substituted by the troops of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a procedure that was supposed to bring Macedonia close to Euro-Atlantic military structures. From today's distance, we can confirm that the declarative rapprochement did not depend at all on these processes and events. These events also show how small states guided by the principles of bandwagoning do not balance relations with other great powers, but on the contrary, in the case of Macedonia, can threaten their security. The events that followed in 2001 are an indicator of the wrong direction of action in foreign policy. China and Macedonia resumed diplomatic relations in June 2001, when then Macedonian Prime Minister, Ljubco Georgievski, officially visited Beijing. During this visit, the two sides signed joint communiqués and economic, cultural, and technical agreements. The circumstances in which relations between the two countries were restored have also changed; Macedonia was in the midst of an armed conflict with Albanian extremists.

The inconsistency and volatility of relations with China have been observed as recently as 2024. Another indicator is that the hedging concept in foreign policy is underused and limited. Two Macedonian parliament members visited China's Taiwan region, violating the One-China principle and bilateral political commitments. This visit damages the political foundation of China-Macedonia relations and sends a wrong signal to Taiwan independence separatist forces. The Joint Communiqué on the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Macedonia, signed in 1993 and 2001, explicitly stated that there is only one China in the world and that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory. The visit by the parliament members goes against these agreements. (See: *Statement by the Spokesperson of the Embassy of China in North Macedonia on the visit by two members of the parliament of North Macedonia to Taiwan. (n.d.).*

Between cooperation and strategic hedging

However, the history of Macedonia-China ties indicates that there have also been instances of collaboration. This is particularly true with the development of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the framework for collaboration between China and Central and Eastern Europe. Following the year 2012, these measures were implemented. China has made significant foreign policy decisions in the past decade, including increasing its military presence in the South China Sea, developing weapons to challenge the US Navy, constructing the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank, and increasing foreign direct investments worldwide. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), along with initiatives like AIIB, BRICS, and the New Development Bank (NDB), has significantly shaped Eurasia's economic landscape and is now the centrepiece of China's foreign policy. By positioning the Western Balkans as a significant territory within Chinese initiatives, more opportunities for economic cooperation have opened up.

In the context of China-Macedonian relations, the trend of China's FDI in Macedonia has been growing, especially since 2015. Overall, the cooperation between the Macedonian government and the government of China can be classified into several areas, namely the areas of the economy, infrastructure, defence, education, culture, agriculture, health, and technical assistance. Projects and policy cooperation take place with the same intensity among all Macedonian governments. China has 15 projects in North Macedonia from 2013 to 2021, with an estimated value of 654,434,689 EUR. It is interesting to highlight cooperation in the military sphere during the COVID-19 pandemic. The donation of medical protection to the Macedonian Army for 250,000 euros came in July 2020, as well as a donation from the Army of the People's Republic of China of 100,000 doses of vaccines from Sinopharm in May 2021. With the procurement and donation of Chinese vaccines, mass vaccination in Macedonia began. To sum up, China contributed to a significant strengthening of the health system in Macedonia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the failure of the EU to support, timely, the Western Balkans with needed medical equipment and vaccines, China stepped in as a truthful friend in time of need in Macedonia. (Mileski et al., 2023)

However, what is the area in which the hedging concept should be concentrated? Apart from bilateral cooperation, given the current trend of EU collaboration with China, Macedonia has the potential to be at the forefront of this trajectory. The objective of China's most recent plan is to establish "dual circulation." This dual circulation will enhance China's self-reliance and fortify its status as a global actor. This technical word symbolizes China's dual aspiration to maintain communication with the global community (external circulation) to fortify local demand and cultivate its technology (internal circulation).

The new approach will change China from a country that is reliant on foreign investment and exports to a country that has access to superior technology and expertise. China is endeavoring to alter the parameters of the geopolitical game. The "Made in China 2025" initiative concentrates on innovative sectors, including semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and electric cars, to boost domestic production by 40% in 2020 and 70% in 2025. The objective is to replace imported products with domestic production. China is currently endeavouring to establish itself in cutting-edge areas and compete on an equal basis with other major industrialized nations. The Chinese corporations are committed to actively participating in technological progress and investing in research.

The EU-China 2025 project, which was overseen by a committee of distinguished individuals from both sides, analyzed the potential for bilateral cooperation and identified priority areas. Both parties will benefit from the project's recommendations, which also have an impact on the global economy. China and the EU will have a significant impact on the global financial services economy in 2025, given their respective sizes. Priorities established by the project consist of: the immediate conclusion of an investment agreement; establishing an EU-China free trade agreement after the conclusion of the investment agreement; connecting the China Belt and Road Initiative with the European Networks to boost trade and cooperation; deepening the EU-China cooperation on energy security and climate change; valorization of technological achievements and innovations; Improvement of financial sector cooperation to boost investments and improvement of financial market regulation; and contributing to strengthening mechanisms of good global governance. (Mileski et al. 2022) Furthermore, BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) is compatible with the United Nations Agenda 2030. They intersect each other

from a perspective of sustainable development. (Yu et al., 2024) These opportunities are open for deeper and more serious cooperation, making the hedging concept of foreign policies more effective.

Conclusion

Today, more than 30 years later, the world has different characteristics. The multipolar world is increasingly drawing its contours. China's peaceful rise and economic growth are reaching their zenith. Several significant initiatives have been launched, such as the "Belt and Road Initiative" and the mechanism for cooperation between China and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Russia is in open conflict with Ukraine and the Global West and is an active participant and creator of the multipolar world. Geopolitical power has shifted from the West to Central and East Asia. This means that the world has changed, and the strategic determinations and foreign policy Euro-Atlantic orientation of Macedonia are (not) giving the desired effect. The country is today a member of NATO, after signing the Prespa Agreement and changing its constitutional name, but is seriously blocked on the path to EU membership. Is it the right time to change certain foreign policy behaviour priorities?

The starting idea of this paper is to point out the possibilities through the strategic concepts of bandwagoning, hedging, and balancing for small states to benefit from the rivalry between great powers in the case of the US and China. The Balkans is a region on the periphery of the Global West and far away from the Global South. In that frame, at the same time, it is evident that through the strategic partnership with the US, Macedonia fails or partially realizes its national interests and is forced to make concessions that undermine the Macedonian national identity, language, culture, and existence. The lack of real strategic hedging in a certain period and due to the asymmetry of power and the lack of balance with part of the immediate neighbourhood, within the framework of the Western alliance, are reasons that problematize the rapid and smooth integration.

In general, hedging is a self-help activity that is intuitive, particularly for smaller states. Rational players would hedge by adopting numerous insurance-providing strategies when circumstances are

unpredictable and the stakes are high, as a result of the increasing and spreading US-China competition. They endeavour to circumvent fixed, irrevocable obligations toward the opposing authorities. In the case of Macedonia, a certain concept of partial hedging is recommended and acceptable, which will primarily enable cooperation in developing economic fields, such as infrastructure or creating strategies for energy diversification. Hedging should keep the possibilities open for as long as possible. Hedging is a logical choice for small states to balance benefits and costs, allowing them to minimize risks and maximize returns. This allows governing elites to focus on domestic tasks without speculating about dominant powers.

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The Values Conflict and the Struggle for World Domination

Zhidas Daskalovski

Introduction

The current state of international relations and the global order is characterized by growing conflicts, and rivalry between the United States of America (US), the declining hegemon, and the rising non-Western powers, first and foremost, China and Russia. In February 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a "special military operation" to "demilitarise" and "denazify" Ukraine. Russia's invasion has unified the Western world. Moscow, as well as, China, Iran, and other non-democratic regimes, vitally endanger the liberal democratic world and the "rules- based order." Rallied around the US leadership, the Western elites mobilized in support of Ukraine. The US and its allies are united against China and Russia. This hostile foreign policy includes "a trade war, unilateral sanctions, aggressive diplomacy, and military operations, is now commonly known as the New Cold War." (Prashad 2023) Some analysts fear the worst. For example, the prominent French intellectual Emmanuel Todd, argues that the Ukraine proxy war is "existential" for both Russia and the U.S. "imperial system" and that it is the start of World War Three. As the Russia expert Fiona Hill commented: "Whether we acknowledge it or not, we have been fighting this War for a long time, and we have failed to recognize it." (Glasser 2022) Similarly, China experts anticipate relations between Washington and Beijing to turn sour in a manner of the old Cold War. Daniel Beckley expects "a new Cold War in which the United States and China continue to decouple their strategic economic centers, maintain a military standoff in East Asia, promote their rival visions of world order and compete to provide solutions to international problems." (2023, 21) He argues that the US has difficulty accepting that China is no longer a rising power, but a world power. In this paper, I will focus on the values the two sides promote in their struggle for allies around the world presenting the Chinese and Russian position.

Promotion of Values to Win Allies

One can argue that following the Russian invasion of Ukraine the world has been divided into Western liberal world and the conservative forces. In the first group, we find the US, EU, the UK and their allies. Russia, Iran, Central Asia, China, Africa, and the Arab Middle East with various political institutions and ideologies – from Islamism to secular communism and state capitalism are united in their rejection of Western modernity, and its associated political and social alternative. Countries of South America, Asia-Pacific, or Southeastern Europe including Turkey do not have strict affiliation with either of the blocks, balancing their interests. The world is not driven by values but by states pursuing their interests.

Information warfare is a key element of the New Cold War. Both the US and its allies and Russia and China and their allies present ideological worldviews to attract further supporters or to change the minds of the opponents. The competition between China and the US is "not so much about ideology than it is about two competing views regarding the nature of the international system, with Beijing concluding that great power competition is competition for the rest of the world." (Hass and Sun 2023) The values of the "other" are criticized and misrepresented both domestically and internationally. In Western societies today, "any effort to promote a balanced and reasonable conversation about China and Russia, or indeed about the leading states in the developing world, is relentlessly attacked by state, corporate, and media institutions as disinformation, propaganda, and foreign interference." (Prashad 2023) The values promoted by the US and Western allies are similarly dismissed by Moscow and Beijing. In this context, the possibilities for dialogue between intellectuals from countries such as, China or Russia, and their Western counterparts, have been diminished.

The US rallies the Western camp under the banner of 'democracy versus authoritarianism.' American soft power, or the ability to offer an attractive lifestyle to the global masses, is associated with intangible power resources such as attractive culture, ideology, and institutions. The success of selling the American dream around the world is to promote Western values, consumption patterns and way of life spread through several strong influence channels of globalization (trade, tourism, cul-

tural exchanges, print and electronic mass media, movies and music). American culture has been hailed as representing universal values under the packaging of Hollywood studios and many US-based transnational corporations, such as, McDonalds and Starbucks. Proponents of American exceptionalism argue that the values, political system, and historical development of the US are unique in human history so that it is destined and entitled to play a distinct and positive role on the world stage where American global dominance is good not only for the US but for the world. China and Russia appear not able to compete with American soft power. Despite its great history of civilisation, "China has not been able to create either a mass culture or a high culture (in music, film or literature), one that might shape the sensitivities, imagination or aesthetic tastes of countries of other parts of the world." (Kuzniar 2018, 175) Russia also does not offer a global ideological alternative comparable to liberalism but in general opposes globalism that is contradictory to national sovereignty.

What Beijing and Moscow can and do argue is that US promotes values and fights for its own interests at the expense of other cultures and economies. While the West emphasizes "democratic governance, human rights, environmentalism, and globalization, Russia and China emphasize the sovereign equality of states, non-intervention in the internal affairs of states, the settlement of disputes by mechanism to which states have consented, the immunity of states and their officials, and the condemnation of double standards in the treatment of states." (Dugard 2023, 232) Both seek cooperation and economic interdependence, not exploitation by the powerful actors. The joint Declaration of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the Promotion of International Law in 2016 details this approach of the two powers. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016)

In a speech, delivered on September 30, 2022, Putin criticized how "the history of the West is a chronicle of endless expansion…beginning its colonial policy back in the Middle Ages, and then followed the slave trade, the genocide of Indian [Indigenous] tribes in America, the plunder of India, of Africa, the wars of England and France against China." He stressed however, that the era of Western domination is gone and never coming back. Russia is a distinct civilization-state that seeks equal treatment and justice in international relations. As Putin declared

"The era of exploitation of anyone is a thing of the past… everyone must be provided with access to the benefits of modern development, and no one should be forced to obey those who are richer or more powerful at the cost of their own development and national interests." (Putin 2023) For Russia, the interest of many nations to join BRICS+ is evidence that countries seek different options to the Western-dominated world. In an interview with Russian News Agency TASS, Yury Ushakov, the Russian presidential foreign policy aide, noted how cooperation within BRICS is undoubtedly one of the key features of Russia's long-term foreign policy. (Korostovceva 2024)

Russia's 2024 BRICS Presidency was focused on ensuring a smooth incorporation of all new members of the association. As the organization grows further, following the summit in Kazan in October 2024, it should be taking a leading role in shaping the global agenda. Moscow supports strengthening ties between representatives of BRICS countries within the UN and within other key multilateral platforms. Moreover, it also supports building horizontal network ties between various regional and sub-regional integration processes in Eurasian, African and Latin American countries and organisations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). This kind of multi-level cooperation is expected to become the basis of a fairer multipolar world order and a model for equal state-to-state communication aimed at finding responses to the challenges the world is facing. (Korostovceva 2024)

In recent years on a global level there is a confrontation between the traditional conservative values (based on the family, religion, spirituality, and communion) and neoliberal values (focusing on individualism, secularism, consumption, multi-culturalism, and networks instead of communities). The West seeks to preserve the current system of the world economy and international relations as the most beneficial one, its privileged position in the international organizations, in the information and cultural space, and in the military sphere. Consequently, liberal values are being promoted as worthy of universal acceptance. On the other hand, many in the Global South demand global redistribution of resources and influence, and do not want Western imposed changes in its value system. Consumerism and individual liberal rights conflict with the traditional cultures, values, and ways of life of many societies around the

world. Liberal democrats fail to recognize the legitimacy of other forms of socio-political entities. For many in the rest of the world every culture and civilization has its unique trajectory and essence and imposing liberalism is seen as an act of aggression and negation of the pluralism of human history and experience. The US emphasis on Western-style liberal democratic values has already faced significant challenges in dealing with its partners in regions such as the Middle East, South-East Asia and North Africa.

Moscow opposes globalization tendencies that do not "recognize the diversity of cultures and ways of life and is designed to force all countries and peoples under the banner of the Western civilization of consumption." (Patrushev 2023) Furthermore, in line with traditional and conservative values, Russia rejects transgender rights and cancel culture propagated by the liberal democracies. These views resonate in many corners of the world. For instance it's obvious that "Putin's Russia, being morally conservative, has become sympathetic to the Saudis who I'm sure have a bit of a hard time with American debates over access for transgender women in the ladies' room." (Devecchio 2023) Putin criticizes this "radical denial of moral norms, religion, and family, of humanity, the overthrow of faith and traditional values," asking if Russians wanted "instead of 'mum' and 'dad', to have 'parent number one', 'parent number two', 'number three'," and "if there are supposedly genders besides women and men, and [children to be] offered the chance to undergo sex change operations," before concluding that Russia has a different future. This kind of rhetoric is close to the worldview of many countries and peoples. (Full text 2023) Russia rejects liberalism in all its forms, challenging the modern Western civilization and renouncing its universalistic claims.

On the value front China has advanced two-pronged strategy. On the one hand, Beijing criticizes democracy in the USA, while on the other, it claims China had developed a better type of a democratic system. As far as the criticism of the US political system goes, China issues a yearly report on human rights violations in the United States. In the latest edition, for 2022, the State Council Information Office notes that "chronic diseases, such as money politics, racial discrimination, gun and police violence, as well as wealth polarization, are rampant in the U.S." and that "that human rights legislation and justice have seen extreme

retrogression, further undermining the basic rights and freedoms of the American people." The Council argues how "political donations have made American elections a game for the rich, alienation of two-party politics has turned into polarized politics, and American democracy is losing its foundation in public support." On the other hand, "civil rights cannot be aptly guaranteed in the U.S. due to surging gun violence, growing racial discrimination and inequality, and historic retrogression in women's and children's rights, according to the report," while in international relations American "abuse of force and unilateral sanctions have created humanitarian disasters."

China's ideas on democracy have been discussed annually at the *International Forum on Democracy: The Shared Human Values*. A parallel to Biden's *Summit for Democracy*, the Chinese event gathers participants from more than 100 countries, regions and international organizations to discuss topics such as "democracy and sustainable development", "democracy and innovation", "democracy and global governance", "democracy and the diversity of human civilization", "democracy and the road to modernization" and so on. Beijing insists on breaking the hegemony of Western discourse on the topic. As President Xi Jinping put it in November 2019, "China is following a path of socialist political development with Chinese characteristics, and the people's democracy is a type of whole-process democracy." (Yu 2021) While the idea of "whole process democracy" entered Chinese political theory in 2007, during the sixth plenary session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in November 2021, the concept was consolidated and a month later, the State Council Information Office of China published a new white paper entitled *China: Democracy That Works*. (Mahoney 2021) No fixed model for all civilizations exists and consequently, the Chinese practice of democracy is closely attached to its culture and domestic situation. It is argued that China's unique approach to governance embraces the principles of grassroots participation, deliberative decision-making, public consultation and transparency. Unlike the multi-party electoral politics in many Western countries, where parties focus primarily on gaining votes with various campaign promises and defeating their rivals, the argument is that China's socialist democracy runs through all processes, including elections, decision-making, management and supervision. China strives to strike a

balance between democracy and development, "the priority always rests with development, which is facilitated by democracy and in turn boosts the development of democracy." (*White Paper* 2021) Democracy here is understood of being based on meritocracy and scientific and effective institutional arrangements that lead to development. Chinese democracy is not "just aimed at elections, there are meetings and consultations on many different levels." (Huiyao, 2023) The Chinese political system is based meritocracy in selection where public servants undergo an examination process.

In Western societies, accountability is based on the rule of law, enforced by an independent judiciary and a free press. Although these systems are still underdeveloped in China, a combination of formal institutions and informal channels have come to fill in the gap. Because China does not practice Western-style, one-person-one-vote democracy, its best strategy going forward is to maintain popular support through accountability and responsiveness. Local officials are sacked summarily should they fail to respond to natural disasters or to outbreaks of epidemics, or if there are local coal mine blasts or serious accidents due to dereliction of duty. (Jin 127) The legitimacy of the Communist Party in China has always been an interesting question. As we have seen, numerous international surveys have shown a high level of satisfaction toward the government. It is, of course, due to the material prosperity and security delivered to a large swath of its citizens. However, on a regular basis, satisfaction comes from the fact that the government remains an attentive and responsive power. The system's accountability mechanisms can sometimes hold their own with those of democratic countries, particularly when it comes to confronting societal problems. For instance, "the number of Chinese departments with investigatory powers has been rising in recent years, as they look into fire prevention, safety measures in the workplace, food safety, pharmaceutical standards, IP protection, pollution control, and anti-corruption measures." (Ibid.) According to Jin, a quarter million cadres are regularly dispatched to investigate private and public institutions at all levels. Between 2016 and 2017, environmental protection inspections resulted in more than seventeen thousand officials being disciplined, prosecuted, and convicted. National and provincial tournament events for environmental protection have been held to award prizes to winners for their vigilance and tenacity.

As a result, the air in Beijing has been cleaned up enough so that its citizens are now enjoying far more "blue-sky days." (Jin 128)

China employs a digital infrastructure to collect and analyze data, ensuring public policies are based on verifiable scientific information. In theories of democracy, free and fair elections are one of the prerequisites for a country to be deemed as democratic. In the Chinese approach, outcomes are prioritized and a strong emphasis is put on maintaining social stability and economic development. China has "lifted 770 million people out of poverty over the past 40 plus years and eliminated extreme poverty altogether…at time when others have seen their idealist democracies mired in polarization, failed governance, economic instability and growing inequality along with various forms of domestic and international conflict that bear little practical resemblance to democracy at all." (Mahoney 2021) This whole process democracy achieves great results in the green development of the country, reducing emissions, aiming to reverse global warming. As the country has grown into an indispensable force to drive the development of the world's clean energy, Chinese green developmental projects are welcomed in Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. (Jennings 2024) Nowadays, Chinese investors make money on green energy without alarming host countries with the cost, scale or pollution brought by the mega-projects from the early phases of Belt and Road Initiative.

Chinese political thought argues that "public servants" exercise political power, represent others and make decisions on citizens' behalf. China calls all those who exercise any kind of power "cadres", responsible to represent the people's interests. In the West, responsibility and political power are gained through elections. Chinese criticism is that once elected public officials assume discretionary power, which they use having in mind the electoral cycle, the aim being to win the next election. Politicians and governments in Western democracies are mostly interested in courtship of those citizens who participate in elections, not of the public as a whole. Great majorities of Chinese citizens have trust in their cadres because they tend to the interest of the society and not for partial groups as Western politicians do. In, China for example, during the period between 1978 and 2016 life expectancy increased by nearly ten years and infant mortality dropped by more than 80 percent. Over the past four decades, more than eight hundred million people in China have

been lifted out of dire poverty—the largest global reduction in inequality in modern times. (Jin 2023, 25)

The Chinese regime has the ability to "protect the poor and to ensure that they have the basic necessities for life, it is steadily carrying out political reform and strengthening the rule of law and the people can feel its sense of responsiveness to their own needs… these are the major reasons why the people continue to have faith in government organs." (Yun-han Chu 2013, 24) Recent research by three American scholars provides supports this conclusion. They have discovered that "if one wants to understand why the Chinese people have such a high level of trust in their government, the most important reason is the government's responsiveness 'to the needs of the masses.'" (Tang et al 2013) A longitudinal survey conducted by researchers at the Harvard Kennedy School—consistent with a range of surveys conducted internationally—reported strong satisfaction with the government, despite paternalism: 86 percent in 2003, 96 percent in 2009, and 93 percent in both 2015 and 2016. (Cunningham et al. 2023) The latest World Values Survey (2017–2020) indicates that 95 percent of Chinese participants had significant confidence in their government, compared to 33 percent in the US and 45 percent, on average, in the rest of the world. (Haerpfer 2020) As of 2022, that level of trust was at 91 percent, compared to 39 percent in the US. (Lehr 2022) Research shows that, "with respect to the political psychology of the Chinese people, political trust – a belief in the legitimacy of the government – appears as the dominant reason for their broad support of the political system." (Tang et al 2013)

On the other hand, Chinese see American democracy as representative one where "elections are merely a means by which common people grant power to political elites. The elected elites need not genuinely represent the people, but only have to administer the affairs of the state in their place, thus replacing the people as "masters." (Shaoguang 2023) Since it does not allow the masses of the people to truly act as masters of the state, but allows only a small group of elected elites (politely calling them "representatives") to serve as masters in their place, then what exactly is "democratic" about the system? In many circumstances politicians are not willing, able, or inclined to act according to the platform presented during the campaign. Chinese criticism is focused on the idea that, modern elections in the West are are geared toward the rich,

and parties and candidates must raise a tremendous amount of money in order to cover election expenses, without which they simply cannot run for office. What this means is that, "for electoral parties and candidates, the most important people are not average voters, but rather wealthy donors." (Ibid.) Given that without wealthy donors there is no way to gain power, it is in fact these donors who truly "grant power."

A majority of Americans expressed dissatisfaction with their democracy saying the government should do more to solve problems and help meet the needs of people. (Stokes 2021) However, governments and elected representatives do not heed to the interests of common citizens. The US is dominated by a rich and powerful elite. Multivariate analysis by Princeton University Prof Martin Gilens and Northwestern University Prof Benjamin I Page (2014) indicates that economic elites and organised groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on US government policy, while average citizens and mass-based interest groups have little or no independent influence. A proposed policy change with low support among economically elite Americans (one-out-of-five in favour) is adopted only about 18% of the time," they write, "while a proposed change with high support (four-out-of-five in favour) is adopted about 45% of the time." (572). Moreover, they found that when a majority of citizens disagrees with economic elites and/or with organised interests, or when fairly large majorities of Americans favour policy change, they generally do not get their preference accepted. They warn that while Americans do "enjoy many features central to democratic governance, such as regular elections, freedom of speech and association and a widespread (if still contested) franchise… if policymaking is dominated by powerful business organisations and a small number of affluent Americans, then America's claims to being a democratic society are seriously threatened." (577) US is an oligarchy, not a democracy, a system of government where a small number of elites rule in other words.

Moreover, in the US, government officials are not ordinary people, they are members of the rich elite. For example, in 2015, the median wealth of U.S. senators exceeded $3 million. (Kopf 2018) U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders warned that democracy cannot survive with concentration of economic and political power where just 3 Wall Street firms, BlackRock, Vanguard & State Street manage $20.7 trillion in assets,

being major shareholders in 95% of S&P 500 companies. (Moorcraft 2024) He also warns that "while millionaires and billionaires own 79.2% of all wealth in our country, the bottom half of Americans own just 1.5% of our nation's wealth." (Raisinghani 2023) Put it alternatively, after years of declines, "America's middle class now holds a smaller share of U.S. wealth than the top 1%." (Tanzi and Dorning 2021) The top 1% represents about 1.3 million households who roughly make more than $500,000 a year. The U.S. has more income and wealth inequality than any other major country on Earth.

US is an oligarchic society as wealth is not distributed justly, and mobility stagnates. There is growth in inequality in the US as class mobility declines. Chetty et al. measured absolute mobility by comparing children's household incomes at age 30 (adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index) with their parents' household incomes at age 30. They found that rates of absolute mobility have fallen from approximately 90% for children born in 1940 to 50% for children born in the 1980s and that absolute income mobility has fallen across the entire income distribution, with the largest declines for families in the middle class. Rates of upward income mobility have fallen so sharply over the past half-century due to lower GDP growth rates and greater inequality in the distribution of growth. More precisely Chetty et al. found that most of the decline in absolute mobility is driven by the more unequal distribution of economic growth rather than the slowdown in aggregate growth rates. They conclude that absolute mobility has declined sharply in America over the past half-century primarily because of the growth in inequality and that if one "wants to revive the "American Dream" of high rates of absolute mobility, one must have an interest in growth that is shared more broadly across the income distribution." (Chetty et al. 2016: 406) Similarly, Leonhardt argues that in recent history the American dream was corrupted to serve only the privileged few. The stagnation of living standards has become the defining trend of American life as the American economy stopped benefiting the majority and became an instrument of acquisition for the few. (Leonhardt 2023)

Hard data gives further evidence to support the claim that the American dream, the belief that US is upwardly mobile society where one generation can do better financially than the last with the aid of hard work and perseverance, has malfunctioned. Former Labor Secretary

Robert Reich commented how "the earnings of the typical American have barely budged (adjusted for inflation)" over the past 40 years, while the compensation for CEOs of large corporations has skyrocketed to 300 times the pay of their typical worker, from 20 times in the 1950s and '60s. (Weber 2023) Reich argued that while globalization and technological change have had some effect, the larger cause of the decline is "the increasing concentration of political power in corporate and financial elite" that have spent years "actively reorganizing the market for their own benefit." Indeed, the wealthiest 1% of Americans now bring home more than 40% of the country's total income, up from 10% in the 1950s and '60s, and they control 31% of the nation's wealth while the bottom 50% has only 2.5%. A Brookings Institute report found that in the US "there is less movement up and down the economic ladder here than in many other countries." (Smith et al. 2022) A worrying trend is the decline of life expectancy. Thus, in 1980, the U.S. had a typical life expectancy for an affluent country," but now it ranks lower than its peers and even many poorer countries.(Leonhardt 2023b) The main reason is the stagnation of life expectancy for working-class people.

Access to the ballot remains unequal, for example. According to research from the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), African American and Latino citizens were three times as likely as whites to be told they lacked the proper identification to vote and twice as likely to be told—incorrectly—that their names were not listed on voter rolls. Laws barring convicted felons from voting disproportionately affect African Americans. These minorities are also more likely to miss the deadline for registering to vote. US is one of the few countries in the world where responsibility for voter registration lies entirely with individual citizens. Indeed, the "US has a long history of governments discouraging and even suppressing the vote." (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2023, 176) As of 2021, 19 states had enacted a total of 34 voter suppression laws that could limit the voting rights of up to 55 million voters in those states. (Eskridge and Barnes 2022) Voter disenfranchisement is a serious issue affecting US democracy.

Furthermore, nonwhite citizens still do not receive equal protection under the law. Black men are "more than twice as likely to be killed by police during their lifetime as are white men (even though Black victims of police killing are about half as likely to be armed); they are more

likely than white men to be stopped and searched by police; and they are more likely to be arrested and convicted—with longer sentences—for similar crimes." (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2023, p. 7) There is a significant problem of multiracial democracy in the country. Indeed, the US is a country where electoral minorities, rooted in a mostly white, rural areas, can consistently rule over a multiracial, urbanized regions. In America "majorities do not really rule." (ibid, p. 171) Minorities use the system where the U.S. Senate over-represents less populated states, while the so-called filibuster procedure necessitates a supermajority of 60 votes to pass legislation. The result is that majorities often cannot gain power, and if they do, they find it hard to govern.

In international relations, China claims that the current world order is 'unjust and unreasonable.' This is where worldviews of Russian and Chinese political elites converge. Both resent US dominance and aim to 'de-Westernize' global governance and 'democratize' international relations. (Rolland 2019) There should be common development and security, as well as fairness and justice, while the global governing system should be open and inclusive. In the fall of 2023 China issued a White Paper entitled *A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions* about building a global community of a shared future, a grand vision put forward by President Xi Jinping in 2013. This vision is related to various aspects of China's diplomacy and actions, including advancing the Xi-proposed Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative and Global Civilization Initiative, as well as jointly building the Belt and Road. Opposing "some countries' hegemonic, abusive, and aggressive actions against others …causing great harm and putting global security and development at risk," China calls for a multipolar world, for strengthened multilateralism. Under Xi's "global community of shared future," the document says, economic development and stability are prioritized as countries treat each other as equals to work together for "common prosperity." Here, China contrasts the BRI, seen as an international public good and the largest cooperative platform, with the U.S., waging trade wars or military operations against countries around the world. Moreover, the BRI not only expends economic prosperity but also diffuses "a proactive discourse to place Chinese norm conceptions in BRI partner countries as well as in global governance institutions." (Pieper 2021, p. 97) For Beijing, all countries

should respect the diversity of world civilizations, respect the democratic development path of other countries, strengthen exchanges and mutual learning, and promote the construction of a community of shared future for mankind. The 2023 white paper introduces "the theoretical base, practice and development of a global community of shared future." There are five key points emphasized in the paper: building partnerships "in which countries treat each other as equals"; a fair and just security environment; "inclusive development"; inter-civilization exchanges; and "an ecosystem that puts Mother Nature and green development first." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2023)

China prioritizes "extensive consultation" among equals and "the principle of sovereign equality" that "runs through the UN Charter." Imposing "one's model of democracy and 'democratic transformations' on others, or forming an 'alliance of values' in the name of 'democracy' versus 'autocracy' – create division and antagonism and trample on the democratic spirit, leaving a poisonous legacy despised by their targets." (CGTN) Foreign Minister Wang said that "there should be no superiority or inferiority among civilizations" and that "values should not be used as a weapon for confrontation". (China Daily 2023) The concept of a global community of shared future reflects the common interests of all civilizations – peace, development, unity, coexistence, and win-win cooperation. The foreign minister also called for nations to resolve differences through dialogue and consultation, and to "oppose the reckless expansion of military alliances that squeeze the security space of other countries". In the future, countries will be free of "bloc politics," ideological competition and military alliances, and of being held responsible for upholding "'universal values' "defined by a handful of Western countries."

Western states challenge the principle of "indivisibility of security." Efforts by liberal states to "expand the zone of liberal peace encroach on state sovereignty and the right of every nation to determine its own course of development." (Krickovic and Sakwa 2022, 9) For Russia, NATO enlargement eschews restraint and instead pursues "preponderance, upsetting the balance of power and violating the foundational principle of the "indivisibility of security." (Putin 2022) China and Russia take issue with what they see as US "heavy-handed democracy promotion" (or "collective unilateralism") and proclaim sovereignty to be a "hard" (or fundamental) concept. Sergei Karaganov argued for the

US, Russia, and China to be the "twenty-first-century concert of nations", the leading triumvirate that could be supported to include other "real" and "sovereign actors." (2017) In opposition to the American approach, Russia cultivates pragmatic relations with different countries, regions, and organizations, insisting on the principles of peaceful coexistence, independence, autonomy, and non-interference. Russian leaders consistently defend the right of each state "to choose those models of development which correspond to their national, cultural and confessional identities." (Lavrov 2018) Their view on international relation is based on respect for the sovereignty of UN member states and the principle of non-interference in their domestic affairs. Moscow often opposes U.S. interventions around the world. While the U.S. fully supported Israel, Putin has blamed American policy in the Middle East for the violence during the war that started in Israel in 2023.

As Wang argues (2024) China is steadily carving out its role as a responsible major power on the global stage, with a firm commitment to actively engage with a wide range of international bodies, including the United Nations, BRICS, G7, and G20. This engagement underscores China's dedication to global governance and its proactive stance on addressing the pressing challenges facing the world today. Among its core priorities is "the advocacy for global peace and stability, with a particular emphasis on the critical need to prevent the escalation of nuclear conflict. China has been collaborating with members of the Global South to balance the gap between developing and developed countries." (Ibid.) China, as a founding member of BRICS, has engaged heavily with developing countries in commerce and trade through BRICS.

During the annual Boao Forum, on 21 April 2022, Xi introduced a Global Security Initiative (GSI) to "uphold the principle of indivisible security, build a balanced, effective and sustainable security architecture, and oppose the building of national security on the basis of insecurity in other countries." GSI advocates a new path to security featuring dialogue over confrontation, partnership over alliance and win-win over zero-sum mentality. The danger is that "bloc confrontation" and "Cold War mentality" would "wreck the global peace framework." GSI affirms the central role of the UN in addressing conflict promoting the "harmonization and positive relationship" between great powers, including opposition to "hegemonic actions". Furthermore, it encourages dialogue to

"cool hotspots" and "release the pressure from crises," while addressing the challenges of traditional and non-traditional security threats and supporting capacity building of global security governance. (GSI Concept Paper) GSI emphasizes the role of the UN as the principal fora for resolving global security issues and promotes a number of China-initiated regional peace and security initiatives, including the China-Africa Peace and Security Forum, the Beijing Xiangshan Forum, the Global Data Security Initiative and its regional iterations in Central Asia and Latin America. To realize this vision, China will hold high-level GSI-related events and invite various parties to discuss security matters.

Analysts have described the GSI as a way of increasing China's global influence reflecting China's willingness to build a "universally secure world." China presents itself as a champion of a "multicivilizational world" and a partner for development and sovereignty. (Leonard 2024) Despite the GSI's relevance to Sino-Russian relations, it will have the most currency across the Global South, where China most readily finds an audience for its alternative ideas for global order. While Jinping has begun to articulate a more assertive vision of how global security governance ought to develop, the success and impact of his initiative will ultimately depend on Chinese partners' willingness to cooperate under the framework of GSI. In fact, "far from being solely driven by Chinese interests, governments across the developing world have long requested Beijing to become more involved in solving regional and local security issues." (Fialla 2022) According to China's Foreign Ministry more than 80 countries and organizations had "expressed approval and support" for the Global Security Initiative. This is a testimony of China's efficacious diplomacy and trust reposed by the international community in China as a balancing actor in resolving global challenges in a highly professional and befitting manner.

Given Beijing's significant investments abroad, China does not force other countries to choose sides. Indeed, substantial majorities across the world do not think that their countries will ever have to choose between China and the United States. (Ash et al. 2023) Consequently, the GSI is likely to garner support in parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. It is also aimed at wooing Caribbean and Pacific countries. Some Latin American states like Nicaragua and Uruguay have already endorsed the project. China has promoted the GSI especially vividly in

the wider Horn of Africa. Xue Bing, China's Special Envoy to the Horn of Africa, has tied the GSI to China's recent efforts to promote peace and stability in the region, framing China as a constructive external actor. Within, China takes a very cautious approach to involvement in bilateral conflicts. Unlike Western approaches to conflicting situations where often parties in dispute are nudged or pushed to accept agreements, Beijing rarely sets the agenda and prefers regional parties to find compromises in negotiations. For example, in concluding the recent agreement to cease hostilities between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) it was the African Union and regional governments – and not China – that led these negotiation efforts.

China's Global Civilization Initiative (GCI), was announced by Xi Jinping in his March 15, 2023 keynote speech to the Chinese Communist Party High-Level Dialogue with World Political Parties. The guiding principles introduced in the GCI are: peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom. Different civilizations had their own perceptions of shared human "values," argued Xi. He also spoke of "common aspirations" of humanity of "peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom." The initiative calls for countries to "fully harness the relevance of their histories and cultures to the present times, and push for creative transformation and innovative development of their fine traditional cultures." Countries must "refrain from imposing their own values or models on others" and need to "uphold the principles of equality, mutual learning, dialogue, and inclusiveness among civilizations." Nations must "push for creative transformation and innovative development of their fine traditional cultures." GCI calls for expanded people-to-people and inter-party dialogues, and for a "new type of international relations."

Liu Jianchao, Minister of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) International Liaison Department, has underlined that China is committed to "international law, not a system of sole national privilege... China has always been a builder of world peace, contributor to global development, and protector of the world order." (Kennedy et al. 2024) Liu Jianchao he has extensive diplomatic experience, including serving as China's ambassador to the Philippines (2009-2012) and Indonesia (2012-2014). He is an important politician thought to have a close relationship with Xi Jinping. His statements are relevant. If Chinese policy is commendable, the American one is not. In a recent piece published in the People's Daily

in August 2023, he contrasted China to the US, asking, "who in today's world is trying to dominate international affairs, dominate the destiny of other countries, and monopolize developmental advantages? ... Who is pursuing policies of decoupling, cutting supply, and sanctions? Who is pushing the world towards division and confrontation? I think people around the world can see this clearly." (Ibid.)

China's approach to international diplomacy is deeply rooted in its historical narrative and foreign policy principles. China had no colonial past and has not engaged in invasive military campaigns in recent history, which serves as a foundation for its credibility on the global stage. This stance, encapsulated in its "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence", emphasizes dialogue and consultation over force and aggression in resolving international disputes. President Xi Jinping's speech in San Francisco in November 2023, underscored the significance of the guiding principles in China's foreign policy – namely, mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation. These core values should be the basis of a coherent foreign policy to help Xi jointly build a world with "lasting peace, universal security and common prosperity".

Russia also disapproves of the imposition of a rules-based international order where international law is interpreted by the US to accord with its national interests. From the Russian perspective, the existing system of international relations and security is unfair, and discriminating against the rival emerging powers. Moscow works to "strengthen its security, protect the sovereignty and multiply military potential through cooperation with other partners, first and foremost within the military alliance, Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)." (Zemanek 2022, p. 7) The Secretary of the National Security Council of the Russian Federation, Nikolai Patrushev explained how all states and peoples who do not want to follow…"but profess and defend their way, sanctified by thousands of years of experience and traditions of their ancestors, are automatically proclaimed enemies subject to re-education by any means, including force." (Patrushev 2023) Russia is against the Western backed rules-based order which makes difference between liberal democracies and "authoritarian powers," between 'good' and 'evil' force in international politics. For Moscow the promotion of the "selective combination of rules, unilaterally employed, is with the

aim to circumvent multilateral, collective decision-making and international legal instruments and processes based on the UN Charter as a core of the post-war order." (Ibid., p. 16) However, times are changing fast. While in the past, "globally significant decisions were made by a small group of states with the voice of the Western community predominating, for obvious reasons today, new players from the Global South and East have come to the forefront of world politics." (Lavrov 2023) Russia supports their focus on strengthening their sovereignty in resolving topical issues, putting their national interests at the forefront.

