EURASIAN SECURITY AFTER NATO

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IIPE

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Introduction

We are witnessing major changes in international relations. The escalation of the Ukrainian crisis and the consequences caused by that escalation only accelerated numerous processes. A new balance of power has been established, the position of the West has changed significantly, and the role of the US and European countries is completely different than it was two decades ago. In contrast, the initiatives we observe within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS indicate that non-Western Great and Regional powers are acting in the international arena with great confidence and offering their own solutions to existing crises. Is the new balance of power permanently changing world politics? What consequences can this have for international and regional security? How ready and capable is the West to maintain its current position? Does NATO have a future? How the EU will transform in political and military sense? What are the perspectives for the EU ambitions to consolidate it on the base of the "Russian threat" and realize its internal transformation?

With this Collection of papers we edit, we want to find answers to these and many other questions. The provocative title "Eurasian Security after NATO" can be taken either literally or figuratively. Certainly, the unpredictability of further events remains high. But that is precisely why we believe that the importance of processing the topics that will be included in this Collection of papers is enormous. Our thinking is directed towards finding answers on: how to guarantee European/Eurasian security in the future; how to ensure peace; and how to organize the system of international relations!?

This Collection of papers is jointly published by the Belgrade Institute of International Politics and Economics and the Moscow Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and it contains a total of 14 papers (of which 3 are co-authored) by authors from Serbia, Russia, China, Turkey, Bulgaria, Hungary and North Macedonia.

The Future of NATO After the Ukraine War: The Emperor's New Clothes

Biljana VANKOVSKA[1]

Abstract: The article aims to envision the prospects of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in light of the ongoing war in Ukraine. Examining the historical and practical aspects of the issue, the starting premise is that NATO has become an obsolete and dangerous alliance. Ever since the end of the Cold War, marked by the collapse of socialism and the disbanding of the Warsaw Pact, the Alliance has been in a perpetual search for new enemies, i.e., a *raison d'être*, at the expense of global peace and security. During this process, NATO has tried to conceal its genuine interests in sustaining American hegemony and preserving its bureaucratic existence. The war in Ukraine is a direct consequence of NATO's "cosmopolitan militarism" on a global scale. The concept of a "global NATO" or "globalised NATO" lies at the core of this study. The article presents tentative conclusions, outlining possible scenarios for NATO's position in the aftermath of the Ukraine War.

Keywords: NATO, Ukraine, Russia, China, international security, militarization.

Introduction

In just a few short years, NATO has seemingly gone from a "brain dead" alliance, as French President Macron put it (*Economist* 2019), to a revitalised force with renewed legitimacy and vigour. Recently, two states previously known for their longstanding neutrality, Sweden and Finland, applied for membership in the club; the latter made it in April 2023, while Sweden is expected to follow suit in July. While the ongoing war in Ukraine is often cited as the main catalyst for this shift, we argue that this explanation merely scratches the surface of global developments. As far as these two states are concerned, observant analysts have indicated a paradigm shift in their

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national security policies towards more military-based options for quite some time. The war on their borders only catalysed what had been underway.

NATO, as an actor on the international stage, is neither the most important nor the most influential one. The period between the end of the Cold War and the current one can be viewed as a transitional phase, during which the United States asserted itself as a global hegemon and an exceptional nation. While the "unipolar moment", as some have referred to it (Krauthammer 1990), was relatively short-lived, it left deep traces in the corridors of American power. As a result, the political, business, and military elites remain resolute in extending this era for as long and as widely as possible, even if it means bringing the world to the brink of a nuclear disaster.

What the US's elites failed to anticipate was the organised response of the "Rest" of the world to the unwelcome and imposed hegemony. The Russian Federation, which had been sending warnings for years, found itself backed into a corner and responded militarily in Ukraine. China has not only emerged as a global power and a competitor to the United States, to quote John Mearsheimer, but it also demonstrates a greater capacity and willingness to take diplomatic and other actions for the sake of a world that no longer depends on *Pax Americana*. Additionally, the majority of the world's states and populations — the so-called Global South — have seized the momentum to demand a more just world order where they are not exploited or bullied by Washington, D.C., particularly in economic and financial terms. The seeds of a multipolar order had already been planted prior to the Ukraine conflict, but now the time seems ripe for a more dramatic global shift.

In this context, we approach the past, present, and future of NATO from a critical peace studies perspective. Regardless of the period examined, one thing remains constant: NATO has always been dependent on the political will and military input of the United States. As the American Empire continues to decline, NATO may become its "last resort" for disciplining allies and weaker states, but the Alliance's further existence will undoubtedly be seriously questioned. The Empire is in decline, but it still tries to put on different "clothes", i.e., to gain some sort of legitimacy. The provisional conclusion is that there is an increasing number of actors ready to cry, "The Emperor is naked!" just like in Hans Christian Andersen's children's fairytale.

NATO's Quest for Purpose (1989-2022)

The end of the Cold War, especially its symbolic act in the form of the 1989 Berlin Wall's fall, was celebrated as a watershed event in the world's history. The enthusiasts saw an exceptional opportunity to gain from the expected peace dividend, i.e., the possibility to redirect financial means and human efforts from the war sphere to civilian/public aims. Other scholars, notably Francis Fukuyama, declared the "end of history", which was a euphemism for the triumph of liberal (Western) democracy over backward and authoritarian socialism. This refrain was repeatedly and uncritically reiterated by a generation of post-Cold War scholars and intellectuals; it has become the "alpha and omega" of international state-building and the compradorial elites of neocolonialism (Milanovic 2023). The result was the creation of a simplistic Western narrative of triumph and defeat. The role of the Soviet leadership, particularly that of Mikhail Gorbachev, has been disregarded and considered irrelevant in offering peaceful solutions and a new vision for Europe and the post-Cold War world. However, other scholars were more cautious and warned that soon we would want to restore the balance of power linked to the Cold War period.

Very few were aware (or cared about the fact) that socialism collapsed due to its internal contradictions and the exhausting arms race that prevented it from achieving declared public goods. Also, the majority turned a blind eye to the fact that the remnants of the Berlin Wall fell over people's heads. In other words, all social and other collective goods and socialist benefits were lost overnight because liberalism promoted an individualist agenda at the expense of the collective good. One could say that the fall of the Berlin Wall represented both a victory for liberal democracy and a loss for many people who relied on the socialist state framework for their livelihoods and social support. The social effects of the so-called shock doctrine were particularly harsh for Russia (Klein 2008).

While ex-socialist armies went through hard times (and in some cases, even traumatic developments)[2], global changes nevertheless affected

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[2] This paper focuses on the Western military establishment through the North Atlantic Alliance, so the issue of military reform in the former socialist states is not discussed further.

Western militaries. The same applied to their Alliance, NATO. Even though they were made to believe they were victorious, seen through the Western military brass' eyes, it was not a good time but rather a challenge to preserve its relevance in the absence of an archetypical adversary. The feeling was illustrated in the best way by Martin Van Creveld's opening line of his book *The Transformation of War* (1991, 1): "A ghost is stalking the corridors of general staffs and defence departments all over the 'developed' world—the fear of military impotence, even irrelevance". The process of military reform in Western countries went on by widening the military missions to include operations and actions seen as not typical for classical army forces. The first challenge was "operations other than war", while the second was "operations out of area".

The Western militaries (notably the American one) needed reorganisation and a new *raison d'être*. The modern mass military, typical of the era of nationalism, should have adapted to the needs of the allegedly post-modern period, i.e., the post-Westphalian one. Western scholars developed the concept of "post-modern armed forces" (Moskos and Burk 1994). The military was expected to shift its focus to the international arena rather than on the defence of a State's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Almost immediately, a parallel process took place in the form of the privatisation of the military and warfare (Leander 2005). Ever since, the internationalisation and privatisation of military force have become two sides of the same coin: militarization on a global scale at different levels. Actually, NATO is the best example of this dialectics: apparently, the Alliance is supposed to present an image of international military cooperation (beyond the national State), but at the same time, it has been known for hiring private military and security companies in the places of its interventions (Krahmann 2016).

The Fukuyamian world order was characterised by the fading risks of traditional inter-state wars and the rise of intra-state conflicts, which called for international intervention. The Western world is presented as a zone of peace where war has gone into the realm of improbability. For instance, Jung (1997) argues that classical war is an exception within the context of mass violent conflicts. During the unipolar moment, a wide majority of authors discussed regional conflicts, civil wars, terrorism, and even corruption and organised crime as post-modern modus operandi of violent clashes. At first, this worldview was not welcomed by the top military brass, as they feared

that missions other than war would be a waste of already limited shares of the military budget as well as missions that would turn the military away from its primary mission.

According to the former US Assistant Secretary of Defence Lawrence Korb (1997, 24), the top brass' resistance to military interventionism was based on two assumptions: "First, the military did not want to become involved in another long-drawn-out Vietnam-type quagmire. If force were to be used, the chiefs felt it should be applied massively and only for the most urgent reasons. Second, the military did not want to undermine its readiness for real combat by being diverted to peacekeeping or humanitarian operations. As Secretary of Defence William Perry was to remark in November 1994, 'We field an army, not a Salvation Army.' Powell and his colleagues structured the armed forces to fight two major regional contingencies simultaneously. This position, which was popularly known as the Powell Doctrine, was opposed by many civilian policymakers, especially Madeleine Albright, then U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. At one point in the spring of 1993, she exploded in frustration at Powell. 'What's the point of having this superb military you're always talking about if we can't use it?' The current secretary of state embraced what she called a doability doctrine, that is, America should use its military power in flexible ways to address practical if limited goals".

Ironically enough, it was the Yugoslav wars and conflicts that assisted the Western military establishment in settling its dilemmas. At first, with the UN Security Council's blessing, NATO forces intervened in the Bosnian War (1992-1995), but the real turning point was the 1999 bombing campaign against the then Federal Republic of Yugoslavia over Kosovo province. The latter coincided with the jubilant summit, which proclaimed its new global interventionist "out of area" doctrine adopted at the Washington Summit. That moment was probably the peak of US hegemony, which was legitimised by the scholars and policymakers who subsequently constructed R2P (Responsibility to Protect) and human security concepts. Both could be elaborated through Chomsky's notion of "new military humanism" (1999). Other authors have rightly argued that this shift represented not only a change of military and political mind in terms of the use of force but, more importantly, a change in understanding of state sovereignty. Even former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan told the General Assembly that "strictly

traditional notions of sovereignty can no longer do justice to the aspirations of peoples everywhere to attain their fundamental freedoms".

The NATO military intervention lacked formal legal authority in the absence of a UN Security Council mandate, but the advocates of the intervention (largely the Western powers) claimed that the intervention was humanitarian and thereby had moral legitimacy and reflected the rise of new international norms not accounted for in the UN Charter (*Independent International Commission on Kosovo*, 2000). In that context, David Chandler rightly argues that the concept of R2P was hardly a moral shift away from the rights of sovereignty and that the dominance of the liberal peace thesis, in fact, reflected the new balance of power in the international sphere (2004, p. 59). Thus, the Western states, led by the US, took over the role of moral arbiter and defender of human rights all over the world. Then NATO Secretary General Javier Solana explicitly said that NATO had just got a new (global) mission: "NATO, as you know, is an organisation founded on key principles and key values, but those are not only proclaimed values; NATO actually defends these values. This is why we had a responsibility to act in Kosovo, and that is why we have done so. To my mind, there is no better way for NATO to commemorate its 50th anniversary than to do what we should, that is, to uphold the values on which the Alliance is based" (NATO 1999).

Then British Prime Minister Tony Blair went so far as to introduce the so-called "Doctrine of the International Community", in which he defined the intervention as a "just war", not based on territorial ambitions by NATO but rather on shared values (Blair 1999). In other words, in the absence of a classical enemy, the Western powers invented a messianic mission for themselves and their military apparatus. Values were securitized to a degree to which one could intervene militarily in a sovereign state. Furthermore, the notion of an "international community" was promoted on the basis of values defined solely by the West. NATO remained shielded by impunity for war crimes committed during the campaign, which was only an overture to the forthcoming expeditions in Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, etc. (see more: *Better World Info*). The allies usually follow the steps of the key player, except in Iraq. In that particular intermezzo in the North-Atlantic relationship, the US showed its readiness to bypass the Alliance and use another mechanism, the Alliance of the Willing.

The attacks of 9/11 by Al-Qaeda gave impetus to the Alliance, which had been almost described as "No Action, Talk Only"; it opened the era of a war with no end against a new enemy, i.e., Islamic fundamentalism and the global war on terrorism. Phyllis Bennis noticed that the newly created "enemy" provided "a new way to justify expanding the longstanding US drive for power and control of resources" (2007, 15). This event was taken as a golden opportunity for gaining sympathy and even inciting a wave of solidarity and mutual cooperation against the invisible adversary. On the other hand, in the words of Donald Rumsfeld, US military power was needed to "help discipline the world" (Woodward and Balz 2002). The war against Afghanistan was just the beginning of a list of interventions with a similar pretext. In the background, the military-industrial complex has been thriving. In the case of Afghanistan, Hakan Wiberg rightly emphasised the concept of "war for war's sake", i.e., the US addiction to war (2010). In short, the United States of War, to quote David Vine, has always been behind NATO's existence and interventionism.

However, American hegemony has not relied on muscle and military power alone. NATO's enlargement policy eastward, regardless of all warnings from Gorbachev to Putin, represents the "soft side" of militarism. Merje Kuus deconstructs the practices through which NATO exempted itself from its military content and transferred it to the sphere of fundamental human values. She sheds light on the practices by which military force and military solutions are linked to moral good. These practices are central to the militarization of social life (2007). In a later article, Kuus (2009) defined this phenomenon as the normalisation of military institutions through the narrative of global cooperation, naming it *cosmopolitan militarism*. Namely, NATO uses global spatial imaginaries to frame military approaches to political problems by presenting them as enlightening and good (but also necessary). This cosmopolitan subjectivity, in turn, produces a teleological narrative of natural progress in which political actors gradually transcend their national contexts and start seeing NATO, but also themselves, as promoters of global peace (2009, 559).

NATO's overall operation of "disciplining the world" was only a small piece in the global puzzle, which is dubbed MIMAC – Military-Industrial-Media-Academic Complex. The notion of a military-industrial complex seems self-explanatory and obvious, but the role of media propaganda and

academic whitewashing of militarism have probably played a much stronger role in the "Westernisation" of the Rest (as a part of the West).

A Military Leviathan: Towards a Global NATO?

If there had been prior doubts, the perception that the US and NATO had a hegemonic position in the European security order and that they could use military power without the UN's approval if they so wished definitively got consolidated during the Kosovo war (Marten 2017). Everything that followed from that moment on only confirmed this conclusion. NATO's strategy of positioning itself as a force for stability and security in Europe and beyond is a façade that masks its true objective of promoting US imperialism. And as it goes with imperialism, it is insatiable and non-constrained.

At the time, both Russia and China were not strong enough to oppose the US march "out of area". The global war on terror, however, offered temporary legitimacy for various operations not only on a global but also on a national level, so many countries remained idle during that period. The attack on Syria (and generally, the so-called Arab Spring) as well as the US's strategy in the Asia-Pacific (notably, over Taiwan) raised red alarms both in Moscow and Beijing, as their national interests were deeply concerned.

Outlining where US strategy stops and where NATO strategy begins has always been a tough task, as there has always been mimicry between the two. Interestingly, in the aftermath of 9/11, the US government at first did not even want to activate Article 5 of NATO's Statute; it called upon NATO only after the invasion of Afghanistan. As already explained, the UN mandate and resolutions were misused on many occasions, while Washington behaved as if no one could prevent him from reaching as far as possible in the extension of "US national interests".

The 1999 Washington Summit was a turning point in terms of the factual re-definition of NATO's own fundamental act. At the Summit, NATO leaders declared their intention to take on a more global role in promoting security and stability beyond the Euro-Atlantic area. This included expanding partnerships with non-NATO countries, increasing cooperation with other international organisations, and engaging in crisis management operations outside the NATO area. NATO's efforts to go global were further solidified at subsequent summits, such as the 2002 Prague Summit, the 2008 Bucharest

Summit, the 2010 Lisbon Summit, etc., up to the latest 2020 Madrid Summit (see more *NATO* 2023). Obviously, throughout time, NATO has continuously emphasised the importance of partnerships with non-NATO countries, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, but most notably in Asia, on the grounds of a "changed security environment", new global threats, and a changed security agenda.

From today's perspective, the Bucharest Summit is particularly important: it clearly marked another important step in NATO's global ambitions, particularly in the Russian Federation's near neighbourhood. Namely, NATO leaders declared their intention to expand the Alliance further eastward by inviting countries such as Georgia and Ukraine to join the Membership Action Plan (MAP). This declaration could be seen as a sort of answer to President Putin's warnings at the 2007 Munich Conference. NATO decided to disrespect not only the promises given to Gorbachev but also the current Russia's red line. Moscow responded soon with a military operation in Georgia. However, in the meantime, Ukraine has become a *de facto* NATO member state or a bulwark of US interests regarding Russia. This has recently been explicitly said by the Ukrainian defence minister (*BBC* 2023), a statement that echoed a previous one by Ukrainian President Zelensky. These are not only political statements but rather confirmations of what has been going on since the 2014 Euromaidan (coloured) revolution. During the conflict, as noted by military expert Scott Ritter (2022), the developments reconstituted the Ukrainian military, which had become a *de facto* proxy of the US-led NATO Alliance. Yet the US's ambitions do not stop in Europe.

The new strategic approach, which names NATO's enemies (Russia and China), *de facto* spells the end of the fallacy of the original NATO (*NATO* 2022); it is an overt proclamation of the so-called global NATO. Obviously, there is a fundamental contradiction even in the term "global NATO". In that context, the Orwellian statement of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg that "weapons are the way to peace" is also not surprising (*NATO* 2023a). Furthermore, EU High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell speaks of "making Ukrainian victory possible" (2023) and also criticises the "enormous naivety" of those who believe that the war could end with a ceasefire or diplomatic negotiations if the West stopped sending weapons to Ukraine (*Euractiv* 2023). It seems that

Western leaders are ready to derogate the fundamental principle of the UN Charter – peace by peaceful means – for the sake of so-called "just peace". Originally defined as regional (i.e., "North Atlantic"), the Alliance is showing its geostrategic ambitions to *de facto* swap the UN collective security system (Vankovska 2022). Almost 20 years ago, a well-known Western pundit went so far as to suggest that NATO should compete with other international organisations, including the UN and even regional organisations in Africa (Tanner 2006, p. 3). The advances to other (non-Western) parts of the world, as already indicated, had been going on for a long time, from the Arctic to the Pacific and Africa (*No Cold War* 2023). However, the number of leaders openly protesting the US's bullying of the smaller states (especially in the context of the Ukraine war) is growing by the day. The Global South is becoming "disrespectful" now that the states see other global alternatives.

What had been envisioned and drafted in the *NATO 2023 Report* is now displayed publicly: Russia is pointed out as a direct enemy, while China represents "a systemic challenge". The developments of 2022-23 and the collective West's responses show evidently that what the West (i.e., the US) fears the most is precisely a change of the world in the direction of multipolarism. De-dollarization and other geopolitical shifts also weaken the US hegemony, and without the Empire, NATO is a paper tiger. The idea of a "global NATO" is but a chimaera: the original Alliance struggles with its internal problems and the attrition and depletion of its military capacities in Ukraine. The rickety relationships among the Asian partners (and their mutual relations with either Russia or China, or both) make it impossible to even think of a classical institutional design that would fit the one in Brussels. The US Secretary of Defence denies any intention to establish an Asian NATO, but at first sight, the actions on the ground speak otherwise (RFA 2022). At the 2022 NATO Summit, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand were invited as observers/guests. The US's "pivot to Asia" policy relies on a few initiatives, i.e., military and political alliances that are expected to only resemble NATO (as a new NATO is not possible). They include the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad 2.0) made of the US, India, Japan, and Australia (Rai, 2018) and the AUKUS (2021), a mini Asian NATO, as it is often named (see: *Oniroco Tribune* 2022; Crabtree 2022), which is an alliance made of the US, Australia, and the UK. Its end result is the augmentation of the alleged China threat, an increased military budget, and the nuclearization of Australia. The Partners in the Blue Pacific (PBP) were promoted in the

summer of 2022 to get together the US, Japan, New Zealand, Australia, and the UK in order to counter development opportunities provided by China's Belt and Road Initiative (Garin and Romanov 2022). More or less, each of them has the goal of keeping the key states in the wider region within the anti-China fold (Vankovska 2022a).

Globalised NATO is supposed to be a sub-contractor for the Anglo-Saxon one, i.e., to provide the Emperor with new clothes. In sum, the concept of a "global NATO" is supposed to serve the same purpose as the Anglo-Saxon one, i.e., to create a pretence of international legitimacy and unity over the so-called "rules-based order". Phyllis Bennis (2022) lucidly points out that it has *de facto* replaced the reference to international law: "We do not hear about international law anymore, we hear about this amorphous thing named 'rules-based order'. Nobody ever says what are these rules? Who makes the rules? Who has to abide by those rules? But we know that the rules are set ultimately by the US".

The Post-Ukraine NATO: Conceivable Scenarios

Ever since the Bucharest Summit, both openly and by other more subtle methods, Ukraine has been NATO-ized, or, as many have suggested, it has become an object of the creation of a *de facto* member state (although the chances of its formal accession were not entirely certain). But the symbolic war with Russia had already begun. For instance, the editor of the *Wall Street Journal* (Stephens 2006), expressing the opinion of the American establishment, declared that "it is time to start thinking of Putin's Russia as an enemy of the United States". Only a few years later, Putin will indeed become the archetypal enemy of the West and thus of NATO.

The territory of Ukraine has been acknowledged as a line of potential and highly probable conflict between the West and the East, even when such terminology of division ceased to be used. Ukraine has become a testing ground for NATO's enlargement policy as a democratisation and peace zone (or security community) as well as for NATO's military capability. Just three years before the current proxy war, NATO was facing the culmination of its long-lasting identity crisis. Its 70th anniversary at the London Summit in December 2019 was celebrated in a tedious atmosphere. Analysts agree that

no matter how much we talk about NATO's birthday, the event was more like a funeral (*Defence News* 2019).

What are the benefits of NATO? This has been a question that has been posed for a long time. As early as 2011, the *New York Times* editorial asked, "Who needs NATO?". According to the author "The Americans have not hidden their dissatisfaction with the contribution of European partners in NATO since 1949. President Eisenhower then stated: "The fact that we have troops there does not mean that the Europeans have fulfilled their share. They do not want to make sacrifices and prepare their soldiers for their own defence". He added: "If the US relationship with Europe assumed ambivalent bargaining from the outset, the treaty organisation has at least once shown its clear purpose. Now, if Americans ask why they should cover three-quarters of NATO spending at a time of 'politically ill budget and subsidy cuts', as Gates put it, then Europeans can answer a much more fundamental question: what is the point of the organisation at all? Who needs NATO?" (Wheatcroft 2011).

This position echoes the thesis and criticism of Robert Kagan, who concluded that the United States is from Mars and Europe from Venus, alluding to the fact that the former invests more in military defence while the latter invests more and more in so-called soft power. Some analysts have pointed out that the Alliance is simultaneously endangering American lives and flooding the country with many strategic responsibilities as a result of its expansion (Ruger 2019; Cancian and Cancian 2019). *The Wall Street Journal* (2019) found that the Alliance was effectively dead. Douglas McGregor (2019) argued that saying "dead" is not enough because NATO is a zombie. According to Barry Posen (2019), one of the most eminent scholars in the field of international relations, President Trump had many bad ideas, but rethinking America's role in NATO was not one of them. Former US President Donald Trump accused European allies of financial and military dependence on US protection. The end of the summit came as a relief.

Stephen Cohen, one of the best connoisseurs of Russian and Eastern European history and politics, wrote: "The split of the new Cold War is already happening in Europe — not in Berlin, but on the borders of Russia. The worst is yet to come. If NATO forces move to Poland's borders with Ukraine, as called for in Washington and Europe, Moscow could send troops to eastern Ukraine. The result would be the danger of war that can only be

compared to the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 (2019, 29). But that the behaviour of states (and their alliances) in international relations depends on the anarchic international system, and their perception of its survival would make Mearsheimer (1993) anticipate in the 1990s that relations between Ukraine and Russia were ripe for an outbreak of military conflict between them. Later in 2014, as in 2022, he reiterated that the blame for Ukraine's fate should be sought in the West (2014). Despite the seemingly different prism of looking at world division lines, Huntington (2010, p. 46) would agree that "it is possible to divide Ukraine into two parts, a division which, according to cultural factors, could be more violent than the division of Czechoslovakia but less bloody than in Yugoslavia".