Moscow opposes the domination of the West, "to continue to skim the cream of global politics, economics and trade, and to ensure its own well-being at the expense of others." (Ibid.) Nowadays, the imbalanced model of "world development which has for centuries ensured the advanced economic growth of colonial powers through the appropriation of resources of dependent territories and states in Asia, Africa and in the Occident is irrevocably fading into the past." (Foreign Policy Concept 2023) The preferred Russian alternative is "a "multipolar world," in which the unilateral power and hegemonic impulses of the United States are constrained by a coalition of major powers, including Russia, China, and India." (Rumer and Sokolsky 2019, 16) For Moscow, the emerging international architecture should be inclusive, cooperative, and not antagonistic where all issues in international affairs are resolved through a culture of dialogue, based on a balance of interests and consensus.

Russian foreign policy is focused on expanding mutually beneficial international cooperation. Moscow is striving towards the establishment of an "equitable and sustainable world order." In his speech at the annual meeting of the Valdai Club on October 5, 2023 President Vladimir Putin outlined the key principles on which a more just and democratic world order should be based. He argued in favor of "openness and interconnectedness of the world – without barriers to communication; respect for diversity as a foundation for co-development; maximum representation in global governance structures; global security based on a balance of interests; equitable access to the benefits of development; equality for all, rejection of the dictates of the rich or powerful." (Putin 2023) The objective process of forming a multipolar world order based on self-sufficient countries and regions is facing serious Western resistance under which, the basic foundations of international communication are

being undermined. Universal norms of law and the principles of the UN Charter, including the sovereign equality of states, non-interference in the internal affairs and self-determination of peoples, are being trampled upon. (Lavrov 2024) Speaking to the participants of the Fourth Eurasian Women's Forum in St Petersburg on September 18, President Vladimir Putin stressed the need to unite efforts in the name of sustainable development and universal, equal and indivisible security. Russia has repeatedly asked for an inclusive architecture of equal and indivisible security in Eurasia. Moscow favors a bigger representation of the Global South in the UN Security Council supporting the candidatures of Brazil and India. Russia is against additional seats for Western countries, which are already overrepresented in the Security Council. (Lavrov 2024b) The UN should remain a forum for aligning the interests of all the countries.

Conclusion

In this paper I focused on the values the two opposing sides promote in their struggle for allies around the world presenting the Chinese and Russian position. In this conflict, the values of the "other" are criticized and misrepresented both domestically and internationally. On the one hand, the US rallies the Western camp under the banner of 'democracy versus authoritarianism' emphasizing the advantages of democratic governance, human rights, environmentalism, and globalization. What Beijing and Moscow argue is that US promotes values and fights for its own interests at the expense of other cultures and economies. Russia and China emphasize the sovereign equality of states, non-intervention in the internal affairs of states, the settlement of disputes by mechanism to which states have consented. Both seek cooperation and economic interdependence, not exploitation by the powerful actors. There should be common development and security, as well as fairness and justice, while the global governing system should be open and inclusive. The emerging international architecture should be inclusive, cooperative, and not antagonistic where all issues in international affairs are resolved through a culture of dialogue, based on a balance of interests and consensus.

Overall, the conflict over values between the political West and Russia, China and other players is ongoing. Each side has arguments in favor of their ideological position and seeks to convince the rest of the

world. Countries around the globe increasingly decide not to resolutely choose one or the other option, aligning themselves with either side depending on the issue and their own national interests. The value battle regarding the meaning of democracy, human rights and the structure of the international relations is crucial for the future world order. The Chinese and Russian positions are increasingly being accepted by states and peoples who might not necessarily support Moscow or Beijing, but prefer multipolar than unipolar world led by the US. The war over the future of the planetary order, might be decided by the ability to promote the value systems and find allies around the world.

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The Security Dilemma: Examining Russian-Western-Ukrainian Relations

Jordanka Galeva and Dejan Marolov

Introduction

National security is one of the fundamental goals of each state and refers to protecting a person, building, organization or country against threats, such as crime or attacks by foreign countries. In this context, the goal of each government is to ensure the national security (which includes territorial security, economic security, ecological security, as well as social and political security) through detection of prospective threats and the planning of the proper response. Due to this, national security is closely linked to security dilemma. According to the Britannica dictionary, security dilemma is a situation in which actions taken by a state to increase its own security cause reactions from other states, which in turn lead to a decrease rather than an increase in the original state's security.

The study in this paper elaborates the historical aspects of relations between Russia and Ukraine and relationship between Russia and the West (USA and NATO), with purpose to identify if the Russian Ukrainian conflict is related to the Russian-Western security dilemma.

The research aims to analyze how the three parties (Russia, West and Ukraine) perceive and address security challenges. The concept of security dilemma will be elaborated through defensive and offensive realism, helping to explain the challenges states face in ensuring their security.

Historical Overview of Russian-Ukrainian Relations

In the 20th century, relations between Russia and Ukraine began with the foundation of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) on December 30, 1922. The Union was established through an agreement signed by Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and the Transcaucasian Republic (composed of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan), during the union's first congress. This "adventure" lasted until 1991 when three of the four creators of the Soviet Union, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, signed the

Belovezhskaya Pushcha which abolished the Union and replace it with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

The first significant step toward the dissolution of the Soviet Union was taken by soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, in 1985, with the adoption of a *perestroika* policy which aimed to modernize Soviet communism through economic reconstruction and changes in the political party leadership. Although the Warsaw Pact[1] was renewed the same year, the agreements with the United States on disarmament and redefining relations between the USSR and Europe strengthened the individual aspirations of the member states of Eastern Europe. These aspirations were further encouraged in 1989 by the second pivotal step towards the collapse of the USSR: the abolition of the Brezhnev Doctrine (Glazer 1971).[2] Gorbachev's reforms contributed also to the spontaneous collapse of the Berlin Wall, which subsequently led to the fall of the Warsaw Pact on July 1, 1991, in Budapest.

Based on Article 72 of the Soviet Union Constitution (Supreme Soviet of the USSR, 1982) it was stipulated that each federal state reserves the right to secede from the USSR. Exercising this right, Ukraine declared its independence on August 24, 1991. In December of the same year, along with Belarus and the Russian Federation (renamed on December 25), signed the agreement to abolish the Soviet Union. In the Russia's case, this decision was preceded by *Declaration of State Sovereignty*, adopted by the Congress of People's Deputies on June 12, 1990. The formal dissolution of the USSR occurred on December 21, 1991, with the signing of the Alma-Ata Protocol by all Soviet republics (except Georgia). The Protocol, excluding the Baltic republics of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, laid out to simultaneous transition to the Commonwealth of Independent States (regional intergovernmental organization in Eurasia). On May 15, 1992, nearly all CIS members (Georgia

1 The Pact had been created in 1955 as response to the inclusion of West Germany in NAT, which had been established six years earlier.

2 The Brezhnev Doctrine, also known as the doctrine of limited sovereignty, was adopted in 1968 and stipulated that no country should leave the Warsaw Pact or upset the balance of the one-party system in the Eastern Bloc countries. Namely, the policy that emerged from this doctrine authorized the USSR to intervene and interfere in the internal affairs of the member states of this pact, for which prominent examples and evidence are the intervention during the Hungarian Revolution in Budapest in 1956 and the Prague Spring in 1968 in Czechoslovakia.

and Azerbaijan joined in 1996) signed the Collective Security Treaty a defensive military alliance (Commonwealth of indipendent states, 2014).

In 1993 following a national referendum "the multinational people of the Russian Federation, united by a common fate on their land, establishing human rights and freedoms, civic peace and accord, preserving the historically established state unity…recognizing ourselves as part of the world community, adopt the Constitution of the Russian Federation" (Rossiiskaya Gazeta newspaper, 1993). Article 5 of Russian constitution states that the Federation consists of equal federal subjects: Republics (with its own constitution and legislation), territories, regions, cities of federal importance, an autonomous region and autonomous areas (with its charter and legislation). In Article 65, Part 3, titled *Structure of the federation*, all federal subjects are listed, including Crimea (after 2014), among the republics and Sevastopol, among the cities of federal importance. These units were annexed by Russia in 2014, even they are also and still part of the Ukrainian Constitution.

Article 133 of Ukrainian constitution (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 1996) explains that the system of the administrative and territorial structure of Ukraine is composed of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, oblasts (24 total, including Donetsk Oblast, and Luhansk Oblast), districts, cities (the cities of Kyiv and Sevastopol have special status, which is determined by the laws of Ukraine), city districts, settlements and village. The tenth chapter is dedicated to the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, which is an inseparable integral part of Ukraine with its own constitution adopted by the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic and approved by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (Article 134). Article 17 stipulates that protecting the sovereignty and territorial indivisibility of Ukraine and ensuring its economic and informational security are the most important functions of the state and a matter of concern for the entire Ukrainian people. Further, the Constitution stipulates that Ukraine is a unitary state, that the territory within its present border is indivisible and inviolable, that the sovereignty extends throughout its entire territory (Article 2), and that the territorial structure of Ukraine is based on the principles of unity and indivisibility of the state territory and the combination of centralization and decentralization in the exercise of state power (Article 132, Chapter IX, titled *Territorial structure of Ukraine*).

As we mentioned previously, in 1992 after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, nearly all CIS members signed the Collective Security Treaty which represents a defensive military alliance. However, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan left the alliance in 1999, followed by Ukraine in 2018. On the other side Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia and Moldova became part of the GUAM Consultative Group, which in 2006 led to formation of Organization for Democratic and Economic Development (ODED), based on the idea of a common path towards the structures of Euro-Atlantic cooperation. In this context it is significant to remark that during the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, a notable statement arose in international discussions. In 1990 U.S. Secretary of State, James Baker asked Gorbachev whether he would prefer a united Germany outside of NATO, independent and without American armed forces, or a united Germany within NATO, with a guarantee that NATO's jurisdiction would not move even one inch (2.54 centimeters) to the East? (Il silenzio di Puskin, 2022).

After this discussion, the first member of the Eastern Bloc to join NATO was East Germany, followed by other former Warsaw Pact members in 1999 and 2004. In 2008 US President George W. Bush Jr. extended an invitation to Georgia and Ukraine to join NATO, provoking a sharp reaction from Russia, which openly opposed (and continues to oppose) their potential membership in the Alliance. In terms of cooperation with the European Union, Georgia began association negotiations in July 2010, and three years later in July 2013 Georga signed a Free Trade Agreement. In November of the same year, during the EU Eastern Partnership Summit held in Vilnius, Association Agreements was signed with Georga and Moldova, but not with Ukraine. The signing of the Association Agreement with Ukraine was canceled, but took place the following year, in 2014, after the outbreak of the protests known as *Euromaidan*[3] and the removal of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych. The same year, the European Parliament adopted a resolution confirming that Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, and any other European country with European aspirations, can submit their application for joining the

3 The Euromaidan crisis began with thousands of people gathered in independence Square Maidan Nezalezhnosti in Kiev to protest the Ukrainian government's decision under Prime Minister Mykola Azarov to suspend the Association Agreement with the Europea Union and the President Viktor Yanukovych's refusal to sign the agreement at Vilnius Summit

EU. The new Ukrainian government signed the Political EU Accession on March 21, 2014, followed by Association Agreement signed by the new President Poroshenko on June 27 of the same year. Meanwhile on March 16, 2014, a referendum in Crimea – claimed to have over 83% voter turnout – resulted in a majority supporting reunification with Russia. Two days later the Russian president Putin requested the Federal Assembly to review the constitutional law for the inclusion of two new subjects in the federation - Crimea and Sevastopol - and to prepare an agreement for their entry into the Russian federation.

Following the Euromaidan protest, the demonstration also began in the Donbas region, where the separatist groups declared Donetsk and Luhansk oblast as People's republics. Two protocols known as Minsk 1 and Minsk 2 were signed, with the aim of bringing a permanent solution. However, the agreements failed as the conflict continued. In February 2022, Russia signed a decree recognizing the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics based on a resolution adopted by the Duma on February 15, 2022. Shortly after, Russia announced its intention to send the troops to the region citing art. 51 (Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression) of the UN Charter (United Nations, 1945) and the treaties of friendship and mutual assistance with the two republics (ratified by the Federal Assembly on February 22). Russia subsequently launched a "special military operation". A few days later, on February 28, Ukraine submitted its application for EU membership alongside Georgia and Moldova (March 3). The European Parliament adopted by 529 votes to 45, with 14 abstentions, a resolution on the candidate status of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia on June 23, 2022.

Security Dilemma in the Russian-Western Relationship and the Russian-Ukrainian Case

The security dilemma is a key concept in international relations, rooted in structural realism, also known as neorealism. Scholars such as Kenneth Waltz, (in his book "Theory of international politics"), argue that the international system lacks a central authority, creating an anarchic environment where countries are responsible for their own security. As representative of defensive realism, Waltz focuses on survival and

stability. In his opinion the states prioritize self-defense and maintaining a balance of power, forming alliances to deter aggression. On the other hand, John Mearsheimer, the representative of offensive realism, views states as inherently aggressive, seeking to maximize power for security, even if it destabilizes the system. Both as representative of neorealism assert that the anarchic system shapes the behavior of states, which act in their own self-interest to survive and protect their sovereignty. Considering that the uncertainty and fear of states regarding the intentions of other states lead to a vicious circle of accumulation of power, and in certain cases to military conflict, this section attempts to detect the pitfalls in Russian - Western relations and the impact to Russian - Ukrainian conflict.

Russian perception and reaction to NATO actions

The establishment of NATO occurred in 1949 through alliance of Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Portugal, Italy, Norway, Denmark and Iceland, with West Germany joining in 1955. This move prompted the Soviet Union to form the political and military coalition known as the Warsaw Pact, on May 14, 1955, in Poland. Members of the Warsaw Pact included the USSR, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Albania (which later withdrew). The Pact was dissolved soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall and formally ceased to exist on July 1, 1991. The first member of Eastern block to join NATO was East Germany, followed by other former Warsaw Pact members starting in 1999. This initiative of NATO's expansion eastward, as well as NATO's activities in countries bordering Russia, represented the main drives for development of the political relationship between Russia and the West and their relationship with Ukraine.

NATO began its eastward expansion in 1999 with the accession of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to the alliance, and continued with the British proposal in 2002 for the membership of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania (former Soviet republics), Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania (former Soviet satellites). These countries along with Slovenia became members in 2004, and in 2008 a new proposal arrived, this time from US President Bush, for the membership of Georgia and Ukraine in

NATO (which was not supported by France and Germany). Subsequently, Albania and Croatia became members in 2009, Montenegro in 2017, N. Macedonia in 2020, Finland in 2023, and Sweden in 2024. The latter two members decided to take this step due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine that began in February 2022.

With the eastward expansion NATO began to accomplish certain actions in the territory of the formerly members of the Warsaw Pact and started to increase the Russian concern about the security. Namely, in 2004, US President Bush proposed the installation of a NATO anti-missile defense system in the Czech Republic and Poland. Although this proposal was withdrawn by Obama, did not mean giving up the idea of strengthening defense against missile attacks from countries such as Iran (as had been argued during the Bush administration). Obama's new proposal consisted of placing SM-3 interceptor missiles in Poland and Romania and installing a computer room in the Czech Republic (Hildreth, 2010). Subsequently, in 2016, a NATO anti-missile system was put into operation in Romania to detect attacks with short- and medium-range missiles as well as to destroy missiles outside the Earth's atmosphere, which was later supplemented by an anti-missile system in Poland, a radar station in Turkey, a command center in Germany, and warships with missile defense and radar systems.

NATO's actions on the territory of the new NATO members, was considered a direct threat to Russia. Immediately after the proposal to install an anti-missile system in Poland and the Czech Republic, the Russian newspaper *Izvestia* published an article stating that there was a possibility of returning Russian strategic bombers to Cuba (Harding, 2008). On 12 December 2007 Moscow suspended implementation of Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty) and announced that if parts of U.S. missile defense system will be stationed in Poland, Warsaw would be the target of Russian nuclear weapons (Kamp, 2015). One year later, after proposal for Georgia and Ukraine to become members of NATO, Russia "responded" with a five-day war in South Ossetia, and the adoption of a decree recognizing the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Although the independence of these countries is recognized by only a few countries, the existing border disputes would prevent Georgia's eventual entry into NATO (Kuchins A. C., 2022).

In fact, regarding NATO enlargement, Russia felt betrayed since by the first eastward expansion in 1999, referring to the "promise" that NATO would not move eastward "not even an inch"[4]. The American response to this was that in fact, in the talks between Gorbachev and Baker, this referred to East Germany (Gordon, 1997). The second enlargement (which took place in 2004) was seen as the completion of Russian encirclement from the north to the southeast (Mini, 2022, p. 209), while the proposal for Georgia and Ukraine to become members of NATO was "the straw that broke the camel's back". After these events the Russian's arsenal of nuclear weapons has been increased and improved, and the new ballistic missile system have been introduced and equipped with greater numbers of warheads. The additional concern for the Russian security came from Ukrainian intention to become part of European Union. Putin openly expressed the Russian dissatisfaction about the ouster of pro-Russian President Yanukovych in 2014 and Ukraine's intention to sign an Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union (declaring it to be against Russian interests). The next Russian step was done by providing support to Russian separatists in Donbas region (i.e. in the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk Republics inhabited by Russians) and by stationing thousands of people on the Ukrainian border, with which it seized Crimea in 2014. Putin's explanation about Russian act was that the possible signing of the Association Agreement was contrary to Russian interests, considering the Russian - Ukrainian economic cooperation and the fact that Russia cooperates with 245 Ukrainian enterprises in the field of defense industry. Additionally, he stated that it is incapable to imagine that they would travel to Sevastopol to visit NATO marines, and in that context says that: it is still better for them to come to us than for us to come to them (Владимир Путин, Зборови што го менуваат светот [Vladimir Putin, Words that change the world], 2017, стр. 237, 285, 290).

4 During the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, a famous sentence that has been mentioned in international discussions over the years, and especially recently, is referred to soviet President Gorbachev by Secretary of State James Baker, in 1990 whether he would prefer to see a united Germany outside of NATO, independent and without American armed forces, or a united Germany tied to NATO, with the guarantee that NATO's jurisdiction would not move even one inch (2.54 centimeters) to the East. (Il silenzio di Puskin, 2022, p. 16)

This act was also response to eventually Ukrainian intention to join NATO and from March 2015 Russia had stopped attending the weekly treaty implementation meetings of the Joint Consultative Group and announced its withdrawal from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), calling it worthless. Alexei Arbatov, head of the Center for International Security at the Institute for World Economy, in an interview with "Russian voice in Macedonian" called Russian step "a demonstrative gesture in response to the increase of NATO forces (American tank brigade in Latvia) along the Russian border" (Тимофејчев, 2015).

Regarding the anti-missile plant in Romania, which Putin also considered a threat, Stoltenberg stated that missile defence programme represents a long-term investment against the long-term threat, that NATO ballistic defence was purely defensive and not directed against Russia (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2016). However, Russia did not remain indifferent and in 2016 responded by deploying the Iskander-M missile system in the Kaliningrad region, while in 2018 it deployed operational-tactical missile systems (OTRK) capable of carrying nuclear warheads. This Russian act was explained by Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, being caused by NATO's destructive actions and therefore Russia has been forced to take an appropriate set of measures to strengthen its defensive capabilities and national security (Corriere della Serra, 2016)[5].

Regarding the transfer of missile troops to Kaliningrad, as part of the plan for combat training of the Russian armed forces on Russian territory, the American side (by deputy secretary general Rose Gottemoeller), stated that "this threatens the member states of the alliance" (МИД РФ: Россия продолжит перебрасывать ракетные войска в Калининград [Russian Foreign Ministry: Russia will continue to transfer missile troops to Kaliningrad], 2017), while the placement of the OTRK was rated (by spokesman for the Ministry of defense Johnny Michael) as a destabilizing move, considering the potential of this weapon and the proximity of several NATO allies (Пентагон отреагировал на размещение в Калининградской области «Искандеров» [The Penta-

5 Lavrov said: "Let me note that we take these steps on our own territory, unlike the United States and other countries, which move their troops to the states that border on Russia and conduct provocative shows of force near our borders.

gon responded to the deployment of Iskanders in the Kaliningrad region], 2018). The Lithuanian foreign minister Linas Linkevichius, on other side, indicated that the deployment not only increases tensions in the region, but also possibly violates international treaties which limit deployment of ballistic missiles of range of over 500km (Reuters, 2016).

The uncontrolled possession of non-strategic nuclear weapons, as well as the development of new types of intercontinental nuclear weapons that are not subject to START, were considered a threat by the West as well. NATO allies have expressed concern about Russian efforts to increase the size and diversity of its nuclear arsenal, as well as the deployment of dual-use missiles and non-strategic nuclear weapons on NATO allies' borders (Iacchi, 2022).

Another concern came from the mobilization of 100,000 Russian troops along the Ukrainian border in the spring of 2021, which continued in October and intensified in January of the following year. When asked, by US President Joseph Biden Jr., about the purpose of Russian's mobilization, President Vladimir Putin replied that it was merely a routine winter exercise. In this context, despite Biden's warning of economic sanctions should an invasion of Ukraine occur, Russia responded, by presenting two draft treaties (on December 17, 2021) as part of effort to address its stated security concerns and reshape its relationship with NATO and USA.

The first document outlined several key provisions among which: a commitment from NATO members to cease any further enlargement of the alliance, particularly with regard to Ukraine; a restriction preventing NATO from deploying forces weapons in countries that joined the alliance after May 1997; a prohibition on the deployment of intermediate-range missiles in regions where they could reach the other side's territory; a ban on NATO military activities in Ukraine, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia; proposal for consultative mechanisms, including the NATO-Russia Council and the establishment of hotline for direct communication. The second treaty proposed additional measures that included: a stipulation that both counties refrain implementing security measures that could undermine the core security interests of the other; a requirement for the USA to prevent further NATO expansion; a ban on the deployment of U.S. intermediate- range missiles in Europa; limits on the operation of heavy bombers and surface I international wa-

ters within range of the opposing side; a mandate for nuclear weapons to be deployed only within the national territories of each party (The Ministry of the foreign affairs of Russian Federation, 2021). In a speech a week later, Putin asked the West to provide security guarantees to Russia, emphasizing that the United States had placed missile systems on the border with Russia.

The intensity of the crisis occurred because of the buildup of Russian troops on the border with Ukraine, and Putin blamed Ukraine and NATO for the same. On December 26, the United States rejected the draft agreements proposed by Russia and allowed the Baltic countries to transfer weapons to Kiev. NATO sent ships and warplanes to protect the Eastern European countries that are part of NATO. Subsequently, in February, Russia sent 30,000 troops to Belarus under the pretext of joint exercises, and in Transnistria, it deployed the 41st Russian Army. A threat, directed at the West, also came from Aleksey Zhuravlyov, the vice-chairman of the Duma's defense committee, who in a commentary to Daily Storm, said that NATO's "flirting" could lead to nuclear weapons appearing in Ukraine or Georgia and in this case, Russia could respond symmetrically by placing its weapons in Cuba or Venezuela (Депутат Журавлев объяснил свои слова о ракетах на Кубе и в Венесуэле [Deputy Zhuravlev explained his words about missiles in Cuba and Venezuela], 2022). Throughout January and February, Russian troops were stationed along the Russian border with Ukraine, and on February 22, 2022, Russia recognized the independence of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk. After receiving authorization from the Duma for the use of weapons abroad, Russia officially entered the Donbass region with an action called "denazification" to save Russians from genocide. A few days later, on February 26, it attacked Kiev, and on February 27, Putin decided to alert the Russian forces to a nuclear deterrent, accusing the West of an aggressive policy towards Russia. Regarding the latter, Germany declares that the Budapest Memorandum, signed in 1994 by the nuclear powers the United States, Great Britain and Russia, which pledged to defend the territorial integrity of Ukraine, to which France and China also joined, has no legal force, because Russia bombs and China watches, and under Russian pressure, France and Germany prevented Ukraine from receiving its roadmap for NATO in 2008 (Pachlovska, 2022).

The impact of Russian-Western relationship to Russian - Ukrainian case

From above analysis we can identify that even NATO's enlargement was justified by intention to provide democracy and stability with secure eastern borders, the NATO enlargement was seen as threat for Russian security, and the potential Ukrainian Euro-Atlantic integration was considered the last bastion that shouldn't be lost. In response to Putin's speech, regarding the statement that the eastern NATO expansion poses a threat to Russia, one of the interlocutors states that in this way the eastern borders have become stronger and safer, asking Putin why he is afraid of democracy. Putin responds to this that NATO is a military-political bloc and that ensuring its own security is the privilege of every sovereign state, but the question that is now and constantly being asked is why the military infrastructure during the expansion must necessarily move towards the Russian borders? (Владимир Путин, Зборови што го менуваат светот [Vladimir Putin, Words that change the world], 2017, p. 100)

To show its concern for NATO's action and at the same time to demonstrate its power, Putin reacted twice, with and without use of force. Trough military action in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, he responded to the proposal for Georgia to become part of NATO, and by annexing Crimea in 2014, responded to the EU invitation, this time addressed to Ukraine. Putin clearly emphasized that Russia is not against cooperation with NATO, but against a military organization showing its forces next to their fence, next to their home or on their historical territories.

The Russian fear increased when Ukraine in 2019 adopted the constitutional amendments (Art. 85, 102 and 116) by which the *state agrees to provide a strategic path for Ukraine to gain full membership in the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty*. At the same time to counter Russia's actions in Ukraine, NATO has stepped up its political and practical support to Kiev, helping to modernize its force structure, command and control arrangements, reform its logistics system, defense and capabilities (Kovac, 2019). Such interventions directly and openly placed Ukraine at the center of relations between Russia and the West. This meant that Western support for Ukraine simultaneously intensified the security dilemma between the West and Russia. In response, Russia

continued with an uncontrolled increase in nuclear weapons, causing concern among NATO allies, and further escalating the security dilemma. This was particularly evident with the deployment of dual-use missiles and non-strategic nuclear weapons along NATO allies' borders.

Regarding Ukraine, in the spring of 2021, Russia began mobilizing thousands of soldiers along the Ukrainian border, a situation that persisted until January of the following year. When questioned by Biden about the reason for this mobilization, Putin claimed it was for winter exercises, justifying a defensive realist perspective. However, after Russia's attack on Ukraine in February 2024, the true justification aligned more with offensive realism – seeking power's sake rather than security. Despite, Russia not being under attack, Putin blamed Ukraine and NATO for buildup of Russian troops along the border. He asserted that Russia's demands for security guarantees from the West, particularly concerning US missile system near Russia's borders, had not been met. Putin's concern over Russian security prompted the attack on Ukraine, although it was clear that Russia sought to demonstrate power even using the protection of Russian population as a pretext for intervention.

Conclusion

The war between Ukraine and Russia is still going on with thousands and thousands of casualties. Considering the neorealist statement that the behavior of countries is shaped by the structure of the international system, which is inherently anarchic without a central authority, each country is responsible for their own security and well-being, contributing to development of international policies in a manner aligned with its own interests. We can suppose that all three parts has the same interest and that is the security: Ukraine aspire to gain it through NATO/EU membership, Russia through keeping Ukraine neutral and hold NATO far from the Russian borders, while the West argues that stability in Europe depends on NATO enlargement. In this context, Ukraine and the West are on one side, while Russia is the opponent. Having the same interest, both choose to maintain it through power. The question is: whether they are power maximizers or security maximizers?

According to neorealist, living in an anarchic system the countries can never be completely sure about the intentions of other countries

towards them, because in an anarchic system, it is impossible to accurately predict the intentions of other countries and for this reason every country must always be prepared for potential threats. Acquiring weapons for defensive purposes may not be perceived as purely defensive; rather, it could be seen as an aggressive move with hostile intentions. Consequently, any expansion of military capacities prompts suspicion about the country's motives. Considering this Waltz's claim that states are not maximizers of power, but of security (prepared for the worst-case scenario, arming themselves for defensive reasons), the same can be recognized specifically in the Western response: that the missiles in Romania and Poland are not aimed at Russia, but to preserve security that can be violated by Iran. But considering the essential elements of the security dilemma, that the uncertainty and fear of states regarding the intentions of other states lead to the accumulation of power, in the Russian case it turned out that this uncertainty stems first from distrust of the West, and then from the movement of NATO forces towards the Russian border. The Russian act confirms the offensive perspective according to which states will seek to aggressively expand their influence and power through military means and offensive actions, even if it risks destabilizing the international system. In response to this perception, the neighbor also escalates military capacities and so on. The reciprocal escalation of actions leads both countries into a full-scale arms race and increases the influence of the military in shaping national decisions. In the Ukraine case, they focus on securing their borders, forming alliances, and maintaining a balance of power to deter potential aggressors, confirming once again the defensive perspective. But even Ukraine has Western support, they should guarantee its survival, fighting by themselves. In defensive perspective, there can be no expectation of mutual trust between nations in an anarchic international system; instead, each country will work to guarantee its safety and survival due to the ongoing threat posed by other countries (Jervis, 1985). This thesis once again seems to be confirmed in the Ukrainian case.

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Part Two
Strategic Shifts in a Multipolar World: Regional Dynamics, Small States, and Global Influence

The Western Balkans in the Multipolar Puzzle: Navigating Between the West and the Global Majority

Biljana Vankovska

Introduction

In geopolitical discourse, cardinal directions—traditionally capitalized in writing—carry connotations that are both historically entrenched and inherently arbitrary. These labels often embed biases with implications ranging from subtle to overtly political. As Edward Said (1977) observed, neither the "Orient" nor the "West" possesses inherent ontological stability; both are human constructs, shaped by processes of affirmation and the identification of an "Other." While this critique could theoretically extend to all four cardinal directions, the geopolitical lexicon remains stubbornly anchored to outdated hierarchies. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the political power of "naming" still dictates perceptions of where nations belong and the roles they are expected to play globally—a dynamic that resists alignment with today's need for a holistic worldview.

We inhabit a Gramscian interregnum, where the old order is dying and the new struggles to be born—a transitional phase marked by metaphorical (and often literal) "monsters." Declining powers cling fiercely, even violently, to the remnants of their dominance. Yet despite sweeping transformations in economic, political, technological, and cultural spheres, the "West" (or "collective West") retains rhetorical and material hegemony.

Historically, the term "West" has been synonymous with civilizational superiority, positioning itself hierarchically above "the Rest." This framing has profoundly shaped global epistemology and academic discourse. During the post-Cold War "unipolar moment"—marked by the ascendancy of the U.S., NATO, the EU, and allies like Japan and South Korea—resistance to Western hegemony was often flattened into a binary of "the West versus the Rest."

Today, as the West's normative and moral authority erodes, the narrative is shifting. The "West" is increasingly juxtaposed against a "global majority" or "world majority." Yet these categories remain fluid:

many states resist alignment, hedging their interests in an uncertain geopolitical landscape.

This analysis focuses on a critical dimension of this transition: the predicament of small states and regions caught at the fault lines of an emerging multipolar order. The Western Balkans—a region whose tumultuous history epitomizes perpetual reinvention—serves as a striking case study.

Long perceived as a crossroads of civilizations and competing geopolitical currents, the Balkans have undergone radical transformations over the past three decades. After the Cold War and Yugoslavia's dissolution, external actors redefined the region as a "sub-region," imposing identities that frequently disregard historical, geographical, and cultural realities. Such top-down redefinitions—driven by strategic interests—reshape how the region and its people are perceived and engaged globally. This underscores the profound implications of external influence in a multipolar era, where power is diffuse but asymmetry persists.

The Invention of the "Western Balkans"

Being from the Balkans has rarely been regarded as a source of pride or a compliment. In her influential book *Imagining the Balkans* (2009), Bulgarian historian Maria Todorova examined how the Balkans have been perceived and represented for centuries, often characterized as a harsh and uncivilized threshold to Europe. Todorova coined the term "Balkanism" to describe this discourse. In addition, she rightly points out:

> "Balkanization" not only had come to denote the parcelization of large and viable political units but also had become a synonym for a reversion to the tribal, the backward, the primitive, the barbarian. In its latest hypostasis, particularly in American academe, it has been completely decontextualized and paradigmatically related to a variety of problems. That the Balkans have been described as the "other" of Europe does not need special proof. What has been emphasized about the Balkans is that its inhabitants do not care to conform to the standards of behavior devised as normative by and for the civilized world. As with any generalization, this one is based

> on reductionism, but the reductionism and stereotyping of the Balkans has been of such degree and intensity that the discourse merits and requires special analysis." (p. 3).

Todorova's book was published during a time of smoldering conflicts on the territory of the former Yugoslavia. At that time, it seemed as though the peoples of the Balkans were widely viewed as primitive and belligerent by nature, at least by some Western experts and media. Few questioned the root causes behind the bloody collapse of Yugoslavia—a state that had once provided a peaceful framework for interethnic and political cooperation among diverse groups (TFF 2014). Nevertheless, the West positioned itself as a "savior," peacemaker, and state-builder (Pardew 2018), while NATO found a new purpose in reviving its (already diminished) geopolitical relevance (Vankovska 2020). The EU, too, embarked on a new foreign and security policy, with missions across the region, though these often resulted in little more than the façade of democracy or the freezing of conflicts (Chandler 1999). Despite decades of (un)successful "Europeanization" of the newly recognized states, "gratuitous References to war, violence, or poverty still characterize vast swathes of articles about the modern Balkans" (Garcevic 2017). In short, the narrative of the Balkans remains dominated by the West, full of stereotypes and even racism. Even when the most pro-EU scholars and pundits acknowledge the failure of the EU's enlargement policy in this region, the blame is almost always placed on the locals, rarely on the internationals (Bieber 2020, Chandler 2006). In this context, NATO and EU membership is often seen as a marker of civilization. Stefanescu rightly points out that "the West uses a fictionalized discourse on the European other to perpetuate its hegemonism and justify its colonial and imperialist tactics in the region." (2013, p. 96).

The countries still considered "not quite European" have effectively been grouped into an invented sub-region, widely known as the Western Balkans. The term was officially introduced in 1998 by the Austrian Presidency of the EU, after Bulgaria and Romania were granted permission to begin membership talks with the EU. Initially, it included Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Croatia—until the latter joined the EU in 2013. In essence, it refers to what could be described as "ex-Yugoslavia minus Slovenia and Croatia,

plus Albania." As some authors suggest, what unites these countries is that they all underwent similar processes of state-building (after violent conflicts or state collapse), delayed transitions, and an EU integration perspective that remains in progress, though at varying speeds and stages (Jano 2008).

Austria's proposal aimed to provide a European response to the geopolitical challenges resulting from the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the need to stabilize the region. It sought to transform the process of "Balkanization" into "Europeanization"—essentially, to incorporate the so-called primitive Balkans into the civilized European fold. At that time, Austria (ironically governed today by a far-right party), historically tied to the Balkans through the Austro-Hungarian Empire, had a vested interest in ensuring stability in its neighborhood, while also proving itself as a constructive and capable member of the EU, which it had joined just a few years earlier. Vienna was also motivated by its own security concerns: the region's instability had, and could continue to have, repercussions for Austria through migration flows, trade disruptions, and other security risks.

Just five years later, in 2003, another pivotal event occurred in Greece, on the southern part of the Balkan Peninsula. The EU-Western Balkans Summit in Thessaloniki concluded with a Declaration in which the EU expressed its "unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries." Indeed, since 2003 the WB political reality changed significantly. Ever since, two new states appeared on the scene: Montenegro (2006) and Kosovo (2008). Croatia was the only one to join the EU in 2013, while, Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, and Macedonia became the NATO members. Yet, none of the EU promises made during that summit have been fulfilled. In short, there is no realistic time frame for completing the negotiation process. Many experts and politicians argue that this limbo fuels Euroscepticism and populism in the region.

In reality, the notion of the WB allowed Brussels to draw a line between the EU and its immediate periphery, signaling which countries were on the EU's radar for potential membership. However, in doing so, it grouped countries with vastly different historical, cultural, and political trajectories into a single bloc. This homogenization overlooked the internal diversity of the region and created a 'sub-region' with an externally

imposed identity—one that aligned more with EU policy goals than with the lived realities of the people in those countries. The EU's objective was to frame the most problematic countries, those less likely to become EU member-states, into a manageable bloc that could be governed through EU-led initiatives and reforms. The insistence on using the "Western Balkans" label allowed Brussels to control the narrative, defining the region in terms of its need for Western intervention and guidance, thus reinforcing its dependency on EU structures. Additionally, the region has become a buffer zone between the EU and potential 'threats' from the east, such as Russian influence, migration flows, or political instability. The Western Balkans often served to contain regional aspirations for integration, with the EU setting (special) conditions for membership that enabled it to delay full accession indefinitely, leaving the region in a state of limbo. The Macedonian case is the best example of this thesis: the country's alleged membership has been largely contingent on compromising its constitutional sovereignty, national identity, and cultural heritage due to the ultimatums of two EU member-states.

The Re-Colonization of the Balkans by the West

The implications of inventing the sub-region of the WB are multifold. By pushing them into a special "folder" of EU integration, the respective Balkan states have again become an object of Balkanism (in Todorova's terms) for the second time. This treatment results into reinforcement of stereotypes and even self-degradation. The imposed identity of the region emphasizes its instability, backwardness, or need for modernization, perpetuating negative stereotypes that hinder its global standing and self-confidence. Instead of sharing a common vision and destiny, the artificial grouping reinforce mutual distrust and divisions, as states are pitted against each other in competition for resources, recognition, or accession progress. On the political level, one of the key effects is loss of (popular and constitutional) sovereignty. By framing the region as dependent on external guidance, local actors are stripped of agency, as their development becomes tied to the strategic interests of external powers. Economically, there is stunted development. The focus on meeting external criteria or aligning with the imposed policies (in the economic and international field) diverts attention from addressing

genuine local needs and aspirations. Especially, in this respect, the WB states are literally limited in the search for better economic development and progress, because Brussels determines with whom they may or may not collaborate.

As already mentioned, the West has treated the entire post-socialist world as its own backyard, even though not everyone has been welcome to join the club. Geopolitics have always played a crucial role in the EU enlargement process, while the Copenhagen criteria played a symbolic and decorative role.[1] Pänke (2018) argues that "the European Union (EU) is an imperial power. Building on the EU-as-empire paradigm and Manners' concept of 'normative power', this article argues that owing to the institutional set-up of its governance and its discursive strategies, the Union resembles an imperial polity which has to adopt an interest- and norm-driven 'dual strategy'." The analysis of EU policies show that there has been a continuous quest of justification of its hidden nature – i.e. being "ambition of being a non-imperial empire" (or as Chandler puts it – empire in denial). The efforts were invested into presenting the idea of EU as 'empire' by distinguishing between benevolent and ruthless forms of imperialism." (Neyer 2012).

The premise that the Ukraine war helped the EU (and the political West in general) get back overtly to classical geopolitical thinking has become conventional truth. Yet the various corners would disagree about the root causes and timeline of the war. The real nature of Western liberal expansionism and imperialism was exposed during the Euromaidan (colored) revolution of 2014. The events of 2022 are just a follow-up of a self-fulfilling prophecy of the US/NATO/EU policies of expansion of Western influence and control. Paradoxically, the passionate wish to join the 'peaceful, democratic and developed' Europe led Ukraine and its people to a disastrous course, which is not over yet. In addition to its political and military assistance (or better, the proxy war carried out on the Ukrainian territory), the EU rushed to embrace not only Ukraine but also Moldova and Georgia. Todorova (ibid, p. 139) was right saying that "Europe" ends where politicians want it to end, and scholars should be at least aware of this and of how one's research can and is being used."

[1] The Serbian scholar, Dušan Proroković, however, disagree with this conclusion. In his mind, the EU did not deal with geopolitics until the beginning of the Ukraine crisis (2016, p. 13).

The decision of the European Council to open the negotiation process with Ukraine amidst war (in the mid 2024) in the WB was received as adding insult to injury.[2] This is particularly true about Macedonian Sisyphus' 20-year long path with no positive result due to the imposition of various demands that had no connection to the Copenhagen criteria. Numerous think tanks and commentators rushed to the conclusion that the war in Ukraine made the EU include geopolitics in its enlargement policy optics. Lippert (2024) – a researcher from the esteemed German think tank *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik* - defined EU Enlargement in the following way: geopolitics meets integration policy. The truth is a bit more complex than that: geopolitics has been embedded into the foundations of the EU as such, which has always been reflected into its enlargement (as in many other) policies. The Ukraine war has only been a catalyst for what was already there. Double standards and criteria were already used during the accession of other countries, such as inclusion of Romania and Bulgaria (despite not meeting the Copenhagen criteria – and far before that, inclusion of Spain and Portugal) and dismissing Turkiye (mostly because of cultural racism and fear of its geopolitical weight that could provoke disbalance within the predominantly Christian Union).

The Ukraine war and sanctions against Russia have caused a serious setback for many of these countries. In addition to increased military expenses and support for Ukraine, these underdeveloped states have to obey the sanctions against Russia which causes serious deficits in agriculture and other spheres. The antipathy against China is the second example, which explains that they are all expected to stay as far as possible from non-Western economic alliances and funds.

Reclaiming Agency and Multipolar Opportunities: Is It Possible?

Hypothetically, in a multipolar world, the WB states would have an opportunity to redefine their place—not as an artificial sub-region imposed by Brussels, but as a crossroads of civilizations with its unique

2 Indeed, after Ukraine applied for membership on the fourth day after the Russian invasion, the EU took a positive decision with extraordinary speed and granted Ukraine candidate status in June 2022. On 14 February 2023, the European Council gave the green light to the opening of accession negotiations with Ukraine, which started on 25 June 2024.

contributions to make on the global stage. But in the dominant political discourse, the aspiration to join the West—embodied by NATO and the EU—remains steadfast, despite significant geopolitical shifts in Europe and beyond. Even amid the turmoil of 2024, which saw the escalation of the war in Ukraine, genocide in Gaza, and the disintegration of Syria, Balkan leaders focused primarily on the so-called unfinished "European symphony," citing delays in the EU integration process (quoting Macedonian president Siljanovska-Davkova; see Ocvirk 2024; Sloboden pečat 2024). On the other hand, the incoming Trump administration and the new NATO Secretary General have announced plans to increase military spending to as much as 5 percent of GDP. Such a policy would place an unbearable burden on already impoverished and heavily indebted countries across Europe, particularly in the Balkans. NATO's justification that "security comes with a cost" aligns with Trump's stance that the United States will not defend Europe without adequate compensation, further emphasizing the increasingly transactional nature of transatlantic security commitments. In essence, the West appears to be reverting to a pre-Cold War mindset, where military security and the protection of the state took precedence above all else.

While leaders in the Western Balkans continue to idealize the West as a beacon of prosperity, the decline of the U.S. Empire and its allies has become a common theme in analyses. The West's military superiority, notably through nuclear power, remains intact. However, its hegemonic role has weakened. Since the 2008 economic crisis, the West's decline has become apparent in several ways. Geopolitical overstretch, especially NATO's interventions in Libya and Afghanistan, has exposed the limits of Western military power. The proxy war in Ukraine has further strained European allies militarily and economically. Trump's controversial global policy will apparently have a negative impact even on the Western allies, which shows the depth of the internal fractures. The "West" is not a monolithic entity, despite all the talks about geostrategic unity and common values.

Another facet of Western decline is the erosion of liberal democracy in both the U.S. and EU nations. Some argue that the West's moral and value system, once central to its self-declared righteousness, is now suffocating from within. Furthermore, increased militarization has deepened socio-economic divides, particularly within Western societies,

exemplified by growing tensions in Germany and France. The EU itself has struggled with internal cohesion, as Brexit, migration crises, rule-of-law disputes, and the rise of far-right politics have highlighted deep fragmentation.

Amid the decline of Western dominance, a Global Majority is emerging—a term increasingly used to describe nations across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and parts of Eastern Europe that are pushing back against Western hegemony. Various scholars and commentators have noted the shift toward a multipolar world over the years. For example, Dalip Hiro accurately anticipated these developments as early as 2010 in his book *After Empire: The Birth of a Multipolar World*, offering a prescient analysis of the key trends driving this transformation. Today's world displays the contours of the emerging order in the following facts, to mention just a few:

- China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has expanded Beijing's presence in the Balkans through infrastructure projects and investments. Russia similarly maintains strong ties with Serbia and other parts of the region, offering economic aid without the conditionalities typical of Western institutions.

- The BRICS Plus bloc and regional coalitions are advancing a vision of global governance that challenges Western monopolies on decision-making.

- Countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, having experienced colonialism and neocolonialism, are strengthening ties with emerging powers and seeking a more inclusive global order that challenges Western dominance in international institutions.

The West's response has been to intensify its influence over what it considers its sphere of geopolitical interest, preserving the narrative of being the "good guys" in contrast to the "bad guys" (e.g., China, Russia). This strategy manipulates the Balkans' insecure structures, presenting them with a stark choice: remain loyal to the West to be recognized as "good" Europeans or align with autocratic powers. The EU has explicitly stated that the Western Balkans now serve as a frontline in Russia's confrontation with the West (EP Briefing 2023). According to Diesen (2016), "European integration" subsequently became a zero-sum process where the shared neighbourhood was asked to choose between "Europe" by decoupling from Russia. NATO's official doctrine treats emerging pow-

ers, like Russia and China, as security threats, creating an atmosphere of fear and repression against those questioning the West's unchallenged supremacy. Recent threats (for instance, to the Georgian prime minister) and even assassination attempts (such as the case of Slovakia's Prime Minister Fico) illustrate how the West treats its satellites in times of war crisis.

The Western Balkans, still recovering from the wars of the 1990s, are now coerced into focusing on enemies rather than economic recovery and regional cooperation. The EU hypocritically demands that these societies confront their violent pasts and reconcile for peace, a principle never applied to European and American colonizers. Furthermore, while enforcing sanctions on Russia, Western countries continue to profit from trade with both Russia and China.

Despite these realities, political leaders in the Western Balkans remain reluctant to acknowledge the shifting global order. The EU's stagnation and de-industrialization offer little hope for the region's impoverished nations, prompting countries like Serbia to balance their foreign and economic policies. Serbia, for instance, has maintained strong ties with both the EU and Russia, benefiting from Chinese investments. The region remains economically dependent on the EU, but China's Belt and Road Initiative, which focuses on infrastructure, energy, and telecommunications, is beginning to shift the balance of power. As Western economies stagnate, China's offers—without the human rights and governance conditions imposed by the EU—are increasingly attractive.

The evolving geopolitical landscape presents the Western Balkans with critical questions about its future trajectory, particularly whether deeper economic engagement with the East and the Global South could offer a more sustainable path to development. Historically, the region has viewed integration into Western institutions, such as NATO and the EU, as the cornerstone of its security and prosperity. However, the ongoing war in Ukraine has exposed the limitations of NATO membership as a comprehensive security guarantee, while the EU's internal challenges and slow enlargement process have left the region in a state of prolonged uncertainty. Compounding these issues is the shifting priorities of the United States under its new administration, which has increasingly favored military spending over addressing basic human needs, further complicating the Western Balkans' prospects for stability and growth.

In this emerging multipolar world, the WB must navigate a delicate balancing act, leveraging its historical and cultural ties with the West while exploring new diplomatic and economic opportunities elsewhere. Surprisingly, the first test for these states will be managing their relationships with Washington, D.C., and Brussels, as these traditional power centers remain influential despite their shifting priorities. Only after addressing these dynamics can the region fully turn its attention to the broader global arena, where rising powers like China, India, and others are reshaping the international order.

Until recently, Serbia's "multi-vector diplomacy" offered a potential blueprint for the region, as the country successfully balanced relationships with the EU, Russia, and China. This approach allowed Serbia to capitalize on opportunities in a rapidly changing global landscape, securing investments and partnerships that bolstered its economic and political standing. However, by the end of 2024, the geopolitical environment is undergoing radical changes. The threat of externally imposed regime change, often referred to as a "colored revolution," has heightened tensions and forced regional leaders to reassess their strategies. Simultaneously, the prospect of strategic cooperation with a potential Trump administration in the U.S. has introduced new variables into the equation, creating both risks and opportunities for the Western Balkans.

As the region grapples with these challenges, it must also contend with internal divisions and the lingering legacy of past conflicts. The Western Balkans' ability to forge a cohesive and forward-looking strategy will depend on its capacity to reconcile these internal tensions while adapting to external pressures. This will require not only skillful diplomacy but also a renewed focus on economic diversification, regional cooperation, and the strengthening of democratic institutions. By doing so, the WB can position itself as a bridge between East and West, leveraging its unique geopolitical position to secure a more stable and prosperous future in an increasingly complex world.

Conclusion: From a Pawn to a Player

The Western Balkans occupies a critical yet precarious position in the shifting multipolar global order, situated at the intersection of declining Western dominance and emerging alternative frameworks.

Historically shaped by external powers, predominantly from the West, the region remains entangled in complex geopolitical dynamics, compounded by its peripheral status within Europe. The legacy of Western hegemony, including the EU's unfulfilled integration promises and NATO's contested security frameworks, stands in stark contrast to the transformative shifts underway in global power structures.

In this chapter, we argue that the WB states have gradually relinquished their sovereignty and policy-making autonomy, leaving them unable to define their interests or navigate the intricate "multipolar puzzle." Small states and regions are compelled to balance precariously between competing power centres. The region now faces a profound dilemma: whether to align with the fragmented, often interventionist "collective West" or to embrace the rising "Global Majority," which advocates for a multipolar world rooted in mutual respect, equality, and cooperation. The stakes are high—this is not merely a geopolitical decision but a choice between perpetuating conflict-driven hegemonies or fostering a more peaceful and equitable global order.

The transition toward multipolarity—or perhaps a reimagined, inclusive multilateralism—presents both formidable challenges and unique opportunities for the WB. To move forward, the region must chart a clear and pragmatic path, anchored in a steadfast commitment to its own agency. The Western Balkans must go beyond its historical role as a passive recipient of external influence and assert itself as an active participant in shaping its future.

To achieve this, the region should adopt a dual-track approach. On one hand, it must maintain and deepen constructive ties with the West, particularly its progressive and anti-war forces, which remain crucial partners for stability and democratic development. On the other hand, the Western Balkans must proactively engage with rising powers and the Global South, exploring new economic, political, and cultural opportunities. By leveraging its strategic geography, cultural diversity, and historical connections, the region can transform into a dynamic bridge between competing global powers, fostering dialogue, cooperation, and mutual understanding.

However, reclaiming agency begins at home. The WB must address internal vulnerabilities, including corruption, weak governance, and fragmented institutions, to strengthen its sovereignty and resilience.

This requires a renewed focus on sustainable development, transparency, and the rule of law. Equally critical is the cultivation of a shared regional identity and common interests that transcend divisive historical narratives. By fostering genuine cooperation and solidarity, the region can overcome internal fragmentation and present a united front in its interactions with external actors.

In the emerging multipolar order, the Western Balkans' strategy must rest on a firm commitment to multilateralism and the principles of the UN system. Advocating for a world order grounded in ethics, international law, and mutual respect will enable the region to contribute to a more balanced and equitable global framework. By prioritizing inclusivity and collaboration over competition, the Western Balkans can redefine itself—not as a pawn on the global chessboard but as a proactive and influential player in shaping the global agenda.

The world today does not need a hegemon or multiple hegemons; it needs a system that values peace, equity, and cooperation. The WB, with its unique history and strategic location, is well-positioned to contribute to and thrive within such a system. By embracing its role as a bridge between East and West, North and South, the region can play a meaningful role in building a more just and peaceful global order.

The journey will not be without obstacles, but with determination, regional unity, and a clear vision, the WB can transcend its historical constraints. It can transform itself from a region shaped by external forces into one that actively shapes its own future—and, in doing so, contributes to the flourishing of humanity in a multipolar world.

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The Crisis of Liberal Hegemony in the Western Balkans

Adrian Waters

Introduction

In recent years it has been said that the post-Cold War liberal order is in crisis. This has been the subject of numerous works by the neo-realist scholar John J. Mearsheimer who argued that the unipolar period that existed between 1991 and the 2010s enabled the US and its European allies to pursue *liberal hegemony* via policy instruments, such as democracy promotion and the inclusion of post-communist states into international institutions, including the European Union (EU) which increased its number of member states and gradually became a key player in both European and global politics. However, this hegemony was undermined by the emergence of a multipolar world in which other powers, notably Russia and China, gained influence on the world stage. This factor persuaded the EU to adopt policies and practices that were guided more by realpolitik and less by liberal idealism in the face of competition with its rivals.

In the Western Balkans, the pursuit of *liberal hegemony* was marked by the EU's enlargement policies that were supposed to democratise the countries within the region and prepare them for eventual membership of the Union. To a certain extent, the efforts of the EU were successful in achieving its liberal aims as the Western Balkan states became more democratic. However, the liberal hegemonic order was destined to fail from the beginning. In the case of the Western Balkans, the EU's behaviour and policies fostered a series of problems that became evident and worsened somewhat when the world order transitioned from unipolarity to multipolarity. As a matter of fact, the Western Balkan states that became liberal democracies during the early 2000s suffered from significant flaws, consequently becoming hybrid regimes by the late 2010s, especially because the EU started to endorse authoritarian leaders who would guarantee stability.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss why the liberal hegemonic system in the Western Balkans is currently in crisis. Its main argument, following Mearshemeir's line of thought, is that the EU's attempts to

consolidate *liberal hegemony* in this region were bound to fail in the long-term. The first part will provide definitions of liberalism and hegemony as well as a description of the main features of a liberal international order in order to provide a better understanding of the principal terms that will be used. This will be followed by an outline of how and why the EU pursued *liberal hegemony* in the Western Balkans and the extent of its successes. The third part will explain how the EU's alleged policy triumphs left a series of issues that undermined the functioning of the region's new liberal democracies. The last section will attempt to explain how these deficiencies were further augmented due to the competition between the EU and other powers for influence in the Western Balkans and how the Union's increased preference for stability undermined the democratisation of the countries within the region.

What is Liberal Hegemony?

John J. Mearsheimer defined political liberalism as "an ideology that is individualistic at its core and assigns great importance to the concept of inalienable rights" which are seen as universal and are used by liberal states as an excuse to pursue enterprising foreign policies (2018, pp. 8-9). This set of ideas assumes that people will sometimes differ about key social and political issues and therefore a state is necessary to ensure that these divergent views do not lead to violence. Liberalism also supports the notion of tolerance in which individuals respect each other despite fundamental differences they might have (Ibid). This is the ideology behind the international order that has been dominant on the global stage since the end of the Cold War in 1991. Mearsheimer defined an 'order' as "an organized group of international institutions that help govern the interactions among the member states" as well as those with non-member states (2019, p. 9). One of the two pillars of the liberal order is its assortment of liberal values that shape the relationship between liberal democracies and institutions, such as openness to trade. The other pillar of the liberal international order is *liberal hegemony* (Nedeljković & Radić Milosavljević, 2022). Mearsheimer described this concept as "an ambitious strategy in which a state aims to turn as many countries as possible into liberal democracies like itself while also promoting an open international economy and building international institutions" (2018, p.

1). Any liberal democratic state that adopts such a strategy will do so because of supposed rewards, like the elimination of any ideological rivals that might threaten the existence of liberal democracies (Ibid, pp. 120-121). The policy of *liberal hegemony* was pursued by the United States and its European allies after the Cold War in order to spread the liberal international order (Nedeljković & Radić Milosavljević, 2022).

International institutions, such as the European Union, the World Bank or NATO, are considered to be the building blocks of orders. They enforce rules that great powers develop and concur to follow since they favour their own respective interests. However, when the rules come into conflict with the interests of a powerful state, then the state in question will either disregard them or revise them (Mearsheimer, 2019). The EU is in this regard a "pillar" of the liberal international order because during the Cold War it established a regional integration model which enhanced the main principles of such order and later played a significant role in expanding liberal democratic norms elsewhere (Lucarelli, 2018, p. 144). After the Cold War ended, a unipolar world emerged in which most of the limitations deriving from tensions with other great powers disappeared and so both the US and its European allies decided to pursue *liberal hegemony* by extending the membership of institutions like the EU, while also creating a hyperglobalised international economy and spreading liberal democracy around the globe (Mearsheimer, 2019). In the 1990s the EU developed itself as an international institution and saw many countries from Central and Eastern Europe joining it. Despite its successes, the liberal order in Europe gradually began to falter due to internal and external issues, starting with the 2007-08 economic crisis that was followed by the growth of euroscepticism, democratic backsliding in certain member states (e.g. Hungary), the 2015-16 refugee and migrant crisis, Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict (Lucarelli, 2018; Nedeljković & Radić Milosavljević, 2022). This coincided with the rise of multipolarity as well as resistance from both Russia and China against Western "exaggerated claims to hegemony" (Sakwa, 2019, pp. 14-15).

Mearsheimer argued in his works that the policy of *liberal hegemony* was destined to fail right from the beginning for several reasons. Firstly, because this strategy can only be adopted in a unipolar world in which the sole great power does not have any competitors to challenge

its position and can therefore implement a liberal approach to foreign affairs. In a bipolar or a multipolar system the liberal powers cannot pursue *liberal hegemony*, meaning that they will prioritise their survival and will act in a realist manner while using liberal rhetoric as a façade. Secondly, democracy promotion, a significant means for constructing a liberal order, is an extremely problematic policy not only because it is difficult to put into practice, but also because it often spoils relations between democratic and non-democratic countries. Spreading liberal democracy can damage the legitimacy of such an action, especially since there has never been a universal consensus on what is the best form of government. Moreover, the population of a country targeted for regime change could try to counter any foreign interference. Lastly, even if there is just one country trying to achieve *liberal hegemony*, the others will probably start opposing the liberal hegemon (Mearsheimer, 2018, 2019). These assumptions will be taken into account in the analytical part of the paper.

The EU's Pursuit of Liberal Hegemony in the Western Balkans

The Western Balkans is a term used to collectively label the countries that used to be part of Yugoslavia (except Slovenia), plus Albania (Simić & Živojinović, 2022). Once Croatia joined the EU in 2013 this term was applied to the remaining states which are candidate countries, i.e. Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania and Macedonia, as well as Kosovo, which is a potential candidate. This region became of great interest to the EU during the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s. In this period the Union was supporting international attempts to prevent any escalation of violent conflict (Glenny, 2012). However, it was only after the conflicts ended in 1995 that a thorough and regionally-based EU policy towards the Western Balkans was formulated with the goals of bringing back stability and peace to the region via funding, investments, the creation of free market economies, the defence of fundamental and minority rights and the spread of liberal democracy and the rule of law. This became known as the Regional Approach in which the EU offered monetary assistance and unilateral trading pReferences as long as the Western Balkan states restored economic ties with each other and respected human rights and the principles of democracy (Blockmans,

2007). The Regional Approach can therefore be seen as the first attempt by the EU to spread *liberal hegemony* in this part of Europe.

The EU's pursuit of *liberal hegemony* at this point in time was also carried out by interventions in the affairs of sovereign states. Its first intervention was against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (which comprised only Serbia and Montenegro) in 1998-1999 because of the Kosovo crisis and it consisted primarily of a series of sanctions (including an arms embargo). Initially they were supposed to end the alleged oppression of the Kosovar Albanian people. Then the objective was to coerce the Yugoslav government to negotiate a political solution to the crisis. In the end the main goal was to enable regime change in Yugoslavia and set the ground for stability in the Balkans (Ibid). Eventually Yugoslavia succumbed to the Western powers after NATO bombed the country in 1999 and in the following year the then-Yugoslav president Slobodan Milošević was forced to hand over power to the Western-backed Serbian opposition (Levitsky & Way, 2010; Glenny, 2012). The second intervention was in 2001 when the EU, in cooperation with the US and NATO, tried to end a conflict in Macedonia between the country's armed forces and ethnic Albanian insurgents. Eventually, under EU and American pressure, the Macedonian government signed the Ohrid Framework Agreement in August that year, thus ending the conflict. This treaty tried to diminish ethnic tensions in Macedonia with two liberal solutions: decentralisation and the inclusion of ethnic minorities at local and central levels of governance. The Ohrid Agreement was also supposed to guarantee the future of Macedonia's democracy and bring the country closer to the EU. In the following years, the EU and the US continued to interfere in Macedonian politics as a means of maintaining the model imposed by the treaty (Gromes, 2009; Dimitrov, 2011). The Yugoslav and Macedonian cases corroborate the argument proposed by Mearsheimer that "liberalism…is all about meddling in other countries' politics, whether the aim is protecting the rights of foreigners or seeking to spread liberal democracy" and so it violates the principle of national sovereignty (2018, p. 160). In essence, the "liberal internationalist framework" instituted during the 1990s defied the "prohibition to interfere… in the internal affairs of other states", meaning that "external intervention was justified by the public goods it promised to achieve, such as democratic development" (Belloni, 2020, p. 6).

From 1999 onwards the EU's liberal hegemonic mission to create an area of peace of stability in the Balkans and to integrate the region into its political and economic structures was carried out by the Stability Pact (SP) and the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP). The first began in 1999 as a declaration of intentions signed by more than forty countries in which they vowed to aid the Balkan states in their endeavour to achieve democracy, peace, economic prosperity and respect for human rights (Fererro-Turrión, 2015). The SAP also started in 1999, but it focuses on assuring that all the Western Balkan countries can satisfy the EU's criteria and then become official candidates for membership of the Union. The most crucial element of this Process are the Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAAs), which are bilateral deals signed between the EU and the Western Balkan states aimed at fostering alignment with EU legislation. Accession does not rely solely on the SAP, but also on the fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria for membership based on the liberal principles of democracy, human rights, the rule of law and a market economy (Blockmans, 2007; Muś, 2008). Because of the region's specific circumstances, the EU's transmission of liberal values had to be executed together with the maintenance of peace, stability, the re-establishment and promotion of regional collaboration and state-building, which is the construction or reconstruction of governance institutions that can guarantee physical and economic security to a country's population (Chandler, 2006; Nedeljković & Radić Milosavljević, 2022). This is also one of the liberal means of increasing the number of liberal democracies (Bliesemann de Guevara, 2010).

The EU has executed its state-building strategy in the Western Balkans via enlargement policy mechanisms and conditionality (Vankovska, 2020). This engagement concentrates on the implementation of the Copenhagen criteria as well as new conditions derived from the international obligations of the Western Balkan states (e.g. the Ohrid Framework Agreement), collaboration with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and extra requirements linked to state-building (Bieber, 2011). Enlargement is seen as the EU's most successful foreign policy instrument because it places the Union in an advantageous position with regards to candidate countries and therefore it possesses a considerable amount of influence in the period during which the aspiring member states try to align their laws, values and institutions

to those of the EU with financial backing and guidance from Brussels (Ioannides, 2018). This corroborates the point made by Mearsheimer (2018) about how liberalism and national sovereignty are in contrast, especially since state-building is based on liberal principles and entails a blurred line between domestic and foreign affairs which undermines sovereignty (Belloni, 2020).

In the short-term, the EU seemed to have achieved its objectives. Indeed the Union's influence was a key factor in the democratisation process of the Western Balkan states, especially through its democratic conditionality (Levitsky & Way, 2010). By 2009, most of the countries within the region (Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania) were semi-consolidated democracies, while Bosnia-Herzegovina was a hybrid regime and Kosovo a semi-consolidated authoritarian state (Walker, 2010). This provided evidence that the European perspective offered to the Western Balkans, the Copenhagen criteria and other requirements that were attached to the liberal democratic agenda served as incentives for domestic reforms within the region. For instance, by 2013 Croatia, Montenegro and Macedonia made significant progress in adopting liberal democratic legislation, more than Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Balfour & Stratulat, 2013). Overall, the EU's influence has certainly contributed to the democratic transformation of the Western Balkans, meaning that the Union managed to achieve liberal hegemony in the region to some extent and this factor still affects the politics of the countries there. Indeed it could be argued that the EU's biggest success is that it still regarded to this day in the Western Balkans not only "as a pole of attraction, a role model and a future shelter under which several internal problems could be solved", but most importantly as an institution that can "make countries undergo reforms which they would never have done if not under the conditionality push of EU integration" (Beshku, 2018, p. 11).

The Problems of Liberal Hegemony in the Western Balkans

Mearsheimer wrote that "the post-Cold War liberal international order was doomed to collapse, because the key policies on which it rested are deeply flawed" (2019, p. 8). This thesis can be applied to the EU's attempts to pursue liberal hegemony in the Western Balkans. Its policies

and behaviour have fostered various problems that made the region more unstable in the present-day multipolar world.

The first issue is that the EU's attitude towards the Western Balkans was always accompanied by realism and by the security interests of its member states. Since the early 1990s the Western Balkans became of strategic importance to the EU and its member states due to the Yugoslav wars and the consequent violence, instability and refugee flows. So the Union wished to establish enduring stability and peace within the region with strategies that combined liberal democracy promotion with security priorities based on the notion that democratisation can lead to peace (Richter, 2012; Cavoski, 2015). This is in line with one of the core principles of *liberal hegemony* that the promotion of liberal democracy can bring about a peaceful world because liberal democracies do not fight each other (Mearsheimer, 2018). Although, the EU tries to achieve both democracy and stability as a way to bring *liberal hegemony* to the Western Balkans, this policy was limited by the fact that the two goals are divergent strategic interests and this has lead to inconsistency in the EU's behaviour and conditionality towards the region (Richter, 2012). This inconsistency is known as the stabilisation-democratisation dilemma which was reinforced by the EU's aims in the Western Balkans, i.e. stability and eventual integration (Kovačević, 2018). Debates, dissimilarities and unsureness within the EU over whether pressing for deeper democratisation can be useful for security interests have resulted in policy balances. An example of these is how Bosnia-Herzegovina's democratisation process in the early 2000s was undermined by the EU's prioritisation of maintaining peace because of strategic concerns that domestic reforms could reignite an armed conflict, leading to a new migration wave and the necessity to send ground forces (Youngs, 2009). This explains why by the early 2010s Bosnia-Herzegovina was still a hybrid regime (Balfour & Stratulat, 2013). So the EU's efforts to achieve *liberal hegemony* were supposed to satisfy security interests by adopting liberal solutions, such as democracy promotion, but in certain circumstances the Union had to adopt policy stances based on realpolitik, rather than liberalism, even before the multipolar world emerged.

The EU's conditionality has indeed been in some ways detrimental to the democratisation process of the Western Balkan states, thus undermining the Union's liberal hegemonic mission from the beginning.

There is an imbalance between EU conditionality and rewards because the Union has acted in a reserved manner towards the Western Balkan countries and has excluded the possibility of accession in discussions about reforms. For example, the EU's lack of commitment towards Macedonia's full-fledged membership played a part in the country's democratic stagnation (Mihaila, 2012). Scholars have highlighted that the Union's incentives concentrated on political elites and rarely involved ordinary citizens and civil society actors. Moreover, some EU-requested reforms menaced the position of the political establishment in each Western Balkan country, meaning that they formally approved liberal reforms and rules without enacting them and ensuring deeply-rooted societal changes. So the Union's approach had the involuntary effect of strengthening the power of corrupt and authoritarian elites (Ioannides, 2018; Belloni, 2020). The unquestioned adoption of EU norms and decisions has fostered popular scepticism towards the EU within the Western Balkan countries and has undermined the legitimacy of political institutions which are perceived as imposed from abroad. Hence, the European integration process was soon targeted by anti-liberal and anti-democratic elites that attempted to thwart democracy promotion endeavours as seen during the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections in Serbia (Bieber & Ristić, 2012).

The roots of such an asymmetrical relationship between the EU and the Western Balkan countries lie in the SAP, which is an agreement made between two unequal sides, since only one of them can judge whether the terms of the deal have been met and is able to coerce their counterpart. Effectively, the SAP commits Balkan countries to a position of subservience towards EU mechanisms. In addition, although it is assumed that conditionality is externalising EU norms and values in a mode that spreads liberal democracy and enhances state institutions, the reality is that the democratic and voluntary side of the SAP ends when a country signs a SAA since the successive steps and conditions are administered by circumventing democratic procedures (Chandler, 2010). The Union's pursuit of liberal hegemony in the Western Balkans via state-building therefore constitutes a new form of enlargement in which there is extensive intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign countries. Even though it could be claimed that candidate states have agreed to share their sovereignty with Brussels, they definitely did not concede to EU

interference in sensitive policy areas (Keil, 2013). Consequently, this interference created a culture of dependency in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo (Woelk, 2013) and even Macedonia (Vankovska, 2020). Such external intervention, however, is not neutral in itself and is often regarded by the target country's population as favourable towards a particular side and can therefore be an obstacle to democratisation (Bieber & Ristić, 2012). This proves the point that trying to transform countries into liberal democracies by interfering in their domestic affairs is challenging and can lead to backlash (Mearsheimer, 2019).

Perhaps the biggest obstacle in the EU's quest for *liberal hegemony* is the region's distinct political culture and transition issues. From the 1990s onwards the Western Balkan countries experienced problems with their transition to what they perceived to be liberal democracy as most of them turned into illiberal democracies where the post-communist executives took advantage of the lack of political competition to control the new democratic institutions. The economic liberalisation of these states involved the privatisation of state-owned companies and state intervention in the business sector. These policies allowed party affiliates to amass wealth and political influence. Additionally, the marginalisation of formal institutions and legal tools entrenched the practices of state capture, clientelism, patronage and abuse of power. Such processes influenced the political evolution of the Western Balkan states to the point that even if there are liberal democratic elements, e.g. multi-party elections, the long-standing tradition of having unrestrained power successfully adjusted to the new conditions. Moreover, these countries still experience problems linked to territorial integrity, weak state institutions, organised crime and corruption which negatively impact their democratisation. Consequently, such issues explain why EU enlargement in the region was more problematic than in other parts of Europe (Ješe Perković, 2014; Kmezić, 2020). The issues faced by Western Balkan countries in their democratisation process proves that the imposition of liberal democracy on a country can function only if there are favourable domestic conditions, e.g. previous democratic experiences, economic prosperity, a powerful central government and ethnic and religious homogeneity (Mearsheimer, 2018).

Multipolarism and Liberal Hegemony in the Western Balkans

From the late 2000s onwards it became clear that the liberal unipolar order in Europe was in decline and this affected EU enlargement and thus *liberal hegemony* in the Western Balkans. The Union started to experience multiple consecutive crises, leading to enlargement fatigue. So the EU member states lost their enthusiasm for allowing countries to join the Union, as well as the financial stimulus, necessity for new investments and the economic interest, particularly after the 2008 global financial crisis began. As a result, the EU showed little interest in promoting quicker reforms in the Western Balkans and focused on curtailing potential security threats, e.g. armed conflicts. Although Croatia entered the Union in 2013, the other countries in the region remained candidate or potential candidate countries. The reports that are published annually by the European Commission to monitor the fulfilment of EU conditions demonstrate that these states have achieved limited advances in accepting the Union's values, norms and standards, meaning that the EU has effectively relinquished its position as a promoter of liberal norms and values in favour of the political and security interests of its member states. Consequently, the Western Balkan countries have been through a process of democratic backsliding. By 2019 all of them have become hybrid regimes and have remained so to this day, meaning that liberal democratic values and norms have remained delimited or regressed further in recent years (Bieber & Ristić, 2012; Csaky, 2020; Nedeljković & Radić Milosavljević, 2022).

The EU's approach in the Western Balkans has, ironically, undermined the concept of *liberal hegemony*, while facilitating the ascent of *stabilitocracies*, i.e. "weak democracies with autocratically minded leaders who govern through informal, patronage networks and claim to provide pro-Western stability" (Belloni, 2020, p. 236). What distinguishes these stabilitocratic rulers is that they are increasingly authoritarian, while declaring themselves to be pro-EU democrats. Meanwhile, the EU ignores their practices as long as they deliver on matters which member states prioritise, e.g. border control or regional stability. The Union would prefer to have a stable region ruled by oligarchs rather than one engulfed by grassroots mobilisations and democratic protests. Accordingly, Western Balkans leaders have learnt that a good relationship with

the EU is enabled by delivering on the Union's pivotal needs, more than implementing the reforms needed for membership (Ibid, pp. 236-237). Despite the fact that EU accession can boost national actors favourable towards liberal democracy, the EU's top-down conditionality has restricted the space for political competition and discussions, while enhancing executive actors who impose their decisions by citing constraints from the Union. By overburdening a country's political agenda with deadlines and criteria, EU conditionality has allowed dominant parties to justify the lack of accountability mechanisms and to consolidate their power. Moreover, the Union's focus on compliance has permitted local elites to strengthen their legitimacy, while hindering opposition voices (Richter & Wunsch, 2020).

The rise of multipolarity coincided with the emergence of security threats whose resolutions have been prioritised by the EU over democratisation. These include Islamic fundamentalist terrorism, drug trafficking, organised crime and the 2015-16 refugee and migrant crisis, during which both Serbia and Macedonia proved to be reliable in closing the Western Balkan route despite the shortcomings of their respective governments. As a matter of fact, in November 2016 the then Austrian foreign minister Sebastian Kurz attended an election rally in Macedonia organised by VMRO-DPMNE, the ruling party of the country's ex-premier Nikola Gruevski, in order to praise the Macedonian executive's closure of the Western Balkan route at Austria's initiative. Earlier that day he even met with the Macedonian foreign minister to discuss the route. This allowed Gruevski to gather external backing during a political crisis that engulfed the country at the time. This shows how *stabilitocracies* can gain EU support as long as they guarantee stability and serve geostrategic interests. Obviously this dynamic is nothing new as many liberal democracies have had pragmatic ties with non-democratic regimes in the past. What makes this dynamic unique is the prospect of eventual EU membership, which requires candidate countries to be liberal democracies. The Union's growing isolationist position due to the various crises it has faced since multipolarity emerged meant that it began concentrating on issues that concerned individual member states or the EU as whole, e.g. the closure of the Western Balkan route that was demanded by Austria (Bobić, 2015; Kovačević, 2018; Bieber, 2020). This can be seen even today by the EU's support for a lithium-mining

project in Serbia that would reduce the Union's reliance on Chinese lithium imports for electric car batteries (Stojanovic, 2024). Such behaviour is typical of Serbia's president Aleksandar Vučić, who receives EU backing despite his undemocratic credentials because of the bilateral deals he makes with the Union's member states (V. Međak, personal communication, February 19, 2024). This proves the point that international institutions, like the EU, are designed by powerful states "to constrain the actions of less powerful states" (Mearsheimer, 2019, pp. 11).

Another EU priority in the Western Balkans is energy security and as such the Union attempts to reduce its energy dependency to a small number of suppliers, e.g. Middle Eastern oil-producing countries. Within this backdrop, the EU's aim in the region is to absorb it into the European regional market for gas and petroleum-derived products. Energy geopolitics forces EU countries and policymakers to secure future energy needs in and through the Balkans, so any instability in this region can seriously affect the passage of oil and gas to the Union (Bobić, 2015). What makes matters complicated for the EU is that due to its enlargement fatigue other major powers, i.e. Russia, China, Turkey and the Gulf states, became contenders for influence in the Western Balkans. Following the 2013-14 Ukrainian crisis, the belief of a growing Russian threat motivated Germany, with support from Austria, Britain, France, Italy, Slovenia and Croatia, to renew the EU's engagement in this area. Consequently, the Berlin Process was established in 2014 with the aim of integrating the Western Balkans into the European energy system and impeding closer links with Moscow. This became increasingly relevant after the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict has made the region's entry into the EU even more crucial for diminishing the need for fossil fuels from Russia. In this context the Western Balkan stabilitocratic leaders have learnt to play different international actors, sometimes against each other, for their own benefit, particularly because the offers from non-Western powers do not entail democratic conditionality. This is seen in the case of Aleksandar Vučić who skillfully maintains a neutral foreign policy by keeping ties with Russia and China, which provide Serbia with energy security, investments and loans, while also working towards EU accession. The EU did not punish Belgrade for not introducing sanctions against Moscow after the Ukraine war started in 2022 precisely because of his ability to make deals that are beneficial for EU countries as the above-mentioned lithium

mine shows (Della Sala & Belloni, 2019; Simić & Živojinović, 2022; Arman, 2023; Marović, 2023). In other instances, the EU was less lenient as in the case of Gruevski. Although he was pro-EU, he accepted Chinese investments and wanted Macedonia to participate in Russia's South Stream pipeline project. He even refused to impose Western sanctions on Moscow over the 2013-14 Ukrainian crisis. The EU was so dismayed by such behaviour that it intervened, together with the US, in Macedonia during the 2015-16 Colourful revolution and supported the opposition leader Zoran Zaev, who soon became prime minister and ratified via unconstitutional means the EU-sponsored Prespa Agreement that altered the country's constitutional name into North Macedonia. This was supposed to end the name dispute with Greece, which previously used it as an excuse to block Macedonia's EU accession. Zaev thus bolstered Western influence in his country and undermined ties with China and Russia (Vankovska, 2020; Polović, 2023). In this way the Union acted in a realist manner by removing a government that threatened its interests and replacing it with a friendly authoritarian one since Macedonia under Zaev was a hybrid regime marred by corruption scandals (Daskalovski & Jankovski, 2023). This situation demonstrates that *liberal hegemony* cannot be pursued in a multipolar world because liberal powers have to behave in a realist way towards their competitors (Mearsheimer, 2018). After the Russian-Ukrainian war began in 2022, the EU revived its enlargement agenda by granting candidate status to Bosnia-Herzegovina and starting accession negotiations with Albania and Macedonia among other things. However there is little evidence that enlargement will occur anytime soon, especially because it can be blocked by member states to further their interests as in the case of Bulgaria over its disagreements with Macedonia (Kacarska et al., 2023; Tocci, 2024). It is clear that current talks of enlargement are driven by geopolitical rationales. However, these can damage the credibility of EU threats against backsliding candidate countries since the EU is less likely to promote "good governance" if it sees that it needs to integrate prospective members to safeguard its liberal order and challenge rival powers (Schimmelfennig, 2023, pp. 190-191). Anyhow the EU's *liberal hegemony* in the Western Balkans is in a shaky position, not only because there is growing opposition to EU membership in the region's population which is becoming more supportive of alternatives offered by non-Western actors, e.g. Russia

and China, but also because the enlargement status quo has enabled the deterioration of liberal democratic values and practices. Stabilitocratic rulers like Serbia's Vučić have become more authoritarian over time, especially with EU backing, and some societal groups continue to re-elect such leaders because of sincere support or deception or coercion (Simić & Živojinović, 2022; Kapidzic et al., 2023; Kraja, 2024). This situation discredits the liberal argument that "the citizens of liberal democracies respect popular democratic rights" because there is always the possibility that liberal democracies, particularly the "fledgling" ones that emerged in post-Cold War Eastern Europe, would revert to authoritarianism (Mearsheimer, 1990). So a combination of factors has undermined the EU's liberal hegemonic goals in the Western Balkans which will be harder to achieve in the near future as the world becomes even more multipolar and more prone to great power rivalries.

Conclusion

The EU attempted to pursue *liberal hegemony* as a foreign policy strategy in the Western Balkans in order to stabilise and eventually incorporate the region. While in the short-term the Union appeared to have achieved its aims since most of the Western Balkan states democratised and adopted EU-inspired reforms, it also laid the foundations for the demise of *liberal hegemony* in this part of Europe. The region's inexperience with liberal democracy, combined with the EU's security concerns and preference for stability in certain cases has undermined the Union's democracy promotion efforts in the long-term. Moreover, the EU's enlargement fatigue, coupled with the rise of multipolarity, have forced the EU to act in a realist manner in the Western Balkans in order to counter the influence of other great powers, leading to the phenomenon of *stabilitocracy* and increasing disillusionment with the Union within the region. Despite the rhetoric the EU has not offered any realistic accession prospects for the Western Balkan candidate countries, meaning that for the time being it will no longer adamantly pursue a liberal foreign policy. This paper attempted to contribute to the literature by applying Mearsheimer's theory of *liberal hegemony* to the EU's enlargement policies in the Western Balkans in order to gain a different insight as to how and why the present circumstances emerged. Overall, the EU's behaviour in the region has corroborated his

claim that in their pursuit of *liberal hegemony* liberal great powers can harm the countries they seek to help and that liberalism is a "poor guide for foreign policy" (Mearsheimer, 2018, p. 218).