In a 2014 article, even Kissinger said about Ukraine that "internationally, it should hold a position similar to that of Finland. Such a nation leaves no doubt about its firm independence, cooperates with the West in many fields, but carefully avoids institutional enmity with Russia". But the opposite happened. Ukraine's determination to join the Western sphere of interest, followed by permission to use the territory not only for advanced weapons systems but also for Western instructors and bases, has made the country a *de facto* NATO country. The resumption of hostilities and the rising cost of human lives and destruction are creating growing frustration with the Kyiv government over NATO's impotence. Brussels has a good excuse not to directly intervene in the conflict: first, Ukraine is not a NATO member; second, it does not want to risk a nuclear conflict with Moscow; and third, it has finally proved to its European allies why NATO is useful (due to its security and nuclear umbrella). Even Macron has acknowledged that the war in Ukraine has acted as an "electric shock" on NATO, giving it "the strategic clarity it lacked" (Reuters 2022). The best indicator of NATO's new life force and significance is the intention of traditionally neutral countries, such as Finland and Sweden, to join the Alliance.

Nevertheless, NATO's military powerlessness could be seen in a few dimensions. First, despite all available intelligence about a possible Russian intervention, Plan B did not exist. In fact, it was only later that an announcement was made for the internal restructuring and stationing of permanent troops on Russia's eastern borders (especially in the Baltic and Black Sea regions), as well as a regular consultative council. Although it sounds decisive, it is still on a level of improvisation because no one knows

who will cover the costs of such permanent bases, who will provide manpower and weapons, etc. In fact, the pressure is again on the United States because all European countries demand that it serve as a protective umbrella. Second, despite its enormous military power, in recent decades NATO has had experience only in some remote parts of the world which had no military power to respond, unlike Russia. The experience of Iraq and Afghanistan is useless (even if military failure is overlooked) for a confrontation with a large military force through conventional warfare. Third, behind the declarative unity, NATO is not a monolithic bloc: individual members calculate first with their own national interests and only then with collective solidarity (the examples of Turkey and Hungary are most evident). NATO's growth also means a decline in the EU's political, economic, and security influence, so the loser in each case is the EU. Lord Ismay's adage could now be read differently: even militarily ineffective, NATO succeeds in keeping the EU/Germany down, the United States in (Europe) and Russia, with the expectation of destruction or defeat that would enable NATO to focus on its main rival, China.

The ongoing war has had a significant impact on NATO's military capabilities and internal cohesion. Some of them include military capabilities, internal cohesion, defence spending, and relations with Russia. As far as military capabilities are concerned, NATO is determined to fight "until the last Ukrainian", so it is hard to truly detect the efficiency of NATO soldiers in direct combat with a strong adversary. Additionally, official and media sources indicate that Western military depots are depleted, which raises questions about the feasibility and grandiosity of the concept of a "global NATO." However, the key lesson from this ongoing proxy war relates to the (im)potence of military power in achieving strategic goals and avoiding nuclear disaster. What is certain is that the only winner in this war of attrition is the military-industrial complex. The war has had a huge impact on defence spending among NATO allies, which is also true for other parts of the world. The arms race is in full swing.

These impacts highlight the challenges that NATO faces in responding to the conflict in Ukraine and the ways in which the conflict is affecting the Alliance's military capabilities and internal cohesion. It remains to be seen how the conflict in Ukraine will continue to affect NATO in the future and how the Alliance will respond to the evolving security environment.

Conclusion

During its history, the North Atlantic Alliance has had one particular constant: inventing ways to hide the bare truth of NATO as an American power instrument in Europe and beyond. For that purpose, various quests for legitimacy (and foes) have been tried: some more elusive, others more concrete. At the moment, on a factual level but also a normative one, NATO tends to confront two enemies: Russia (or even worse, a personalised enemy, Vladimir Putin) and China. If the first one calls for a revival of the idea of conventional war capacities against a respectable rival and a struggle over a geopolitical (territorial) span, the other one is much more peculiar. In the case of China, the collective West opposes and even declares as inimical the very idea of development and cooperation. In other words, what used to be a dominant mantra for the best way to create a security community and zones of peace (through functional interconnectedness, trade, exchange, etc., in sum, through globalisation), with the EU pointed out as the best example in this respect, now, in the case of China and BRICS+, this same (or similar) strategy is denounced as an act of hostility (towards Western economic, political, cultural, and military hegemony).

NATO's military capabilities are more likely equal to the US's military potential. And it has its limits – not only the obvious one in the form of a potential nuclear endgame. One should not fail to recall the 2021 failure in Afghanistan. Things are not going well or in accordance with Western interests in Ukraine either. On the other hand, NATO has also reached its limits in terms of its enlargement policy. Ironically, Ukraine was supposed to be a Western bulwark on Russia's border, but it has turned into a Russian bulwark on the Western borders. In short, there is a stalemate of some sort. The US warmongering over Taiwan poses the question of whether this is a new Ukraine in the making. The Western allies, even the ones across the globe (such as Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and Korea), have more expectations from the US (nuclear) umbrella than abilities to be an equal military partner to the Empire.

In various conjectures, it seems as if NATO faces a few future scenarios, and each of them depends on the outcome of the war in Ukraine. They include the following: a) Business as usual and continued expansion. In this option, NATO is expected to continue to expand its membership. On the European continent, the options are limited, and on the global one, this

scenario looks unrealistic (at least in the form of a classical international organisation or alliance in compliance with the UN Charter). NATO is currently unable to embrace even a weak state such as Bosnia and Herzegovina or Kosovo without deepening tensions with Russia and other countries or increasing the security dilemma. In short, business as usual is not an option anymore because the war business is getting close to nuclear one. b) Transformation into a global alliance means the ability of NATO to evolve into a global alliance, encompassing a wider range of security threats beyond Europe and North America. Before the war in Ukraine, the pretext was seen in deepening partnerships with other countries and organisations and increasing its focus on global security challenges such as terrorism, cyber-attacks, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Now this is a new world in which NATO/US cannot hide their global hegemonic interests behind a comprehensive security agenda. On the other hand, in a multipolar world, few things would likely remain truly "global". The rivals will respond accordingly. c) The deterioration of transatlantic relations as a scenario at this moment looks highly unlikely. There were crises in the past, but now, in the new configuration of the world, they are less likely for an indefinite period of time. It means that for the time being, US disciplinary politics is tightening vis-à-vis its Western allies, particularly the European ones. d) The decreased relevance scenario assumes that NATO could face declining relevance in the face of new security challenges and changing global power dynamics. This could be due to a shift in priorities among NATO members, a decline in the willingness of NATO members to contribute military resources, or a decline in the perceived effectiveness of the Alliance. e) The renewed relevance scenario is the one that the Western leadership is sticking to at the moment. But after the de facto defeat in Afghanistan, NATO (and the US) can hardly afford to lose another war. NATO's victory in Ukraine is not realistic at the moment, but even if it were, that situation would raise major concerns with Russia and other rivals.

These are just a few potential scenarios for the future of NATO. As said, the outcome of the war in Ukraine would make things more clear if the war ended any time soon. The quest for "just peace" is, ironically, a cry for "more war".

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The New Little Entente and other Eurasian security alternatives after NATO

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Abstract: This paper considers possible options for the future of Europe after the collapse of NATO, formally or informally, which is the likely result of the Alliance's continued atrophy and the unwinnable proxy war in Ukraine. This paper focuses on what will happen to European security in the aftermath of such a collapse. Caught in the middle of NATO's collapse, Europe has been put in a very difficult position. In this essay, I will discuss the division of the continent into "Old Europe" and "New Europe", as defined in 2003 by then-Secretary of Defence of the United States, Donald Rumsfeld. In addition, I will consider other factors breeding division within Europe, such as the formation of what I term the "New Little Entente" of Serbs and Hungarians, which is disrupting the use of the Intermarium as a cordon against Russia, or the sub-military alliance within NATO comprised of France and Greece, which is designed to counter Turkey. One disturbing unknown factor is the future of Turkey and its special position vis-à-vis the US and its other nominal allies within NATO due to their complex and opposing interests. In the concluding portion of this paper, some possible outcomes will be presented with regard to the highly unpredictable future of Europe in a multipolar world, none of which take the form of a monolithic element like the European Union, despite the hopes of today's European leadership.

Keywords: New Little Entente, Security, Europe, NATO, Russia, Intermarium, United States, Ukraine, Middle East, China, Eurasia, war, de-dollarization.

In search of a purpose

"Pax Romana was an empire; Pax Britannica was based on an empire. It is natural to assume that Pax Americana must be one too" (Cooper 2004, 173).

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Since the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the bipolar world order, and the beginning of *Pax Americana*, many have questioned NATO's purpose. Since the decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall, NATO has had a very difficult time justifying its own existence. Instead of dissipating, it soon began to expand eastward, ignoring a non-proliferation pledge by Western leaders to the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev.

According to declassified US, Soviet, German, British, and French documents posted on December 12, 2017, by the National Security Archive at George Washington University, US Secretary of State James Baker's famous "not one inch eastward" assurance regarding NATO expansion in his meeting with Soviet leader Gorbachev on February 9, 1990, was a part of a cascade of assurances about Soviet security given by Western leaders to Gorbachev and other Soviet officials throughout the process of German unification in 1990 and on into 1991. A total of 30 declassified documents show that multiple national leaders were considering and rejecting Central and Eastern European membership in NATO. Promises and guarantees against NATO expansion were not only given behind closed doors, but leading politicians in the West also did so publicly. The first concrete assurances by Western leaders about NATO began on January 31, 1990, when West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher made clear in a major public speech at Tutzing, Bavaria, "that the changes in Eastern Europe and the German unification process must not lead to an 'impairment of Soviet security interests'. Therefore, NATO should rule out an 'expansion of its territory towards the east, i.e., moving it closer to the Soviet borders". Genscher also proposed to leave the East German territory out of NATO military structures, even in a unified Germany within NATO. The notion of moving "closer to the Soviet borders" is written down not in treaties but in multiple memoranda of conversation between the Soviets and the highest-level Western interlocutors (Genscher, Helmut Kohl, Baker, Robert Gates, George H. W. Bush, Francois Mitterrand, Margaret Thatcher, John Major, Manfred Woerner, and others) offering assurances about protecting Soviet security interests and including the USSR in new European security structures. The "Tutzing formula" immediately became the centre of a flurry of important diplomatic discussions, leading to the crucial February 10, 1990, meeting in Moscow between Kohl and Gorbachev, when the West German leader achieved Soviet assent in principle to German unification in NATO,

as long as NATO did not expand to the east. In his meeting with Gorbachev on February 9, 1990, not once but three times, Baker confirmed the "not one inch eastward" formula. He agreed with Gorbachev's statement in response to the assurance that "NATO expansion is unacceptable". Baker assured Gorbachev that "neither the President nor I intend to extract any unilateral advantages from the processes that are taking place". At the same time, the unacceptability of NATO's expansion towards the east of Europe was explicitly pointed out. For example, on February 6, 1990, when Genscher met with British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, British records show that Genscher said: "The Russians must have some confidence that if, for example, the Polish government one day leaves the Warsaw Pact, they would not join NATO next" (National Security Archive, 2017).

The reason for NATO's existence soon became the Yugoslav crisis and the first bombing of Serbian positions in the Republic of Srpska and the Republic of Srpska Krajina on the territory of the former Yugoslav socialist republics of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, where NATO intervened militarily in 1994 and 1995. In 1999, on the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Western military alliance, NATO launched, to use the vocabulary of the Resolution on Ukraine of the European Parliament of March 1, 2022, an "illegal, unprovoked, and unjustified military aggression against and invasion" of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. On that occasion, as stated in the aforementioned resolution, NATO troops "committed numerous violations of international humanitarian law, including indiscriminate shelling of living areas, hospitals, and kindergartens (while their allies on the ground from the so-called Kosovo liberation army were engaged in), the plundering of public and private property, and wanton destruction of civilian infrastructure".

The illegal bombing of the Serbs solidified the reason for the existence of this military alliance in the eyes of the political West, but, on the other hand, it inevitably caused chain reactions that irreversibly disrupted the decades-long international order. One of them was putting an end to the vision for a geopolitical order that had been established at the conferences of the victorious powers of the Second World War in 1943 in Tehran and in 1945 at Yalta and Potsdam. The second but equally significant consequence is that the US's flagrant violation of international law, such as military aggression without a decision of the United Nations Security Council,

caused alarm in Russia, which had a decisive effect on the end of the era of Boris Yeltsin and the coming to power of Vladimir Putin. Among the Russian elites and throughout Russian society, a turning point occurred, at which point Russia's "honeymoon" with the West was understood to have been a deception, and awareness arose that the expansion of NATO to the east was ultimately directed against Russia. "The only vision NATO seems to have for the Balkans is full integration, and for the Serbs, absolute capitulation is the only compromise they could and should hope for. NATO-orchestrated changes in Kosovo, Republika Srpska, Montenegro, and Macedonia, and relations with Russia are the most glaring examples of such a calculated policy. The new cold war with Russia is what is driving the rapid NATO-ization of the Balkans, as are the general insecurity and dissonant tones coming from different centres of the political West. Lord Hastings Lionel Ismay, NATO's first Secretary General, once famously said that the role of NATO is to "keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down". From the early 1990s, the goal of NATO in the Balkans has been to keep the Russians out, NATO in, and the Serbs down" (Gajić, Ponomareva 2020, 83).