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Political and Economic Challenges and Opportunities of Small States in the Chapter of Re-Building Infrastructure of International Relations: A Case Study of Serbia and N. Macedonia

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Introduction

Classical realists viewed small states as a "necessary evil" in the so-called system of international relations. The focus of classical realists on great "powers" logically placed small states in a subordinate position. The realist thesis on small states was largely based on these foundations. That is, they are largely political entities with limited capacities and opportunities, and political entities "incapable" of taking care of themselves, and finally, political entities that are in an absolutely dependent position in relation to great "powers". Such theses have largely influenced the significantly limited research into the foreign policy activities of small states, and subsequently their positioning in international relations in general. The "dominant" thesis was that small states adjust their foreign policy decisions and positioning in accordance with the interests and needs of large "powers". It is likely that this thesis could have been justified in the international order before World War II, more precisely before World War I. When large empires "divided" spheres of interest in the political, economic and security domains. When colonialism, primarily economically motivated, represented a legal mechanism in international relations, and when geography, at the then level of technological development, played a significant role in international relations. Realists are absolutely correct in their description of the international system, as a field in which self-help is the primary motivation of states, because, as they explain, they must ensure their own security due to the fact that they cannot count on any other agency or actor to do it for them, (Walt, 2017, as cited in Arnaudov, Jelisavac Trošić, 2024) even in actual international relations flows. But the understanding of self-help should be also applicable in the context of small states, because not always national interests of small states could be coordinated with national interests of the so-called big powers. Especially in the contemporary international relations, where

political, security and economic flows are dependable, but not always synchronized. In such circumstances, small states, although they do not intend to oppose the positions of the great "powers", ongoing circumstances often position them that way.

From the other side, bilateral cooperation of small states is also questionable for the majority of scholars. There are numerous of scholars which are claiming that bilateral or regional cooperation between small states is forced outside, by the big powers, if it is in their own interest. Such approach, from the other perspective, is also based on the realists' position regarding the small states. Because it also claims that small states foreign policy activities, even in relation "small entity with small one", is also dependable of the interests and forecasts of big "powers". „However, unlike classical realists with their classical understanding of foreign policy action, in the context of the analysis in this paper, a signifi cantly more favourable position is offered by one of the most famous representatives of structural realism, the American political scientist James Rosenau (James N. Rosenau), who, unlike his classical realist predecessors, leaves more room in the understanding of foreign policy action, especially when it comes to small states" (Trošić & Arnaudov 2024, p. 266). Thus, Rosenau, also known as the godfather of comparative foreign policy, presented three possibilities for understanding foreign policy action based on three assumptions: size, the rate of development, and the political system of a particular state (2003, as cited in ibid, p. 266). On these foundations, Rosenau broke down his possibilities of understanding foreign policy into five categories: the international system; roles (meaning bureaucratic actors); government (the relationship between government representatives); society (public attitudes and national culture); and eccentricity (individual behaviour) (ibid).

In this context, the authors will use the international system as a variable in understanding the foreign policy decisions of small states, while the relationship between government representatives will be a determinant in promoting or retarding the foreign policy actions of small states. Serbia and N. Macedonia were chosen as case study precisely because of their different security positioning in international relations, as well as the overlap in relation to foreign policy and foreign economic strategic goals, the implementation of which is largely determined by

their accession to the European Union. The beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in this paper will provide a time frame, where new challenges, risks, and threats in international relations can be identified, and at the same time the actions of the mentioned states can be analysed. Finally, the analysis of foreign policy and foreign economic decisions of the states taken as case study from the beginning of the Ukrainian war to the present day will provide us with an answer to the question of how much the foreign policy "room for manoeuvre" of small states in the process of restructuring international relations has improved, and the authors will simultaneously offer a projection of foreign policy action, as well as recommendations valuable for the foreign policy positioning of these subjects of international law.

Generally, this paper is focused to the thesis that even in the re-building chapter of international relations the perception of big powers to the small states is mostly the similar, based on the national interests and ongoing circumstances, defined by instrumentalisation of the foreign policy of big "powers" and applicable on the different traditional approaches of the big powers in the international relations framework. In such a context, relations between big powers and small states are still pragmatic on the big powers side and in a huge manner paternalistic from the small states perspective. While, from the other side, manoeuvring space for the small states is the consequence of the international relations circumstances, big powers current interests, as well as the institutional framework of small states.

The Case of Serbia

Foreign policy positioning of Serbia in the ongoing international relations could be analysed through three perspectives: security domain (positioning to the Ukrainian War and EU sanction policy), political domain (Belgrade-Pristine dialogue and EU integration) and economic domain (diversification of energetic supplies). The three indicators provide scientifically reliable and sustainable understanding of this small state positioning in the current international flows. And it is in a huge manner in accordance with the understanding of neorealism.

In the context of the Ukrainian War, official Belgrade has decided to take a position which is not at full range following the position of the

European Union. In fact, the position of Serbia is fully adapted to the international law and UN Charter principles but it is not in the context of relations with the Russian Federation, synchronised with the European Union, including with the Western Balkans entities which are pledging to become EU member-states. Before we start with the explanation of the foreign policy positioning of Serbia in the context of the ongoing Ukrainian War, we have to mention that "neoclassical realism, like realism, does not represent a normative theory that deals with the desirable behavior of states, but tends to explain the foreign policy and actions of states without defining correct behaviour" (Meibauer, Desmaele, et al. 2021, as cited in Gjurovski, Arnaudov, Hadžić, 2023, p. 16). In fact, neoclassical realism seeks to explain the variation in the foreign policy of one state in a certain period or between several states facing similar foreign policy constraints (Mintas, 2020, as cited in ibid, p. 16). Therefore, in neoclassical realism, it is important to include the so-called ideation (creative) variable in the analysis, which can help leaders understand opportunities and dangers, and as such, provide them with guidelines in the decision-making process (Meibauer, 2020, as cited in ibid, p. 16). The adoption of the Conclusion of the National Security Council of the Republic of Serbia on 25th February 2022 presents an official document which, in the context of Ukrainian War, in a huge manner explains the foreign policy positioning of small states in the ongoing international relations. Although so-called traditional interpretation of the small states foreign policy positioning in the chapters when international relations are at a crossroads mostly in context of taking a certain side, without any room for souveregn decision-making process, in the classical way of understanding, aforementioned decision adopted by Serbian authorities at the beginning of Ukrainian War shows certain new, or not enough researched tendencies in the understating of foreign policy of small states.

Serbia with the mentioned document declares that "provides full and principled support for respect for the principles of territorial integrity of Ukraine", but at the same time states that "the Republic of Serbia, when considering the need to possibly adopt restrictive measures or sanctions against any country, including the Russian Federation, will be guided exclusively by the protection of its vital economic and political interests", at the same time remembering the public that, "as a country that experienced Western sanctions in the recent past and whose compa-

triots in the Republika Srpska are suffering sanctions today, believes that it is not in its vital political and economic interest to impose sanctions on any country at this time, not even its representatives or economic entities" (Gjurovski et al. 2024, p. 19).

Such a decision, analysed from the perspective of neorealism, or structural realism, testifies to three contemporary tendencies that provide significant opportunities for small states in their foreign policy activities, and thus their foreign policy positioning. From the perspective of the given international circumstances, the decision-making of the National Security Council of the Republic of Serbia established that such conclusions will not negatively affect Serbia's foreign policy positioning in terms of security, because later empirical examples, such as the signing of an agreement between Serbia and France, one of the most prominent countries within NATO and Europe, on the most modern air combat systems and aviation, testify that official Belgrade is still viewed as a responsible and reliable partner in the Western Balkans, even though it opposed the decision to follow the EU's foreign and security policy in the context of imposing sanctions on Russia. In fact, the aforementioned agreement between France and Serbia on the procurement of fighter jets, as well as the previously adopted conclusions within the framework of the National Security Council, demonstrate, through an empirical example, three tendencies that directly relate to small states: current international relations allow for a certain degree of creativity in foreign policy action (condemn Moscow for aggression, but refuse to join the policy of sanctions (*Conclusion of the National Security Council* 2022, n.d.), current international relations depend to a large extent on the personal relationships of political leaders and statesmen (the relationship between the current presidents of Serbia and France (Stojanović 2024), but also Serbia and the Russian Federation (Taylor-Braçe 2024), current international relations in the era of absolute interdependence between large and small, primarily on the economic and security level, open up space for small states to create sovereign foreign policy decisions (the interests of the so-called political West in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, but also economic interests in Serbia allow Belgrade to implement foreign policy tactics).

In the context of European integration, Serbia also did not face negative consequences due to the decision not to impose sanctions on

the Russian Federation. Although it persisted in its decision almost five years after the beginning of the conflict, despite significant international pressure, (Lazarević, 2023) this did not negatively affect its European integration path, in the context of foreign policy positioning. Even the postponement of the EU-Serbia intergovernmental conference on the opening of Cluster 3 in the negotiation process was not a consequence of the failure to impose sanctions on Moscow, but primarily issues from the domain of Serbia's domestic policy with which a certain number of EU member states disagree (Čongradin, 2024). In fact, no clear and strong political consequences have been observed due to the decision not to impose sanctions on Russia, neither in the context of European integration, nor in the context of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue.

The dialogue is at the same level as in the period before the start of the Ukrainian war due to two evident reasons: diametrically opposed positions between the negotiating parties, Pristina insists on status solutions, while Belgrade is focused primarily on the status of the Serbian people living in Kosovo and Metohija; (*BBC News* na srpskom, 2023) on the other hand, international circumstances de facto marginalize this regional dispute, placing it at the level of a potential security challenge in the Western Balkans, but at a time without evident capacities to worsen regional security developments. Although a parallel is drawn between the war in Ukraine and the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, the security dynamics in Kosovo and Metohija are not threatened at the level of armed danger, except in the media and public discourse that Moscow is trying to "justify" its military aggression in Ukraine using the example of NATO's aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Anđelković, 2022).

In the given international environment, it seems that Serbia's foreign policy positioning, both in the economic, political, and security context, is largely favourable. At the same time, it is largely based on national interests, triple in the context of the development of the Serbian economy, and in the context of Serbia's security sustainability, and in the context of Serbia's political predictability.

In an attempt to analyse, explain and understand the foreign policy actions of small states, the authors have shown in this paper, using the example of Serbia, that independent foreign policy actions based on state interests are possible, primarily in a tactical sense, bearing in mind

that the period of the empirical example used is very narrow. Namely, the given international circumstances enable sovereign and tactical foreign policy actions of small states, but this does not confirm the thesis that the aforementioned actions are realistic in the event of confrontation with the interests of great powers and that such actions will be a practice in the emerging stages of international relations. The thesis offered by the authors is exclusively based on the Serbian experience in the context of the period from the beginning of the Ukrainian war to the present day.

The Case of N. Macedonia

In the context of N. Macedonia, as a model of a small state with limited political, economic, security and diplomatic capacities, it is important to emphasize the fact that its foreign policy positioning is largely determined by its strategic foreign policy goal, as well as by strategic foreign policy goals that are most often the subject of internal political and social disagreements due to the ever-present debate about their alignment with national interests.

N. Macedonia faces challenges in the implementation of foreign policy goals that to a certain extent encroach on the national identity of this country, more specifically on the national attributes of the largest national community. These are the overcome disputes with the Republic of Greece over the constitutional name of the state, over the existence of the Macedonian language, over the Macedonian identity to which both Athens and Skopje claim to have a right. On the other hand, there are current disputes with official Sofia, which refuses to accept the existence of the Macedonian nation, Macedonian identity, language, history and uniqueness. A relatively sustainable solution was reached for the first dispute with Greece, by changing the constitutional name from "the Republic of Macedonia" to The Republic of North Macedonia", but while maintaining and respecting the right to exist of the Macedonian nation, Macedonian language and history, separate from the identity, language and history of the ancient Macedonians, and thus this country became a member of NATO, achieving one of the two main foreign policy goals (*Final Agreement* 2019). We are emphasizing the point "a relatively sustainable solution," because it is an agreement that has not met with the support of Macedonian society (taking into account the results of advi-

sory referendum), and at the same time, according to certain Macedonian constitutionalists, an unconstitutional agreement. From the referendum perspective, as explained by Saveski (2020), the Decision for announcing a referendum adopted by the Assembly outrages the basic constitutional principles. For pronouncing the consultative referendum, the majority of the Assembly in that period refers to Article 73 of the Constitution, but in the quoted constitutional provision only is regulated the obligatory, and non-obligatory referendum, but not the advisory referendum. From the other, geopolitical perspective, Vankovska (2020) claims that the Prespa Agreement was an imposed solution by the great Western powers with one very unique term, represented in domestic political and scholarly circles, called geopolitics in denial (Vankovska 2020). In contrast, Mileski argues (2024), proponents of the treaty highlight its importance because of the security threats if a small country does not resolve the dispute. Based on the two above mentioned controversies related to the adoption of Prespa Agreement, also we could refer to the remark of Vankovska when it comes to clear, unconditional and strong support of the "deal" between Skopje and Athens which also strengths the issue of controversy: "Although a number of high-ranking international officials and dignitaries attended the ceremony, unlike the Ohrid Agreement, neither the EU nor the US formally appeared as a co-signatory or a guarantor of the Agreement" (Vankovska 2020).

From the other side, but at the same "isolated Macedonian island", the dispute with Bulgaria, if we isolate the factor of marginalization of the European Union's enlargement policy in the given international circumstances, continues to be a significant determinant in the process of realizing the first strategic foreign policy goal - EU membership. N. Macedonia is *de facto*, but also *de jure* - by insisting on accepting Bulgarian positions, conditioned in the process of foreign policy positioning, i.e. membership in the European Union, (Kohnen 2024) which largely determines the degree of its independent foreign policy positioning.

Additionally, its dependence in foreign policy positioning is conditioned by an internal factor, i.e. different discourses on national interests from which foreign policy goals are derived by definition. While one part of the political establishment advocates for the strict implementation of the conditions arising on the path of European integration, with special emphasis on Sofia's demands as an EU member state, arguing that

this ensures the preservation of national interests, i.e. the sustainability and development of the country, with all its national, ethnic, linguistic and religious attributes, the other part believes that Bulgaria's conditions on the European path directly interfere with internal issues and threaten the country's national interests. This leads to the thesis that the European integration of N. Macedonia, in the given format with the existing prerequisites, is opposed to the national interests of the state.

From a realist perspective, analysing Macedonia's NATO membership from the standpoint of accepting the agreement with Greece on changing its constitutional name, we argue that this country has been pursuing a dependent foreign policy, largely conditional. Representatives of classical realism would say that it is quite logical for a small and powerless state to adapt to the interests of large ones - in this case, the interests of Greece's significantly larger neighbour with all its comparative advantages in the format of a member state of both NATO and the EU. From the perspective of structural realism, as well as the postulates of international law and the UN Charter, it could be argued that N. Macedonia apparently pursues an independent foreign policy. In the context of NATO membership, the country signed an internationally binding agreement that resulted in constitutional changes. It is important to stress that Skopje officially sought NATO membership of its own accord, without any external coercion. In December 1993, the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia adopted the Resolution on NATO Accession, and five years later, on October 17, 1998, the Strategy for the country's integration into NATO was published in the Official Gazette (Arnaudov 2021). It is precisely these strategic documents that testify to the country's commitment to Atlantic integration, which logically implies certain conditions, through defined and undefined principles. It is therefore very controversial to claim that N. Macedonia, in the context of Euro-Atlantic integration, which is still current on the EU side, has pursued a conditional foreign policy, because in theory there is always room to abandon any foreign policy goal and positioning if internal national and political consensus is achieved on the conflict between the aforementioned goals and national interests. Political instability and institutional unpredictability within N. Macedonia further contribute to the clumsiness of this country in its sovereign foreign policy positioning. On the domestic level, for almost 35 years, from the moment of gaining independence

to the present day, no political party and socially agreed platforms have been set that would have a harmonized understanding of national and state interests, but also the determination and setting of foreign policy goals. Both national interests and foreign policy goals themselves are the subject of daily political debates, the collection of party points and social divisions.

In the context of the war in Ukraine, N. Macedonia, as a candidate country for membership in the European Union, has strictly aligned its foreign policy positioning with the foreign policy positioning of the European Union (Арнаудов, 2022, p. 299). In addition, it went a step further and, despite its significantly limited economic, financial, and military capacities, agreed to send military aid to Ukraine (ibid).

On the other hand, from the perspective of economic and energy challenges, it is important to recall the data from 2022:

- There are a total of about 70 companies with Russian capital operating in N. Macedonia;
- These are business entities that employ around 1,250 citizens;
- They generate an income of 210 million euros, according to data from 2020;
- One of the ten companies "TeTo" is engaged in the production of electricity, which, according to Macedonian media, is an important factor in the Macedonian energy market (it has capacities for the production of 220 megawatts of electricity annually, as well as 160 megawatts for the production of thermal energy, which, as it is emphasized, is the total supply of central heating in the capital city of Skopje (*Вечер* 2022; Арнаудов 2022, 301).

Based on the Macedonian experience in Euro-Atlantic integration, but also the country's positioning in the context of the Ukrainian war, we can establish that Skopje has officially positioned its foreign policy actions and positioning at the level of a cause-and-effect relationship, which does not lead to the ultimate conclusion that this is a dependent foreign policy action, but rather a conditioned foreign policy response/re-action of the Macedonian diplomatic service, without any evident attempts to create a national, social and state platform, strategy and capacity to relativize the given conditions through diplomatic and institutional mechanisms. It is therefore worth emphasizing, using the

example of N. Macedonia, that the foreign policy positioning of small states, in the past thirty years, but also the emerging circumstances of international relations, has been largely conditioned and determined by the internal capacities of the country, which timely recognize the emerging dynamics within the framework of the international order, but at the same time create institutional and personal mechanisms for adapting to the given circumstances while respecting national interests and foreign policy goals. Adaptation as such should not be interpreted as the acceptance of external guidelines, conditions and policies, but rather an internal restructuring aimed at foreign policy efficiency and effectiveness.

The Case of the Open Balkans Initiative

The authors decided to take into account the regional initiative Open Balkans because it is an authentic project that emerged within the so-called Western Balkans and based on whose empirical example the international positioning of small states can be explained through the prism of structural realism. This is an initiative that is primarily based on the common interest of local leaders, and one of the theses of structural realists about the relationship between political leaders is largely explained through the Open Balkans, taking into account the relationship between the leaders of the participating countries in this initiative in the process of launching, developing and sustaining the initiative itself. Analysing the meetings between the leaders of the participating states of the Open Balkans through various frameworks, from summits, to online meetings during the Covid pandemic, to a joint and coordinated appearance in the context of European integration (*N1 Beograd*, 2022), we come to the conclusion that the component of inter-leadership relations has played a key role within the framework of this regional project. It is precisely the joint appearance in Brussels at the EU-Western Balkans summit that largely empirically proves the room for manoeuvre that small states enjoy in foreign policy.

On the other hand, the Open Balkans represents a doubly good empirical example:

- "on the way" to proving the foreign policy space that small states enjoy in the current international environment
- "on the way" to proving that the great powers do not explicitly

oppose the foreign policy ambitions of small states, unless they contradict their interests.

When it comes to foreign policy, the Open Balkans initiative is a clear sign that small states enjoy a certain degree of independence in foreign policy decision-making. An example of this is N. Macedonia and Albania, which are NATO member states, which have numerous fundamental disagreements with Serbia (primarily regarding the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue), but which have independently decided to take a foreign policy step in the direction of economic integration with Serbia, which in the current circumstances may be criticized in certain "Western" metropolises due to the good relations between Serbia and the Russian Federation, but also due to Belgrade's refusal to accept the status dialogue with Pristina. Although the Open Balkans is primarily an initiative with an economic focus, in this context it is difficult to confirm the thesis that Skopje and Tirana, as examples of small states, are pursuing a dependent and exclusive foreign policy.

On the other hand, what is even more important for this study in proving the foreign policy effectiveness of small states, is an example of the support that the great powers provided to the launch of the Open Balkans. But, before we show this support, it is important to remember that the goal of the Open Balkans is to create a single market in the Western Balkans that will be based on the principles of the European Union market and the free movement of people, goods, capital and services (Trošić and Arnaudov 2023, p. 69). In this context, it is worth recalling that the main goal of the Berlin Process (an initiative launched in 2014 by Berlin in cooperation with the EU) is a common regional market, (ibid.) and that the single market is certainly one of the basic postulates in the European integration processes. That is precisely why the Open Balkans enjoyed the "tacit" support of official Brussels. On one occasion, even a spokeswoman for the European Commission welcomed the fact that the participating states were committed to greater regional cooperation, (Arnaudov, 2023, p. 70) but at the same time noted that the greatest benefits would be achieved by the inclusiveness of all six political entities of the Western Balkans.

As for Washington, as Arnaudov (ibid, p. 74) explains, the United States has supported the Open Balkans initiative, always emphasising its economic dimension, which means that the initiative itself should not

threaten American political and security interests in the region. In this context, American officials have also publicly supported this initiative, always insisting on its inclusiveness, and economic character, but also its compatibility with EU membership, as a foreign policy goal of the Western Balkans and all actors in the region.

Additionally, Moscow has also instrumentalised the Open Balkans in line with its national interests and foreign policy goals. Thus, at the height of the Ukrainian war, the ban on Russian aircraft flying through the airspace of a NATO member state, which prevented the Russian foreign minister from visiting Serbia, was used by Moscow to accuse "Brussels of not wanting to provide space for Russia to express its views on numerous regional issues in Belgrade, but also to provide support to Belgrade and its *Open Balkans* initiative, which should improve relations in the region", stating that "NATO and Brussels want the Balkans for themselves, or rather, they want a closed Balkans" (ibid., p. 80).

The empirical example of the Open Balkans can largely be used to understand the relationship between great powers and small states as well as how this relationship can be used to understand the foreign policy actions of small subjects of international law. Namely, regional integration within the framework of the Open Balkans testifies to the fact that in the given international circumstances, the foreign policy actions of small states are not isolated and impossible, but as such cannot be defined as a rule for two reasons: because it is an initiative that does not oppose the interests of great powers; because it is an initiative that has additionally contributed to the increase in regional disagreements, which is also an evident interest of certain great powers.

Conclusion

Structural realism as a theoretical approach in this paper represents a good basis on which the authors analysed the foreign policy actions of the case study states and initiatives (in the context of regional cooperation). On the other hand, classical realism is also applicable to the case of N. Macedonia, especially if the foreign policy actions of this country in the context of the Ukrainian war are analysed in isolated conditions. For a comprehensive demonstration of the stated thesis, structur-

al realism serves as the ideal theoretical foundation. Analysed from the perspective of empirical examples, the authors managed to prove that foreign policy actions, and thus the positioning of small states in current international relations, are to a significant extent achievable, without predicting how much such sovereign action is guaranteed and predictable in the long term. The period from the beginning of the Ukrainian war to the present day represents, in a qualitative sense, a significant indicator on the basis of which the capacities of foreign policy actions of small states can be established. Most states have taken a position in relation to conflicting and opposing parties. Therefore, it was possible to quantitatively measure the "space" that small states "enjoy" in their foreign policy positioning. On the other hand, in a quantitative, time frame, this is a very small space on the basis of which a solid thesis can be built that the foreign policy sovereignty of small states is the rule, rather than the exception, in given historical chapters of international relations. Therefore, the authors, using the example of N. Macedonia and Serbia, conclude that the foreign policy sovereign action of small states in contemporary and current international relations is realistic and feasible if the positioning in question is not fundamentally opposed to the interests of the great powers and if small states, on the internal level, have a consensus according to the model of the lowest common political, social and institutional denominator, on the key foreign policy priorities of the country based on national interests.

There are several factors that can determine the "degree" of foreign policy independence of small states: medium-term adjustment of foreign policy strategies depending on current international circumstances (these are subjects of international law that do not have the capacity and resources to maintain long-term foreign policy strategies, therefore a medium-term adaptive model, aligned with unchanging national interests, is a quality basis on the path to creating "foreign policy independence" a stable and sustainable internal institutional framework, protected and resistant to phenomena such as politicization, corruption and clientelism (this is the basis for independent action, protected from potential external threats, challenges and risks which, in current international relations, are one of the key instruments for "interference" in sovereign decision-making processes) creating realistic "pictures" of the situational interests of the great powers in a given geographical area, general (comprehensive)

and individual (a dual understanding of the comprehensive and individual interests (security, political and economic) of the great powers in the Western Balkans can represent the basis for understanding Serbia's foreign policy actions in the context of the Ukrainian War, but also the actions of N. Macedonia and Albania in the context of the Open Balkans) regional cooperation and coordination based on the "lowest common denominator" (because historical experience shows that regional disagreements largely contribute to "interference" in the foreign policy decisions of small states, and thus to the impossibility of their foreign policy independence and effectiveness).

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The Sino-Macedonian Cultural Foundations of Multipolarity in the New Era of Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technologies

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Introduction

The centuries-old cultural ties between China and Macedonia, deeply rooted in historical exchanges along the Silk Road (Lajčiak, 2017), have become a cornerstone for contemporary collaboration, particularly in the burgeoning era of artificial intelligence (AI) and advanced technologies (Kurecic, 2017). This paper explores the historical underpinnings and contemporary implications of the Sino-Macedonian cultural relationship within a multipolar framework. These enduring connections have laid the groundwork for modern cultural collaboration initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, China-CEEC Mechanism for cooperation and bilateral cultural exchange programs. In the current era, the intersection of culture and technology is more pronounced than ever, with AI and emerging technologies facilitating cross-cultural communication, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering mutual understanding. Technological advancements like AI-driven language translation tools, immersive virtual reality experiences, and digital archives offer innovative avenues for cultural exchange and collaboration, surpassing geographical and linguistic barriers. However, these opportunities come with challenges and ethical considerations, including data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the digital divide (Beridze, 2021). Thoughtful deliberation and strategic planning are necessary to ensure cultural collaboration remains equitable, inclusive, and respectful of diverse cultural values. This paper advocates for a forward-looking approach to Sino-Macedonian cultural collaboration in the digital age, emphasizing the importance of long-term strategic planning, investment in capacity-building initiatives, and adherence to ethical principles. By embracing these principles, China and Macedonia can deepen their cultural ties, contribute to global multipolarity, and foster a more interconnected and harmonious world.

The resilient cultural ties between China and Macedonia, spanning across historical periods, serve as a beacon for the transformative potential of cross-cultural dialogue in the modern era (Lajčiak, 2017). Initially

nurtured through the venerable Silk Road, these connections have continuously been reinforced, establishing a foundation of mutual respect, comprehension, and collaboration. As civilizations rich in historical narratives, China and Macedonia possess a wealth of cultural heritage, artistic ingenuity, and intellectual prowess to share, fostering a symbiotic relationship that strengthens their alliance and provides a robust platform for contemporary partnerships. In the context of the new era of artificial intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies, these cultural foundations are more critical than ever, acting as a catalyst for innovation and fostering a multipolar world where diverse perspectives and approaches can coexist and thrive.

The cultural exchanges between China and Macedonia serve multiple purposes: they honor the tapestry of diversity and fortify the alliance between these two nations. This symbiotic relationship is pivotal in the modern context of AI and emerging technologies, where cultural foundations are essential for innovation and the promotion of a multipolar world. The significance of these cultural ties is manifold:

1. Cultural Diplomacy: The shared cultural heritage serves as a diplomatic tool, fostering goodwill and facilitating dialogue on a range of issues, from trade to technology.

2. Innovation and Creativity: The exchange of ideas and artistic expressions can inspire novel solutions in AI and technology, leading to breakthroughs that benefit both nations.

3. Educational Exchange: Collaboration in education can prepare future leaders with a global perspective, equipped to navigate the complexities of a multipolar world.

4. Economic Synergy: Cultural understanding can pave the way for joint ventures and economic partnerships, leveraging the strengths of both countries in the tech sector.

5. Social Cohesion: By promoting mutual respect and understanding, cultural ties can help build social bridges, countering divisive narratives and fostering a more cohesive global community.

In an epoch marked by a burgeoning multipolar landscape, cultural exchange has become a cornerstone in the architecture of international relations (Peters, 2023). It acts as a conduit that weaves nations together, nurturing a global community predicated on interconnectivity and shared aspirations. The art of cultural diplomacy has risen to prominence as an

influential instrument for amplifying soft power and advancing national interests on the global platform. Within this framework, the rapport between China and Macedonia transcends the confines of a mere bilateral dynamic, becoming an essential thread in the tapestry of a broader, multipolar world order. Here, the synergy of cultural collaboration not only enriches the global discourse but also contributes to the scaffolding of a more balanced and equitable international system (Türkcan & Keşvelioğlu, 2020).

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) and a suite of emerging technologies has heralded a new era in cultural exchange, characterized by unprecedented connectivity and interactivity. These advancements have introduced new dimensions to how countries engage with each other culturally and have revolutionized the very fabric of cross-cultural communication (Beridze, 2021). AI-driven language translation tools, immersive virtual reality experiences, and digital archives have become instrumental in fostering cross-cultural understanding and collaboration. These technologies have transformed cultural diplomacy, allowing nations to engage in real-time cultural exchanges and collaborations that were previously constrained by physical distance.

The integration of AI and emerging technologies into the realm of cultural diplomacy presents a host of challenges and ethical considerations that must be navigated with care. As the digital age progresses, issues such as data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the digital divide become increasingly pertinent to ensure that cultural collaboration remains equitable and inclusive (Hadji-Janev, 2021).

This paper advocates that the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies with cultural diplomacy represents a paradigm shift in the advancement of Sino-Macedonian cultural collaboration, significantly bolstering the principles of global multipolarity in the 21st century (Vangeli, 2021). The transformative impact of AI on cultural exchange is palpable, offering a plethora of opportunities to dismantle traditional barriers, catalyze cross-cultural dialogue, and pioneer innovative frameworks for shared cultural experiences.

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to explore the Sino-Macedonian cultural relationship within a multipolar framework. The research methodology includes a comprehensive review of academic literature, policy documents, and reports related to Sino-Mace-

donian relations, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the impact of AI and emerging technologies on cultural diplomacy. Data analysis is performed through thematic analysis, identifying key patterns and trends that shed light on historical ties, current cultural collaborations, and the ethical implications of AI integration in cultural exchanges. This approach facilitates a focused examination of the factors influencing Sino-Macedonian relations and the role of technology in these dynamics.

The paper will proceed as follows: First, it will delve into the historical underpinnings of Sino-Macedonian relations, highlighting key moments of cultural exchange and their impact on bilateral ties. It will then examine the current state of cultural collaboration, focusing on initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative and its cultural dimensions. Subsequently, the paper will explore the role of AI and emerging technologies in cultural diplomacy, drawing on examples from China and Macedonia. Finally, it will conclude with recommendations for fostering cultural collaboration in the digital age, emphasizing the importance of ethical considerations and strategic planning.

Historical Cultural Connections between China and Macedonia

China has been a cradle of enduring friendships, with the ancient Boli Dao (6th c. BC), known as The Glass Road, initiating cultural exchanges between China and Europe, marking the first trade exchange between the East and the West (Vitkovska, 2022). The legacy of Alexander the Great from the ancient Kingdom of Macedon had a profound influence on the early foundations of cross-cultural exchange. His empire, though short-lived, left an indelible mark on the regions it encompassed, significantly impacting the evolution of trade and cultural interactions. These interactions would later flourish with the emergence of the Silk Road. The historical backdrop of the Silk Road and its associated trade routes had an enduring influence on cultural exchanges from ancient times to the present day, with the echoes of Alexander's reach still resonating today. In the modern era, Macedonia stands as the successor to the ancient Kingdom of Macedon, once ruled by Alexander the Great. His empire's vast expanse, which once spanned across three continents, has left an enduring cultural and historical legacy that continues to resonate in the region's identity.

The China-Macedonian bond, dating back to 101 AD with a Macedonian caravan's arrival in Luoyang (Ambassador Zhang Zuo 2023),

signifies a significant milestone in their long-standing relationship. This historical interaction has paved the way for future diplomatic, economic, and cultural engagements. The ancient Silk Road was more than a mere network of trade routes; it was a catalyst for cultural exchange, interlacing the civilizations of the East and West. This extensive web facilitated not only the commerce of goods but also the rich intermingling of ideas, cultures, and values (Lajčiak, 2017). The Silk Road's role in nurturing early cultural exchanges is a testament to the enduring connections that have shaped the region's cultural heritage, with the legacy of Alexander the Great serving as an early cornerstone for such interactions.

The influence of Alexander's empire served as a precursor to the broader exchanges facilitated by the Silk Road, setting the stage for the exchange of a myriad of elements, from the tangible—silk and spices—to the intangible—philosophical concepts and technological innovations. Although the kingdom of Macedon and the Silk Road did not coincide chronologically, the cultural and commercial interactions initiated by Alexander's conquests laid the groundwork for the more extensive exchanges that would follow. Present-day N. Macedonia stands as a testament to this enduring impact.

The Silk Road's legacy on cultural exchange is monumental, having catalysed not only the trade of material commodities but also the dissemination of cultural practices and intellectual thought (Vangeli 2020). Within the framework of the modern Belt and Road Initiative, a particularly crucial branch is the 'Balkan Silk Road,' which connects Beijing to Athens, with pivotal stops in Belgrade, Sarajevo, Skopje, Budapest, and Tirana, among other notable waypoints (Vitkovska 2022). This route is seminal in carving out new avenues for transportation and the establishment of economic corridors, earning Macedonia its moniker as the 'gateway to Europe' (Vitkovska 2022).

Throughout history, China and Macedonia have engaged in reciprocal exchanges that have significantly enriched their cultural heritages. The historical commerce along the trade routes saw a flow of goods such as silk, ceramics, and medicinal herbs from China to Macedonia, as well as the transmission of philosophy, artistic styles, and scientific knowledge from Macedonia to China. The exchange was not unidirectional; it was a mutually beneficial relationship where both civilizations gained from the transfer of knowledge and commodities (Belidis, 2019). Ex-

ploring the adoption and adaptation of these cultural practices within the context of each civilization reveals how these exchanges contributed to the development of their societies.

The historical interactions between China and the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC), including Macedonia, date back to ancient times and were characterized by thriving trade along the Silk Road (Vangeli 2020). This network facilitated the exchange of goods, technologies, and cultural influences, leading to the mutual enrichment of both regions. Macedonia, with its strategic location, played a pivotal role in this exchange, acting as a conduit for cultural and commercial interactions between China and Europe.

Investigating the impact of these exchanges on the cultural development of both nations, the influence of art and philosophy can be discerned in the aesthetic and intellectual movements within China, while Chinese innovations in technology and craftsmanship left a lasting impact on Macedonian society. The analysis considers the long-term effects of these cultural exchanges, examining how they have shaped the cultural identities of China and Macedonia and their approaches to diplomacy and international relations. Extending the discussion to the role of these historical exchanges in laying the groundwork for modern cultural initiatives and collaborations, parallels are drawn between the ancient trade routes and contemporary efforts to foster cultural ties, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, which seeks to revive the spirit of the Silk Road in the context of the digital age (Vangeli 2020).

The persistent legacy of historical connections between China and Macedonia is a cornerstone of their modern cultural relations. Dissecting how these ancient ties have sculpted contemporary cultural initiatives, particularly the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to channel the spirit of the ancient Silk Road into the tapestry of 21st-century globalization (Dimitrijević 2017), reveals how these historical links have molded the cultural policies and diplomatic endeavors of both nations, as well as their influence on public perception and cultural identity. By scrutinizing the enduring impact of these historical exchanges, it becomes clear how the past continues to shape and enhance the current cultural relationship between the two countries.

The historical interactions between China and Macedonia have cast a long shadow over their contemporary relations. The bequest of mutual

respect, cultural exchange, and economic cooperation has established a solid foundation for the enhancement of partnerships in the modern era (Vangeli, 2020). The BRI has emerged as a pivotal force in shaping the dynamics of Sino-Macedonian relations, presenting new frontiers for collaboration and engagement between the two nations (ibid). The BRI's focus on connectivity, infrastructure development, and economic collaboration has resonated across the Sino-Macedonian landscape, unlocking opportunities for amplified cooperation in trade, investment, and cultural exchange.

In conclusion, the historical cultural connections between China and Macedonia, as exemplified by the ancient Silk Road and subsequent exchanges, have profoundly influenced their modern relations. The reciprocal exchanges of goods, ideas, and cultural practices have not only enriched both nations' cultural heritages but also continue to sculpt their contemporary interactions, especially within frameworks like the Belt and Road Initiative. The enduring impact of these historical connections stands as a testament to the perpetual importance of cultural exchange in nurturing international cooperation and understanding. As China and Macedonia forge ahead in the new era of AI and emerging technologies, the lessons and insights gleaned from their historical connections provide a valuable compass guiding their path towards a future of shared cultural prosperity.

Cultural Collaboration in the Modern Era

The Belt and Road Initiative and Cultural Dimensions

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a modern revival of the ancient Silk Road, is designed to enhance global connectivity and foster cooperation among nations through infrastructure development and economic integration. The BRI catalyses cultural exchange and mutual comprehension, highlighting its role as a conduit for cultural interaction and a bridge for enhancing understanding among diverse societies. The BRI's cultural impact is manifold, encompassing efforts to link cultural heritage sites, promote educational exchanges, and forge stronger people-to-people connections (Vangeli et al., 2021). The focus is on the contribution of the BRI's cultural initiatives to the overarching objectives of peace,

understanding, and mutual respect among participating countries, with a particular emphasis on China and Macedonia.

The BRI has been pivotal in reanimating historical connections and nurturing a contemporary ethos of collaboration between China and Macedonia (Vangeli, 2020). It has created a dynamic platform for the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and cultural insights, thereby enriching the bilateral relationship. The initiative has facilitated not only infrastructure development but also cultivated a profound appreciation for the cultural heritage of both nations, fortifying the bonds between their peoples.

Examining the cultural dimensions of the BRI involves considering:

1. Cultural Heritage Connectivity: The BRI enhances the preservation and accessibility of cultural heritage sites, allowing a broader audience to engage with and learn from these historical treasures.

2. Educational Exchanges: The BRI promotes academic and educational exchanges, vital for nurturing future generations of global citizens equipped with cross-cultural understanding.

3. People-to-People Bonds: The BRI fosters personal connections and cultural appreciation through tourism, cultural festivals, and other people-to-people diplomacy initiatives.

4. Cultural Diplomacy: The BRI serves as a platform for cultural diplomacy, enabling countries to engage in dialogue and cooperation on shared cultural interests and values.

5. Economic and Cultural Synergy: The interplay between economic development and cultural exchange under the BRI, highlighting how economic initiatives can support cultural objectives and vice versa.

By exploring these dimensions, the analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of how the BRI contributes to cultural collaboration in the modern era. It also reflects on the future potential of the BRI in shaping cultural relations, particularly in the context of emerging technologies and AI, which are transforming the way cultures interact and collaborate globally.

Bilateral Cultural Exchange Programs and Initiatives

China and Macedonia's shared history of cultural exchange has given rise to a multitude of bilateral initiatives in the modern era, extending beyond the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

These programs encompass a diverse array of activities including cultural festivals, art exhibitions, academic conferences, and language courses, all designed to cultivate a deeper appreciation and understanding of each other's cultures (Csikó, 2022).

Investigating specific collaborative initiatives undertaken by both nations, such as establishing sister-city partnerships, offering scholarships to students for study in one another's country, and making joint efforts to preserve and promote their respective cultural heritages, reveals the impact of these initiatives on enhancing mutual cultural awareness and solidifying bilateral ties (Krstinovska, 2021).

The development of Makedonistika in China and Chinese studies in Macedonia has been pivotal in fostering cultural ties between the two countries. Makedonistika, as a field of study within Chinese linguistics, has been instrumental in deepening the Chinese academic community's comprehension of the Macedonian language, culture, and history (Vitkovska and Shen, 2018). Reciprocally, the growth of Sinology in Macedonia has been crucial in fostering a nuanced understanding of China's rich cultural heritage and its dynamic role on the global stage.

The BRI has been a catalyst in reinvigorating historical ties and nurturing a renewed spirit of partnership between China and Macedonia (Vangeli, 2020). It has not only facilitated the development of infrastructure projects but also fostered a deeper appreciation of each other's cultural heritage, strengthening the people-to-people ties between the two nations.

In the context of AI and emerging technologies, these cultural exchanges are more relevant than ever. The digital age provides new platforms and tools for cultural collaboration, offering opportunities for innovation in cultural expression and exchange. These modern initiatives contribute to the broader goals of peace, understanding, and mutual respect among participating nations, including China and Macedonia.

By exploring these bilateral cultural exchange programs and initiatives, the analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of how the past continues to inform and enrich the present-day cultural relationship between China and Macedonia. It also reflects on the future potential of these initiatives in shaping cultural relations, particularly in the context of emerging technologies and AI, which are transforming the way cultures interact and collaborate globally.

The Current State of Sino-Macedonian Cultural Relations

An assessment of the current state of Sino-Macedonian cultural relations reveals a vibrant exchange of cultural initiatives and a commitment to fostering mutual understanding. However, challenges such as asymmetries in trade balances, concerns about debt sustainability, and the need for transparency in project procurement have to be addressed to ensure the sustainability and mutual benefit of these cultural ties (Richet & Zafiroski, 2019). The relationship between the two countries has been influenced by a variety of factors, including their involvement in the 16+1 initiative (now China-CEEC Cooperation) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which marked a period of intensified cooperation.

In recent years, the dynamics of Macedonia-China relations have seen a significant downturn, most notably marked by the absence of official high-level visits from Macedonian officials to China. The bilateral relationship encountered stagnation, most notably influenced by Macedonia's alignment with NATO and the European Union's strategic orientations. The period following the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the support from China, failed to rejuvenate the momentum, as evidenced by the absence of significant activity in the post-crisis period (Gjorgjioska, 2024).

However, the highly likely change of government in Macedonia opens the possibility for a shift in course and improvements in relations with China, especially if parties like Levica, which advocate for closer ties with China, become part of the ruling coalition. This shift underscores the profound impact of Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration process on its external relations, particularly with non-Western partners like China, highlighting the loss of sovereignty that the country has experienced as a result of its membership in NATO (Gjorgjioska, 2024).

In conclusion, the historical cultural connections between China and Macedonia, as evidenced by the ancient Silk Road and subsequent exchanges, have profoundly influenced their modern relations. The mutual exchanges of goods, ideas, and cultural practices have enriched both nations' cultural heritage and continue to shape their contemporary interactions, particularly within initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative. The lasting impact of these historical connections serves as a reminder of

the enduring significance of cultural exchange in fostering international cooperation and understanding.

The Role of Artificial Intelligence and Emerging Technologies in Cultural Exchange

AI-Driven Language Translation Tools

The advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has revolutionized cross-linguistic communication between China and Macedonia, breaking down linguistic barriers and facilitating richer cultural exchanges (Beridze, 2021). AI-driven language translation tools have become instrumental in enhancing Sino-Macedonian interactions by offering advanced machine translation engines and real-time translation apps that promote dialogue and collaboration (Nesoff, 2024). These tools have transformed the landscape of interactions by providing a platform for seamless communication, thus fostering mutual understanding and cooperation.

The influence of AI in translation extends beyond basic communication, permeating the localization of cultural artifacts. By making films, literature, and educational materials accessible in both languages, AI translation tools are enhancing mutual comprehension and fostering a deeper appreciation of each other's cultural heritage. This nuanced dissemination allows for a more profound engagement with cultural works, contributing to a more vibrant and diverse cultural exchange.

The integration of AI in language translation acts as a bridge for cultural exploration. It empowers Macedonian scholars and students with access to a vast repository of Chinese literature and academic resources, while concurrently offering Chinese speakers the chance to delve into the intricacies of Macedonian cultural creations. This reciprocal access is pivotal for cultivating a holistic understanding of each other's societal constructs and value systems (Beridze, 2021).

Furthermore, AI translation tools play a crucial role in preserving and promoting linguistic diversity. They provide a platform for lesser-known languages to have a voice in the global dialogue, ensuring that cultural nuances are not lost in translation. This is especially significant in the context of a multipolar world, where cultural diversity and multilingualism are celebrated and leveraged for global cooperation and understanding.

In summary, AI-driven language translation tools are indispensable in the modern era of cultural exchange between China and Macedonia. They not only break down language barriers but also build cultural bridges, enabling a more interconnected and harmonious global community. As AI continues to evolve, its role in fostering cultural understanding and exchange will only grow in significance, shaping the future of international relations in the new era of technology.

Virtual Reality Experiences and Digital Archives

The advent of Virtual Reality (VR) and the establishment of digital archives have ushered in a new paradigm in the realm of cultural heritage preservation and interaction. These technological advancements are redefining the engagement with cultural artifacts and broadening the scope of cross-cultural understanding between China and Macedonia (Bánkuty-Balogh, 2022).

VR technology has opened up a realm of immersive experiences, allowing users to virtually traverse historical landmarks and museums, providing an intimate encounter with the cultural heritage of China and Macedonia. These virtual tours and experiences can significantly enhance the appreciation and comprehension of each other's history and culture, offering a deeper, more personal connection that transcends geographical boundaries.

Digital archives, on the other hand, play a pivotal role in safeguarding cultural artifacts, art, and knowledge. They provide accessible platforms for artifacts that might be challenging to access due to geographical constraints or preservation requirements (Vangeli, 2021). By creating digital repositories, both countries are ensuring that their cultural heritage is not only preserved for future generations but also made available for educational and research purposes globally.

Revisiting the examination of technological innovations, it becomes evident that they significantly enhance cross-cultural learning and engagement. They offer novel, interactive ways to experience culture, which is vital in an era where cultural exchange is increasingly important for fostering international cooperation and understanding.

The use of VR in cultural heritage presents an innovative approach to experiencing art, history, and cultural practices from different geo-

graphical locations. It provides the opportunity to virtually walk through ancient Chinese dynasties or Macedonian archaeological sites, offering a unique perspective and fostering a global cultural consciousness (Bánkuty-Balogh, 2022).

In summary, the integration of VR experiences and digital archives in cultural exchange is a testament to the evolving nature of cultural diplomacy. As China and Macedonia navigate the new era of AI and emerging technologies, the role of these tools in shaping future cultural relations is set to become increasingly significant, offering promising avenues for enhanced mutual understanding and collaboration.

How Technology Facilitates Cross-Cultural Communication and Understanding

The rise of emerging technologies has ushered in a transformative era for cultural exchange, redefining not only the scope of interaction but also the very mechanisms through which it occurs. Social media platforms and digital repositories of cultural content are now the bridges that connect artists, scholars, and the general public across geographical divides, fostering unprecedented levels of dialogue and exchange.

Enhancing Cultural Diplomacy through Technology

The integration of technology in educational landscapes, exemplified by e-learning tools and virtual cultural exchange programs, has been a boon to cultural diplomacy. It has facilitated people-to-people ties by providing accessible platforms for cross-cultural learning and engagement. These tools not only make cultural resources more readily available but also enable interactive experiences that were previously unattainable, thus deepening the understanding and appreciation of different cultures.

Democratizing Cultural Exchange

The proliferation of digital platforms and social media has played a pivotal role in democratizing cultural exchange. It has empowered individuals and communities to become active participants in the global cultural discourse, sharing their unique cultural practices and perspectives on a scale that was unimaginable in the pre-digital era. This democratization is instrumental in advocating for cultural diversity and fostering a global ethos of mutual understanding and respect.

Balancing Advancement and Authenticity

While the democratization of cultural exchange through technology is laudable, it also presents a dual-edged sword. It necessitates a delicate

balance between harnessing technological advancements and safeguarding the authenticity of cultural expressions (Hadji-Janev, 2021). The digital transformation of cultural heritage must be managed in a way that respects and preserves the cultural integrity of the content, ensuring that it is not merely commodified or misrepresented.

Challenges and Considerations

The advent of these technologies also brings forth a spectrum of challenges. Access to technology varies widely across different regions and societies, potentially exacerbating existing digital divides. Furthermore, the digital literacy among users is a critical factor that influences the effectiveness of these platforms in promoting cultural understanding. There is also the ongoing debate surrounding the preservation of cultural authenticity in the digital realm, where the risk of misinterpretation or cultural appropriation is ever-present.

In conclusion, technology has emerged as a powerful catalyst for cross-cultural communication and understanding. It has the potential to both unite and divide, to enlighten and to distort. As China and Macedonia, along with the broader international community, harness these tools for cultural exchange, it is imperative to approach them with a keen awareness of their transformative power and the responsibilities that accompany their use. The future of cultural diplomacy in the digital age hinges on the capacity to navigate these complexities, utilizing technology to cultivate a more interconnected, empathetic, and culturally rich global community.

Opportunities Presented by AI and Emerging Technologies

Enhancing Cultural Heritage Preservation

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) represents a pivotal moment in the preservation of cultural heritage, greatly enhancing the ability to safeguard and honor the global cultural legacy. AI-driven analytics and machine learning stand at the forefront of this transformation, fundamentally altering the landscape of cultural conservation by providing deep insights and predictive analytics (Wang and Zvarych, 2024).

Predictive Preservation with AI

AI's analytical acumen is exemplified in its capacity to distill vast repositories of historical data, uncovering patterns and trends essential for anticipating the preservation needs of cultural artifacts. Contemporary algorithms are now capable of forecasting the decay trajectories of ancient sculptures or murals with unprecedented precision, thereby enabling conservators to implement preemptive measures that were hitherto unattainable. This shift from a reactive to a proactive conservation approach marks a significant advancement in the effort to ensure the longevity of cultural heritage.

The Impact of 3D Technologies

Concurrent with AI's advancements, the emergence of 3D scanning and printing technologies has been equally instrumental, offering innovative solutions for the replication and restoration of historical sites and relics. These technologies have democratized access to cultural artifacts, facilitating precise replication that maintains the integrity of the original piece while creating a stable, preserved version for study and display.

Cultural Exchange and Education

The application of 3D printing for cultural heritage extends beyond mere physical preservation. It plays an indispensable role in digital preservation, creating digital archives that serve as invaluable resources for education and cultural exchange (Bánkuty-Balogh, 2022). This approach is particularly beneficial for artifacts that are delicate or located in inaccessible regions, ensuring their endurance and accessibility for future generations.

Digital Preservation and Access

Digital preservation through 3D technologies not only safeguards artifacts but also enhances their accessibility for educational purposes and cultural diplomacy. It permits individuals worldwide to engage with cultural heritage in ways previously restricted to those with physical access to these sites or relics. This heightened accessibility has the potential to cultivate a deeper global appreciation for cultural diversity and historical significance.

Challenges and Considerations

Despite the substantial benefits, the amalgamation of AI and 3D technologies in cultural heritage preservation is not unencumbered by challenges. Issues such as copyright, the authenticity of replicas, and

the ethical implications of digitally manipulating cultural artifacts must be meticulously considered. It is imperative to strike a balance between technological intervention and the preservation of cultural authenticity.

Fostering Mutual Understanding and Collaboration

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies has been pivotal in bolstering mutual understanding and collaboration between China and Macedonia. These sophisticated tools have transformed cultural interactions, forging new avenues for cross-cultural engagement and shared initiatives.

Data Analytics in Cultural Exchange

Data analytics plays an indispensable role in deciphering cultural trends and consumer behaviors, which is invaluable for crafting cultural exchange programs that resonate on a profound level (Vangeli, 2021). By harnessing the prowess of AI, organizers can glean insights into the preferences and interests of their target audiences. This data-driven approach facilitates the development of cultural diplomacy initiatives that are not only efficacious but also nuanced, fostering a genuine appreciation and comprehension of the respective cultures.

AI as a Catalyst for International Collaboration

AI functions as a potent catalyst for international collaboration by dismantling traditional communication barriers. It offers innovative platforms that facilitate the sharing of ideas and knowledge across borders. Tools that provide real-time translation, ideation, and project management are increasingly accessible, rendering international research initiatives and collaborative artistic projects more feasible (Beridze, 2021). These AI-powered tools enhance collaboration by not only simplifying communication but also by enriching the diversity of thought and creativity in such endeavors.

Enhancing Cultural Diplomacy

The application of AI in cultural diplomacy is manifold. It can aid in the curation of digital exhibitions, the organization of virtual cultural festivals, and the creation of interactive educational programs. These initiatives, powered by AI, can reach a global audience, transcending geographical limitations and making cultural heritage accessible to all.

Challenges and Opportunities

While AI presents numerous opportunities for fostering mutual understanding, it also comes with challenges. Ensuring equal access to

these technologies and maintaining cultural authenticity in the digital space are concerns that must be addressed. Moreover, the ethical implications of AI, including data privacy and algorithmic bias, must be carefully considered to ensure that cultural exchange remains respectful and inclusive.

Creating Novel Avenues for Cultural Diplomacy

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies are not only redefining the landscape of cultural diplomacy but also carving out innovative pathways for its practice. Their capabilities to analyze and anticipate the outcomes of cultural policies and initiatives have become invaluable assets in the strategic planning of cultural diplomacy (Mansoor, 2023).

AI in Strategic Cultural Planning

AI's analytical capabilities enable it to process and interpret vast datasets from social media and digital platforms, providing insights into the reception and impact of cultural initiatives. This ability allows policymakers to make data-driven decisions, tailoring their strategies to maximize the effectiveness and resonance of their cultural diplomacy efforts.

Technology in Cultural Content Dissemination

The role of technology in spreading cultural content is increasingly significant. Targeted digital campaigns and virtual cultural festivals are leveraging the extensive reach of the internet and social media to connect with global audiences, promoting cultural understanding on a scale that was previously unimaginable (Csikó, 2022). These platforms offer China and Macedonia the opportunity to exhibit their rich cultural heritage to a worldwide audience, fostering greater appreciation and understanding of their distinct cultural identities.

AI in Cultural Education

The integration of AI in cultural diplomacy extends into the realm of education. Digital platforms equipped with AI-driven tools can offer personalized learning experiences, making the study of foreign cultures more engaging and accessible. AI can curate cultural content based on individual user preferences, creating a more immersive and enjoyable learning journey.

In conclusion, AI and emerging technologies are catalysts for enhancing cultural heritage preservation, fostering mutual understanding and collaboration, and creating novel avenues for cultural diplomacy between China and Macedonia. As these technologies continue to evolve, their potential to enrich cultural ties and promote a more interconnected and harmonious world becomes increasingly evident. The future of cultural diplomacy lies in the strategic and responsible use of AI and emerging technologies, ensuring that cultural exchange remains a vibrant and dynamic component of international relations.

Challenges and Ethical Considerations

Data Privacy Concerns in the Context of Cultural Exchange

AI and emerging technologies have ushered in innovative forms of global interaction within the cultural exchange sphere, such as online cultural festivals and VR experiences. Yet, these advancements have also amplified the intricacy of safeguarding personal information, especially within digital cultural initiatives (Hadji-Janev, 2021). Delving into the ethical dilemmas surrounding data privacy, the discourse underscores the necessity for transparency, consent, and robust security measures. It's crucial to develop protocols that prioritize individual privacy rights without hindering the flow of cultural exchange between nations. This approach ensures that while cultural interactions are facilitated and enhanced through technology, the privacy and security of individuals remain protected.

The use of digital platforms and multimedia resources for cultural documentation and preservation presents opportunities and challenges regarding data privacy (Vitkovska, 2022). In the context of Sino-Macedonian cultural exchange, a collaborative approach between China and Macedonia could lead to the development of best practices in data privacy. This collaboration could ensure that cultural initiatives are both inclusive and secure, fostering an environment of trust and mutual respect (Vangeli, 2016).

As AI becomes more prominent in cultural diplomacy, associated privacy concerns must be addressed. The use of AI-driven analytics and machine learning to process vast amounts of data from social media and other digital platforms must protect individual privacy. This involves

developing and adhering to stringent data protection policies that comply with international standards and respect the cultural norms of the countries involved.

In conclusion, while AI and emerging technologies offer immense potential for enhancing cultural exchange and understanding, it is vital to approach their use with awareness of the data privacy challenges they present. By doing so, China and Macedonia can harness these technologies to build a more interconnected and harmonious world while safeguarding the privacy rights of their citizens.

Addressing Algorithmic Bias and Ensuring Cultural Representation

Exploring the growing presence of AI within cultural exchange platforms reveals significant concerns regarding potential algorithmic biases, which may result in the unfair representation or exclusion of certain cultural groups. The examination of these biases within AI-driven cultural applications brings to light the necessity for strategies that guarantee a diverse and authentic depiction of various cultures (Nesoff, 2024). To address and reduce these biases, it is crucial to adopt an inclusive approach that encompasses a wide range of datasets, includes multicultural viewpoints in the design of algorithms, and ensures continuous monitoring and assessment of AI systems. This proactive stance is essential for fostering equitable representation and preventing cultural marginalization in the digital realm of cultural exchange.

Collaboration between China and Macedonia in addressing algorithmic bias could set a precedent for other nations. By working together, they can develop best practices in data privacy and algorithmic transparency, ensuring that cultural initiatives are equitable and secure. This partnership could foster an environment of trust and mutual respect, promoting a more inclusive and representative global digital space (Beridze, 2021).

In cultural diplomacy, AI's ability to analyze and predict the impact of cultural policies and initiatives is invaluable for strategic planning. However, it is crucial to ensure that AI systems are designed and trained to respect and represent diverse cultures. This can be achieved by involving stakeholders from various cultural backgrounds in the development

process and using diverse and balanced datasets that reflect the plurality of voices and perspectives.

Moreover, as AI technologies such as machine learning are used to curate and recommend cultural content, it is important to be aware of and counteract any potential bias. This can be done through constant evaluation and adjustment of the algorithms to ensure they promote a fair and accurate representation of the cultural heritage of China, Macedonia, and other participating nations.

To sum up, although artificial intelligence presents vast opportunities for boosting cultural interaction and comprehension, it is crucial to tackle the issue of algorithmic prejudice and guarantee that these tools are employed to foster cultural variety and inclusivity. In this manner, China and Macedonia can utilize AI to strengthen their cultural bonds and aid in the creation of a more cohesive and interlinked global community.

Bridging the Digital Divide Between and Within Countries

The digital divide emerges as a considerable challenge in the age of AI and emerging technologies, often leading to unequal access to digital resources and infrastructure among individuals and nations (Türkcan & Keşvelioğlu, 2020). This reality can significantly impact cultural exchange, especially within the context of Sino-Macedonian relations, by impeding cultural collaboration and mutual understanding due to unequal access to technology.

Addressing the digital divide involves devising strategies that ensure all communities have access to the internet and digital technologies, which are foundational for today's cultural interactions. Enhancing digital literacy is equally important, as it equips individuals with the skills necessary to effectively engage with technology. By prioritizing these efforts, a more inclusive model for cultural exchange can be established, ensuring that the benefits of technological advancements are widely shared across society (Peters, 2023).

By strategically bridging the digital divide, China and Macedonia can move towards a more inclusive cultural exchange paradigm. This involves ensuring that all members of society, regardless of their geographical location or economic status, can participate in and benefit from the rich cultural heritage shared between the two nations.

The digital divide is not only a barrier between countries but also within them, affecting rural and urban areas differently. To address this, a multifaceted approach is necessary, involving government policies, educational reforms, and public-private partnerships. This approach should aim to provide affordable access to technology, develop relevant digital skills, and create content that reflects the diverse cultural perspectives within each society.

In conclusion, bridging the digital divide is essential for fostering cultural exchange in the digital age. It allows for the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage, facilitates intercultural dialogue, and contributes to the multipolarity of the global cultural landscape. By taking proactive measures to ensure equal access to digital technologies, China and Macedonia can enhance their cultural collaboration and work towards a more equitable and interconnected world.

Strategic Planning for Cultural Collaboration in the Digital Age

Long-term Strategic Planning for Sino-Macedonian Relations

In the digital age, the cultivation and enhancement of Sino-Macedonian relations require a well-considered strategic plan that includes both cultural and technological collaboration. The development of a long-term strategy is crucial for maximizing the benefits and navigating potential challenges in this dynamic partnership, aligning with the strategic approach outlined by Krstinovska to optimize the relationship between Macedonia and China in the context of the Western Balkans (Krstinovska, 2021).

Focusing on the collaboration between China and Macedonia, the development of shared objectives and the synchronization of interests are key. Strategic planning plays a pivotal role in leveraging AI and emerging technologies to enhance cultural exchanges. By aligning efforts and capitalizing on technological advancements, both nations can strategize and implement future initiatives that will strengthen and invigorate their cultural ties. This approach ensures that collaborative endeavors remain pertinent and advantageous for both parties over time (Crawford, 2024).

Strategic planning should adopt a comprehensive approach, including cultural, educational, and technological exchanges. It is essential to acknowledge historical interactions that have shaped the current

relationship. By building upon these historical ties and fostering new connections through digital platforms, both nations can create a robust framework for cultural collaboration.

To craft a successful long-term strategy, should be considered the following key components:

1. Shared Vision and Objectives: Define a shared vision for cultural and technological collaboration, outlining specific objectives reflecting mutual interests and values.

2. Infrastructure Development: Invest in digital infrastructure to ensure both nations have the necessary platforms for cultural exchange and collaboration.

3. Capacity Building: Enhance digital literacy and technological capacity among citizens to fully participate in and benefit from digital cultural exchange.

4. Cultural Exchange Programs: Facilitate the creation and sustenance of cultural exchange programs that promote understanding and appreciation of each other's cultures.

5. Joint Research and Development: Encourage joint research and development initiatives in AI and emerging technologies with cultural applications, fostering innovation and collaboration.

6. Policy Alignment: Align national policies to support and facilitate the strategic goals of cultural and technological collaboration.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the progress of strategic initiatives, ensuring their effectiveness and making adjustments as needed.

In conclusion, long-term strategic planning is vital for the future of Sino-Macedonian relations. By creating a roadmap that prioritizes cultural and technological collaboration, China and Macedonia can ensure their partnership remains strong, dynamic, and mutually beneficial in the era of AI and emerging technologies.

Investment in Capacity-Building and Technological Infrastructure

Within the digital epoch, the robustness of cultural collaboration between China and Macedonia is contingent upon a strong technological infrastructure paired with strategic initiatives aimed at capacity-building. Echoing Beridze's observations, the foundation of such collaboration is

the establishment of a Digital Single Market that prioritizes data protection and cybersecurity (Beridze, 2021).

Delve into the imperative for significant investment in digital connectivity, AI research and development, and the nurturing of human capital becomes essential. By exploring viable paths for China and Macedonia to channel investments into these domains, a conducive environment for cultural exchange and collaboration can be cultivated, thereby fostering a symbiotic relationship that thrives on technological progress and strategic foresight.

A key emphasis is placed on the indispensable role of both public and private sectors in driving investment and the importance of international cooperation in sharing expertise, resources, and best practices (BIRN Consultancy, "China in the Western Balkans"). Such collaboration is vital for establishing a digital ecosystem that fosters innovation and cultural understanding.

Investments in technological infrastructure must be designed to bridge the digital divide, ensuring inclusive participation in cultural exchanges across all segments of society. This includes creating digital platforms that facilitate language learning, art exhibitions, academic collaborations, and serve as conduits for the expression and sharing of cultural heritage.

Furthermore, capacity-building initiatives should target equipping the workforce with the necessary skills to thrive in the digital economy. By enhancing cultural and economic ties between the two nations, these initiatives can act as catalysts for growth and development in the era of AI and emerging technologies.

In conclusion, strategic investment in capacity-building and technological infrastructure is a cornerstone for the future of Sino-Macedonian cultural relations. Through such investments, the two nations can harness the potential of AI and emerging technologies to create a dynamic and inclusive cultural exchange platform, reinforcing the cultural foundations of multipolarity in the new era.

Adherence to Ethical Principles in Cultural Diplomacy

As AI and emerging technologies become more integrated into cultural diplomacy, adherence to ethical principles becomes increas-

ingly important. These principles are vital for ensuring that these tools are used in a way that preserves cultural integrity and promotes mutual understanding. The integration of AI into cultural diplomacy calls for a commitment to ethical guidelines that respect cultural diversity, ensure fair access to digital resources, and maintain transparency in AI and data usage (Hadji-Janev, 2021).

The importance of protecting intellectual property rights, ensuring privacy, and preventing the misuse of technology in cultural exchanges cannot be understated. It is crucial for both China and Macedonia to work together to establish and uphold these ethical standards, fostering a culture of accountability and respect within their digital cultural diplomacy (Vangeli, 2016). This collaboration is key to ensuring that technological advancements serve to enhance, rather than compromise, the rich cultural heritage and diplomatic relations between the two nations.

Ethical considerations must be at the forefront of all digital cultural initiatives. This includes developing clear policies and guidelines governing the use of AI and other digital tools in cultural diplomacy. Both China and Macedonia should commit to transparency in their use of technology and ensure these tools enhance, rather than undermine, cultural diversity and mutual understanding.

The ethical use of technology in cultural diplomacy can be achieved by:

1. Promoting Cultural Diversity: Ensuring AI and digital platforms used in cultural exchanges reflect and respect the multicultural fabric of societies.

2. Ensuring Equitable Access: Working to close the digital divide and provide equal opportunities for all individuals to engage with digital cultural resources.

3. Transparency in AI Usage: Being open about the algorithms and data practices used in cultural initiatives, allowing for public scrutiny and trust.

4. Safeguarding Intellectual Property: Protecting the originality and ownership of cultural content in the digital realm.

5. Respecting Privacy: Implementing stringent data protection measures to safeguard personal information in cultural exchanges.

6. Preventing Misuse of Technology: Avoiding the use of technology in ways that could lead to cultural appropriation or misrepresentation.

By integrating these ethical principles into their strategic planning, China and Macedonia can work towards a future where digital technology acts as a conduit for cultural collaboration that is not only innovative but also ethically responsible. This approach will help ensure that the cultural diplomacy of both nations is grounded in a commitment to mutual respect, understanding, and the preservation of cultural heritage in the new era of AI and emerging technologies.

Conclusion

As this paper draws to a close, it is essential to reflect on the transformative roles that AI and emerging technologies have played in the cultural exchange between China and Macedonia. These tools have demonstrated immense potential in facilitating language translation, virtual reality experiences, and the preservation of cultural heritage (Wang and Zvarych, 2024). The ability of AI to enhance cross-cultural understanding through real-time translation and the creation of immersive cultural experiences is a testament to its power to bridge divides and foster dialogue.

However, it is also crucial to reiterate the challenges that accompany these advancements. Data privacy concerns, algorithmic bias, and the persistent digital divide are not mere obstacles but areas that require proactive and thoughtful solutions to fully leverage the potential of AI in cultural diplomacy (Beridze, 2021). Addressing these challenges is not just a matter of ethical responsibility but also a prerequisite for creating a sustainable and inclusive framework for cultural exchange.

Looking ahead, the way forward for Sino-Macedonian cultural relations must be one of collaboration, innovation, and ethical stewardship. Both nations must continue to invest in capacity-building and technological infrastructure to ensure that the benefits of AI and emerging technologies are accessible to all segments of society. This includes not only the development of digital platforms for cultural exchange but also the implementation of educational initiatives that prepare the workforce for the digital economy.

Furthermore, China and Macedonia must work together to establish ethical guidelines and best practices in cultural diplomacy. This involves creating policies that govern the use of AI and digital tools, ensuring

transparency, and respecting cultural diversity and intellectual property rights.

In the context of a multipolar world, AI and emerging technologies can serve as catalysts for cultural collaboration and understanding. They can help to break down barriers, facilitate dialogue, and promote a more interconnected global community. However, this can only be achieved if the ethical considerations are at the forefront of all technological advancements.

In conclusion, the integration of AI and emerging technologies into cultural diplomacy presents both remarkable opportunities and significant challenges. As China and Macedonia navigate this new era, they must do so with a commitment to ethical principles, strategic planning, and a deep respect for cultural diversity. By embracing these values, they can harness the power of AI to create a more vibrant, inclusive, and harmonious world of cultural exchange.

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Place of Sub-Saharan Africa in the Multipolar World: Between the Dragon, the Polar Bear and the European Union 'Gateway'

Danilo Babić

Introduction

This study delves into the intricate interactions between Sub-Saharan Africa and three major external players – China, Russia, and the European Union – within the context of an evolving global order characterized by multipolarity. Situated in a dynamically significant region, this paper aims to comprehensively analyze the geopolitical dynamics and strategic involvements of these external actors in Sub-Saharan Africa, transcending the historical dominance of Western powers. Through an exploration of the multifaceted relationships forged between these external actors and African nations, the research seeks to untangle the complex web of evolving power structures, economic collaborations, and geopolitical consequences for Sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, the paper extends its inquiry to scrutinize potential neocolonial tendencies that may be embedded within the engagements of these external actors in the region. By examining these dynamics, the research aspires to provide a nuanced understanding of the multifarious challenges and opportunities emerging in Sub-Saharan Africa within the framework of an emerging multipolar world order. This inquiry not only contributes to the existing body of knowledge on international relations but also enhances our comprehension of the complex relationships shaping the future of Sub-Saharan Africa in a multipolar global landscape.

Sub-Saharan Africa stands at the crossroads of an evolving global order characterized by multipolarity. The region's strategic significance has attracted the attention of multiple global powers, each competing for influence and access to its vast resources and growing markets. This competition has created both opportunities and challenges for African nations, as they seek to leverage striving for development via foreign investments, while maintaining their sovereignty. As traditional Western dominance wanes, the engagement of new players like China, Russia reshapes the geopolitical landscape of Sub-Saharan Africa. The European

Union however tries to parry Russia and China with the new plan – The global gateway.

This paper explores the region's interactions with these three major external players. By focusing on the geopolitical dynamics and strategic involvements of these actors, this study aims to elucidate the complex matrix of power structures, economic collaborations, and geopolitical consequences for Sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, the paper examines potential neocolonial tendencies within these engagements, offering a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities for the region in a multipolar world.

Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analyses. Data is gathered from primary and secondary sources, including academic journals, government reports, and international organization publications, and media sources. This paper seeks to answer the following research question: which are more prevalent, the characteristics of neocolonialism or decolonialism?[1]

To assess whether engagement with these actors exhibits neocolonial or decolonial characteristics, I introduce my own concept of neocolonial/decolonial indicator. This innovative approach is still work in progress, it aims to highlight the originality and novelty of this paper. It is a composite descriptive indicator Its goal is to uncover the extent to which the behavior of external actors towards a particular country or region reflects patterns of exploitation, dependency[2], and dominance

1 Neocolonialism, as defined by Kwame Nkrumah, refers to the covert continuation of socio-economic and political influence by former colonial powers, aimed at preserving neoliberal capitalism and cultural dominance over formerly colonized nations. Nkrumah (1965) described neocolonialism as the final stage of imperialism, where countries, though nominally independent, have their policies externally controlled, allowing for ongoing exploitation to benefit the former colonial powers in various domains, such as economics, politics, culture, and military affairs.

2 Dependency can be measured in at least eight different ways: trade dependency, debt dependency, FDI, infrastructure projects, aid, technology and telecommunications, military support, cultural and educational exchanges. Given the paper's limited length, our focus will be on specific areas: for China, we will examine dependency in terms of debt and infrastructure; for the EU, our focus will be on development and humanitarian aid dependency; and for Russia, we will explore dependency related to military support in certain African countries.

reminiscent of historical colonial relationships. Neocolonial indicator has four categories: economic (which includes resource extraction dependency, financial dependency, labor exploitation), political (which implies different types of political interference), environmental degradation, and cultural hegemony. Due to its complexity and limited scope of the paper cultural hegemony will not be analyzed on this occasion.

On the other hand we introduce a decolonial[3] indicator as well. It is comprized from the following categories: Inclusive development which implies local ownership and control, community participation and benefit-sharing (tricle down effects), technology transfer and capacity building, environmental sustainability, diversification and industrialization, human capital investment, political non-interference, cultural empowerment. Once again cultural dimension will be ommited. The idea for creating this indicator came from the need for post-colonial concepts to become more concrete and understandable. It was inspired by the works of Kwame Nkrumah (1965) and Albert Memmi (2003). After describing the actions of the aforementined actors in Sub-Saharan Africa, the effects their actions will be summarized in these two indicators.

Nature of Chinese Investments in Africa

Modus operandi of Chinese investments and expected benefits

Padraig Carmody's concept of „flexigemony" describes China's adaptable and context-sensitive approach to exerting influence in Africa. Unlike traditional hegemony, which is often rigid and relies on a consistent set of practices, flexigemony allows China to tailor its strategies to fit varying circumstances and objectives (Carmody 2011). This approach is evident in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), where China's investments in infrastructure are adjusted based on geopolitical shifts and economic landscapes. Flexigemony combines both soft power, such as cultural diplomacy and economic aid, and hard power, like military presence and economic sanctions, to create a coordinated and multifaceted influence. By promoting Chinese standards, especially in technology and

[3] Decolonization represents an ideology focused on attaining true freedom for former colonies. It involves the ability or determination of previously colonized nations to liberate themselves from imperial dominance and gain control over their internal and external affairs (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018).

infrastructure, China secures long-term economic influence in Africa, as countries that adopt these standards are more likely to continue engaging with Chinese markets and technologies. This strategy of forming tailored partnerships ensures that China's engagement meets both its own strategic interests and the needs of its African partners (Carmody 2023).

Instead of using soft power or hard power exclusively, the concept of flexigemony allows China to use „smart power" (Carmody 2010, 499). Smart power is a blend of soft and hard power, using a combination of attraction and coercion to achieve foreign policy goals. This nuanced approach involves leveraging both economic and military strengths while also engaging in cultural diplomacy and building favorable international relations (Nye 2008).

Carmody contends that China's „flexigemony" contrasts with the Western neoliberal, one-size-fits-all model by offering a more adaptable and context-sensitive approach to development. While this method challenges the traditional „enclave-led growth" prevalent in Africa, it also bolsters existing authoritarian regimes, thereby reinforcing entrenched power structures rather than promoting more inclusive governance (Carmody 2011, 182).

In practical terms, Chinese investments in Africa are primarily channeled through Special Economic Zones (SEZs), which provide a liberal investment environment focused on strategic industries. These SEZs in countries like Mauritius, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Zambia serve several strategic objectives:

1. Counterbalancing protectionist measures against Chinese products.
2. Expanding Chinese companies into new markets, recognizing Africa's growing market potential.
3. Mitigating risks for Chinese firms through government protection via intergovernmental agreements.
4. Promoting industrial competitiveness by fostering industry-specific clusters.
5. Facilitating the exploration and processing of natural resources (Antonio and Ma 2015, 86-87; Rotberg 2008, 137- 141).

SEZ offer numerous benefits, including the transfer of Chinese expertise, local employment, and the production of domestic goods. The methodology of Chinese investments involves using large state-owned

enterprises to enter the African market, followed by the entry of private companies, leading to widespread Chinese business activity across various sectors.

Africa's infrastructure needs are immense, with major gaps in roads, railways, and water systems. Chinese investments through the BRI play a crucial role in addressing these needs, particularly in large countries like D.R. Congo and Sudan. Improved infrastructure enhances internal connectivity, supports market growth, and mitigates secessionist tensions by promoting balanced development. While these projects boost trade, labor mobility, and quality of life, Western critics argue they primarily facilitate resource extraction. However, unlike colonial infrastructure, Chinese projects focus on inward connectivity, cementing China's influence by setting infrastructure standards (like railway standards) that limit other geopolitical players (Mlambo 2018; Babić 2019).

Carmody points out two major problems with Chinese investments: The first issue is poor investment appraisal. Between 2011 and 2013, China used more cement than the United States did throughout the entire 20th century leading to significant overcapacity in cement and steel that needed to be exported. This was a key driver of the BRI. Many projects, such as ports and railways, often suffered from inadequate investment appraisal and were not necessarily economically viable. African political elites are often interested in loans to fund infrastructure projects, such as Kenya's multi-billion dollar Standard Gauge Railway (SGR), because these projects generate short-term economic growth and create jobs, which boost the economy. For instance, the President of Kenya inaugurated the railway shortly before the 2017 election, highlighting the influence of the political business cycle. While these projects can lead to repayment challenges, they help maintain political regimes. However, if these projects are not economically viable, they can hinder long-term economic growth and result in a debt overhang. SGR cost 6% of Kenya's GDP to construct. For every 7.8 tons of high-value manufactured goods transported inland from Mombasa, only 1.01 tons of low-value raw materials and natural resources are sent back to the port for export. This disparity in volume and value has led to claims that this represents an extractivist economic model. Additionally, the Chinese government became concerned about the contradictions of the BRI, leading to a significant reduction in new loan commitments to Africa from

2016 onwards (Carmody 2023, 10). However, the Kenyan government and its Chinese partners intend for the SGR to be profitable in the long run.

In general, Chinese investment strategy operates as follows: China initially deploys large state-owned enterprises to penetrate the African market. After overcoming initial market-entry barriers, private Chinese firms start operating in conjunction with these state-owned enterprises. Gradually, business activities are redistributed, allowing Chinese companies to expand across various economic sectors, thereby fostering synergy within their operations (Бабић 2022).

Chinese investments are widespread across Africa. According to AEI, Nigeria receives the largest share (17%) due to its sizable economy, followed by Angola and Ethiopia (8% each), and Kenya (6%). The largest investment category is "rest" (46%), indicating widespread presence. Sector-wise, investments are distributed in transport (33%), energy (33%), metallurgy (11%), real estate (11%), and other sectors (12%), countering the narrative that China seeks only Africa's natural resources (Бабић 2024, 212-213).

Negative aspects of Chinese investments in Africa

Chinese investments in Africa have several negative aspects: 1) inadequate environmental regulations, 2) poor working conditions and 3) debt trap diplomacy, which are potential neocolonial tendencies:

1) Regarding environmental protection, at a macro level, China has initiated industrial restructuring efforts to enhance Africa's industrial framework and boost energy efficiency (Xie 2010, 25). However, micro-environmental issues, especially in the fishing industry and ivory trade, are significant. The expansion of Chinese fishing vessels, especially in Eastern Africa, threatens food security and depletes local fish populations like Mackerel. The high demand for ivory in China, fueled by cultural beliefs, promotes widespread poaching of elephants and rhinos (Power, Mohan, Mullins 2012, 203, 209). The environmental challenges are exacerbated by Chinese investors' failure to enforce robust environmental regulations, and local political elites' tendency to overlook environmental pollution, possibly due to unawareness, a desire to please investors, or corruption (Babić 2022). While China's environmental

policies are slowly evolving at home, their implementation in Africa lags, reflecting a broader issue of modern capitalism rather than specific national actions. Hence, the primary polluter in Sub-Saharan Africa is not China, but modern capitalism.

2) Working conditions under Chinese employers often include low wages, unfair dismissals, lack of paid leave, inadequate health and social insurance, and poor housing for workers living far from their jobs. African workers report job insecurity and risks of workplace injuries, lack of trade union representation and irregular health and pension payments as major issues. From the above we can conclude that African workers are in dire need of stable employment, fair wages, comprehensive health coverage, job security, and guaranteed time off. Chinese companies' reluctance to offer long-term contracts stems from perceived issues with the local workforce's working ethic, discipline and overall workforce quality, as well as fear of legal disputes (Бабић 2022, 156).

It is important to emphasize that Chinese workers in Africa live and work under the same conditions as local workers, and Chinese supervisors are housed in the same, or slightly better accommodations compared to local workers. This contrasts with supervisors from the Western companies, who typically live in luxurious villas separated from the local population. Almost every Chinese worker, guided by their country's experience, views harsh working conditions as a necessary price to pay for development. This is not the case with African workers. These cultural differences can explain misunderstandings regarding workplace accidents. Chinese supervisors consider the number of work-related accidents to be a normal occurrence in the initial stages of development. For instance, the managers of a copper purification company boasted about having „only" three accidents per week, as this was significantly fewer than the number of accidents they experienced in China. On the other hand, Africans were quite concerned about the high frequency of accidents. An event in 2010 in Zambia represents the worst labor dispute in the history of Chinese-African relations. Chinese supervisors shot at workers who were protesting against low wages and conditions in the Collum coal mine in the southern province of Sinazongwe. Eleven people were hospitalized following the shooting. The incident provoked reactions from both citizens and political leaders. However, it is essential to note that the situation in Chinese companies in Africa has significantly

improved compared to the earlier period (2008-2010) due to the reduction of cultural gaps and language barriers. (Бабић 2024, 221-224).