The next major crisis occurred in 2003 with the Western invasion of Iraq, led by the United States. That crisis divided Europe into old and new, as defined by then-US Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld (Hooper, Black, 2003). In France, especially, but also in other Western European countries, the idea surfaced that Europe should create its own security framework outside of NATO. On the other hand, Eastern European countries, former members of the Warsaw Pact, became increasingly aggressive and enthusiastic members of the Western military alliance. They saw NATO as a ticket to the European Union and the EU as heaven on Earth. At that time, not only did the political elites believe this, but so did many nations among the candidate countries for NATO and the EU.

All this changed in 2007 with Putin's historic speech at the 43rd Security Conference in Munich. With an unprecedented openness and ferocity that stunned the West and shook its previously unquestionable self-confidence, the Russian president, in a speech on February 10, 2007, attacked the policy of the US, then the only superpower, as well as the militarization of international relations and the increasingly frequent unilateral and illegitimate use of force, arguing that it only creates new tragedies and

tensions. Putin said that the unipolar world is incompatible with modern times and that the use of force is legitimate only with the blessing of the UN, which cannot be replaced by either NATO or the EU, warning that no pressing problem can be solved without Russia: from the Middle East, through Iran, to Kosovo and Metohija. He also fiercely criticised NATO's expansion to Russia's borders despite earlier firm assurances that the Western military alliance would not expand beyond the eastern borders of a united Germany (Putin, 2007). Then it became clear to the West that Moscow would not stand idly by NATO's eastward expansion, and in 2008, the five-day war in Georgia demonstrated this in practice.

This led to a new moment of loss of confidence among the members regarding the purpose of the Alliance. France, especially with the coming to power of President Emmanuel Macron in 2017, has been at the forefront of rhetoric about European security forces outside of NATO. After Donald Trump's statement during the 2016 presidential campaign that the Alliance was obsolete, Macron stated that NATO had experienced "brain death" (The Economist 2019).

Things are also changing following the escalation of the eight-year war in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, which has brought upon a new revival of NATO, whose purpose is now to openly confront Russia. NATO is growing more and more involved in the war, and practically all members of the Alliance, with the exception of Hungary, are sending huge amounts of military aid, including "volunteers" to fight against Russia. As time passes, it is increasingly clear that this proxy war, in which the Ukrainian army is little more than cannon fodder, is not developing in NATO's favour.

In response to the situation, Macron has revived the narrative of European security and the strategic autonomous defence of Europe in relation to the US (Rasqouet 2023). It seems, however, that it is a bit too late for such an initiative now that the US has utterly humiliated and subdued the whole of Europe. This goes especially for the leading duo of the EU, France and, perhaps even more so, Germany; the US has essentially made them vassals once again, albeit more obviously.

Despite everything, NATO continues to grow: for now, to Finland, and most probably soon to Sweden as well, though the process is currently handicapped by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Turkey, but that may change as was promised by Erdoğan at the Vilnius NATO Summit in July 2023.

All in all, against the background of the war in Ukraine, NATO continues to expand, but it is very possible that it will soon suffer the fate of an overinflated balloon. Here we will consider possible security options for countries of the Alliance after the collapse of its proxy in Ukraine, i.e., after Kiev's military defeat. The question is what security alternatives European countries will seek for themselves, both those that are members of NATO and those that are under the political influence of the Western military alliance, particularly in Southeast Europe.

In essence, the true dominance of the West lasted from 1991 until it was symbolically shattered by the terrorist attack on New York's twin towers on September 11, 2001. The 1990s were a period of invincibility and belief in the global moral superiority of the West. In addition to the collapse of the Soviet Union, 1991 also marked the first CNN war, i.e., the highly televised Gulf War, which created the perception of the complete invincibility of the American army and the United States. Television observers around the world could watch targets marked with a cross that then exploded, which sent a powerful message of American omnipotence. American weapons seemed absolutely supreme and precise, in accordance with the perception of American moral superiority.

Robert Cooper writes in the book *The Breaking of Nations: Order and Chaos in the Twenty-First Century* that Western superiority is fundamentally based on a monopoly over superior weapons: "The doctrine of prevention therefore needs to be complemented by a doctrine of enduring strategic superiority – and this is, in fact, the main theme of the US National Security Strategy" (Cooper 2004, 65). It is interesting that this book was published in 2002, a year after the first serious blow against the US and the first crack in the monolithic facade of the West, the first hint of the coming collapse of Western dominance.

Regardless of the circumstances behind the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, what we know for sure are the consequences. The results have been fantastically described by Naomi Klein in her book *The Shock Doctrine*, which shows how American society is drifting towards systemic totalitarianism via the creation of a series of intelligence agencies that monitor not only foreigners but also their own citizens, limiting domestic freedoms and the rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States. "First, the White House used the

omnipresent sense of peril in the aftermath of 9/11 to dramatically increase the policing, surveillance, detention, and war-waging powers of the executive branch – a power grab that the military historian Andrew Bacevich has termed 'a rolling coup'. Then those newly enhanced and richly funded functions of security, invasion, occupation and reconstruction were immediately outsourced, handed over to the private sector to perform at a profit" (Klein 2007, 576–577). She compares these policies to those employed by the Nazis.

The bottom line here is that the images of the 9/11 attacks that were aired in real time around the world had the effect of shattering the Western myth of invincibility. The staggering shock of the events in New York and Washington and the collapse of the twin towers of the World Trade Centre were etched into the collective memory of all of humanity. These attacks represented the beginning of the end for the Pax Americana. Even if we were to accept the conspiracy theories arguing that US elites organised the attacks themselves behind the scenes in order to justify a series of wars, starting with the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and the subsequent occupation of those two countries with the larger aim of preventing the political consolidation of the Eurasian continent that could rival American power, 9/11 and these occupations ultimately had the exact opposite effect.

The process of consolidation on the Eurasian continent was largely initiated for two reasons. One was the global recognition that America is not invincible and that it is in fact vulnerable, which sent a signal to the countries whose security depended on the US to start searching for potential alternatives. The second was the doctrine of the so-called preemptive attack that was put forward by the Bush administration as a response to the 9/11 attacks.

The official narrative of Bush's propaganda was that the aggression against Afghanistan and later Iraq that followed 9/11 was actually part of America's self-defence in the so-called war on terror. The direct consequence of this, especially the doctrine of preventive attack, was nuclear proliferation, as countries realised that only possession of nuclear weapons (this primarily applies to North Korea but also to Iran and eventually others as well) would allow them to defend themselves against inevitable American aggression.

The consolidation of the Eurasian continent culminated years after 2001, with China brokering the reconciliation of long-time arch-enemies Saudi Arabia and Iran on March 10, 2023. Photos of China's diplomatic triumph

at a ceremony in Beijing instantly went viral. It was immediately clear that this was an unprecedented event, and the epithet of tectonic changes in the Middle East was attributed to it on all meridians, especially due to the fact that America had not played a role in this extremely important process (Baker 2023), with many believing that the reconciliation succeeded precisely because of America's absence. The processes of consolidation in greater Eurasia are happening as an effect of the collapse of the image of the invincibility of the United States and the West as a whole. This image has become a hard reality on the ground, whether we are talking about the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, Eastern Europe, or the Pacific region. This has been followed by changes in the global economy, such as the process of de-dollarization and the breakdown of the global economic system in which the US played a leading role.

These processes are beginning to bolster one another, and the almost panicked expansion of NATO to the east seems to be a consequence of the fear of Eurasian consolidation.

The next milestone after the September 11 terrorist attacks was the agreement at a NATO summit in Bucharest in early April 2008 that Ukraine and Georgia would become members of the Alliance. This represented the transgression of a point of no return. Four months later, the emboldened regime in Georgia militarily attacked South Ossetia, which ended disastrously for Tbilisi in the short war between Russia and Georgia.

Old Europe

The escalation of the war in Ukraine, or, should we say, the war in Eastern Europe, led to the exacerbation of internal contradictions across the European continent. These contradictions were pointed out by Rumsfeld back in early 2003, when he divided Europe into old and new. According to that division, the new Europe is made up of the countries that Polish dictator Marshal Jozef Pilsudski called the "Intermarium", that is, the countries of Eastern Europe, which belonged to the Warsaw Pact and were quite enthusiastic about both NATO and the EU, as evidenced by the large military contingents that these countries have been sending to various American and NATO missions around the world. Intermarium, or Międzymorze in the Polish language, is a concept put forward by Pilsudski

at the very beginning of the third decade of the 20th century about the creation of a federation consisting of Poland, the three Baltic states, Belarus, Finland, Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and the then Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (Yugoslavia). The goal of creating a predominantly Roman Catholic geopolitical formation (an idea that was not realised at the time but has recently been fueled by Russophobic elements, especially in Poland, Ukraine, and Croatia) was to suppress Russian influence, which included the appropriation of the territories of the "Russian world" (Belarus and Ukraine).

Rumsfeld's division was based on the attitude of certain European countries towards the American military invasion of Iraq in March 2003, which Washington wanted to present at all costs as a "joint allied action". The backbone of old Europe is Germany and France. At first glance, it seems that the escalation of the war in the former Soviet Socialist Republic of Ukraine has rapidly revived the internal integrity of NATO but has also essentially resulted in the American reoccupation of Western Europe, which especially applies to Germany. Let us recall that the original mission of NATO in Europe, as defined by the first Secretary General of the Alliance, Lord Lionel Ismay, was to keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down. What the escalation of war in Ukraine did in effect was reestablish the American occupation of Germany, as many have pointed out. However, it has now become undeniable, even to those who refused to see it before.

At the end of the Second World War, Germany was divided into four occupation zones, of which three were western: British, French, and American, with the Soviet zone in the east. The occupation zones of Western countries were united into West Germany, while East Germany was part of the Soviet zone. West Germany was unquestionably dominated from the very beginning by the United States, whose hegemony was extended to the entire territory of the country as soon as its creation was announced on May 23, 1949. These are all known facts; however, what is more controversial is the unpleasant truth that the unification of the two German states on October 3, 1990, also meant a new expansion of the American occupation zone.

This unpleasant truth has been fully illuminated by the puppet-like behaviour of the current German political leadership, including Chancellor

Olaf Scholz and especially Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock of the "Greens", a party that was led by Joschka Fischer at the time of NATO's illegal military aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999. Baerbock even declared that she was more interested in the defence of the regime in Kiev than the opinions of German citizens. In Prague on September 1, 2022, she literally said: "If I give the promise to people in Ukraine 'we stand with you as long as you need us' then I want to deliver, no matter what my German voters think, I want to deliver to the people of Ukraine" (Ruptly 2022). The logical consequence of this model of political championing is more than mild resistance to Germany's involvement in the NATO war and the constant shifting of the Overton window towards war against Russia on the territory of Ukraine. (Note: "Overton window" is the framework within which the range of ideas considered acceptable to the public is placed. The name is derived from the surname of the concept's creator, the American political scientist Joseph Overton. By "inserting" new ideas into that "space of acceptability", the "Overton window" is also moved in one direction or another, depending on the intentions of those who guide the public).

In a series of lectures, including one in Belgrade in 2014, the founder and former chairman of the American strategic intelligence publishing company Stratfor, George Friedman, essentially a spokesman for the CIA, repeated that the main issue in Europe today is the problem of Germany. Germany has enjoyed its hegemony in Europe for decades, but this hegemony has not come from the physical or military occupation of other countries. Instead, it is a result of economic dominance, as the entirety of the EU's economy has been working in Germany's favour. Germany wanted this to last as long as possible, and that was the main goal of Chancellor Angela Merkel, but Ukraine changed everything. According to Friedman, the Germans themselves bear a part of the blame for this because they promised the Ukrainians entry into the EU, thinking that they would not take it seriously (Friedman 2015). In any case, it is clear that the irrevocably broken arrangement in Europe was created after the Soviet withdrawal, the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, and the unification of Germany.