3) The Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, financed by Chinese loans, became a focal point of the „debt-trap diplomacy" narrative. In 2017, facing debt challenges, Sri Lanka leased a majority stake in the port to China Merchants Port Holdings for 99 years, raising concerns of sovereignty loss. However, the lease was a commercial agreement to generate foreign exchange currency, not a debt-for-equity swap. The port's proceeds were used to repay high-interest international bonds, not Chinese loans. The Sri Lankan government retains ownership and control over port security, countering claims of a Chinese military takeover. The port project aligns with Sri Lanka's long-term developmental goals (Brautigam 2019, Singh 2020 Бабић 2024, 224-225).

As Joseph Onjala points out, Chinese loans are very attractive in Africa given that the levels of domestic savings and investments are quite low, and money is necessary for successful development (Onjala, 2017). Chinese lending practices offer an alternative financing source, particularly appealing to countries with limited access to conventional financing. Chinese loans often come with competitive terms compared to commercial loans, including lower interest rates and longer repayment periods. However, they sometimes lack transparency, which has led to criticisms. Unlike Western loans that often impose policy reform conditions, Chinese loans typically do not require structural adjustments, allowing borrowing countries more policy autonomy. In cases where countries face repayment difficulties, China has shown a willingness to renegotiate loan terms to avoid defaults. These loans are sometimes secured by natural resource concessions, aimed at reducing lending risks rather than predatory resource acquisition (Brautigam 2019, Singh 2020)

Debra Brautingam (2019), previously critical of Chinese investments in Africa, revised her views in her paper „A critical look at Chinese 'debt-trap diplomacy': the rise of a meme". She argues that the narrative of the Chinese debt trap has become an internet meme, fueled by unverified stories and a biased negative narrative from Western media. She cites a major study by the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, which analyzed 1,000 Chinese loans in Africa and found no evidence of deliberate Chinese debt entrapment for unfair or strategic gain, including asset seizures. The study showed that China's

involvement in African debts is limited, with significant presence only in three African countries facing debt issues out of 53 observed. Brautigam underscores this perspective, noting that from 2000 to 2017, Chinese financiers signed over 1000 loan commitments worth over $143 billion with African governments and their state-owned enterprises. The IMF classifies several African countries as being in or at risk of debt distress, but the contribution of Chinese lending to this distress varies significantly. For instance, in Djibouti, Zambia, and the Republic of Congo, Chinese loans are substantial, but the debt distress stems mainly from broader economic issues, including other international creditors and domestic fiscal mismanagement.

This is also confirmed with my own analysis. In August 2018, Kenya's public debt was 56.4% of GDP ($49 billion), with China holding 72% of the external debt ($5.34 billion). This indicates Kenya is not at risk of a „Chinese debt trap" due to its manageable debt level and the relatively small proportion owed to China.[4] Similarly, Tanzania's total debt in 2017/2018 was 43% of GDP ($22.5 billion), with China being the largest bilateral creditor, yet maintaining a low debt distress score because debt is lower than 60% of GDP. Ethiopia's external debt was $26.4 billion in 2017/2018, with China holding $17 billion. Nigeria's total debt is $79.436 billion, with external debt at $25.27 billion (6.07% of GDP). China, as the largest bilateral creditor, holds only $2.485 billion, while Nigeria owes $8.7 billion to multilateral institutions like the World Bank (Бабић 2024, 226).

Ajit Singh (2020) also references the Hopkins University study, noting that the vast majority of African external debt is borrowed from multilateral institutions or other non-Chinese creditors. The average Chinese debt in countries at risk of debt distress is only about 15%. While concessions exist ин Chinese loans secured by natural resource, their primary motivation is to reduce lending risk, not to gain predatory access to resources. China's lending practices often benefit countries with limited access to conventional financing, and China has shown a willingness to adjust loan terms in response to changing circumstances. The narrative of China using loans to take over natural resources oversimplifies a complex financial and geopolitical landscape.

4 Hoewer it must be mentioned that Kenya's debt distress was worsened since that period. New arrangement with the IMF led to the introduction of new financial bill which sparked protests in summer of 2024.

The EU's Global Gateway: At the Crossroads of Postcolonial and Neocolonial Dynamics

The European Union (EU) unveiled the Global Gateway on 1 December 2021, a strategic initiative aimed at supporting global infrastructure development. With an ambitious target of mobilizing up to €300 billion in investments between 2021 and 2027, the Global Gateway represents the EU's efforts to position itself as a significant global power. The initiative seeks to foster sustainable projects through high standards, good governance, and transparency, while simultaneously enhancing the EU's own strategic interests and reinforcing the resilience of its supply chains (European Commission - Press release Brussels, 1 December 2021).

The Global Gateway is financed through a combination of development aid, loan guarantees, grants, investment capital from European investment banks, member state investments, and private capital. It aims to build connectivity through physical and digital infrastructure projects, renewable energy, trade, and capacity building. The initiative emphasizes an ethical approach, ensuring infrastructure projects do not create unsustainable debt or unwanted dependencies (Tagliapietra, 2021).

Key Pillars of the Global Gateway, its normative stance and geopolitical reality

The initiative's key pillars include:

• Democratic Values and Standards: Promoting the rule of law, high standards of human, social, and workers' rights.

• Good Governance and Transparency: Ensuring transparency, accountability, and financial sustainability.

• Equal Partnerships: Collaborating with partner countries based on mutual interests and needs.

• Green and Clean: Investing in climate-neutral projects aligned with the European Green Deal.

• Security-focused: Building secure infrastructure to enhance global resilience.

• Catalyzing Private Sector Investment: Leveraging resources to attract private capital.

• Digital Transition: Deploying digital networks and infrastructures.

• Sustainable Transport Networks: Promoting inclusive and safe transport networks.
• Health and Education: Diversifying pharmaceutical supply chains and investing in quality education and research (ECQ&A 2021).

By defining its principles in this way, the EU aims to emphasize the normative aspect of its actions, thereby implicitly assuming its own moral superiority. The concept of the EU as a normative power, primarily articulated by Ian Manners, posits that the EU transcends traditional state behavior, promoting peace, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, human rights, anti-discrimination, and good governance. This identity, rooted in a treaty-based legal order, allows the EU to influence global norms through its values and principles, distinguishing it from traditional state actors (Manners 2002; Manners 2008). The EU's foreign policy, thus, is aimed at promoting ethical norms (Schiepers and Sicurelli 2008).

However, the practical application of the EU's normative power often reveals inconsistencies, particularly when economic interests of member states overshadow ethical commitments. A notable example is the EU's stance on China in 1996, where economic relations took precedence over human rights issues, leading to a regular human rights dialogue rather than critical resolutions (Balducci 2010). Similarly, the EU's double standards are evident in its approach to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. In Bosnia, the EU supports the controversial institution of the High Representative, reminiscent of colonial administration, while in Kosovo, it facilitates the recognition of the secessionist province, contradicting its firm support for Ukraine's territorial integrity (Бабић 2024, 389-390).

In reality, The Global Gateway is not just an economic initiative nor normative concept; it is a strategic geopolitical tool. It is designed to project the EU's influence globally, countering China's BRI by offering a „values-based" alternative. This competition between major powers is a hallmark of the emerging multipolar world order. The Global Gateway is explicitly framed as an alternative to the BRI. While China's infrastructure investments have been criticized for creating debt dependencies and prioritizing Chinese interests, the EU emphasizes transparency, ethical standards, and sustainable development. This framing aims to attract countries wary of falling into the so-called „Chinese debt trap". The evidence that Global Gateway is the direct opposite of the BRI comes

directly from the statements of Ursula von der Leyen herself and other EU diplomats. (Standish 26 Oct 2023; Lau and Moens 20. Dec 2022).

Challenges and neocolonial tendencies

The major drawback of this initiative is its funding; specifically, it lacks a dedicated new funding line and instead relies on unspent remnants from other initiatives and funds. Blended finance, a key mechanism of the Global Gateway, involves combining public and private funds to finance infrastructure projects. While this approach can mobilize significant resources, it also risks creating debt dependencies that can be exploited for political and economic gains. (Prontera & Quitzow, 2023). Given this financing method, the sustainability of projects within this initiative is questionable. Moreover, if the goal is to compete with China, this funding model is not viable, considering China's substantially greater financial resources.

The neocolonial tendencies of the Global Gateway initiative are intertwined with the broader Green Transition Agenda. Through the signing of a series of memorandums on Sustainable Raw Materials Value Chains, the EU aims to shift potentially environmentally damaging mining operations to far away, non EU countries with less stringent regulations and lower environmental protection standards. Those memorandums are signed with Chile, Namibia, Kazakhstan, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Argentina, D.R. Congo and Serbia in last two years. Most problematic is the memorandums with Rwanda. The reason for this is the fact that Rwanda does not possess some of the minerals for which it has signed agreements. These minerals are found in neighboring D.R. Congo. Rwanda has supported the rebel group M23, which operates in eastern Congo, and through this group, it facilitates the extraction of natural resources (UN Press SC/15760, 8 July 2024). In this way, the EU tacitly enables a proxy war and the destabilization of a sovereign state.[5]

5 Outside the African context, the memorandum with Serbia is also problematic. Although there are countries in Europe with more lithium than Serbia, such as Portugal, Germany, and the Czech Republic, there is an insistence on mining in Serbia, which is not an EU member. Moreover, this would be a unique attempt at mining in a densely populated area. The guarantees provided by the EU for environmental protection are unclear because Serbia is not an EU member, and the company Rio Tinto is also not owned by EU states.

Reach and Limits of Russia's Influence in Africa

Historically, Russia's relationship with Africa dates back to Tsarist times and intensified during the Soviet era when the USSR supported anti-colonial movements. Despite a period of neglect post-Soviet dissolution, Russia has renewed its focus on Africa under Vladimir Putin. Politically, Russia leverages its non-colonial legacy and support for anti-colonial struggles to build credibility as a reliable partner (Babić 2022, 52-54).

In summary, Russian policy towards Africa is built on two main pillars: (i) securing economic access to international markets, and (ii) leveraging multilateralism to advance Russian geopolitical hegemony (Pahm 2010, 75). Recently, Russia has been leveraging BRICS as a platform to advocate for multilateralism. Since the onset of the conflict in Ukraine, Russia has been actively working to strengthen its relationships with African countries, positioning itself as an international actor that provides an alternative to the (neo)liberal order promoted by the collective West. Russia supports Africans in addressing their domestic challenges, including security and economic development, independently while actively participating in shaping global architecture. The connection between social and economic progress in Africa and long-term peace and stability is evident. A notable example is the African Union (AU), which granted observer status to Russia in 2006. Both Russia and the AU are keen on expanding their cooperation, as evidenced by the Memorandum of Understanding signed in September 2014 between the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the African Union Commission. This agreement outlines the procedures for political consultations Moscow prioritizes diversifying its relationships with continental and regional African bodies, especially the AU. Putin's special representative for the Middle East and Africa regularly participates in AU summits (Daniel and Shubin 2018, 56–57; Babić 2022, 53). The cooperation reached its peak with the Russia-Africa Summit held on 27-28 July 2023, which highlighted Russia's strategic engagement with the African continent, focusing on military, economic, and humanitarian cooperation. Russia offered weapons and intelligence support to bolster regional security and pledged to send up to 50,000 tons of grain to Burkina Faso, Zimbabwe, Mali, Somalia, Central African Republic and Eritrea, aiming to address

food security challenges. Additionally, Russia emphasized expanding trade relations and proposed developing financial systems using regional currencies to reduce dependency on the US dollar and promote economic integration. These initiatives reflect Russia's broader strategy to strengthen its geopolitical influence in Africa by addressing immediate needs and fostering long-term economic and security partnerships, positioning itself as a key player amid the competitive presence of other major powers such as China and the European Union. Furthermore, Russia has become the unofficial patron of rogue West African states (Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso).

Goals and aspects of Russian Policy in Africa

Based on the previous points, we can more clearly articulate Russia's objectives in Africa.

First goal: Projecting Power on the Global Stage. By garnering support from African nations, Russia aims to enhance its global influence, especially within the UN General Assembly. African nations form the largest voting bloc in the United Nations General Assembly. By supporting these countries, Russia is strategically cultivating allies to challenge the current security order dominated by the United States and Euro-Atlantic powers. This approach has previously benefited China, which managed to exclude Taiwan from the United Nations with African support. Recognizing the effectiveness of this strategy, Russian diplomacy is actively working to win the hearts and minds of African countries. In doing so, Russia aims to bolster its ability to block resolutions in the United Nations General Assembly that are unfavorable to its interests.

Second goal: Accessing raw materials and natural resources: Russia seeks strategic resources that are complementary to its own, ensuring a steady supply of critical materials. Unlike other external actors focused on fossil fuels or gold, Russia is interested in different rare elements such as manganese, chrome, and cobalt. For instance, bauxites imported from Africa contribute to over 60% of Russian aluminum production, which benefits from lower production costs in Africa. From the DRC to the Central African Republic, Russian companies are expanding their mining operations for resources like coltan, cobalt, gold, and diamonds. In Zimbabwe, a joint venture between Russia's JSC Afromet and Zim-

babwe's Pen East Ltd is developing one of the world's largest platinum group metal deposits. In Angola, Russian mining company Alrosa recently increased its stake in local producer Catoca to 41%, securing a significant production base outside Russia (Adibe 2019). Additionally, Russia is utilizing its state-owned oil and gas companies to establish new energy supply channels. For instance, in 2018, Nigerian oil and gas company Oranto Petroleum formed a partnership with Rosneft, Russia's largest oil producer, to develop 21 oil assets across 17 African countries. Russian companies have also made substantial investments in the oil and gas industries of Algeria, Libya, Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Egypt. Unlike other international partners, Russia's approach is not centered on extracting African oil and gas but rather on developing infrastructure to transport these resources. This strategy not only enables Russia to generate profits but also maintains the option to integrate this infrastructure with its own systems in the future. By investing in African energy infrastructure, fostering long-term partnerships and creating new energy supply streams Russia is solidifying its position in the region (Babić 2022, 60-62).

Third goal: Arms Exports and Security. Arms exports serve both economic and strategic purposes, reinforcing Russia's presence and influence in Africa. In recent years, Russia has emerged as the leading supplier of arms to Africa, accounting for 35% of the region's arms exports, followed by China at 17%, the United States at 9.6%, and France at 6.9%. Since 2015, Russia has entered into over 20 bilateral defense industry agreements with African nations (Adibe 2019). For Russia, arms exports not only generate revenue but also extend its influence. Russian weapons are known for their favorable cost/quality ratio compared to those from other manufacturers. Additionally, their reliability is notably high, allowing them to be effectively used as „second-hand merchandise." A significant competitive advantage for Russian arms is their longstanding presence in Africa since the „liberation period", making them familiar and well-accustomed to local forces. The situation in the C.A.R. exemplifies a model Russia replicates across Africa. It is stepping in to fill security voids left by the waning interest or fatigue of Western countries. Russia's objective in such engagements is to secure governments that are open to cooperating with Moscow. Unlike some of

its competitors, Russia's approach in these partnerships is not driven by ideological principles (Ibid, 61).

Between 2021 and 2023, a series of military coups swept through West Africa, notably in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. These coups were marked by a strong anti-French sentiment and a pro-Russian stance. Support for Russia was not only evident among the military leadership that orchestrated the coups but also widespread among the populace. In contrast, Guinea's situation was slightly different, with significant public support for Russia, but the new military government maintained a more balanced stance compared to Mali and Burkina Faso. The pro-Russian sentiment was solidified by Burkina Faso's President Ibrahim Traoré's statements at the Russia-Africa summit in July 2023.

Practically, these coups were executed peacefully without bloodshed, and there was no direct involvement of Russia in these events. Despite persistent claims by Western media regarding the involvement of the Wagner Group, evidence of Wagner's presence was only confirmed in Mali, and even then, solely in the capacity of instructors. Since the deaths of Wagner's leaders Yevgeny Prigozhin and Dmitry Utkin, Russia's military engagement in Africa evolved in a new form - Russian Africa Corps which means greater alignment with the official policies of the Russian state.

Based on these defined goals we can define three different aspects of Russian engagement in Africa:

1) Economic Aspect – Russia's economic interests in Africa are distinct from other global players. While other players seek to extract African resources to sustain their economic growth, Russia focuses on complementary resources like manganese, chrome, and cobalt. Major Russian companies participate in African mining projects, such as Zimbabwe's Darwendale platinum mine. Russia also invests in energy infrastructure, notably through projects like ANGOSAT in Angola, and has made significant invetments in Nigeria. Russia's trade with Sub-Saharan Africa has seen significant developments in recent years. Russian exports to Africa surged by 43% in 2023, reaching $21.2 billion, up from $12.1 billion the previous year. This increase is notable given the broader geopolitical context, including the ongoing war in Ukraine and Western sanctions against Russia. Key exports include grain, which constitutes

nearly 30% of Africa's grain supply, as well as other commodities like coal, refined petroleum, and electronics. (Osman 19.04.2024).

2) Military Cooperation – Military cooperation is a cornerstone of Russia's engagement with Africa. Russia is a major arms supplier to the continent, providing cost-effective and reliable military equipment. This cooperation often opens doors for business concessions in strategic sectors like energy and mining. Russia's involvement in the C.A.R. exemplifies its military strategy, where it filled a security vacuum left by Western powers. Indeed, the cooperation model similar to that in the C.A.R. has been replicated in Mali and Burkina Faso, where Russian troops, alongside local forces, are effectively combating terrorist groups. In Mali, this collaboration has led to remarkable results, with government forces successfully regaining control over nearly the entire country, for the first time since 2011. However, this engagement has its drawbacks, including the preservation of authoritarian regimes, occasional human rights violations during military operations, and significant casualties among both local security forces and Russian soldiers.

3) Soft Power – Russia's soft power in Africa includes cultural, educational, and humanitarian initiatives. Russian Centers of Science and Culture in various African countries promote Russian language and culture. Educational exchanges and scholarships attract African students to Russian universities. Additionally, Russia's humanitarian aid and medical assistance, including vaccine distribution during COVID-19, pandemics, enhance its soft power. Media outlets like RT and Sputnik extend Russia's influence by providing alternative narratives to Western media (Babić 2022, 59-60).

Discussion

Based on the criteria of neocolonial/decolonial indicator and the actions of the observed actors illustrated above, we can summarize their activities as follows:

	Neocolonial indicators					Decolonial indicators				
	Resource extraction	Creating dependency	Exploitative labor practices	Political interference	Enviormental degradation	Inclusive development	Diversification and industrialization	Financial access	Human capital investments	Technology and knowledge transfer
China	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
EU	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	
Russia	✓	✓						✓	✓	

We have identified five neocolonial and five decolonial criteria. In the following sections, we will discuss each of these criteria in order from left to right. Neocolonial indicators are:

Resource extraction: All the countries under observation are engaged in the exploitation of natural resources, albeit through different methods and with different objectives. Despite these variations, each actor continues to extract resources from Africa. However, it's important to recognize that these countries now offer more in return than what has been given to Africa in eras of colonialism and early independence period.

Creating dependency: All of actors mentioned above the contribute to creating dependencies for African nations, though they do so in various ways. Our analysis has concluded that while there isn't a „Chinese debt trap" in the conventional sense, many African countries do carry substantial debts to Chinese creditors. Furthermore, Chinese companies have established significant presences in African markets, with Chinese products becoming the preferred choice for a large number of African consumers. Moreover, Africa is dependent on China for infrastructure building and development. The EU creates dependency by tying development aid, and very often humanitarian aid, to certain political conditions. While Russia's presence in Africa is not as extensive as to create widespread dependency, recent years have shown that countries like the C.A.R, Mali, and Burkina Faso are increasingly reliant on Russian security support.

Exploitative labor practices: It appears that only China engages in exploitative labor practices, though the situation is gradually improving. The presence of Russian companies in the region is considerably smaller compared to Chinese companies, resulting in fewer reports concerning working conditions in Russian operations. As for the European Union, it is not directly involved in these practices; instead, the values of the EU are implicitly represented through its member states and multinational corporations.

Political interference: There are only two notable instances of Chinese interference in African internal affairs. The first occurred as a defensive response to anti-Chinese rhetoric during Michael Sata's 2006 presidential campaign in Zambia. However, when Sata was elected in 2011, he did not implement anti-Chinese policies. The second instance

involves China's implicit approval of the overthrow of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe. The EU consistently engages in political interference in African politics by imposing various conditions for receiving aid or investments. Additionally, the EU tends to categorize African politicians as either „good" or „bad" dictators. Russia's policy consistently involves cooperating with the official authorities of a state rather than the opposition. Therefore, Russia does not participate in regime change operations. However, Russia does play a role as a guarantor for the stability of regimes in the Central African Republic, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.

Environmental degradation: The adverse environmental effects of Chinese mining operations in Zambia and the Congo are widely recognized. Despite advocating for a Green Agenda domestically, the EU engages in less environmentally friendly activities in Africa, especially in the mining of lithium and coltan. There is limited information on pollution from Russian activities, likely because the environmental impact from Chinese and European operations is more significant. Consequently, it can be inferred that the environmental degradation caused by Russian companies does not surpass the typical levels associated with resource exploitation.

Regarding decolonial indicators, the situation is as follows:

Inclusive development: Only China offers comprehensive and inclusive development to African countries. The other two actors neither have sufficient resources nor a clear strategic vision for Sub-Saharan Africa.

Diversification and industrialization: Among the observed actors, only China provides a diversified approach that encompasses all sectors of the African economy, emphasizing industrialization. The other two actors focus on specific sectors and do not implement a comprehensive, holistic strategy.

Financial access: China clearly holds the most substantial financial resources among all the observed actors. In contrast, Russia's financial resources are limited, particularly due to the ongoing war in Ukraine, but Russia offers debt cancelation and donations of agricultural products. Meanwhile, securing finance remains the biggest challenge for the EU's Global Gateway project.

Human capital investment: All actors invest in human capital through various initiatives, including student exchanges, scholarships, professional training programs, and other educational opportunities.

Technology and knowledge transfer: To date, only China has actively engaged in technology transfer. However, Russia has also announced plans to expand its technological contributions in the Sahel, including promises to build gold processing plants. The transfer of knowledge and technology is not included in the EU's strategic documents.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the important role that Sub-Saharan Africa occupies in the evolving multipolar world order, marked by the strategic engagements of China, Russia, and the EU. Each actor's approach to the region reveals a complex interplay of economic, political, and normative influences that both challenge and reshape the traditional power structures in Sub-Saharan Africa. China's "flexigemony" model, characterized by its dynamic and context-specific strategies, has significantly impacted African development, particularly through infrastructure investments under the BRI. However, the risks of economic dependency, environmental degradation, and labor exploitation are evident, raising concerns about the long-term sustainability of this relationship.

Russia's re-engagement with Africa, rooted in its historical ties and strategic interests, has similarly shaped the region's geopolitical landscape. By offering military support, particularly in politically unstable regions, and securing access to key natural resources, Russia has positioned itself as a key player in the region. Nonetheless, this engagement carries the potential for reinforcing authoritarian regimes and contributing to regional instability, especially in the context of its military partnerships and influence in recent coups.

The EU's Global Gateway initiative, while ambitious in its goals to promote democratic values and sustainable development, faces significant challenges in its implementation. The reliance on blended finance, coupled with the initiative's inherent contradictions between ethical commitments and economic interests, raises questions about its effectiveness and the potential for neocolonial practices. Despite its emphasis on normative power, the EU's engagement with Africa is challanged by

the competing influences of China and Russia, which offer alternative models of development and governance. The double standards applied by the European Union work to its detriment.

The neocolonial/decolonial indicator introduced in the methodology serves as an innovative tool for evaluating the interactions of external powers with Sub-Saharan Africa. This composite descriptive indicator was developed to assess the extent to which these interactions exhibit either neocolonial or decolonial characteristics, providing a nuanced framework for understanding the complex dynamics at play. The use of this indicator provides a structured approach to assessing the dualities inherent in the relationships between Sub-Saharan Africa and these global powers. It underscores the importance of evaluating both the exploitative and emancipatory elements of foreign engagements, offering a more comprehensive understanding of how these interactions shape the region's development. The analysis revealed that all the external actors – China, Russia, and the EU – exhibit varying degrees of neocolonial behavior, particularly in resource extraction and the creation of dependencies. However, the specific methods and impacts differ, reflecting each actor's unique strategies and interests in the region. Conversely, the decolonial aspects of the indicator highlight positive contributions such as inclusive development, diversification and industrialization, financial access, human capital investment, and technology transfer. Among the actors, China emerged as the most active in promoting decolonial forms of development.

Ultimately, the future of Sub-Saharan Africa in this multipolar world order will depend on the ability of African nations to navigate these external influences. While the engagement of these major powers presents opportunities for development and economic growth, it also poses significant risks, particularly in terms of dependency and exploitation. The challenge for African nations will be to leverage the benefits of these relationships while safeguarding their sovereignty and ensuring that development is both inclusive and sustainable. As the global order continues to shift, the strategic importance of Sub-Saharan Africa will only increase, making it a critical region in the ongoing reconfiguration of global power dynamics.

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Part Three
Bridging Divides: Civil Society, Peace and Cooperation in a Multipolar World

We the Civil Society—a Center of Power? Impact of Civil Society on Peace and Flourishing Nature

Clemens Huchel

Introduction: Transformation to a New World Order

The search for a new world order cannot ignore the issue of peace. We are experiencing a world of wars and the devastation of the ecological system. A concentration of power characterizes the world's social systems and follows the myth of unlimited growth. There are firmly established power structures that are self-perpetuating. Control over the mainstream media is crucial in keeping the chain of power in an endless loop. The elites have a central role of power with which they assert their interests. To stabilize this system, its structure is handled as a taboo subject. The 'law of the strongest' and the 'trick of minimal participation' are fundamental principles in maintaining power. From within these systems, peace efforts are not very authentic. The transformation of this dysfunctional system does not come from the profiteers of the system but lies in the hands of civil society. Clarity about the existing cycle of power should inspire an increase in awareness among the civilian population so that they, as sovereigns, can fulfil their underestimated power for peace and the common good. Leverage points need to be identified and made aware of.

Violence, wars and the increasing destruction of nature have become commonplace. The challenges of peacebuilding and environmental protection make social change urgently necessary. Clarity about power structures is of crucial importance for the possibilities of active change in the system. This article examines the interrelationships and chains of impact that make change for peace and environmental protection difficult. It shows how a closed cycle reproduces itself again and again and how an endless loop can be recognized in the current reality. The overarching goal is to identify key areas through clarity in order to transform the existing systems based on vested interests. Starting with individuals, it is about inspiring and sensitising civil society to recognise and overcome the limiting system boundaries of mainstream thinking.

Power structures are a taboo subject and no matter how extensively they are researched and documented, the unveiling of these systems is met with resistance and criticism from the profiteers of power, followed by disregard and defamation.

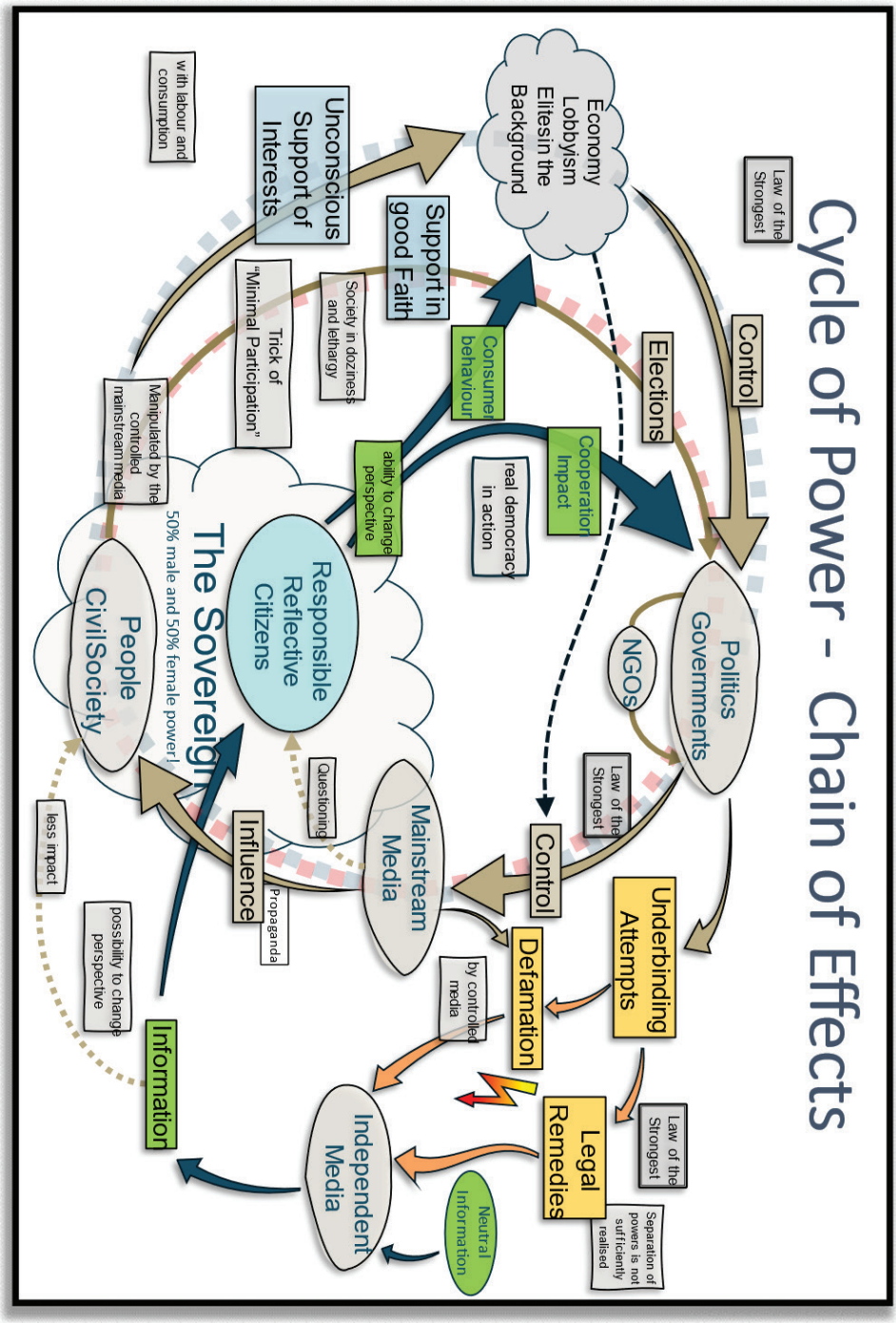
Power Distribution in the World System

Biological ecosystems provide more robust system responses to disruptive impulses when they are more diverse. The prevailing economic systems and the international state system behave in a similar way. Among the approximately 196 states worldwide, there are four particularly large elements. These are the USA, China, Russia and the EU. Disturbances from this direction often have a major impact on the entire system.

Civil society is a largely underestimated element with little power, although it is referred to as the sovereign in democracies. In some areas, there is a significant concentration of power in society, often referred to as elites. Overall, it is noticeable that the influential systems of this world are dominated by a concentration of power and that there is too little diversity, equality and co-determination. Concentrations of power have a high potential for violence, as they encourage and even challenge the phenomenon of the "law of the strongest." According to the motto, "Because they can!". This can also be found in *The Melian Dialogue* (Thucydides), where the Athenians said, "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."

Note on Circulating Graphic

The graphic below is the last page of a presentation that develops step by step. In the final stage, it has a lot of information and is overloaded. It is intended to provide a space for your own thoughts and interpretations. Ideally, these thoughts should inspire developments that serve the common good.


Cycle of Power - Chain of Effects
Law of the Strongest
Control
Elections
Economy
Lobbyism
Elitesin the
Background
Politics
Governments
NGOs
Law of the Strongest
Control
Underbinding
Attempts
Defamation
by controlled media
Legal
Remedies
Law of the Strongest
Separation of powers is not sufficiently realised
Neutral Information
Independent
Media
Information
possibility to change perspective
less impact
Mainstream
Media
Questioning
Influence
Propaganda
Responsible
Reflective
Citizens
The Sovereign
50% male and 50% female power!
People
CivilSociety
Cooperation
Impact
real democracy
in action
Consumer
behaviour
ability to change perspective
Support in
good Faith
Society in dozines
and lethargy
Unconscious
Support of
Interests
Trick of
"Minimal Participation"
Manipulated by the controlled mainstream media
w ith labour and consumption

Functional Cycle of a Social Power System

Main elements

Two major elements are evident in the large social power system. One is civil society and the other is the respective government. Less obvious are the other two elements of power, which should not have a power function in a system based on the democratic model. On the one hand, these are the actors in the background, who mostly come from the economic sector, where they have built up the corresponding power. This element, often referred to as the elite, can consist of large companies, associations, organizations, lobbyists or powerful individuals. On the other hand, there is the mainstream media, whose role should be to provide neutral information.

Functional chains designed for growth escalate to the point of bursting

Systems based on growth, such as the capitalist economic system, reach their limits of growth in a finite system, which is what the earth is. The term zero growth is already a feared aspect in the capitalist system, and everything is being done to accelerate economic growth again. This poses the danger of escalating developments, even to the point of a figurative explosion or total collapse. This is well known from driving a car. A vehicle that is constantly accelerating will eventually fly off the road. Inadequately damped vibration-capable systems will literally tear apart at some point. This can be observed in conflicts, in the economic system and in the social system. The strategy of 'business as usual' then leads to collapse. And that is where the world is heading right now.

Minimal participation

In the regular democratic elections, the population is led to believe that they have an influence on the development of their country. In Germany, the major popular parties no longer differ significantly from one another and the credibility of the parties has been severely damaged.

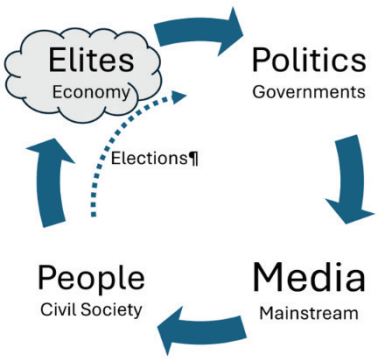
This is part of the trick of minimal participation. Another aspect is the limited participation in prosperity, which generates just enough individual satisfaction. This includes, for example, a car, smartphone, mass tourism vacations, media consumption, alcohol and the consumption of cheap mass-produced goods at Temu, Aldi, Lidl, etc. According to the

motto: “Everything is OK, I’m fine.” Overall, the population is kept in a dozy state with information overload and enough other distractions, which severely limits independent, conscious decision-making.

Chain of Effect

The aforementioned elements in the social system are mutually dependent, yet a direction of influence and power can be recognized and depicted.

For the chain of effects in social systems, the focus here is on the four major elements. These are the respective governments, the media, civil society, and the powerful elites who operate more or less in the background.



The simplified cycle at a glance

Ideally, neutral, independent media should provide the civilian population and all other elements with information that is as objective and factual as possible. In this informed society, everyone can then decide for themselves how to categorise the information. Conscious and self-reflective people are thus able to influence politics through their choices. Further opportunities for participation and co-creative processes could shape policies that serve the common good and nature. This would be a real democracy that would do justice to the people as sovereign.

Observation in the cycle

Due to the given circumstances, civil society remains in a certain state of consciousness and develops only slowly, which hinders any necessary change to the system. Based on the information it receives from the mainstream media, it elects its representatives at certain intervals

to form the respective government. In principle, this is done with good intentions. The elites who influence governments and politics in favour of their interests act in parallel. As this is mainly about economic power, it is unconsciously supported by civil society as a consumer and as a resource in the form of labour.

The elites, too, are made up of people with their own egoistic interests, which are reflected in their actions. How can ego-based thought patterns evolve towards principles orientated towards the common good? NGOs are not an independent influencing factor in this cycle due to their financial dependence on governments. In principle, the term NGO no longer makes sense and needs to be reconsidered.

Endless Loop of Power?

As Prof. Dr. Harald Welzer (2021, 144) noted, our 'culture has no concept of stopping'. Once the system is established, it follows the principle of self-preservation. Disruptive impulses that counteract its own interests are combated with the means at its disposal. The cycle is very stable and self-perpetuating due to the effect of the mainstream media and the tabooed 'law of the strongest'. Attempts by alternative media to contribute a different point of view to the formation of opinion are prevented as far as possible from the outset. This includes defamation with the support of the controlled media as well as legal means against disruptive journalists and alternative media. In Germany in particular, this shows that the judiciary is not independent in the sense of the proclaimed separation of powers.

As the mainstream media are directly linked into the chain of effects and thus close the circle, an endless loop is created. Are openings and interruptions to this cycle possible for a development orientated towards the common good? How realistic is a change in the large elements? Can enough small elements also contribute to change, and if so, how?

Elites in the background

This element is the main beneficiary of this system of power. This is where all the stimuli for stabilising the system come from. In some cases, the media are directly influenced because they are owned by them, or they receive generous donations. Politics is subject to a long-es-

tablished system of lobbying, which can be categorised as belonging to the elites. If new parties cannot be brought under control quickly enough, they are infiltrated and defamed, including attempts to ban them. Here, the elites work together with politicians or control them. It is also interesting to note that the outstanding power figures of the elite are admired by the population.

Government / Politics

Perhaps politicians are endowed with a higher degree of ego and identify themselves through positions and their public visibility. The party system itself leads to a dilution of the principle that politicians are only bound by their conscience. Just as a fundamental reform of gun laws seems impossible in the USA, a general speed limit on motorways in Germany cannot be enforced against the strong car lobby.

Why was Obama unable to fulfill his election promise to dissolve Guantanamo? In Germany, the government appoints the judges. This means that the separation of powers is not realised, which is also reflected in the fact that direct influence is exerted on judicial decisions. For example, the Russian broadcaster RT was banned in Berlin shortly after the start of the war in Ukraine. Overall, no change in the cycle of power can be expected from politics as long as the elites control politics.

Mainstream media

The media are not actually intended as an element of power, but as a provider of information. The mainstream media are either directly under the influence of politics, which in turn is controlled by the elites, or they are orientated towards the political consensus. Journalism is subject to pressure to conform, which is already reflected in the term mainstream.

There is also the financial aspect of maximising print circulation. Depending on the ownership structure, the elites then have a direct influence. The mainstream media have achieved a position of power through the manipulative presentation of information, including perfect propaganda. No fundamental change can be expected from these media if this does not take place in the upstream power elements. How realistic is the decoupling of the mainstream media from politics and elites in terms of independence and neutrality?

Civil society

Civil society is, in principle, a major power factor. If the saying from the peace movement 'Imagine there is a war and nobody goes' were to prove true, a war could actually be ended or not even started. As described above, as a consumer and a resource of labour, it has a huge and unimagined influence on the economic elites. This does not break the circle, but the effective power has shifted more towards the sovereign of democracy. The key question for civil society is: "Why does it not gain its effective power?" Or "What has to happen for civil society to gain its effective power?"

The elements as mental constructs

The power element of elites in particular is a mental construct that is not defined by a clearly delineated group of people or by precisely identifiable organizations. Conversely, it is often very obvious which person, or organization can be assigned to this element in the system. The system was not planned like this from the outset, but has developed over time. To describe the system, it is helpful to name these elements and have terms for them. In principle, this applies to all elements in this cycle.

Can politics create peace?

If there is a war, some actors must have an interest and an advantage in it. The mothers, the wives who lose their sons and husbands in armed conflicts are not. What or who drives a government to provoke wars, start wars or support war in other countries? How do these governments manage to justify this to their own civilian populations and reconcile it with their declared will for peace? Peace only exists when it is wanted. So how can politics promote peace when there is apparently no honest will to do so? There are many people with good intentions working in peace NGOs who want to serve peace from the bottom of their hearts. However, NGOs have little room for manoeuvre as they are largely funded by governments.