The miserable current position of Germany, yesterday's European hegemon, was completely exposed by its behavior after the destruction of the Nord Stream 1 and 2 gas pipelines at the bottom of the Baltic Sea on

September 26, 2022. As American journalist Seymour Hersh claims in a detailed report (Herch 2023), the explosive used to carry out this terrorist attack was placed on the orders of President Joe Biden himself; the charge was placed by the US Navy with the help of Norway, another German "ally". This destroyed one of the most important pillars of Germany's economic power, and yet Germany did not say a word despite the fact that both Biden and Victoria Nuland had openly announced they would end the Nord Stream in one way or another (Yoo & Delahunty 2023).

As a result of the war on the territory of Ukraine, it turned out that Western Europe, part of so-called "Old Europe", was to be dragged onto the same page with "New Europe" via NATO's Russian policy. France, essentially, turned out to be a vassal state, sending the regime in Kiev even more weapons than Germany had. Official Paris is stumbling on the world geopolitical stage: after everything he said in the past, Macron is trying to revive his idea of a European army, that is, of the "strategic autonomy of Europe" in relation to the United States. Of course, there is nothing to be gained from that for now, especially since he cannot do much of anything after being compromised in the eyes of other international actors, particularly Russia, China, and Turkey.

Macron, who in 2018 spoke about a strategic partnership with Russia and Turkey, actually managed to do what Turkey had already done during the time of Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, when it declared a policy of "zero problems with its neighbours" (Khan 2015, 38), but in effect created "zero neighbours" with its aggressive policy towards Syria. France has done something similar: instead of a meaningful partnership with Russia and Turkey, it let itself get pulled into a proxy war with Russia, actively sending weapons to the Ukraine regime and loudly declaring that Russia must not be allowed to win. On the other hand, it has created its own military alliance with Greece (Wichmann 2021) within NATO, which is essentially intended to counter Turkey. According to that agreement, if a third party were to attack Greece, and this third party could only be Turkey, France would be obligated to defend it. The conflicting interests of France and Russia in several African countries and conflicts between French and Turkish interests in Libya are also at play.

The United States has practically reoccupied the countries Rumsfeld grouped into the "Old Europe" category. The only thing that could save Old

Europe from American occupation would be the collapse of NATO and/or some sort of political collapse, or some other highly unlikely turn of events that would bring about excessive turmoil in the United States, forcing it to divert its attention and resources away from Europe. While unlikely, such an outcome is not completely inconceivable given the history of the US and the domestic turbulence we have seen since 2016, including a series of political scandals that are shaking the country, as well as the decline of the influence of the United States on the world stage caused by the incompetence of Biden's administration.

At the same time, NATO, while it might appear solid on the surface, has serious cracks, and not only because of Turkey, which has been leading an autonomous policy for a long time and has proven quite unpredictable. NATO succeeded in making the war in Ukraine a war of survival for Russia, as John Mearsheimer had warned, but it has also become a war of survival for NATO. "Contrary to the conventional wisdom in the West, Moscow did not invade Ukraine to conquer it and make it part of Greater Russia. It was principally concerned with preventing Ukraine from becoming a Western bulwark on the Russian border. Putin and his advisers were especially concerned about Ukraine eventually joining NATO… For Russian leaders, the prospect of Ukrainian membership in NATO is, as Putin himself put it before the invasion, 'a direct threat to Russian security' — one that could be eliminated only by going to war and turning Ukraine into a neutral or failed state" (Mearsheimer 2022). If the complete military collapse of Ukraine happens, which is the most likely outcome, the divisions that already exist would be too great to ignore, and this would inevitably cause the dissolution of the Alliance.

The crisis in the European Union, which has essentially functioned as the political wing of NATO, is also likely to deepen. The process of the EU's dissolution had already begun in 2016 with the departure of Great Britain, after which the UK immediately started to strengthen its security ties with the US and Australia separately from the rest of the European NATO partners. It is only a matter of time before other countries start looking for their own alternative security options.

Unless major cracks occur, however, Germany and France will very likely continue to be "covered" by American military dominance. However, the possibility of serious ruptures that alter this relationship should not be ruled

out. In such a case, it is a question of whether the United States would have enough energy and resources to devote to Europe, especially because the position of the dollar as the world's reserve currency is not nearly as strong as it once was due to the acceleration of de-dollarization and the rapid decline of US economic influence. The dissipation of US influence is particularly noticeable in the Middle East, but it is also occurring in Africa, Latin America, and countries throughout Asia, including in some countries of Southeast Asia, which were, until recently, considered to be US vassals. A significant meeting of finance ministers and central bank governors of ASEAN countries (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) at the end of March 2023 in Indonesia went somewhat under the radar. It was dedicated to the necessity of leaving the US dollar, the Japanese yen, and the euro. Local media reported that Indonesian President Joko Widodo, in mid-March, urged regional administrations to be less dependent on foreign payment networks and start using credit cards issued by domestic banks to shield any transactions from possible geopolitical fallout. ASEAN countries are determined to conduct trade with countries outside their ten-member bloc in local currencies. So, immediately after the ASEAN ministerial meeting, Indian media reported that India and Malaysia were starting to settle their trade in the Indian rupee. As a result, the United States is desperate to maintain a dominant position within the Western bloc, where Europe is the key.

The problem in Europe, a peninsula of the great Eurasian continent, consists of the fact that Anglo-Saxon politics, the politics the English geopolitician Halford Mackinder called "thalassocracy", are beginning to lose their influence. The principle of "divide and rule" no longer works as reliably as it once did because Eurasian countries have started to form strategic partnerships. The rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia is one clear example of something that Israel perceives as a security threat, and above all, in the strategic pact between the Eurasian giants Russia and China. Changes in the Middle East had a very significant impact on the politics in the Balkans: "It seems that Serbia, especially during the reign of Aleksandar Vučić, has begun to resemble a kind of joint-stock company. I have already written that, roughly estimated, it can be said that the West and the East have approximately equal influence, with Russia and China on the one hand and the Anglo-American coalition and the European Union on the other, which, for the sake of argument, we could say amounts to 40%

each. The third pole, the Arab factor, and the Emirates above all (the good relationship between Vučić and the President of the Emirates Mohamed bin Zayed al-Nahyan), but also Saudi Arabia, holds around 20% of the 'shares'… It is an interesting coincidence that Serbian foreign policy changed radically during the summer of 2022, at the moment when Saudi Arabia and the Emirates that support it rejected the American request to increase oil production in order to bring down its price and punish Russia" (Gajić 2022, 83–84). The recent trips of Macron and Ursula Von Der Leyen to Beijing, as well as Scholz's earlier visit, hint at the development of a new policy wherein the Europeans try to find a place in the emerging non-Washington-dominated international order, though we shall have to see to what degree these efforts prove successful.

New Europe & The New Middle East

Given these developments in Old Europe, the question naturally arises as to what all of this means for "New Europe". As things stand now, it seems that not only the governments but also the populations of the countries that were either part of the Soviet Union, such as the Baltic countries, or those that were in the Warsaw Pact, such as Poland or Romania, are by and large quite enthusiastic about the war in Ukraine. That is, they are supportive of NATO's assistance to the Kiev regime, including sending weapons and covertly sending military personnel for NATO's proxy war.

All of this would seem like nothing out of the ordinary, save for two problems that have arisen for NATO: Turkey and Hungary. Erdoğan's Turkey is extremely problematic for the West, given that it is an unreliable ally. It is clear that there are mounting problems between Ankara and Washington, especially since the attempted military coup in July 2016, after which Turkey practically accused the United States of organising the failed attempt not only to oust Erdoğan but also to assassinate him. Since then, Turkey has been trying to rebalance its position. After the escalation of the Ukrainian war in February 2022, Turkey sold arms to Ukraine and traded with Russia, cooperating with everyone, but its position was abruptly disrupted by the catastrophic earthquake on February 6, 2023, which killed at least 50,000 people, including about 6,000 in neighbouring Syria.

To make things even more complicated, the disaster struck Turkey just three months before a crucial presidential election. It is reasonable to presume that now that Erdoğan has barely succeeded in maintaining his position, he will try to continue to engage in this geopolitical balancing act, but there is now a question as to how long such a policy will remain possible, considering that only a month after the earthquake, the political circumstances in the neighbourhood have changed drastically. Under the auspices of China and with Russia undoubtedly in the background, while the Americans were completely excluded, a second earthquake occurred, this time geopolitical: the two arch-enemies, Saudi Arabia and Iran, reconciled, concluding an agreement that practically ended the alliance between the Gulf monarchies and the United States. Indirectly, the agreement also disrupted allied relations between the Gulf countries and Israel. An alliance that was never publicly announced, for understandable reasons.

The US-Saudi alliance, however, was already on shaky legs, as was clearly seen in July 2022 during Biden's visit to the kingdom (House 2022), when he tried to convince the hosts to increase oil production in order to lower its price. The American calculation was clear: increasing oil production would reduce Russia's income and significantly reduce inflation in the US, and yet the Saudis did the opposite: they further cut oil production. This fundamentally destroyed the American-Saudi agreement of 1945, that is, the policy of Anglo-Saxon domination, which obliged Riyadh to sell oil exclusively in dollars, with Washington in return guaranteeing the security of the desert kingdom, which for decades then bought American weapons with those same dollars.

Russian policy is the exact opposite of Henry Kissinger's doctrine that the United States should rule by balancing roughly equal opponents in the Middle East, all of whom have partnered relations with the United States but are mutually locked in a prisoner's dilemma, that is, in constant fear of one another. The approach of Russia and China is based on mutual trust. These events have created a huge problem for Israel, which remains alone, confronted with Iran, and unable to count on local alliances, i.e., the Gulf Sunni monarchies. We have yet to see how this situation will play out both for Israel and for its neighbours in the long run.

Turkey, in the region where immensely important events are rapidly unfolding, seemed for a while to be frozen by the drama of the tragedy

caused by the earthquake. An illustration of this transformation is the fact that defence ministers of Syria, Iran, Turkey, and Russia met in Moscow, which suggests that changes in the security architecture of the Middle East are already underway. But then again, how do we get around Erdoğan's Vilnius summit *Eastern promises*? In any case, Erdoğan won the tight presidential election and will have to change something in his conduct. Or perhaps not? But at what possible price? In the worst-case scenario, the internal contradictions and tensions in the country should not be ruled out.

Thus, while Turkey remains an enigma, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán presents another problem for NATO in central Europe. What has changed? In the centre of the Intermarium is Poland, a country that, on the wings of the war in Ukraine, took on a role of massive self-importance, igniting its huge ambitions and fantasies about creating its own empire with implied territorial expansion. Those ambitions are based on historical memory and a sense of the greatness of the Polish state and its mission to oppose Russia, which also has a strong religious component, given that Poles are Roman Catholics and Russians are Orthodox Christians.

The bottom line is that the concept of "New Europe" worked, and one of its integrative manifestations was represented by the so-called Visegrad Group, or V4, which included Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary. The Atlanticist idea, the idea of NATO for the V4, was obviously to be one of the security keys preventing the merger of Russia and Germany. When the war escalated in February 2022, Seymour Hersh proved that the United States had mined gas pipelines in the Baltic Sea, although this was already obvious to everyone. Well, to everyone except the Germans, who were and still are too scared to even notice, let alone say anything about a terrorist attack against their most vital economic interests, despite the open gloating of the US and direct allusions to the attack by Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland and Biden himself before it occurred.

The Intermarium concept, i.e., the strengthening of the most warlike and Russophobic part of NATO, is further served by the rapid admission of Sweden and Finland into the Alliance. In effect, the US is practically pushing them into the Alliance by force, without a referendum of their populations, according to a recipe already successfully tested in Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and a number of other countries. By joining NATO, Finland has entered into a very dangerous game,

destroying an arrangement that suited it fantastically, especially when it comes to its economy. Needless to say, the country was far more secure before it made itself a legitimate target for neighbouring Russia. It will be more difficult for Sweden to join NATO, however. That is another reason why NATO will likely do everything it can to help Erdoğan make the "right" decision. Thanks to Turkey's blockade, Sweden remains formally outside the Alliance for now, although its actions, including sending military aid to Ukraine, show that it has been a de facto member of NATO for some time now.

NATO's attempt to recreate the Intermarium was disrupted by Hungary, which actually withdrew from the formation and began to follow its own independent policy. Although it is close in values to the conservative governments of Eastern Europe, especially Poland, Hungary has begun to play its own game in a spectacular fashion. Orbán has essentially changed the paradigm of Hungarian nationalism. He is perhaps the first Hungarian nationalist to realise that confrontation with Russia will only lead to defeat and national tragedy. In changing the paradigm, Orbán was not hindered by his own anti-communist past nor by the fact that, as soon as he came to power, he erected a statue of the American President Ronald Reagan on Liberty Square (Szabadság tér) in Budapest, just opposite the monument to the Soviet Red Army. Reagan's statue defiantly walks towards the Soviet monument, sandwiching the Soviet monument between himself and the American embassy. Yet, the very next year, Orbán met with Putin, and since then things have gone in the direction of rapprochement between the countries.

Orbán's geopolitical choice became even more interesting when Hungary, which had problems with essentially all of its neighbours, created an unexpected strategic partnership with Serbia. It would actually be more accurate to say with the Serbs, given that Hungary has excellent relations with the Republic of Srpska, which it financially assisted to the tune of 100 million euros at the end of 2021. Orbán, together with Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó, both warned that Budapest would block any attempt by the EU to impose sanctions against the President of the Republic of Srpska, Milorad Dodik (Radosavljevic 2023).

On a symbolic level, the creation of this coalition, which I am calling the New Little Entente, was evident at the military exposition "Granit 2023" held at the Belgrade military airport on April 22, 2023, where Orbán, Serbian

President Aleksandar Vučić, and Dodik together observed a parade of the newest equipment of the Serbian army. Only two days after that, Hungary, although it still formally recognises the independence of Kosovo, voted against the admission of this illegal entity to the Council of Europe.

Therefore, in Eastern Europe, we are yet to see how the concepts of the Intermarium and the New Little Entente, alongside the uncertain future of Turkey, will develop in relation to one another.

What does tomorrow bring?

It can be concluded that post-NATO Europe, even if NATO formally continues to exist, will suffer from compromised security. It is very difficult to accurately predict the future, but the contours of the several blocks that will fill the gap left after NATO formally or informally dissolves are clearly visible. On the one hand, we are looking at Rumsfeld's "Old Europe", above all France and Germany, each of which has its own separate path, and the question remains as to which countries will stand by them or whether some kind of new joint alliance might be considered. What would Italy's position be, for instance, given that its interests in Libya are opposed by France and held in common with Turkey? Turkey and Italy support the government in Tripoli, while France and Russia, which have opposing interests in other parts of Africa, provide support to the Benghazi government led by General Khalifa Haftar.

In any case, NATO-dominated Europe is at a turning point: it will either remain firmly under American domination or the US will lose its grip as it has in other regions. There are two potential scenarios that could provoke dramatic change, though both could occur simultaneously: severe turmoil between European countries and/or a deep crisis in the United States. In any case, these societies should brace themselves, given the alarming signs of a coming crisis that are increasingly visible throughout the West.

On the other hand, "New Europe", i.e., the countries of the imagined Intermarium, along with classic NATO member Norway and the freshmen countries Finland and Sweden, will not escape these changes. There remains only the question of Turkey's future, which is extremely uncertain. Turkey is faced with a security dilemma in light of major changes in the Middle East, and it is also uncertain what will happen in Turkey itself. The Middle

East, on the other hand, is marked by tectonic changes triggered by Saudi Arabia's detachment from the petrodollar and the normalisation of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The rapprochement of the Sunni monarchies and Shiite Iran, as well as the so-called "Shiite rainbow" (Syria, Lebanese Hezbollah, and Shiite-dominated Iraq), opens up the chilling question of what Israel will do if it feels cornered by its neighbours.

Nevertheless, one should bear in mind the increased aggression and self-confidence of Poland, which has grown bold enough to begin demanding payment of astronomical war reparations from Germany. Polish imperial aspirations – Warsaw's apparent belief that it enjoys the greatest possible protection and encouragement from Washington and London – have grown to such an extent that, against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, it has begun to openly bully Berlin. After all, the regime in Kiev has been doing the same, so why not? Certain Polish ambitions have a historical dimension; that is, they stem from the Polish-Lithuanian union known as Rzeczpospolita and the messianic self-perception of Poland as a bulwark of the "civilized" West towards the "barbarous" East.

Perhaps the most interesting process is the birth of the New Little Entente, that is, the alliance of the Serbs and Hungarians, which is undoubtedly a disruptive factor for the Euro-Atlantic Intermarium project. Hungary effectively, although not formally, behaves as if it has withdrawn recognition of the illegal secession of Kosovo and Metohija. On April 24, 2023, Hungary voted against Kosovo's membership in the Council of Europe. At the same time, economic and infrastructural ties, among other connections, between Serbia and Hungary are only getting stronger. Orbán's and Dodik's visit to a military parade at the Belgrade military airport is very significant in this regard. This event provided an excellent opportunity for Serbia to display its newly acquired Russian, Chinese, and French military equipment, as well as the latest weapons and equipment produced by the Serbian military industrial complex. American military equipment was also on display, but on a much more modest scale. The New Little Entente could become a kind of intermediary between the emerging Greater Eurasia and the Western bloc, but on the other hand, it could also serve as the western outpost of Greater Eurasia.

NATO is already so fragmented that it is all but certain that it will not continue to exist in the form we see today, especially after the expected

military collapse of Ukraine, which is actually NATO's avatar in its proxy war against Russia. However, the future of Europe and the architecture of Europe's feudal-style security remain uncertain.

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The Battle for Eurasia and the Indian Balancer

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Abstract: The battle for Eurasia is engaged, and it is not the result of chance or strategic miscalculations. One cannot say if it was planned, but a structural analysis of the long durée, along with an eye on economic and geopolitical trends, shows that there was a convergence on Eurasia, or what Mackinder defined as being the "heartland". It seems quite possible that the Russian elite was aware of this convergence. However, the reaction to counter or abort it was late or inadequate, given the scale and swiftness with which the strategic tsunami was arriving. This slight haphazardness pushes Russia to fall back on certain "all-weather" structural elements. One of these elements is its partnership and friendship with India. One can convincingly argue that this relationship has the potential to impact the fast-approaching battle for Eurasia but also to help Russia co-define the world order for the next 50 to 100 years. In this relationship, India will always be India, but it will make Russia even more Russian. And interestingly, this will suit the United States in its careful path towards sustainable multipolarity.

*Keywords***:** Eurasia, Indian Civilization, Russian Civilization, Core Russian Eurasia, Indic-system.

Methodology

When we make a geopolitical and structural analysis of an issue, we consider, of course, what happened before and what is happening now. But more importantly, we are interested in what will transpire over the next few decades. We seek to identify structural alignment over time. In the first part of this study, I will develop and assess some concepts and theoretical

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constructs. The aim is to develop concepts that will help the reader understand the geopolitical situation and evolutions relating to both Eurasia and the Indic system, which together form a unique international phenomenon that I define as the Global Middle Sphere (GMS). Then, in the second part of this study, I will describe how each other's positional structure provides them with mutualized resilience to confront common threats posed by new imperialistic expansionism from Communist China and re-feudalizing and re-arming Europe. Europe increasingly declares that Russia cannot and should not win its civilizational renovation. In the rest of the world, especially in India, the echo of this is, "If Russia cannot win its civilizational re-emergence then we are all lost because Europe and China will go on a massive genocidal killing spree again". Without a strong Russia, the Global South will feel very unsafe and disarmed. I would like to argue that the outlines of Russian and Indian defence and foreign policy strategies point to the emergence of a united structure, the GMS, as a defensive measure against this eventuality. Furthermore, through this illustration, I would like to show how India will become a balancer in the international arena.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Unitary-Punitory Civilizations and Polymeric Civilizations

The current dominant civilizations can be classified into two distinguishable types. The first type wants to see uniformization — everyone put into one mould. What does not fit the mould is considered an abnormality and an enemy of civilization. Here, punishment can go as far as genocide. We can, therefore, call this type the Unitary-Punitory civilization type. Both China and Europe belong to this category. One of the reasons China believes it can slip into the Western hegemonic order without much struggle is that it basically has the same modus operandi as Europe. The United States is moving away from this model through its structural dynamism, but it acts as if it belongs to the European unitary-punitory model. One of the reasons for this is that European culture is stuck in the 19th-century feudal mentality of privileges and is hardly compatible with today's universalism envisioned by India, the US, and Russia. The famous Indian strategist, K. M. Panikkar, puts it this way: "The Westerners were, therefore, considered by the peoples of India during these early periods as

uncivilized barbarians who paid no heed to the laws of humanity" (Panikkar, 1960, 138). And, talking about the feudal structure of European relations with the Indian Ocean Region, Panikkar highlights the following: "British authority did not make a distinction between Englishmen and Indians, but between Europeans and Indians. The exclusive privileges which they assumed were not for themselves alone but for Europeans as such" (Panikkar, 1960, 138). The United States, possessing one of the most enlightened constitutional systems in the world, cannot sponsor the survival of this abstruse unitary-punitory model. In the future, the United States will actively disengage from all discriminatory models. As Panikkar puts it: "The fact that for over 150 years political power was centred in Europe has favoured the development of a general European-centrism, which has led to a narrowness of spirit and a condescending approach to other civilizations" (Panikkar, 1960, 140). The same narrowness of attitude is shared by the Chinese system. All other civilizations had a different approach to humanity.

The second type is polymeric, where diversity is the basic structure of civilization. Unity is the result of a careful balance between uniformity and diversity. India and Russia are the best examples of this second type. Here, integration need not be conflictual; although it has to be mentioned that the Fringe Mesopotamian caste system could quickly turn into a punitive model, there is a structural risk. Polymeric civilizations are better suited to accommodate and consolidate an eclectic membership of ethnicities and communities. While the unitary-punitory model sees incompatibility as its main strength, the polymeric model sees compatibility as its foundational strength. What is interesting about the first type is that the United States is showing signs that it might be slowly blending itself into a unique polymeric civilization, making it compatible with both the Indian and the Russian civilizations. That is a reason why, in the long run, one is led to believe that there will be a structural alignment between these three powers.

However, it has to be said that both models could experience cyclical out-of-norm periods when they diverge from their core principles. That could create the illusion of rapprochement and compatibility, but, in reality, we could be in a period of extreme divergence from the core tendencies of a civilization. It could, therefore, be detrimental to misread the structural

evolution of a civilization. It is very important to clearly distinguish between patterns of compatibility and those of incompatibility.

The Heartland Construct and its Existential Reasons

The reasons why Mackinder proposed his Heartland Theory in 1904 are fundamental to a better understanding of his much-quoted contribution to geopolitics. When he formulated his famous theory, the British Empire was in a deep crisis; India was boiling with Bengali militant nationalism; Britain had just finished with the gruesome Boer War; and above all, it was beyond the idea of creating an Imperial Federation out of its white dominions. The object of the federation was none other than the cost-sharing of the ruinous Royal Naval and its competition with the newly unified Germany in Europe, the US in North America, and Japan in the East, who had just defeated the Eastern naval forces of Tsarist Russia. All this coincides with the British ambition to dominate the four great civilizations: Indian, European, Chinese, and Persian. Out of these four, it was controlling three using its sea power. The idea was that if Britain managed to knock out Russia, it could totally dominate three civilizations by land and sea, even more so by controlling the resource-rich Eurasian hinterland (Mackinder, 1904, 436). In this manner, it could keep continental European powers like Germany at a distance. Far beyond that, it could keep the rise of the United States in check. In this way, Britain could maintain its hegemonic status and racial hierarchy. Ruling the world would become an unchallenged, eternal feudal birthright for Global Britain. In short, Mackinder presented his Heartland Theory when the British (imagined) power in the world was on the verge of collapsing (Kearns, 2010, 190). In a similar manner, the same argument is echoed by Brzezinski's Grand Chessboard Theory. More specifically, he argues that the Western coalition (the Greater United States) should control the Ukraine as a stepstone to controlling the Russian (Eurasian) resources and, by doing so, keep the industrial power of Germany insulated from the Russian reserves of natural resources (Brzezinski, 1997, 46). Both Mackinder and Brzezinski were working under the shadow of declining empires, and their theories might not have any universal or scientific value beyond that.

For our purposes, the core of Eurasia is the prime domain of Russian civilization today. We can easily reject the vision of it being a civilization

torn between Europe and Asia. We must accept it as a unique domain of its own, and on its own. For the same reasons, it cannot be considered an intermittent region between the Chinese compact civilization and a relatively compact European civilization. Russia is a civilization, not a hinterland to be conquered or exploited by the West or China. The sooner we all realise this, the better it will be for everyone, because it is a reality.