Leverage Points

Decentralize concentration of power – minimize manipulation

Systems change solely through intrinsic dynamics, while external influences can inspire, which is a task for the "Transformation to a New World Order". How can the concentration of power among the elites and the control of the media be minimised or eliminated? It is also well known that the separation of powers is insufficiently realized and that the courts take action against alternative media if they do not confirm the predetermined opinion. How can influence be exerted in this system, which has an unwavering manifest orientation?

Strengthening the civil population

In large parts of society, there is hardly any awareness of their own manipulation, no matter how obvious it may be. Cognitively, people know that propaganda also exists in their own country, but they usually only allow this to apply effectively to other countries, where they harshly criticise it. What is missing is the will and the ability to change perspective. It's like advertising, which we know works, otherwise we wouldn't spend so much money on it. Nevertheless, most people believe that they themselves are completely unaffected by advertising in their purchasing behaviour. The situation is similar with propaganda, which worked well many years ago and has not become less effective since then.

Consciousness cannot be forced, but happens within each individual. Those who are not willing and not open to a change of perspective remain in their daze and thus stabilize the entire existing system. This also shows a lack of personal responsibility, which is partly rooted in the system itself. Persisting in the role of victim can also be an aspect.

None of this is mentioned in the mainstream media, as they do not want to reveal that they are manipulating the population according to their ideas. However, it is also the case that they often have no awareness of this, thinking from within their system, or believe themselves to be on the side of the "good guys" and consider any means to be justified.

Where does civil society have an influence?

If civil society is an element of power, how does its potential effectiveness show itself, how can it exert influence? Going to the polls

every four years is only a theoretical opportunity to make an impact. In Germany, for example, the Green Party is in favour of supplying weapons to a war zone after the election, even though they have always publicly rejected this, including on their election posters.

Between the government and the civilian population are the real rulers who exert their influence on the government through their economic power. For this economic power, they need resources and also customers who buy their products and services. With its labour and as a consumer, civil society has these two roles at the same time.

Labour

When people refuse to work, not just to fight for higher wages, but because they no longer want to support a dysfunctional system, they have an effect. This restriction of resources has an impact on the entire system.

Consumer behaviour

In a finite world, there can be no limitless growth. The Club of Rome has been pointing this out since the 1970s. Growth also means more resource consumption and more waste. As the Global North cannot dictate to the Global South to remain in its lower stage of development and to give its mineral resources mainly to the Global North, a reduction in consumption must be mandatory in the Global North. In the dysfunctional economic system, zero growth is already a disaster. Reducing consumption therefore makes sense in general and in particular it serves to have a direct impact on the concentration of power in the economic sphere.

If, for example, a large retail corporation is boycotted due to behaviour that is not oriented towards the common good, it is in existential difficulties within a few weeks. This type of effect was seen at Shell (1995) when the company wanted to sink the floating oil tank Brent Spar in the sea and was met with boycotts and huge protests.

Female Power

Around 50% of the population are women. The feminine, nurturing and life-giving nature has no influence in this system. How can this imbalance be corrected and how can the feminine aspects come into their

peace-promoting effect? What would the world look like if the age-old patriarchy were overcome?

Aspects of the ego

A deep dive into societal problems quickly leads to the topic of consciousness. When opposing parties claim this term for themselves at the same time, there seems to be no uniform use of this term. There are always people who think they know what is right and wrong and seek to impose this view on others. One familiar form is debates in which an attempt is made to convince the other party, which rarely works. The escalation is violence and war.

An even deeper dive into the causes leads to the ego, with issues such as identification, power, recognition and greed. This is where the desire for development from the outside ends. Each individual is responsible for their own development and progress, provided they have the will and the willingness to do so. None of this can be forced and what remains is inspiration and living by example. Authenticity should not be underestimated, which is one of the reasons why sustainable peace efforts by the state are usually ineffective. Ego is a deeply personal issue that cannot, or should not, be directly influenced from the outside. Advertising, news, propaganda and other manipulations do this, of course, beyond any ethics for their own special self-interest.

Media denial

Reducing the consumption of mainstream media, especially advertising and news, leads to sensitisation to manipulation and reduces the possibility of influence and control. In concrete terms, this promotes the consciousness of individuals and, as a whole, the consciousness of society. Anyone can experience this for themselves if they practise this over a longer period of time and suddenly realise how intrusive the media is.

The alternative media must also be viewed critically, as some of them do the same thing on the other side. The dependent and manipulated media must be removed from the circle of effect so that the civilian population is no longer hindered in its effectiveness. How can this be achieved?

System Preservation

The elements of power strive to secure the status quo or to expand their power and wealth. This seems to happen automatically on a large scale as it does on a small scale. At national level, laws and rules enacted by governments serve this purpose. Incomplete separation of powers also serves to safeguard the entire system. In addition to the direct control of the mainstream media, there is also a tendency for journalism to independently adhere to the political consensus, in anticipatory obedience, so to say.

Replacing the term "censorship" with "prevention of disinformation" is a modern tactic in which the "right of the strongest" asserts interpretative sovereignty and dictates what is right and wrong. In practice, the entanglements between the elites, politics and the media manifest themselves in a variety of ways in the form of conferences, meetings and organizations.

Shrinking Spaces

The more digitalization and surveillance there is in the state, the more difficult it becomes for civil society to take corrective action, as many activities and developments are recognized and combated at the outset. Germany criticizes China in particular here, thereby distracting attention from its own development in this direction. The topic of "shrinking spaces" is often seen in others, but rarely addressed in itself. Only the masses of people working together can achieve effective power. The system knows this and does everything it can to prevent this.

Division of society

The cohesion and solidarity within civil society is a threat to the power system and attempts are being made to prevent it. This is expressed in the division of society with artificially polarizing topics. These currently include the war in Ukraine, right-wing or not right-wing, pandemic issues and climate change. Freedom of assembly as an important basic democratic element is already restricted and is interpreted in Germany according to the respective power interests and interpretative sovereignty.

Are the Elites Willing to Enter into Dialogue?

Why should they? They find it difficult to recognize and name the cycle of power as such from within their own system of thought. Going to the edge of one's own system of thought and, at best, beyond it, requires openness and the will. As the French Revolution showed, hardly anyone voluntarily gives up the advantages of power.

Restricted freedom

The German Federal President Johannes Rau gave a memorable speech on May 12, 2004, in which he linked the economy, politics and freedom.

'Our democratic state is more than a service provider and also more than an agency for strengthening the economy. The state also protects and strengthens the freedom of citizens against social and economic forces that have long been a much greater threat to the freedom of the individual than any authority. To this end, it also lays down rules and obligations in favour of the community. In this way, the state creates a space of freedom against pure economism and against the all-dominant dogma of efficiency and profit maximisation.'

What about these open spaces? How do the actors of the power elements react to them? Why does the term "shrinking spaces" exist at all?

Despair

A well-established system of power that sustains itself, with a well-controlled civil society in a daze, leaves little room for change in the direction of the common good. Are there any prototypes in which a fundamental change to the power system has ever come from the people? How can civil society be strengthened in its effectiveness? How can more awareness be created among the civilian population? How can we achieve a fundamental change of direction?

Hope - Concern

Observing and analysing the existing power system leaves me in a state of emotional chaos. It is not an abstract topic, but one that concerns me personally. I am at the centre of this system and a part of it.

I feel powerlessness and despair in the face of global misery. Friedrich Glasl (Austrian peace researcher) says: '*Civil society must not let anyone insinuate that it is powerless*.' Awareness of this system and the decision to be part of the transformation is personal responsibility and meaning.

'*Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out.*' (Václav Havel).

What Else Can Happen?

Enduring not knowing what will happen

Thoughts and ideas usually revolve around the mechanisms we are familiar with. In Theory U Prof. Dr. Otto Scharmer calls this downloading. A saying that is often quoted in coaching is: "If you always do what you've always done, you always get what you've always gotten." Sometimes things happen unexpectedly with a significant impact, such as Greta Thunberg, who triggered a global movement on August 20, 2018. A few weeks earlier, hardly anyone would have thought it possible that this could have such an impact. Despite the huge global response, the climate problem has not been solved. Awareness of the climate problem has increased among many people, but overall, it seems to be getting worse, as the rising sales figures for SUVs illustrate.

It is questionable whether conventional methods or events can change this situation. The great catastrophe of the Second World War was unable to change the system significantly. Change by disaster has not been sustainable here. This shows the extreme stability of this cycle of power as a self-sustaining system.

The media's self-derailment

A change can come unexpectedly from a completely different direction. The media has already lost credibility. People usually only recognize the manipulation when they see news coverage that they themselves have a direct connection to or were perhaps even there and can therefore judge the truth for themselves.

Questioning

Who benefits from the way information is presented in the mainstream media? Who finances this information? Who exactly does this narrative suit?

These questions overwhelm many people or are considered uncomfortable by them because they have consumed information over the years that fits into their preconceived beliefs. Reflecting and questioning shakes up a system that gives people order and orientation and in which people feel safe and secure.

Added to this is the need for connectedness and belonging, which manifests itself in a pressure to conform. Those who cannot feel a sense of security within themselves and are not connected to themselves must fulfil these needs on the outside.

Do we have to work 35 hours or more? A reduction in weekly working hours and an unconditional basic income could allow more room for personal development.

AI now generates videos that look deceptively real, and it could get to the point where everyone will see that they can hardly believe anything anymore. Then people are left to their own devices and must check for themselves whether the information presented is realistic.

Trust in mainstream media could collapse completely due to the exaggeration of AI. Society will then hit rock bottom in terms of information technology and people will have problems believing anything. This will also cause the overall power system to shake and could result in disruptive transformation processes towards more decentralisation, which would ultimately reduce the potential for violence and make more peace possible.

Self-destruction

Can the power system dissolve or change significantly from within itself? The destructive forces of power interests, greed, competition and ego are also at work in the powerful elements.

If there is a minimum of diversity in the system of power and conflicts arise there, can this bring about change or a collapse? The question is whether the system will change fundamentally afterwards, or whether the principles will remain the same and only the colour scheme will change.

Social change happens slowly and in small steps. How many more collapses are necessary to establish a fair social system that is orientated towards the common good worldwide is questionable. Perhaps in the end there will be a multifactorial genesis.

Conclusion

There is a self-perpetuating cycle of power in today's society. In this cycle, power is concentrated among the elites. In terms of environmental protection, sustainability, democracy and the common good, this system is dysfunctional. This is unlikely to change unless a decisive impetus comes from civil society. With this clarity about its own role and operating principles, civil society can identify leverage points for its effectiveness.

1. Renunciation of mainstream media (news, advertising)
2. Refusal to work if it is helpful for a desired change
3. Adjust consumer behaviour in order to influence the concentration of power of the economic elites

It is not easy, if not impossible, to predict exactly what will ultimately break this dysfunctional cycle. Everything we have done so far has not worked in the long term. The solution cannot be achieved by one person alone, and that is why we need exchange, cooperation and prototypes where something has already worked. Every supportive contact motivates, pleases and strengthens humanity.

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Peace is Possible Through Non-Violent Means: Peace Studies and Peace Education

Kazuyo Yamane

Background

First of all, I would like to write why I have been promoting Peace Studies, peace education and peace movement for many years. Most significant motive is that I am one of the second generation of the atomic bomb survivors: my father was the victim of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima in 1945. The effects of radiation on people are different from those ones by conventional weapons because their descendants could be influenced by radiation and also be discriminated against in terms of marriage and employment. This made me think of the nuclear issues in terms of nuclear weapons and nuclear power generation of electricity. On the other hand, my mother was the second generation of Japanese Americans: during World War II, her parents and siblings were sent to a concentration camp while she was in Japan. This made me think of issues of human rights and racial discrimination. Such a family background made me work as a volunteer at the international exchange section of a peace museum called Grassroots House (Kusa no Iye) in Kochi City in Kochi Prefecture for nearly 20 years. The director, Mr. Shigeo Nishimori, asked me to attend the 1st International Conference of Peace Museums held at the University of Bradford in England in 1992. This changed my whole life because I began to get involved with the International Network of Museums for Peace (INMP) and the Japanese Citizens' Network of Museums for Peace. I ended up writing of my Ph.D. thesis at the University of Bradford and started teaching Peace Studies at universities in Japan and Spain. This article on Peace Studies and peace education through museums for peace will make clear that peace is possible not by war but by non-violent means such as dialogue and diplomacy.

Outline

Various problems exist in the world such as the issues of nuclear war, nuclear accidents, global warming, human rights violations and so

forth. Is war the only way of solution of conflicts? Are there non-violent means to solve problems? The author belongs to the IPRA (International Peace Research Association) and the Peace Studies Association of Japan. I belong to the Peace Education Commission in the IPRA and an editorial member of the *Journal of Peace Education* published by Routledge (England) for 20 years.

First, Peace Studies classes in Japan and Spain will be introduced. It is important to educate students to deal with conflicts peacefully. Secondly, peace education through museums for peace in Japan and abroad will be dealt with. This is one example of promoting peace education for peaceful future. Finally, the way of non-violent means to deal with conflicts will be made clear such as multi-track diplomacy.

What is "Peace Studies"?

Peace Studies is the scientific study of the conditions and processes that lead to the realization of peace values. It helps people think of how to solve various issues. Conflicts (such as the war in Ukraine, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) should not be resolved violently and they should be solved peacefully without the use of force.

International Peace Research Association was established in 1965 to promote research in various regions of the world. It has five regional affiliates such as the European Peace Research Association (EUPRA), the Asia-Pacific Peace Research Association (APPRA) and so forth. The Peace Studies Association of Japan was founded in 1973. Hiroshima University, Meiji Gakuin University, International Christian University, and others have peace research institutes, and there are classes of Peace Studies and Peace Research at universities and colleges throughout Japan.

In the case of Ukraine War, how should it be solved? Rather than the NATO, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) should be the organization to discuss how to solve conflicts. The OSCE is an organization that evolved from the CSCE (Council for Security and Cooperation in Europe), which was launched in Helsinki, Finland, in 1975 to encompass both NATO members and members of the Warsaw Pact Organization. It is a regional security organization covering all of North America, Central Asia, and Europe, including Russia and

Ukraine. Unlike NATO, the OSCE does not have an army, and its missions include ceasefire monitoring, election monitoring, and confidence building through non-military means.

In terms of building relationships with various countries and regions, it is becoming increasingly important to build relationships and promote communication not only between countries, but also among various layers, such as local governments, universities, NGOs and private citizens. Thus, various actors, such as local communities and the private sector, have been playing a role in multi-track diplomacy (Diamond and McDonald 1996, p. 4).

Now is the time to lay down arms in Ukraine. A novel called "Lay Down Your Arms!" was written by Bertha von Suttner (1843-1914) and was published in 1889. She was an Austrian writer and a great peace activist. She is known in Europe as the "Mother of the Peace Movement" and she is the first woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Her portrait appears on the Austrian 2 Euro coin.

Peace Studies at Universities and Peace Museums

There are many schools that offer Peace Studies programs including universities that focus on conflict resolution. Some universities will be introduced in this section.

(1) Peace Studies at the University of Bradford and Coventry University in England

The author had an opportunity to study Peace Studies at the School of Peace Studies of the University of Bradford (UK) in the 2000s. The name was changed to "the School of Peace and International Development". The library has over 150 collections of rare books and archives for peace. It was impressive to see a statue of reconciliation in front of the library, and it also exists in Hiroshima, Coventry, Berlin, and Belfast.

Coventry University in the UK has MA program of Peace & Reconciliation Studies addressing the question of how to create a peaceful world through peaceful means. Graduates tend to work on various issues where conflicts are likely to occur, and work for NGOs providing humanitarian assistance such as mediating between conflicting groups.

(2) Peace Studies at the University of Jaume I in Spain

The author gave an intensive course on Peace Studies at the graduate school of the University of Jaume I in Spain in the 2000s. In the war on Iraq in 2003, the Vice President of the University asked all professors and students to attend a peace rally on campus to protest against the war in Iraq, which was surprising because such a thing was unthinkable in Japan. There was also a public peace rally in the community (Castellón de la Plana, Valencia).

A booklet "The Flame of Hiroshima and Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan," was published by Peace Museum called "Grassroots House" in 1995 introducing Article 9 in 12 languages. It was used as a teaching material in the author's Peace Studies class.

Here, it is necessary to explain Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan.

> CHAPTER II. RENUNCIATION OF WAR
> Article 9. Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.
> In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.[1]

Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan stipulates one of the fundamental principles of the Constitution: the principle of pacifism. This principle includes the following three principles. Renunciation of war, non-preservation of military power, and denial of the right of belligerency.

The reason why the Japanese people sympathized with this Article 9 after the end of World War II is the background of the U.S. air raids throughout Japan and atomic bombings by the U.S. military. (Hidaka, 2010, p. 185) Article 9 was also an international pledge by which Japan, as the aggressor nation, pledged its future to the international community, especially to the peoples of Asia. (Hidaka, 2010, P. 186)

1 Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, available at: https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html

Article 9 which renounces war forever is an integral part of the peace constitution. It should be appreciated that "it is also a forward-looking statement which acts as a precursor to the creation of a new international order and must be acknowledged as a step towards a new universal peace doctrine which is beginning to take shape today." (Horio, 2024, P. 315)

In the story, "The Flame of Hiroshima" written by Yuko Yamaguchi and translated into English by the author, the flame, which was brought back using pocket heater from the burnt ruins of Hiroshima to Fukuoka, eventually became a village fire and was moved to Ueno Toshogu Shrine (Tokyo). 30 years after it was lit, it was sent to Fukushima's peace museum called "Hiroshima Nagasaki Bikini Fukushima Dengonkan: Fukushima Museum for No Nukes". (The flame from Hiroshima exists in about 60 places in Japan, and also in Canada and New Zealand).[2]

As the impressions of the graduate students on Article 9, there are various ideas such as "I was surprised that such an article exists.", "I think it takes courage not to have armed forces.". "A country like Costa Rica without a military would be better.", "This article is important to resolve conflicts peacefully.", "Many people don't know about it, so why don't we spread it in the word?" and so forth. It should be noted that there were graduate students not only from Europe and America, but also from Asia, Africa, and South America. This is because scholarship was offered by Spanish banks as a contribution to the society.

It is interesting that Mr. Shigeo Nishimori was welcomed by the then president of the Parliament of Macedonia, Tito Petkovski, in May 1997 thanks to Professor Svetomir Skaric and Professor Olga Murdzeva-Skaric. Nishimori also visited the Balkan Peace Studies Center, where Professor Olga Murdzeva-Skaric was director and founder, and was hosted by the dean of Faculty of Philosophy, where the center was located. In the book, *The Peace and Constitutions* (in Macedonian language) edited in 1997 (the authors are Tadecasu Fucase, Svetomir Skaric and Olga Murdzeva-Skaric), there is "A Song of Down" dedicated by

2 "Fire of the Atomic Bomb" to be moved from Ueno to Fukushima in Tokyo Shinbun, July 25, 2022. https://www.tokyo-np.co.jp/article/44639#:~:text=%E5%BA%83%E5%B3%B6%E3%80%81%E9%95%B7%E5%B4%8E%E3%81%AB%E7%94%B1%E6%9D%A5%E3%81%99%E3%82%8B,%E7%B4%84%EF%BC%96%EF%BC%90%E3%82%AB%E6%89%80%E3%81%AB%E3%81%82%E3%82%8B%E3%80%82

Shigeo Nishimori to the article 9 that had been published in a Japanese book, *The Partisans before Dawn* by him in 1995.[3]

Song of Dawn
4

We will not wage war.
We will not bear arms.
The ninth article of the Japanese constitution
was born in a moment of world history
as a song of dawn
that transcends Japan.

It is encouraging to learn that such exchanges of ideas by peace scholars between Macedonia and Japan were done in the 1990s.

Getting back to the Peace Studies Course in Spain, the most impressive project by a graduate student called Nati Fortea in Spain was that she took an initiative in founding a peace museum in Spain. After learning about education for peace and human rights at the Grassroots House Peace Museum in Kochi, Japan, she asked me to meet with a mayor candidate to suggest a peace museum be founded in Spain. It was a great surprise that a peace museum was founded with cooperation of the Mayor and the University of Jaume I in La Vall d'Uixó in 2000.

The author had an opportunity to visit the Peace Museum created there in 2005. It was moving to see not only exhibits for peace but also many photographs of children who visited there. It was also impressive that graduate students organized an event and educated junior high school students about peace, especially the result of the atomic bombing and making paper cranes for peace. As the background, Mr. & Mrs. Masahiro Okamura, the director of Grassroots House, presented panel photos of atomic bomb survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the peace museum.[5]

3 This section is based on Professor Olga Skaric's email to the author on September 24 in 2024.

4 The poem was translated from Japanese into English by Kazuyo Yamane.

5 Grassroots House Newsletter 79 published on June 10th in Japanese at http://www.maroon.dti.ne.jp/kusanoie/tayori/tayori79.htm

(3) Peace Studies at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, Japan

In Peace Studies class at Ritsumeikan University, a book, *Peace and Conflict Studies* by David P Barash and Charles P Webel (SAGE Publications) and other books were used.

Students formed groups and collaborate on issues of their interest. Then they made a presentation and discussed their research result in class. (Students who have done their own research study made a presentation individually.)

It was interesting that students tended to change ideas after listening to various testimonies related to various issues. For example, students in favor of nuclear deterrence theory changed their ideas after they listened to testimonies by atomic bomb survivors and learned about horrible results of the atomic bombing. There was also change of ideas among the students in favor of restarting nuclear power plants after listening to a woman who experienced the nuclear accident in Fukushima in 2011 and evacuated with her child to Osaka. The student realized that they had not been informed of the danger of nuclear accidents.

As for Senkaku Islands issue, students from China, Taiwan, and Japan reported together and were surprised at the differences in education in their own country because it was written in school textbooks that the Senkaku Islands belong to their own country. Natural resources near the Senkaku Island are controversial even today. Various discussion on how to solve conflicts gave students a chance to think of various global issues.

There was a unique Peace Studies tour by Ritsumeikan University and American University in Washington D.C. since 1995. As for the background of the Peace Study Tour, in 1995, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the atomic bombing, the Enola Gay, the bomber that dropped the atomic bomb, was exhibited at the Smithsonian Institution. However, no artifacts or photographs of atomic bomb survivors were displayed. They were, however, displayed at American University in Washington, D.C. In 1995, a Peace Study tour to Hiroshima by Japanese and U.S. students began by Professor Atsushi Fujioka of Ritsumeikan University and Professor Peter Kuznick of American University. The author was in charge of a class called “Peace Studies Seminar” and we took students from various countries such as China, Korea, England, Thailand, etc. to Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August from 2011 to 2015.

Oliver Stone and Peter Kuznick published a book and DVD called "The Untold History of the United States" and students were lucky to be able to listen to both authors.

Students from different countries tend to have different historical perceptions. How did they learn different histories during the Peace Studies Tour? What happened to their historical perceptions after the trip?

American students tend to learn that the atomic bombing was necessary, rather than learning about the consequences of the bombings, including the fact that Hibakusha (atomic bomb sufferers) have been suffering from the effects of radiation by the bombings. On the other hand, Japanese students learn the facts about the atomic bombing, but modern history tends to be omitted from their school education because it is often excluded from university entrance examinations. They tend not to learn the consequences of Japanese aggression of other countries, such as Japan's invasions of China and Korea.

On the other hand, Chinese and Korean students tend to learn that World War II ended as a result of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They also learn little about the consequences of the atomic bombing and the suffering of the hibakushas. They tend to learn how much the people of China and Korea suffered as a result of Japan's aggression against their countries.

As for the views on the atomic bombing, it was shocking for Japanese students to learn that "85% of the American public approved the use of the atomic bombs because they were falsely led to believe that the bombs ended the war" (Kuznick and Stone, 2012, p. x). Professor Kuznick asserted, "It is unknown to most of the public that many top U.S. military leaders believed that the atomic bombings were militarily unnecessary or morally reprehensible."

In Hiroshima, the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission (ABCC) was established in 1947, but it only conducted health studies of Hibakusha and did not provide treatment. In other words, Hibakusha were treated as guinea pigs. Students directly listened to Hibakushas in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As for the students' reaction to Peace Museums, American students tend to be shocked by the exhibits at Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum. Chinese and Korean students also tended to be shocked by the horrible effects of radiation

on people and the environment. Japanese students tended to be shocked to learn about Japan's acts of aggression on display at the Museum for Humna Rights and Peace in Nagasaki. As for a student's reactions to the exhibit, a Japanese student said, "It is important for the Japanese to understand that the people of China and Korea have suffered as a result of Japan's aggression, and this is the first step toward understanding true history and creating a peaceful world." The Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and American students learned about the history of World War II from different perspectives and came to understand each other better than before.

As the conclusion of the Peace Studies Trip, the trip to Hiroshima and Nagasaki changed the students' historical perceptions and deepened their mutual understanding. According to Professor Peter Kuznick, the trip tends to be a life-changing experience for American students. It is interesting that there are those whose lives were changed by visiting Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum such as Mr. David Krieger (1942-2023) who visited Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum and was shocked. He founded the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation[6] and contributed to promoting peace.

(4) Citizens' Peace Research by the members of the Grassroots House Peace Museum

One of the characteristics of the Grassroots House is that there are exhibits not only on Japan's victim side of World War II such as the U.S. air raids on Kochi and the atomic bombing on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but also photographs showing Japan's invasion of China and paintings by Korean women who were forced to work as sex slaves by Japan's military in World War II. Such exhibits can't be seen at public peace museums because of nationalists who glorify the war and attack exhibits on Japan's aggression against other countries. The museum also exhibits a poet named Kou Makimura, who was imprisoned for resisting the war and was killed. The peace museum also organizes various peace events by citizens through art, such as Peace Concerts, Peace Art exhibitions, Peace Film Festivals and so forth.[7] One million paper cranes were folded by about 100,000 people every year by children and citizens, and

6 Nuclear Age Peace Foundation at http://www.wagingpeace.org/

7 Grassroots House at http://www.maroon.dti.ne.jp/kusanoie/index.html

they were decorated downtown which was air raided by U.S. bombers in World War II.

The late Shigeo Nishimori, the founder and the first director of the peace museum, created "Constitutional Forest" to protect and nurture the spirit of the Peace Constitution along with environmental preservation. It was started on May 3 (Constitution Day: the day the Japanese Constitution went into effect on May 3, 1947) in 1995 in Tachikawa, Otoyo Town, Kochi Prefecture. It is a forest of hearts and minds to nurture young people, a symbol of peace that calls out to the world. Citizens and children planted a variety of young trees on bald hills and a tag was added to each tree with the name of the tree and the name of the person who planted it. Based on such experiences, a Painting Class was opened for children. The painting was titled "Forests are Lovers of the Sea". It is believed that forests facing the sea provide shade and food for fish, thereby increasing their catch. The title emphasized the importance of forests from the perspective of sea creatures and the environment.

The members of the peace museum started the investigation of germ warfare conducted by Japanese military in China in World War II. This is a part of activities for making clear the historical facts and promoting reconciliation with Chinese people. A booklet, "Germ Warfare was Carried Out" was published by the peace museum in 1999. It is a collection of reports from the 6th "Journey for Peace in China". It includes interviews with victims of the germ war, as well as the complaint and statements of opinion from the Unit 731 germ warfare state compensation lawsuit. Such a historical fact has not been written in school textbooks and have not been reported in the media much. Such booklets were based on citizens' peace research in China and it has been used for peace education. It should be noted that peace research has been promoted not only by universities but also citizens of peace museums. Exhibitions are based on peace research, and activities for peace and reconciliation are promoted such as supporting the lawsuit of Chinese victims of germ warfare.

How about peace museums around the country? Dr. Peter van den Dungen, the former lecturer of Peace History at the University of Bradford, said, "Japan is the only country with a peace museum movement." How about the situation of peace museums in Japan? The next section will make clear the status of peace museums in Japan and abroad.

2. Peace Education through Museums for Peace in Japan and Abroad

(1) The International Network of Museums for Peace

The International Network of Peace Museums was established in 1992 when the first International Conference of Peace Museums was held at the University of Bradford, England.
Activities of the Network include holding international conferences, publishing newsletters and books, editing the guidebook, "Museums for Peace Worldwide", exchanging ideas and exhibits and so forth. The objective was to create a peace museum that tells the history of the peace movement in the U.K. and encourages people to join the peace movement today. Over the next decade, the Peace Gallery and then the Peace Museum were created in Bradford.

This was made possible primarily through the financial support of Quakers and other volunteers. "Bringing Peace to the People: September 10-12, 1992" was published after the first conference of peace museums. The International Network of Peace Museums (INPM) was founded and international exchanges started.

2nd International Conference was held in Stadtschleining, Austria in 1995. Partnership was made with the United Nations. Furthermore, in 1997, INPM was recognized as a registered organization by the Department of Public Information (DPI) of the United Nations in New York. Since May, 2014, the INPM has been granted Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations.

Peace Museums Worldwide, the first peace museum directory, was published by the United Nations Library in Geneva, and the Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford in 1995. It was edited by Peter van den Dungen. *Peace Museums Worldwide* was revised and was published in 1998 when the 3rd International Conference of Peace Museums was held in Osaka and Kyoto. Ten years later in 2008, the *Museums for Peace Worldwide* was edited by the author and published by the Organizing Committee of the 6th International Peace Museums Conference at the Kyoto Museum for World Peace, Ritsumeikan Uni-

versity. The latest *Museums for Peace Worldwide* was published in 2020 and it is available on the INMP website.[8]

In 2003 the 4th International Conference of Peace Museums was held in Belgium (Flanders). Characteristics of the province of West Flanders in Northern Belgium is that large scale fighting in World War I resulted in many casualties. For this reason, there are many communal cemeteries, memorials, and memorial halls for the war dead. The theme reflects this feature: "From War Retrospective to Peace Education." Participants in the conference visited the Flanders Fields Museum (Diskmude) and the Ypres Tower Museum (Ypres) where the first use of poison gas in World Wat I in 1915 was exhibited.

The INMP board members including the author went to the European Parliament in Brussels to meet with the members and asked for 3 requests: First, build a European Peace Museum that can exhibit the history of the people who worked for the realization of peace and the culture of peace. Secondly, financial support should be given to the existing peace museums to help them create and move mobile exhibits. In addition, as the International Network of Peace Museums, we would be happy to cooperate with the European Parliament when it comes to exhibits at the European Parliament. Thirdly, the European Constitution should clearly state the renunciation of war, like Article 11 of the Italian Constitution and Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. In response to the above requests, a member of the European Parliament responded, "We will make our utmost efforts."

It should be noted that there was the author's collaboration with Ms. Piera Caramellino in Italy as the background of requesting the third point. She and her partner attended the International Conference of Peace Museums held in Osaka and Kyoto in 1998. They visited the Grassroots House in Kochi City in Kochi Prefecture with some other participants from Austria and England. Piera was impressed by the exhibition of U.S. air raids on Kochi in World War II and it reminded her of U.S. air raids on Gola in Italy in 1944: 205 children were killed. She started to collect photographs, documents and testimonies related to the U.S. air raids and began to educate people and children about the experience of the air raids in Italy. In 2007 the author was lucky to have an opportunity to visit

8 INMP at https://sites.google.com/view/inmp-2020/museums-for-peace-worldwide?authuser=0

Milan and attended a peace educational rally in Milan. Such mutual exchanges led to the cooperation to request the third point at the European Parliament. The INPM made it possible to request the three points and this can be called citizens' diplomacy to promote peace.

In 2005 the 5th International Conference was held in Guernica in Spain. Nazi Germany bombed Guernica in 1937 during the Spanish Civil War. The theme of the conference was "Museums for Peace: Memorials, Reconciliation, Art, and Contributions to Peace" The name of the network was changed from "International Network of Peace Museums" (INPM) to "International Network of Museums for Peace (INMP)" with the extended definition of *museums for peace* and to be able to include more peace related sites, centers and institutions in the network.

The 6th International Conference was held in Kyoto/Hiroshima in 2008. The theme was "The Peace Museum as a Place for Creating Peace: Fostering 'the Capacity to Understand and Communicate Peace' for Solving Global Problems". As for the publication, *Peace Museums: Past, Present, and Future, a collection of papers*, edited by Ikuro Anzai, Joyce Apsel, and Syed Sikander Medhi, was published. *Museums for Peace Worldwide* edited by Kazuyo Yamane was also published.

7th International Conference was held in Barcelona, Spain (Mundjic Castle) in 2011. It was used as a military prison until 1960, and was turned into a military museum in 1963. In 2007, when the Spanish military handed over the management and administration of the castle to the Barcelona City Council, it was decided to establish a peace center in the castle (offering training courses for professionals in peacebuilding, crisis management, and humanitarian fields, exhibitions, etc.) The International Peace Resource Center was established in Barcelona in 2009. It made it imaginable that a military museum could be transformed into a peace museum. The conference theme was "The Role of Museums in the Transformation from a Culture of Violence and War to a Culture of Nonviolence and Peace." *Museums for Peace: A Cultural Transformation* was edited by Clive Barrett and Joyce Apsel and was published in 2012 by the INMP.

The 8th International Conference was held in No Gun Ri Peace Park, the Republic of Korea in 2014. In the early days of the Korean War in July 1950, hundreds of innocent civilians in the village of No Gun Ri were killed by U.S. Air Force bombings and the guns of American mili-

tary units. Fifty years later, a successful campaign by survivors demanded an investigation into the truth and an apology by the United States. With the support of the Korean government, the No Gun Ri Peace Park was created with various facilities, including a peace museum, a memorial tower, a visitors' center, a plaza with sculptures, and an educational center. The theme of the conference was "The role of peace museums in preventing war and promoting reconciliation, historical facts, and memory (memorialization)" On the final day of the conference, participants went to Imjingak in the DeMilitarized Zone, where the Peace Declaration was read by the Peace Foundation. In December 2013, the INMP was awarded the No Gun Ri Peace Foundation's 6th Peace Prize in the Human Rights category.

The 9th International Conference was held in Belfast in 2017. The theme was "The City as a Living Peace Museum." Focus was put on the transformation of a city from a city of division and problems to a model of peace through post-conflict healing and reconciliation. Notable features of the 9th Conference were that the opening ceremony was held at the Parliament House, and the closing ceremony was held at the Northern Ireland Assembly. It was an opportunity to celebrate INMP's 25th anniversary.

The 10th International Conference was held in Kyoto in 2020. It was held online because of the Covid 19. Presentations are still available on the INMP website. *Museums for Peace Worldwide* edited by Kazuyo Yamane and Ikuro Anzai was published then.

The 11th International Conference was held in Uppsala, Sweden in August 2023. The theme was "Museums as Future Peacekeepers". There was participation from 105 peace museums in 37 countries. What are the roles of the INMP through the INMP international conferences and INMP Newsletters?

(2) The Roles of the INMP

The INMP has been playing important roles to promote peace education. One example is to exchange exhibits. Swords into Plowshares Peace Center and Gallery in Detroit was donated "Atomic Bomb and

Humanity[9]" exhibit by Grassroots House in Kochi, Japan in 1995. The background is that Enola Gay (Atomic Bomber) was exhibited at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C., but the reality of the atomic bombing such as the victims' suffering was not exhibited. This is a kind of peace diplomacy by peace museums between the United States and Japan. It displayed what the official exhibition didn't show. The members of the Grassroots House folded paper cranes and sent them with the photographs of the victims of the atomic bombs. Then a corner for making paper cranes was created at the Swords into Plowshares Peace Center and Gallery in Detroit. The author was very impressed by the beautiful corner when she visited there.

Another example is an exhibition of "Memories of the Japanese Occupation of Indonesia: Dutch, Japanese and Indonesian Perspectives" by Dr. Erik Somers, a researcher at the Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide in the Netherlands. The content showed Japan's dark history in the past and it was rejected by public peace museums in Japan. However, it was accepted by the Grassroots House and was exhibited at the Kochi Liberty and People's Rights Museum in Kochi City in 2000. The author helped display the exhibition with some students of Kochi University where she used to teach Peace Studies. 16 years later Dr. Erik Somers gave a lecture titled "How to transmit the memory of war to the next generation: the role of photography" at the Kyoto Museum for World Peace in 2016. Such exchange made it possible to work for peace together. For example, a curator of the Nagasaki National Peace Memorial Hall for the Atomic Bomb Victims wished to have an Atomic-bomb exhibition in the Netherlands. Then Dr. Erik Somers found a place to hold the exhibition in the Netherlands. As a result, many Dutch people went to see the exhibition and learned the reality of the atomic bombing. Such international exchanges have been playing important roles to promote peace education and also trust building through museums for peace.

The Kyoto Museum for World Peace has a partnership with the Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders. International Poster for Peace Exhibition was held as a special exhibition at the Kyoto Museum for World Peace in 2020.

9 The Atomic Bomb and Humanity was made by Nihon Hidankyo (Japan Confederation of Atomic and Hydrogen Bomb Sufferers Organizations) which was awarded Nobel Peace Prize in 2024. The details are available at https://www.ne.jp/asahi/hidankyo/nihon/english/webgallery/01.html.

The peace museum also has a partnership with the No Gun Ri Museum and promote peace education together. For example, the Peace Academy was held in 2017 in the No Gun Ri Peace Museum. Lectures and workshops were held and students from various countries participated in it. They visited the site where Korean residents were killed by U.S. troops during the Korean War. The Peace Academy was very fruitful, but it was stopped because of Covid 19 and it is hoped that the Peace Academy will start in the future.

The Kyoto Museum for World Peace reopened on September 23rd in 2023 after the renovation. Chronology on the wall explains the history from the Opium War in 1840 to the Myanmar coup in 2020. One of the characteristics is that exhibits display not only the history of Japan's war damage such as the atomic bombing but also Japan's dark history as its aggression against other Asian countries.

There is participatory exhibition in which visitors' impressions are projected on the floor. There is a place to watch videos of people involved in "Museums for Peace" abroad and in Japan in the International Network of Museums for Peace. It is important that there is a space where visitors can not only view the exhibits, but also discuss them after their visit.

(3) Networks of Museums for Peace in Japan

(3-1) Japanese Citizens' Network of Museums for Peace

There are two networks of museums for peace in Japan. One is the Japanese Citizens' Network of Museums for Peace, and the other is the Association of Japanese Museums for Peace. One of the outcomes of the 1998 International Conference was the creation of the "Japanese Citizens' Network of Museums for Peace". Since July, 1999, a newsletter titled "Muse" has been published twice a year in both English and Japanese editions. It is now published four times a year. While there have been periods when the INMP was unable to continue publishing its newsletters, the Muse newsletters have continued to be published. (2003-2010). All the issues are available on the website of the Japanese Citizens' Network of Museums for Peace.[10] A National Conference has

10 Muse Newsletters from 1999 to today are available at https://jcnmp-web.jimdofree.com/.

been held once a year to exchange ideas and information to promote peace education through museums for peace.

(1-2) The Association of Japanese Museums for Peace

The Association of Japanese Museums for Peace was founded with the aim of "developing peace promotion projects by working together to conduct surveys and research to inform people about the horrors of war and to help realize peace" in 1994. (Kawasaki City, 2021) There are ten member museums: Kawasaki Peace Museum, Peace Museum of Saitama, Kanagawa Plaza for Global Citizenship, Kyoto Museum for World Peace, Osaka International Peace Center, Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum, Okinawa Prefecture Peace Memorial Museum, Himeyuri Peace Museum, Tsushima Maru Memorial Museum. (This is from north to south.) The number of visitors to the museums is approximately 4 million per year.