The Concept of Middle Space/Middle Ground/Middle Sphere

In geopolitics, besides inter-civilizational relations, the concept of middle space, middle ground, or middle sphere is necessary to understand the structural nature of world affairs, in particular those pertaining to Central Asia, core Eurasia, and the Indic system. The middleness is multidimensional and forms the bedrock of India's and Russia's global positioning as well. In their civilization, tradition of statecraft, and conduct of foreign policy, Indians and Russians always prioritise and privilege the middle ground and the middle spaces. All this makes them uniquely aligned with all that is tied to Central Asia and Eurasia in general. In his 2015 article, Luis Simón explains that "The security of Europe and East Asia cannot be separated from "middle spaces" such as the Indian Ocean, Central Asia, and (to a lesser extent) the Arctic, which straddle the Euro-Mediterranean Basin and the Asia-Pacific" (Simón, 2015, 2). What are the main intrinsic (theoretical) characteristics and geopolitical aspects of these middle spaces? There is no simple or obvious answer to this question.

The "middle ground" or "space in between" allows for mitigated relations or transmission with transition, a possibility of reconfiguration to the compatibility of relations with others who otherwise might not be readily compatible. In this process, the middle spaces can be considered an instrument of compatibility. One of their chief functions is to generate compatibility between extremities that would otherwise remain dead ends, unconnected due to the lack of a structure that provides palpability. This intermittence, palpability, and compatibility-creating function could become a geopolitical and strategic asset if the possessor of the middle ground is fully aware of its functional potential. The middle ground is also a posture, unwilling to accept polarity in a "this or that" configuration. Instead of saying "this and that", one could substantiate that India, Russia, and maybe

France are civilizations characterised by a non-polarity posture. For them, it is a way of life. This should not be seen as pulling towards neutrality but, on the contrary, as pulling the extremities to the middle ground. As such, it could also mean an interruption of a certain process or phenomenon, a pause before the continuation of it as something different or modified and made palpable. In an argument or debate on something, we can say that there is a middle ground to be found or that the divergence of opinions is so extreme that there is no middle ground to be sought.

Samuel Walker, discussing the issue of Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb against Japan, puts it in the following way: "The polarisation and acrimony over Truman's decision to use the bomb muddied efforts to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the competing positions and to reach a defensible middle ground" (Walker, 2005, 311). He then goes on to describe how the distance between the extremes, traditionalists and revisionists, has narrowed over the years (Walker, 2005, 312). Further on, he says that "During the 1990s, scholars of a middle-ground persuasion contributed fresh perspectives on familiar issues that accepted some key elements of the opposing interpretations while rejecting others" (Walker, 2005, 324). Walker then goes on to demonstrate how Barton J. Bernstein made his contribution by basing his arguments on the middle ground: "Bernstein not only questioned the foundations of both the revisionist and traditionalist interpretations but also offered his own middle ground view of whether the use of the bomb was necessary to achieve victory at the earliest possible moment" (Walker, 2005, 327). In the concluding comments of his essay, Walker makes an excellent remark concerning the richness of opinion within the middle ground: "… the middle ground covered a wide spectrum of opinion that allowed much room for conflicting views" (Walker, 2005, 333).

This final remark gives us a fabulous insight into the structural aspects of the middle ground. Notably, it is diverse in content and is characterised by its fluid nature. While the polarities are characterised by immobility and inflexibility, the centre ground is fluid and flexible. This is the structural mapping of an intellectual debate in a metaphysical sphere. It is now up to geopolitical analysts to take this structure further and see if we can make a geopolitical reading of this tri-dimensional intellectual structure. In essence, we would like to know if this sheds light on the function and fate of middle

spaces, middle countries, or landlocked countries. We want to know if these above-described aspects could in effect be a guide to building a resilient foreign and strategic policy for the middle spaces or middle-positioning countries like India, Russia, Central Asia, and even countries like Serbia, which have not yet joined the European Union and can still be considered middle spaces.

In a different context, an Indian scholar, Suhas Palsikar, takes us into another dimension by showing us that the concept of middle ground can be applied to a political spectrum: two contending extremes and the majoritarian middle ground (Palsikar, 2004, 5426). He explains that not many people among the Indian electorate wanted to embrace the extreme political polarity offered to them, so they tended towards the middle ground. This political structure shows us that, in reality, consensus does not happen in extremities; instead, it happens in the middle space. This means that the purported "leading ideologies" sit on the extremities, but those preferred by a majority sit in the middle. In other words, although people succumb to the rule of extreme minorities, they nonetheless aspire for the middle ground and what it offers. In this particular case, there is no one representing the middle ground ideology, which forces people to vote for the extremes because they have more visibility. Richard White gives us an explanation: "There are instances in which the process can be evident, but the space may fail to emerge" (White, 2011, XIII). India has long steered on this international middle ground, and Russia has structured itself to do the same, with the fight against racism and decolonization as the main topics that define the middle ground.

Similar dynamics and the effervescent structure of the middle ground are explored by Richard White in the encounter between the first-nation American Indians and the invading European settlers. He explains: "A middle ground is the creation, in part through creative misunderstanding, of a set of practices, rituals, offices, and beliefs that, although comprised of elements of the group in contact, is as a whole separate from the practices and beliefs of all of those groups" (White, 2011, XIII). Sometimes, the middle spaces do not exist and have to be created to fulfil a much-needed function. White thinks that "The space of the middle ground depended on the creation of an infrastructure that could support and expand the process, and this infrastructure was possible only when there was both a rough balance

of power and a mutual need between the parties involved" (White, 2011, XIII). His understanding in this context can be extrapolated to the international system in a meaningful way. He confirms my interpretation when he goes on to explain that these spaces are potentially "a place in which peoples adjust to their differences while positioned between cultures" (White, 2011, XIII). Accommodation and compromise are possible in the middle ground.

For his part, James C. Scott describes the middle spaces as anarchic places, as bases for revolt and rebellion, and also as places of escape and refuge, where sovereignty has a variegating meaning: "Beyond such zones, sovereignty was ambiguous, plural, shifting, and often void altogether. Cultural, linguistic, and ethnic affiliations were, likewise, ambiguous, plural, and shifting" (Scott, 2009, 61). Furthermore, sovereignty in such circumstances is the result of insubordination, a reunion of shattered pieces: "Those populations that had managed to fight free of European control for a time came to represent zones of insubordination. Such shatter zones, particularly if they held abundant subsistence resources, served as magnets, attracting individuals, small groups, and whole communities seeking sanctuary outside the reach of colonial power" (Scott, 2009, 132). In short, these spaces can be considered "…extra state zones of flight and refuge. The inhabitants of such zones often constitute a composite of runaways and earlier-established peoples" (Scott, 2009, 133). Just notice how two forms of sovereignty cohabit, one permanent and another temporary: "Between these two zones of forced servitude, however, there was a seam of relative immunity to which many of the migrant poor, particularly gipsies, fled. This no-man's land, this narrow zone of refuge, became known as the 'outlaw corridor'" (Scott, 2009, 133). Interestingly, Scott leads us convincingly to believe that where frontier expansion happens, there are bound to be adjacent spaces transformed into middle spaces of refuge and revolt and, on rare occasions, reconquest (Scott, 2009, 138). This means that middle grounds are "…zones of political and cultural difference" (Scott, 2009, 166). In conclusion, for Scott, these spaces are locations of marginality because "… physical mobility, subsistence practices, social organisation, and settlement patterns can also be deployed, often in combination, to place distance between a community and state appropriation" (Scott, 2009, 183). As an escape route from oppression and colonialism, these middle grounds are transformed into bastions of anti-colonialism and liberation.

Maybe it is this confusion of motivations and intentions that makes Jonathan N. Lipman consider the middle ground as being ambiguous: "Though it may be dominated by one side or the other, the middle ground is always ambiguous ground, always capable of multiple interpretations" (Lipman, 1997, 183). When we look at some Central and Eastern European countries' actions, we can understand what Lipman is proposing. He goes on to assert that this ambiguity could have its origins in the tribal nature of the middle ground. "Tribes are what have been called a "secondary form", created in two ways and only in the context of a state or empire. The antonym or binary to "tribe" is "peasantry". The difference, of course, is that the peasant is a cultivator already fully incorporated as a subject of a state. Tribes, or tribals, on the other hand, are those peripheral subjects not (yet?) brought fully under state rule and/or those who have chosen to avoid the state. Colonial empires and the modern state have been most prolific at creating tribes" (Lipman, 1997, 257). This means that in an imperialistic international order, there are bound to be counter-imperialistic forces and actions that tend towards the middle ground. Middle spaces are a structural inevitability seen from this angle.

To conclude on these conceptual and theoretical aspects of the middle grounds and middle spaces, I would like to return to the arguments proposed by Luis Simón. It is important to consider his perspective because he is part of the transatlantic contingent of ideologues that see the world as being centred in the West and projecting an imperial control over the main resource-rich regions of the globe: "Peace and economic interdependence are institutional expressions of geopolitical balances. For the past two decades, the international geopolitical balances have been largely defined by Western strategic primacy, both globally and in Europe" (Simón, 2013, 1). Contrary to Lipman and others, Luis Simón sees the middle spaces as targets for neo-colonial or neo-imperial control because he sees them as temporary or semi-permanent "strategic middle grounds": "The 'middle spaces' — the Indian Ocean, Central Asia, and the Arctic — should be placed at the centre of the security dialogue between Japan and Europe. These regions harbour considerable energy and economic potential and constitute the main inter-Eurasian conduits. As such, they offer the keys not only to the prosperity and security of Europe and East Asia but also to the preservation of a rules-based international liberal order. Ultimately, the effective integration of the "middle spaces" into a rules-based international

liberal order depends upon political stability and the preservation of a favourable balance of power. This requires proactive engagement on the part of Europe, Japan, and like-minded allies" (Simón, 2015, 2). And he continues: "If Europe and Japan are to fully exploit the energy and mineral potential of Central Asia, they must help uphold a favourable balance of power in the region" (Simón, 2015, 2). In other words, Europe should exercise imperialistic control over Eurasia (the Russian civilizational domain) and the Indian Ocean Region (the Indian civilizational domain).

India, Russia, and the Global Middle Sphere (GMS)

One major geopolitical reality that has been overlooked over the centuries is that the Core Eurasian Region (CER) is a mirror reflection of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), with India at its core. The defence of one cannot be guaranteed or secured without the defence of the other. Together, they represent the Global Middle Sphere (GMS). Since the middle of the 19th century, the strategy has been to keep these two antagonistic regions apart. This was possible because much of the IOR was in the hands of the European colonials, who believed in feudal and racial hierarchies. Soviet Russia, following the longstanding tradition of integration without racism of the former Russian Empire, mobilised considerable resources to decolonize the region and fend off the encroachment of neo-colonialism. It has to be mentioned that the United States, in its own way, mustered all its weight to make decolonization in the IOR region possible, especially in the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. Today, the CER and the IOR have reached a new maturity, and although coaxed by "boundless" friendship from both the East and the West, Russia does not believe that, in the long run, its civilization is safe from these extremities sitting on its borders. India, at the core of the IOR, along with prominent countries like Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa, believes the same dangers haunt its neighbours. Rather than being short-sighted, both regions have set their eyes on creating a Global Middle Sphere, allowing any country threatened by "Eastern-Western" racism and colonialism to join this "middle ground" platform in global politics and contribute to the formation of a new strategic balance.

Without surprise, the United States would welcome the creation of the GMS because it would mean the stabilisation of its own position at the global

level. It would give the United States the necessary time and means to adjust its transition from a position of contested unipolarity to an acceptable multipolar configuration. In 2020, long before the Ukrainian conflict re-erupted, Manjeet S. Pardesi argued that "Not only is this psychological dimension significant, but so are its implications. A rising India seeks to emerge as a pole in "a multipolar Asia" and "a multipolar world". However, Australia and the US are unlikely to re-establish Western dominance in Asia – an order under which Australia has lived ever since the first European settlements in the Antipodes" (Pardesi, 2020). From this, it becomes clear that the creation of the GMS is not only about creating a protective system against European and Chinese predatorism but also about managing the United States' transition to multipolarity, allowing time and flexibility for it to adjust without noticeable declassification. It knows that it can safely retreat and have a hold on how things evolve only if the Indic Sphere is revived. No other option would be viable in the long term. The United States wants to delegate Asia's security to reliable patterns of relations so that it can wisely use its resources and time to consolidate what it considers to be Western civilization and its core. The US will support the resurgence of a tried and tested security mosaic aimed at bringing order to the Indic superstructure in the world system.