(4) Other Organizations for Promoting Peace

There are other organizations to promote peace. For example, the Article 9 Society for Global Peace Charter was founded in 2017. It is a global charter project based on the principles of Article 9 of Japan's Constitution that renounces war. As its background, "it is essential to expand the principles of Article 9 to the world in order to protect Article 9 in the midst of the sense of crisis, where the Abe administration has recognized the right of collective self-defense and enforced the Security Law toward constitutional change." (Horio, 2013, p. 255)

It is introduced on its website as follows:

> "In the 21st century, there is a renewed and growing voice of opposition to war and a desire for lasting peace among the peoples of the world. In this context, a growing number of people around the world are newly sympathizing with and endorsing Article 9 of Japan's Constitution and its principles, in which the people of Japan have ordered their government to remain permanently non-warlike and demilitarized, and have promised this to the peoples of the world." (The Article 9 Society for Global Peace Charter 2017)[11]

11 Article 9 Society for Global Peace Charter at https://www.9peacecharter.org/about

Journalist Hando Kazutoshi (1930-2021) said, “Even now, as an ideal of humanity, for the sake of the earth’s tomorrow... I sometimes want to shout to the nations of the world, ‘Follow the Constitution of Japan!” in 2003 (the year of the U.S. military attack on Iraq). (Okubo, 2019, p. 67.) He was almost killed by the U.S. air raids on Tokyo on March 10th in 1945 when over 100,000 people were killed overnight. When he told his father that he thought Article 9, which renounces war, was wonderful, his father replied, “Are you an idiot? As long as human beings exist, war will never cease.” Since then, he had chosen not to praise the war renunciation, but in 2003 he had to shout it that way.

It is expected that the Article 9 Global Peace Charter will be shared by many people in the world, and conflicts will be solved non-violently without using force in the future.

Conclusion

War tends to be regarded as a means of resolving conflicts, but peaceful means are more important so that nobody will be killed. Peace Studies are necessary and possible not only by researchers and students but also by citizens and individuals by reading, critical analysis of media reports, research activities, and so forth.

Peace education should be based on Peace Studies, and museums for peace can play important roles in peace education not only at schools but also in communities. Exhibits should be made based on Peace Studies without the control by national and local governments, nationalists and so forth. International exchanges by citizens, museums for peace, NGOs, etc. are important. It is because it is a step toward promoting peace which is based on trust building at the grassroots level.

There are many conflicts and problems in the world, and war has been used to resolve them. But such a way does not work and many people tend to be killed. In the worst case, it could develop into a nuclear war, which could destroy the earth and lead to the fall of mankind. However, if we solve the problems through dialogue and negotiation without using force, no one will be killed. Multi-track diplomacy by citizens, NGOs such as the INMP can play important roles to resolve problems non-violently. It should be noted that international laws are important, and the International Court of Justice was established in 1945 as one

of the principal organs of the United Nations, and primary means for the pacific resolution of disputes between states. Peace is possible only through peaceful means.

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(Japanese and English versions)

Peace Education in Romania

Otilia Sofron

Introduction

Peace education plays a vital role in shaping the perspectives of both younger and older generations. For young learners, who often lack direct experiences related to conflict and peace, formal education serves as an essential source for cultivating knowledge and values that promote harmony. For older generations, peace education offers an opportunity to revisit and enrich their understanding, often adding new perspectives gained from evolving societal contexts.

This paper explores peace education in Romania, drawing primarily from my personal experiences as a teacher. It focuses on the integration of peace-related themes within various curriculum subjects and highlights the importance of fostering peace-oriented attitudes among students.

It is important to mention that the emphasis on peace education was given in socialist times too (Năstase 1983), so there is a sort of a continuation even under different political, societal and economic circumstances.

Curriculum Subjects

Peace education in Romanian schools is not a standalone subject but is interwoven across multiple disciplines. These subjects contribute in diverse ways to fostering understanding, tolerance, and cooperation among students.

Civic and Social Education

Peace education is often integrated within Civic Education (for 3rd and 4th-grade students) and Social Education courses. These subjects familiarize students with concepts such as human rights, democracy, and conflict resolution. The curriculum promotes understanding and tolerance toward different cultures, religions, and ethnic groups, foster-

ing a foundation for peaceful coexistence. Key topics include conflict resolution strategies, cooperation, and social responsibility—essential components for building peaceful and inclusive communities.

History

Starting from the 4th grade, history education emphasizes the causes and consequences of wars and underscores the value of peace. Lessons often include analyses of historical conflicts, peace treaties, and the efforts of peace movements. Notably, the introduction of "Holocaust History" as a separate subject for 11th-grade students aims to instill awareness of past atrocities and the importance of upholding peace and tolerance in contemporary society.

Ethics and Religion

From the 1st grade onward, Ethics and Religion classes encourage discussions about morality, ethical decision-making, and respect for others. These lessons often touch on themes of peace, tolerance, and empathy. Regardless of the religious background of the teachings, core messages frequently emphasize peace, love, and harmony as fundamental values.

Language and Literature

Language and Literature classes provide opportunities for students to explore themes of peace, conflict, and human rights through literature. By analyzing characters and narratives, students gain insights into human relationships and social dynamics. Writing assignments often encourage students to reflect on these themes, fostering critical thinking and empathy.

Art and Music

Creative expression through Art and Music classes plays a crucial role in peace education. Students engage in projects that explore themes of peace, unity, and tolerance. Art exhibitions within schools and

communities provide a platform for showcasing these creative endeavors. Similarly, performances such as plays, music concerts, and poetry readings often convey messages of harmony and peace, encouraging both performers and audiences to reflect on these values.

In conclusion, while peace education is not a standalone subject in Romanian schools, it permeates various disciplines, contributing to a holistic approach to peacebuilding. By nurturing critical thinking, empathy, and an understanding of history and social responsibility, the education system plays a vital role in fostering a culture of peace among students. This integration underscores the importance of creative, reflective, and values-based learning as a foundation for peaceful coexistence in contemporary society.

Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities play a crucial role in peace education, offering students practical opportunities to learn and embody principles of non-violence, cooperation, and empathy. These activities provide a dynamic and interactive environment that complements formal classroom learning. Schools in Romania have developed diverse approaches to integrating peace education through workshops, seminars, projects, cultural exchanges, and collaborations with NGOs.

Workshops and Seminars

Workshops focused on conflict resolution, communication skills, and non-violent behavior are effective methods for equipping students with tools for peaceful interactions. These sessions often cover active listening, negotiation, and mediation techniques. Diversity and tolerance workshops encourage students to appreciate different cultures, religions, and perspectives. Similarly, seminars on non-violent communication help students express themselves assertively and respectfully, fostering more harmonious social interactions.

Peace Projects and Special Events

Many schools participate in national and international peace projects that promote cooperation and understanding. Celebrating the International Day of Peace on September 21 is a common practice, with events such as peace marches, thematic lessons, and assemblies. Anti-bullying weeks or days further reinforce peaceful behaviors through activities that promote kindness and respect.

Inviting guest speakers, including peace activists, conflict resolution experts, and representatives from international organizations, provides students with valuable insights into peace and non-violence. International exchange programs, particularly those under Erasmus+, allow students to engage with peers from different countries, fostering cross-cultural understanding and global peace.

Cultural Projects and Creative Clubs

Artistic and cultural initiatives are powerful tools in peace education. Projects that explore and appreciate different cultures through artistic and musical traditions foster cultural understanding and unity. Peace clubs and debate clubs often address themes related to human rights and global issues, encouraging critical thinking and respectful argumentation. Students gain confidence and develop empathy through participation in such discussions.

Community Service and Charity Events

Organizing or participating in charity events, such as fundraising for peace-related causes, nurtures a sense of solidarity and global citizenship among students. Community service projects that support social justice, environmental sustainability, or marginalized groups help students develop empathy and a sense of civic responsibility.

NGO Collaborations

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play an essential role in promoting peace education by providing resources, training, and or-

ganizing events in schools. NGOs often design tailored peace education programs that are either integrated into the school curriculum or offered as extracurricular activities. These programs cover key topics such as conflict resolution, human rights, and intercultural dialogue.

Workshops led by NGOs frequently target both students and teachers, covering themes such as non-violent communication, mediation, and tolerance. Educational materials provided by NGOs, including textbooks, activity guides, posters, and multimedia content, supplement existing school resources. Teacher toolkits with lesson plans and activities are particularly valuable for integrating peace education effectively (see more Lauritzen 2020).

NGOs also run awareness campaigns in schools to promote peace and tolerance. These campaigns often align with international observances, such as the International Day of Peace, and may include activities like debates, peace marches, and art contests.

Challenges to Peace Education

Despite these efforts, implementing peace education in Romania faces several challenges. In some communities, resistance may arise from traditional views or norms that conflict with peace education principles. Educators, parents, or community members may prioritize other aspects of education or fail to recognize the value of peace education.

Romania's diverse population includes various cultural and ethnic groups, and in some areas, existing tensions can create obstacles to peace education. These tensions may be reflected within school environments, complicating efforts to foster harmonious relationships.

Another significant challenge is the assessment of peace education outcomes. Unlike traditional subjects, the impact of peace education is often subjective and difficult to measure. Schools may lack standardized tools to evaluate students' learning and application of peace-related concepts, making it challenging to demonstrate tangible benefits to stakeholders.

Parental engagement also poses a challenge in some areas. Parents who do not see the benefits or who have different views on conflict and discipline may be reluctant to support peace education initiatives.

Building parental support is crucial for reinforcing peace education at home and ensuring a holistic approach to peacebuilding.

Extracurricular activities in Romanian schools offer diverse and impactful avenues for peace education. However, addressing the challenges of resistance, assessment, and parental engagement remains critical for enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of these initiatives. Through continued collaboration between schools, NGOs, and communities, peace education can become a more integral and transformative aspect of students' educational experiences.

Conclusion

Peace education in Romania, though not a standalone subject, is integrated across various disciplines and extracurricular activities, fostering values such as tolerance, empathy, and conflict resolution among students. While the curriculum incorporates peace-related themes through subjects like Civic Education, History, and Ethics, extracurricular initiatives such as workshops, cultural projects, and NGO collaborations further enrich students' understanding of peacebuilding.

However, challenges such as inconsistent implementation, resource limitations, and resistance in some communities hinder its full potential. Addressing these barriers through stronger institutional support, teacher training, and community engagement is essential for making peace education a transformative and sustainable part of Romania's educational system. Ultimately, fostering a culture of peace requires a collaborative effort among schools, NGOs, and policymakers to ensure that all students, regardless of location or background, have access to meaningful peace education.

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Food Security: A Crucial Factor in the Era of Global Changes

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Introduction

Security, in its broadest meaning, refers to being free from danger or threat. It encompasses measures aimed at protecting against unauthorized access, harm, damage, or loss. Security can be categorized into various types, including physical, information, cyber security, financial, personal, and national security. National security focuses on safeguarding a nation's citizens, economy, and institutions from external threats, such as terrorism, espionage, and military aggression. Food security is a critical component of national security, as it directly affects a nation's stability, health, and resilience. In today's world, characterized by rapid global changes, from climate shifts to economic instability, food security has become a central factor in the well-being of populations across the globe.

Food security is defined as the condition in which all people have access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food at all times to meet their dietary needs for an active and healthy life. However, food security is increasingly threatened by a variety of global changes. On the other hand, food sovereignty refers to the ratio between domestic production and consumption of a specific agricultural commodity at a given time. This concept provides a deeper understanding of the interests of food producers rather than consumers (Pitrova and Lukaskova 2018).

Food security is often framed around four main pillars: Availability, Access, Utilization, and Stability. Availability refers to the presence of an adequate food supply, which encompasses the quality and quantity of food produced, distributed, and exchanged both domestically and internationally. Access involves ensuring that individuals have the resources to obtain the appropriate foods necessary for a nutritious diet, which is influenced by factors such as income, food prices, and the food distribution within communities. Utilization ensures the proper biological use of food, meaning that diets must provide sufficient energy and essential nutrients, alongside clean water, sanitation, and healthcare to maintain nutritional well-being. Stability is the assurance that access to adequate

food is consistent over time, which means that populations should not be vulnerable to temporary disruptions such as natural disasters, economic instability, or conflict that could affect food access.

Food security plays a crucial role in national security in many ways, as we demonstrate in the following text.

One of the key aspects is economic stability, which is influenced by both agricultural dependence and supply chain vulnerabilities. Many economies are heavily reliant on agriculture, and any disruption to food production—whether due to climate change, natural disasters, or conflict—can destabilize the economy, affecting both local and global markets. Additionally, modern food systems are interconnected on a global scale, so disruptions in one region can have far-reaching impacts on food availability and prices in other parts of the world, potentially leading to economic stress and social unrest.

The relationship between food security and social stability is also critical. Hunger and malnutrition can trigger public health crises, weakening the workforce and exacerbating poverty, social unrest, and migration. Historically, food shortages have often been a key trigger for civil unrest, protests, and even revolutions. Ensuring food security is therefore essential for maintaining social order and public confidence in government institutions.

In terms of national defense and military readiness, food security is indispensable. A well-nourished population is essential for maintaining a strong and healthy military. Poor nutrition can undermine the physical and cognitive abilities of soldiers, which directly impacts national defense capabilities. Moreover, in regions where food is scarce, competition over essential resources—such as fertile land and water—can lead to conflict. Countries may resort to disputes or even wars over access to these vital resources.

Food security also plays a significant role in global stability and international relations. Countries with surplus food supplies often use food aid as a diplomatic tool, building alliances, stabilizing regions, and enhancing their global influence through aid provision. Furthermore, ensuring food security in unstable regions can help prevent conflicts that might otherwise spread across borders, creating broader security concerns.

In today's digital age, cybersecurity has become an increasingly important factor in food security. As the agriculture sector becomes more reliant on technology, including GPS-guided machinery and automated supply chain systems, cyber-attacks targeting these systems pose a significant threat to food production and distribution. Moreover, protecting the data associated with food supply chains is crucial; breaches could lead to misinformation, causing panic, hoarding, or artificial scarcity.

Climate change is another critical factor impacting food security. Long-term shifts in weather patterns, along with an increase in the frequency and severity of natural disasters, are undermining food production and threatening global food stability. In response, nations must invest in resilient agricultural practices and infrastructure to mitigate these impacts. Climate change has increasingly become recognized as a national security priority due to its potential to disrupt food systems worldwide.

Lastly, food security is vulnerable to the threat of bioterrorism. Deliberate attacks on agricultural systems, such as crops, livestock, or food processing facilities, can have devastating effects on food security and, by extension, national security. Such attacks can disrupt food production on a large scale, creating instability and insecurity in affected regions.

In conclusion, food security is intricately linked to national security. A secure, stable, and resilient food system not only ensures the well-being of a nation's citizens but also strengthens its economic, social, and geopolitical standing. The importance of addressing food security challenges has never been more urgent, as it affects not only the immediate health and stability of nations but also their ability to maintain influence and cooperation in an increasingly complex global landscape.

Global Changes and Their Impact on Food Security

Global changes such as climate change, population growth, geopolitical dynamics, environmental (in)justice, food consumption, globalization etc. significantly affect food security.

Climate change, with its associated extreme weather events and shifting weather patterns, including more frequent disasters and emergencies disrupts agricultural production by affecting crop yields

and livestock health. For instance, increased frequency of droughts and floods can lead to reduced agricultural output, impacting food availability and driving up prices. For instance, the FAO has reported that climate change could reduce global cereal production by up to 10% by 2050, which poses a serious threat to food availability. Natural resources are being subject to unprecedented pressure from human activities. The fact that agricultural land, which is a limited resource, is competed for not only by plants used as human food, but also by those used as animal feed, as well as raw material for biofuel production, puts additional pressure on food safety. Additionally, photovoltaics encroach on agricultural land increasing the pressure on food production.

Population growth further intensifies the pressure on food systems. The global population is expected to reach nearly 9.7 billion by 2050, significantly increasing demand for food. This increase in demand for food puts additional pressure on agricultural systems to produce more food sustainably. Meeting this demand requires innovative agricultural practices and significant investment in food production systems. One of the joint reports from the FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and the WHO reported that 702–828 million people faced acute food insecurity in 2021, almost 150 million more than in the pre-pandemic period. Changing patterns in the types of food consumed, resulting from economic expansion, globalization and urbanization, are also significant factor which affect food security. Human numbers have more than doubled since 1960, yet the global supply of food calories per capita rose from 2420 kcal per day in 1958 to 2808 kcal in 1999 (Gilland, 2002).

Globalization is affecting the agriculture sector and food security, with major implications for the free trade of food and access to markets and information as well as the availability of land for food production and food prices (Pitrova and Lukaskova, 2018). Also, rural-urban migration is increasing considerably, (urban areas accounting 70 percent of the global population in 2050). If we add GMO, corporatization of agriculture etc., all this lead to environmental injustice. A 2006 “Manifesto on the Future of Seeds” affirms that: “Seeds are a gift of nature, of past generations and diverse cultures. As such it is our inherent duty and responsibility to protect them and to pass them on to future generations. Seeds are the first link in the food chain, and the embodiment of biological and cultural diversity, and the repository of life’s future evolution.” For centuries, “the

free exchange of seed among farmers has been the basis of maintaining biodiversity as well as food security." Moreover, "the exchange goes beyond the actual seed: it extends to the sharing and exchange of ideas and knowledge, of culture and heritage." Now, however, the erosion of seed "diversity has been propelled by industrial agriculture's drive for homogenization." New property rights and technologies "are transforming seed from a commons shared by farmers to a commodity monopolized by corporations." (Traer, 2020).

Geopolitical factors, including conflicts and trade disputes, also affect food security. Conflicts can lead to the destruction of agricultural infrastructure and disrupt food supply chains, while trade barriers and economic sanctions can restrict access to essential food products. Free trade also destroys food self-sufficiency. "Food is not a commodity like others," Clinton learned. "We should go back to a policy of maximum food self-sufficiency. It is crazy for us to think we can develop countries around the world without increasing their ability to feed themselves."(ibid.)

The global food security situation in 2024 remains precarious, with significant challenges that vary across regions and income groups. Globally, food insecurity remains high, with about 11.6% of the global population experiencing severe food insecurity as of 2023. While there has been a slight improvement since the peak of 11.9% during the COVID-19 pandemic and the aftermath of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the recovery is slow and uneven. Low-income and heavily indebted countries are particularly vulnerable, facing worsening conditions and a projected increase in food insecurity over the next few years.

Impact of conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East on world food security

The war in Ukraine has had a profound impact on global food security, with several key consequences. Ukraine is one of the world's largest exporters of wheat, corn, barley, and sunflower oil. The conflict has severely disrupted agricultural production and export logistics, leading to significant reductions in global supply. The Black Sea region, where much of Ukraine's grain exports are shipped, has been particularly affected by blockades and attacks on ports.The reduced availability of

Ukrainian grain has caused a ripple effect across global markets, leading to sharp increases in food prices. This has hit particularly hard in countries that rely heavily on imports from Ukraine, such as those in the Middle East and North Africa.

The war has contributed to record-high global food prices. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported significant price spikes in wheat, corn, and other staples, exacerbating the cost-of-living crises in many countries.Countries with already fragile economies have been most affected, as the rising cost of food imports strains national budgets and increases food insecurity. This has led to greater hunger and malnutrition, particularly in regions like sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Russia and Belarus, key allies of Ukraine, are major exporters of fertilizers. The conflict and subsequent sanctions have disrupted these exports, leading to global shortages of fertilizers. This has reduced agricultural productivity in other parts of the world, further exacerbating food supply issues.The war has also led to a humanitarian crisis within Ukraine and surrounding regions, displacing millions of people and creating additional food security challenges in refugee-hosting countries.

The displacement of people has put additional pressure on food systems in neighboring countries, increasing demand and straining resources in areas already vulnerable to food insecurity. The conflict has led to the destruction of farmland, equipment, and infrastructure in Ukraine, which will have long-lasting effects on its agricultural output. Rebuilding these systems will take years, prolonging the impact on global food supplies. The presence of landmines and unexploded ordnance in agricultural areas further complicates the resumption of farming activities, posing long-term risks to food production.

European countries, particularly those bordering Ukraine, have experienced increased food prices and supply chain disruptions. While Europe is less dependent on Ukrainian grain than some other regions, the impact on food prices and availability has been noticeable. The war has highlighted the role of food security in global diplomacy. Countries that are heavily reliant on Ukrainian and Russian grain have been forced to seek alternative suppliers, reshaping global trade patterns and alliances.

In summary, the Ukraine war has significantly disrupted global food security, driving up prices, reducing supplies, and exacerbating vulnerabilities, particularly in low-income countries. The conflict has also

highlighted the interconnectedness of global food systems and the severe consequences of disruptions in key agricultural regions. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated international efforts to stabilize markets, support affected populations, and rebuild agricultural infrastructure.

The war in Ukraine has had a quantifiable impact on global food security, with specific numbers illustrating the severity of the situation:

1. Wheat Exports: Ukraine's wheat exports dropped dramatically due to the conflict. Before the war, Ukraine exported about 20 million tons of wheat annually, accounting for roughly 10% of global wheat exports. The war has cut these exports by more than half, significantly disrupting global wheat supplies.
2. Corn Exports: Ukraine was responsible for 16% of global corn exports before the war. The conflict has severely reduced these exports, contributing to global shortages and price increases.
3. Global Food Price Increases: According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the global food price index reached an all-time high in 2022 due to the war. Wheat prices increased by 40-50% compared to pre-war levels, with similar increases seen in other grains and oilseeds.
4. Fertilizer Prices: The war has also driven up fertilizer prices, with some reports indicating increases of 100-200%. This has raised the cost of agricultural production globally, which in turn has driven up food prices.
5. Impact on Global Hunger: The United Nations World Food Programmed (WFP) estimated that the war in Ukraine could push an additional 47 million people into acute hunger, especially in regions heavily dependent on Ukrainian and Russian grain
6. The overall number of people facing food insecurity worldwide rose to over 828 million in 2022, partially due to the war's impact on food prices and availability.
7. Loss of Agricultural Output: It is estimated that Ukraine lost nearly 20-30% of its arable land to either direct conflict or abandonment due to the war, significantly reducing its agricultural output.
8. In 2022 alone, Ukrainian grain production dropped by 40-50% compared to the pre-war average, affecting not only Ukraine's economy but also global food supplies. (Mottaleb at al 2022).

These numbers underscore the significant impact the war in Ukraine has had on global food security, driving up prices, reducing supplies, and exacerbating hunger in vulnerable regions.

From another side, impact of conflict in Palestine and the broader region on world food security is multifaceted:

1. Disruption of Agriculture: Wars and conflicts often lead to the destruction of farmland, irrigation systems, and agricultural infrastructure. This disrupts local food production, making it difficult for communities to grow and harvest crops.
2. Supply Chain Interruptions: Conflicts can cause disruptions in the supply chain, affecting the distribution of food both locally and internationally. For example, ports, roads, and transportation networks may be damaged, hindering the movement of food supplies.
3. Economic Instability: Conflict leads to economic instability, which can result in higher food prices and reduced purchasing power. This can exacerbate food insecurity not only in the conflict zones but also in neighboring regions that depend on the same supply chains.
4. Humanitarian Crises: Conflicts often lead to large-scale displacement of people, creating refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). This population movement can strain food resources in both the areas from which people flee and the areas where they seek refuge.
5. Global Market Fluctuations: Regional conflicts can sometimes affect global food markets, especially if they involve key agricultural producers or disrupt significant trade routes. This can lead to price volatility and uncertainty in global food markets.
6. Humanitarian Aid Challenges: Providing humanitarian aid in conflict zones can be difficult and dangerous. Aid organizations might face restrictions or threats that prevent them from delivering food and other essential resources to those in need.

Overall, while the direct effects of regional conflicts on global food security may vary, the ripple effects can influence food availability, prices, and stability worldwide. Quantifying the exact impact of conflict

on food security can be challenging, but here are some relevant statistics and figures that illustrate the broader impacts:

1. **Destruction of Agriculture**: total of 36.9% of destroyed land—more than 75% of the Gaza Strip's agricultural land, roughly 80% of the area containing greenhouses there was destroyed, had damaged hundreds of agricultural buildings, including 256 agricultural warehouses, 484 broiler farms, 397 sheep barns, and 537 household barns, plus roughly 46% of the Strip's 2,261 agricultural wells.
2. **Economic Impact**: Official data reveals a 35 percent decline in real GDP in the first quarter of 2024 for the Palestinian territories overall, marking its largest economic contraction on record. The conflict has brought Gaza's economy to the brink of total collapse, nearly every Gazan currently lives in poverty. The Palestinian Authority's (PA) financing gap is projected to reach US$1.86 billion in 2024,3 more than double the gap of 2023, which may pose elevated risks for a systemic failure, especially affecting public service delivery and at least over the short term.
3. **Food Prices**: Conflicts can drive up food prices. As a result, food insecurity in Gaza has soared, pushing nearly 2 million people to the edge of widespread famine**.**
4. **Humanitarian Needs**: The situation on the ground in Gaza has developed into a full-fledged humanitarian catastrophe, with continued hostilities and sieges preventing entry of essential supplies, including water, food, fuel, non-food items, essential medical supplies and medicines**.**
5. **Displacement**: The humanitarian situation is exacerbated by the displacement of approximately 1.9 million people, 2 with shelters overflowing and insufficient sanitation services. (World Bank economic report, 2024)**.**

These numbers reflect the broader impacts that conflicts can have on food security, illustrating both direct and indirect effects on food availability, prices, and stability globally.

Economic implications of wars on food security

The allocation of resources towards military spending rather than food security can exacerbate economic disparities. Countries with high military spending often have fewer resources available for social programs, including those aimed at improving food security and agricultural development The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI 2023) reported that global military spending reached approximately $2.2 trillion in 2022. This substantial expenditure highlights the disparity between investment in defense and the funding available for addressing food security challenges. The global mass production of weapons instead of food has several significant impacts on global stability and well-being:

1. **Resource Allocation**: Investing heavily in weapons diverts resources away from essential areas like food production, healthcare, and education. This can lead to underinvestment in agriculture, infrastructure, and social services, exacerbating issues of food insecurity and poverty.
2. **Economic Costs**: High military spending can strain national budgets, reducing funds available for social programs and public services. For example, countries with high defense expenditures may have less capacity to invest in agricultural development or disaster relief, affecting their ability to ensure food security.
3. **Increased Instability**: High levels of armament can contribute to regional and global instability, potentially leading to conflicts that disrupt food production and distribution. The presence of advanced weaponry can escalate conflicts, causing widespread destruction and displacement, which in turn affects food security.
4. **Opportunity Costs**: Resources spent on developing and manufacturing weapons could be used to advance agricultural technologies and improve food production systems. Investing in sustainable agriculture, infrastructure, and research can enhance food security and resilience against climate change.
5. **Humanitarian Impact**: Conflicts fueled by weapons production often lead to humanitarian crises, including food shortages. In conflict zones, food production is often disrupted, and human-

itarian aid can be obstructed, leading to increased hunger and malnutrition.

6. **Environmental Consequences**: Military activities can have environmental impacts, including damage to ecosystems and pollution. Such environmental degradation can reduce agricultural productivity and further strain food systems.

Quantifying the exact impact of global mass production of weapons versus food can be complex, but here are some figures that provide insight into the broader implications:

1. Global Military Spending: According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), global military spending reached approximately $2.2 trillion in 2022. This figure includes expenditures on weapons, personnel, and other defense-related activities.
2. Global Hunger: The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported that around 828 million people worldwide were undernourished in 2021. This figure highlights the scale of food insecurity globally.
3. Opportunity Costs: A 2022 report from the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) estimated that $1 trillion invested in sustainable agriculture could help feed an additional 2 billion people by 2030, potentially reducing global hunger by up to 50%.
4. Economic Impact: According to the Global Burden of Armed Conflict (GBAC), conflicts have led to economic losses amounting to hundreds of billions of dollars annually. For example, the Syrian conflict alone has caused an estimated $530 billion in economic losses since 2011.
5. Aid and Development: In 2023, global humanitarian assistance, which includes food aid, amounted to approximately $36 billion. This is significantly less than global military spending and highlights the disparity in funding priorities.
6. Environmental Damage: The World Bank estimates that environmental degradation, partly exacerbated by conflicts, can cost up to $1 trillion annually, affecting agriculture and food security.

These numbers illustrate the significant resource allocation towards military spending compared to food security efforts and the broader economic and humanitarian impacts.

Looking forward, the World Bank's World Food Security Outlook projects that the number of people facing severe food insecurity could reach nearly 956 million by 2028 if economic conditions do not improve. Addressing these issues will require significant financial resources, with an estimated $90 billion annually needed to provide basic social safety nets for the acutely food insecure.

Sustainability in Agriculture

Sustainability is crucial for maintaining long-term food security. Traditional agricultural practices often lead to environmental degradation, such as soil erosion, water scarcity, and loss of biodiversity. To combat these issues, sustainable agricultural practices are essential. Techniques such as crop rotation, organic farming, and integrated pest management can improve soil health, conserve water, and enhance crop resilience. Using of such of technologies can increase efficiency and reduce environmental impact. Sustainable agriculture not only protects natural resources but also supports economic stability. By adopting sustainable practices, farmers can increase their resilience to climate change, maintain productivity, and ensure a consistent food supply. Additionally, sustainable agriculture can contribute to poverty reduction by creating job opportunities and supporting rural economies. Farmers who practice sustainable agriculture study and learn from nature. "Mother earth never attempts to farm without livestock; she always raises mixed crops; great pains are taken to preserve the soil and to prevent erosion; the mixed vegetable and animals wastes are converted into humus; there is no waste; the processes of growth and the processes of decay balance one another; the greatest care is taken to store the rainfall; both plants and animals are left to protect themselves against disease." Nature's food system evolved as a "circular economy." Sustainable agriculture utilizes the natural cycles of nutrients and water. (Traer 2020).

Unfortunately, the trend in agriculture go toward corporatization of agriculture. The extinction of diverse crops and the development of property hybrids and sterile seeds "threatens the very future of seed, and

with it the future of farmers and food security." Genetically engineered seeds that transfer "DNA sequences for individual traits in ways that could not occur naturally," were commercialized in the 1990s. The risks "in this technology for human health and the environment and especially the long-term effects on biodiversity are unpredictable. (Manifesto of seeds) Genetically modified foods are not inherently dangerous, two academic health researchers argue, but farmers using GM seeds must also use the seed manufacturer's Doing Environmental Ethics pesticides designed for these GM crops. "As this GM-industrial complex continues to proliferate, the world's food supply grows increasingly dependent on GM seeds, which in turn increases dependence on chemical fertilizers and pesticides." (Hakim 2016)

On August 8, 2018 farmers from Arkansas to South Dakota filed a class-action lawsuit in federal court against Monsanto, claiming the agro-chemical company "created dicamba-resistant crops knowing it would likely cause harm to other fields." The lawsuit also claims that Monsanto is creating a monopoly by promoting dicamba-resistant crops. In the words of the attorney representing the farmers, Monsanto is "commercializing a product that destroys its competition. We believe that's a violation of the federal antitrust laws (Back 2018).

Under this system of subsidies farmers bought machinery and more fertilizer and pesticide to increase their crop yield. Higher productivity, however, has led to lower market prices, less profit for farmers, and the consolidation of agricultural land under corporate ownership. In the 1990s Congress eliminated direct payments to farmers to let the market control commodity prices, but after prices dropped, Congress again subsidized farm commodities—for crops grown increasingly by large corporations. Low food prices, due to overproduction and subsidized imports from foreign countries, drive farmers into bankruptcy and shift land ownership from farmers to corporations. Fifty members of the Forbes 400 list of the richest Americans "got at least $6.3 million in farm subsidies between 1995 and 2014," and "likely received even more subsidies through the federal crop insurance program." (Traer 2020).

However, governments should invest in modernizing agricultural infrastructure, including irrigation systems, storage facilities, and transportation networks. This can help reduce post-harvest losses and improve food distribution. Funding research into drought-resistant crops,

sustainable farming practices, and other agricultural innovations is crucial. Governments can partner with universities and private companies to accelerate the development and deployment of these technologies.

Current and future global food security

The current global food security situation in 2024 remains critical, with significant challenges persisting worldwide. Several key factors contribute to acute food insecurity:

1. **Conflict and Violence**: The primary driver of acute food insecurity is conflict, impacting millions of people across various regions. Countries like Sudan, the Gaza Strip, and others are particularly affected by ongoing conflicts, leading to severe food shortages and humanitarian crises (JRC report, 2024)
2. **Extreme Weather Events**: The past year has seen record-breaking temperatures and extreme weather conditions, such as the El Niño phenomenon, contributing to food crises. These climatic events disrupt agricultural production, leading to reduced food availability and higher prices.
3. **Economic Shocks**: Economic instability and shocks, exacerbated by global events like the COVID-19 pandemic, continue to affect food security. Inflation and economic downturns limit people's ability to purchase food, pushing more individuals into acute hunger (UN policy brief 2020).

The **2024 Global Report on Food Crises** highlights that nearly 282 million people in 59 countries experienced high levels of acute hunger in 2023, an increase from the previous year. This persistent high level of food insecurity is a significant concern, with the most affected regions being in conflict zones and areas hit by extreme weather (JRC food crisis, 2024)

The future of global food security is facing significant challenges, with predictions indicating a complex and potentially worsening situation. Several factors contribute to these concerns.

1. Climate change have strong impact on agriculture, threatening to future food security. Changing weather patterns, more frequent and severe natural disasters, and shifts in growing seasons are expected to reduce crop yields and disrupt food production glob-

ally. Regions that are already vulnerable, particularly in Africa and South Asia, are likely to be the hardest hit. As temperatures rise, water resources are becoming more strained, impacting irrigation and leading to competition over water, which is crucial for agriculture.

2. Ongoing economic instability, characterized by high inflation and slow economic growth, is expected to continue putting pressure on food prices. This situation could worsen, especially if central banks are unable to stabilize the global economy. The result could be higher food costs, making basic nutrition unaffordable for many people, particularly in low-income countries (foodsecurityportal.org/node/2701). Many low-income and heavily indebted countries are already struggling to afford food imports and maintain social safety nets. As debt burdens increase, these countries may face even greater challenges in securing enough food for their populations.
3. Geopolitical tensions, such as those seen in the Russia-Ukraine and Middle East conflict, can severely disrupt global food supply chains and cause food insecurity. Conflicts in key agricultural regions can lead to shortages and price spikes, affecting food availability worldwide. In response to shortages or economic pressures, countries may impose trade restrictions, exacerbating global food insecurity by limiting the flow of food to regions that rely on imports.
4. While technological advances in agriculture have the potential to improve food security, there are concerns that these innovations are not being adopted quickly enough in regions that need them the most. This includes advancements in drought-resistant crops, sustainable farming practices, and efficient irrigation systems. Inadequate policy responses, both at the national and international levels, can hinder efforts to improve food security. This includes insufficient investment in agricultural infrastructure, poor disaster preparedness, and weak governance that fails to address the root causes of food insecurity.
5. The global population is expected to continue growing, particularly in regions that are already struggling with food security. This increased demand for food will put additional pressure on

agricultural systems, potentially leading to shortages and higher prices.

6. Globalization will lead to uneven distribution of resources for food production (arable land, water, energy etc.) and monopolization of agricultural production.

Conclusion

Food security is a vital consideration in times of global changes, including climate shifts, economic fluctuations, and geopolitical developments. Ensuring food security requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the impacts of global changes, invests in sustainable agricultural practices, straightening food sovereignty and tackles economic and poverty-related challenges. By understanding the connections between these elements, we can work towards a more secure and equitable global food system, ensuring that future generations have access to the food they need to lead healthy and productive lives.

The main threats to future food security are climate change and economic instability. These factors are likely to have the most far-reaching and severe impacts, particularly when combined with ongoing geopolitical tensions and population growth. Addressing these challenges will require coordinated global efforts, including significant investments in sustainable agriculture, climate adaptation strategies, and economic policies that protect vulnerable populations.

What can government do to prevent food insecurity? Governments should expand and strengthen food assistance programs to ensure that vulnerable populations have access to sufficient nutrition, especially during times of crisis. This includes direct food aid, as well as subsidies or vouchers that can be used to purchase food. Implementing programs that provide essential nutrients to at-risk groups, such as children and pregnant women, can help prevent malnutrition and its long-term impacts on public health. Government can also promote farming practices that are resilient to climate change, such as agroforestry, conservation agriculture, and the use of climate-resilient crop varieties. This helps ensure stable food production even under changing environmental conditions.

Developing and implementing robust disaster preparedness and response plans that protect agricultural production and food supplies from

extreme weather events, such as floods, droughts, and hurricanes can also be helpful for better food security. Central banks and governments should work to control inflation and stabilize the economy, as high food prices can significantly impact food security, particularly for low-income households. They also can provide financial support to farmers, such as subsidies, low-interest loans, and crop insurance, to help them cope with economic volatility and continue producing food, encourage diversification of food import sources to reduce dependency on a single country or region. This helps mitigate the risk of supply chain disruptions due to geopolitical tensions or natural disasters.

Support local food production and urban agriculture initiatives to reduce reliance on imports and enhance community-level food security, encourage diversification of food import sources to reduce dependency on a single country or region and support local food production. This helps mitigate the risk of supply chain disruptions due to geopolitical tensions or natural disasters. Government can also engage in international cooperation to address global food security challenges, including participating in international food aid programs and supporting global initiatives to improve food security and negotiate trade agreements that ensure the free flow of food across borders, even during crises, to prevent shortages and stabilize global food prices.

Education and public awareness is also very important with education the public about sustainable consumption practices, such as reducing food waste and choosing locally produced foods, to enhance food security at the household level and with providing training programs for farmers on sustainable farming techniques, climate adaptation, and efficient resource use.

By implementing these measures, governments can significantly enhance food security, ensuring that their citizens have reliable access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food. Without effective interventions, the number of people facing severe food insecurity could reach nearly a billion by the end of the decade.

States can play a critical role in protecting food security while ensuring general safety and security through several key actions and strategies:

1. Developing and Implementing Comprehensive Policies:
    - Food Security Policies: Establish national food security policies that prioritize the availability, accessibility, uti-

lization, and stability of food supplies. These policies should address both short-term emergency needs and long-term food system resilience,

- Disaster Preparedness and Response: Implement robust disaster preparedness and response plans that include provisions for food security during emergencies, such as natural disasters, conflicts, and economic crises (FAO 2021)

2. Strengthening Agricultural Systems:
   - Supporting Local Agriculture: Invest in local agriculture by providing subsidies, training, and resources to farmers. This includes promoting sustainable agricultural practices, improving infrastructure, and ensuring access to markets.
   - Climate-Smart Agriculture: Encourage the adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices to enhance resilience against climate change and extreme weather events. (WBG 2024)
3. Ensuring Stable Food Supply Chains:
   - Infrastructure Development: Improve transportation, storage, and distribution infrastructure to ensure that food can be efficiently moved from production areas to consumers, even during crises.
   - Market Regulation: Regulate markets to prevent price gouging, ensure fair trade practices, and stabilize food prices.
4. Social Protection Programs:
   - Safety Nets: Implement social protection programs such as food assistance, cash transfers, and school feeding programs to support vulnerable populations during times of crisis.
   - Nutrition Programs: Establish nutrition-specific interventions targeting pregnant women, children, and other at-risk groups to prevent malnutrition.
5. Conflict Prevention and Resolution:
   - Promoting Peace and Stability: Work towards preventing and resolving conflicts that disrupt food production and

distribution. This includes diplomatic efforts, peacekeeping missions, and supporting local conflict resolution mechanisms.
    - Humanitarian Access: Ensure that humanitarian organizations have safe and unimpeded access to deliver food and aid in conflict zones.
6. International Cooperation and Aid:
    - Collaboration with International Organizations: Partner with international organizations such as the United Nations, World Food Programmed (WFP), and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to coordinate efforts and receive technical and financial support for food security initiatives.
    - Aid and Trade Policies: Engage in international trade and aid policies that support global food security, such as participating in global food aid programs and reducing trade barriers for food imports.
7. Monitoring and Early Warning Systems:
    - Data Collection and Analysis: Develop and maintain comprehensive food security monitoring systems to track food availability, prices, and nutritional status. Use this data to inform policy decisions and early interventions.
    - Early Warning Systems: Establish early warning systems to detect and respond to potential food crises before they escalate (Vos at all 2023)

By integrating these actions into a cohesive strategy, states can protect food security and contribute to overall safety and stability, ensuring that their populations get consistent access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food.

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