This is exactly what Indo-Russian cooperation in Eurasia and the Indic system is about. The Russian Civilizational Sphere, along with Central Asia and the Indic Civilizational Sphere, are not only mirror reflections of each other, but, together, they constitute the "Great Vertical" in world affairs. The middle ground that will become a framework for all those who want to create a non-discriminatory, non-racist, and multipolar platform in world affairs is sitting on the extremities of Eurasia: East Asia and Europe. They both have problems with racism and colonial tendencies, as history has shown us at regular intervals. Hannah Arendt wrote the following in 1944 in relation to European racism: "The historical truth of the matter is that race-thinking, with its roots deep in the 18th century, emerged during the 19th century simultaneously in all Western countries. Racism has been the powerful ideology of imperialistic policies since the turn of our century" (Arendt, 1944, 36). Using the Ukraine conflict as an excuse, both China and Europe have embarked upon unprecedented arms procurement programmes. Interestingly, their targets are found mainly in the middle ground, namely in the Indian and Russian spheres. These very reasons have

led to a sustained rapprochement between India and Russia. They share the same disdain for racism and neo-colonial tendencies, or at least have consistently done so since 1945. They share the same tradition of consensus-building in international relations. And they need each other since both are currently economically weaker than the old/new predatory elements of the new international system.

The key alignments in the immediate Indian Ocean Region are the rise of local powers and two outside stakeholders that will form the crux of the region's security system. Since the rise of their belligerent capacity, the Europeans and the Chinese are the potential threats to the region, and because of this, it becomes obvious that the United States and the Russian Federation are the obvious outsiders who have a stake in the region's peace and security. The regional champions will, of course, be India, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Australia, Iran, and South Africa. With the possible exception of Iran and Australia, what is particular about this group is that they all enjoy excellent relations with both Russia and the United States. This is a promising constellation for the GMS to take root and consolidate its position, in which the US is a key player.

One of the biggest geopolitical changes over the last two decades that largely went unnoticed in Europe is the shift in the attitude of the United States towards India and the Indian Ocean Region (Roy 2023). The same can be said of India's attitude towards the United States and the role it can play in the Indian Ocean Region. Since the 1970s, India has been suspicious of the US entering its civilizational lake for two reasons. The first was the increasing cosiness between Communist China and Capitalist America. The second reason was the willingness on the part of the Nixon administration to use US naval forces against India during the Bangladeshi War of Independence. For its part, the US was willing to contain or restrict India because of its friendship with Soviet Russia, a friendship that was offered to America as well but was received with disdain. The general feeling is that the US military establishment was very sceptical of the US posture in the region, one reason being that India had rendered a valuable service to the US during the Second World War as a rear base for its operations in China and the Pacific against Japan. Today, the relations between the two are very constructive; the United States is now willing to place greater reliance on India to secure the IOR so that neither Europe nor China can make a

predatory re-entry into the Indian Sphere (Roussi and Guillot 2023). Furthermore, the United States wants to see the rise of India economically and militarily in order for it to take responsibility for its own sphere, similar to what it is probably expecting from Russia, to seal off Eurasia from possible incursions by expansionist powers.

Therefore, India has a double-edged responsibility, similar to what is happening with Russia today. In international and global affairs, India is considered a nation-state. But, for its part, it sees itself as a civilization whose engagement and scope far exceed the colonial borders of 1947 (Express News Service, 2023). India's defensive system collapsed once the colonials disturbed the Indic System in the IOR. To regain its pre-colonial strength, India has to have a civilization-wide perception of its security arrangements. Thus, India is faced with a gigantic uphill mission to rebuild the entire superstructure of the Indic system piece by piece. It cannot do it alone; it must build and fend off Euro-Chinese expansionist conjunctures in its sphere. The only solution possible is to implement the middle ground method, pulling diverse forces to a common "middle ground" of understanding and approach towards a defensive mechanism for the whole of the Indic system (IOR). Even in its basic construction, the Indian Sphere will exemplify the global middle sphere. There is absolutely no scope for unilateralism or belligerent posturing on its part, and this was true in earlier periods.

An Indian security analyst, Ravindra Varma, explains: "As a country with major interests in the Indian Ocean, India cannot afford to plan her defences on her own frontiers. She has to encourage naval development in the area" (Varma, 1967, 60). This means India would welcome regional initiatives to build security capacity for the IOR. But today, the reality of this civilizational ocean is that it has become a pool of weakness due to the accumulation of developmental hindrances and economic dislocations. This was evident right from the beginning. K. M. Panikkar, another Indian expert, pointed out in 1945 that India cannot secure the whole of its sphere alone and that it needs to take appropriate steps to stabilise the situation: "Clearly no country in this region is able on its own to undertake the responsibility of ensuring peace and security in the area. Owing to the weakness of the units comprising this area and their great importance as the reservoir of raw materials, the organisation of the region for security is of vital importance to future world peace" (Panikkar, 1945, 248). And he continued by concluding

that "A regional organisation alone offers the possibilities of future security" (Panikkar, 1945, 249). To make things worse, the political situation of India's partner countries in the region has not radically changed since the Europeans withdrew from the IOR. If all the member countries of the Indian civilization were decolonized at the same time, there might have been a common awakening, but it stretched on into the 1980s, and the British "Divide and Run" method of decolonization transformed sister nations into enemies. As Panikkar reminded us in 1945, "Politically, the countries of the Indian Ocean area are not yet fully emancipated" (Panikkar, 1945, 250). The first step for India, therefore, is to restore political unity to the IOR civilization.

Then intensive economic planning has to be undertaken to revive the same unity and rehabilitate the principle of "spherical primacy", meaning that priority should be given to the region before considering relations with friendly regions. And, most importantly, never give a foothold to countries with belligerent intent. In 1945, Panikkar suggested that India should take several steps to reinvigorate the IOR: 1) find the means to remove backwardness; 2) urgently eliminate the colonial exploitative economic model; and 3) improve living standards (Panikkar, 1945, 250-251). Almost 80 years since Panikkar's prescription was put to paper, the situation has not radically changed. The problem was that Europe soon developed a neo-colonial industrial policy to strengthen Communist China to the disadvantage of the democracy-loving Indian Ocean Region. India was robbed of industrial capacity development and market possibilities for its goods. The region was handicapped first by colonialism and then by "Communist China-loving" neo-colonialism. Structurally speaking, for these reasons, the region needs impetus from friendly powers like Russia and the United States.

On top of this, India, as the principal guardian of this regional order, has a lot of catching up to do in terms of physical infrastructure and organisational capacity. The colonials had disrupted the Indic system and radically altered its strategic mix. "Countries in South Asia had a very limited conception of defence, which ignored the sea altogether. In India, defences were built to checkmate threats from the North-West and, occasionally, Central Asia. This made the conquest of Asia by the maritime powers of Europe easier" (Varma, 1967, 60). This means that India has to build an unparalleled superstructure from scratch overnight in order to

confront the security threats posed by the combined naval strengths of predatory powers. South Asia is one of the poorest regions in the world, with almost 2 billion people; if we add its civilizational sphere, then it would be closer to 2.5 or 3 billion people. No other country in the world faces such a gigantic strategic mission. Recalibrating its strategic needs and turbo-charging the region's economic development would be a colossal venture, complex, and fraught with difficulties. But let us not forget that we are talking of India, the historical epitome of the middle sphere method of pulling diverse interests together. As Varma argues, "In evolving an appropriate strategy of defence in the Indian Ocean, India has to play a leading role in concert with other nations" (Varma, 1967, 61). Building a defensive alliance in the region with all the members is in itself a constant pillar of India's strategic thinking, which means reaching out to great powers beyond the region. Harsh V. Pant concords with this when he writes: "In all likelihood, India will look towards cooperation with other major powers in the Indian Ocean region to preserve and enhance its strategic interests" (Pant, 2009, 280).

Two French security experts, Samaan and Grare, see things happening in several phases. In the initial period, they see India building coalitions with resident and non-resident middle powers in order to anchor the regional security mechanism. Once this is accomplished, it will then go on to federate all the others around the system. Both believe that the aggressive Chinese intrusion into the Indian civilizational sphere would act as a catalyst to transform the mechanism into an overwhelming, all-encompassing security system: "In the process, the nature of Indian Ocean regionalism is changing, moving away, even if in a very uneven way, from post-colonial concerns to the reappropriation of the region" (Samaan, 2022, 208). This could possibly lead to the formation of a loose poor man's military alliance in the IOR. Most Indian strategic thinkers would agree with this line of thought, but they would see the revival of the common Indic civilization at the centre of the process rather than seeing it as a solely Indian national initiative. There are practical reasons for this: "… though India has historically viewed the Indian Ocean region as one in which it would like to establish its own predominance, its limited material capabilities have constrained its options" (Pant, 2009, 280). When national capabilities are limited, you turn to civilization — the global middle sphere as a natural way out. It is all about building cooperation and finding the high middle ground.

Although diverging in other regional engagements, Russia and the United States are destined to have a constructive and supporting role in this Indic re-construction and consolidation. The Indian national strategist, K. M. Panikkar, was clear on this geopolitical evolution: "Direct Russian access to the Indian Ocean will obviously revolutionise the whole conception of security in the area" (Panikkar, 1945, 247-248). In essence, after WWII, the US was active in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, while the USSR was active in East Africa and the Arabic region. Since the 1990s, both have been intermittently active in the whole of the IOR. What is more important is that we are witnessing the progressive extinction of the colonial and neo-colonial influence of Europe in the region. As for China, since 2012, it has literally invaded the IOR with its chain of pearls strategy. Contrary to some, I think this is a very positive development because it wakes up the countries of the region to the expansionist and colonial actions of China. For both Russia and the United States, it becomes obvious that there is a seamless replacement of European influence in the region by Chinese influence, as if there was an agreement between them behind closed doors. For both superpowers, it becomes evident that this Chinese "replacement" process has to be disrupted before it can do lasting harm to the Indic Renaissance. We are witnessing this in Eastern Europe with the Ukrainian conflict. The first casualty is the 17+1 forum that China tried to use to replace both US and Russian influence in this key region, and Europe knowingly allowed this to happen. Region by region, the US needs Russia's cooperation to square things up and foil Sino-European designs on the strategic middle spaces. Russia has a military base in the IOR, and it might build on this to increase its presence to counter Chinese encroachment.

Nonetheless, whatever future increases in Russian presence in the IOR, they have to be concomitant with the Indic system restoration. Any other format or reason will be considered an intrusion by all the powers contingent on the IOR, especially India, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Indonesia, and Australia. It is most probable that even the US will be against such moves. Every action by outside powers has to be envisaged as a considerate step to support the regeneration of the Indic system. What might define the future involvement of both the US and Russia might not be the number of bases each has in the region but how much defence manufacturing capacity they will have in the core of the IOR to cater to the integrated procurement needs of the regional players. India has insufficient defence manufacturing

capacity to fulfil the security needs of the IOR, which means that as a lead trend-setter, it will look for several safe and trustable partners for regional defence procurement. We should also mention that India will want not only a trustworthy partner but also a supply of armaments without interruption. Understandably, a clog in supply could seriously compromise its defence capability. India and its two superpower supporters should think of integrating the defence procurement considerations of IOR countries into the larger defence strategy of the Indic Sphere. The two superpowers, Russia and the United States, have to see the process as part of stabilising the multipolar world order by giving physical strength to the GMS.

Both Russia and the US have to take part of their defence manufacturing capacity to India so that, in the long run, it can become a common defence procurement base for the whole of the Indic system. There are substantiated reasons for this. The first reason is that it seems that Russia and the United States are having capacity problems, creating tensions on the receiving side (Pant, 2009, 294). This does not date from the Ukrainian conflict; it is a continuous problem. Now that the world, especially China and Europe, is re-arming and becoming increasingly belligerent, defence capacities everywhere will come under strain, and there could be delays in supply chains. This is bound to happen with spare-part producers as well as assemblers. Sanction policies and geopolitical upheavals could further add constraints. What this shows is that countries like Japan and South Korea, as countries with major industrial know-how, should actively participate in the process and converge towards an Indic security platform.

In the long term, this trend can result in two very important geopolitical and structural consequences. Firstly, Russia has to give guarantees that it will not engage in implicit or explicit defence or security arrangements with China. If Russia allies itself with China, it will disqualify itself from playing a predominant role in the IOR strategic architecture (Kaura, 2019, 51). As mentioned earlier, it is primordial for Russia and the Eurasian core to be part of the GMS superstructure that the IOR is. It is not an easy task for Russia because it is also a notable supplier of armament to China, although this might change in the future. Russia will soon realise that making China a strong military power will go against its own national security and integrity in the long run. It shares a long border with China and has a protective civilizational responsibility towards the Central Asian nations

and their territorial integrity (Kaura, 2019, 54). In a similar fashion, the US has to completely disassociate its NATO strategy from its Indic strategy. The United States cannot bring neo-colonialism through the back door into the Indic Sphere. It has to keep NATO as far away from the IOR as possible if it wants to make a success out of its IOR strategy.

What Westerners and Chinese often forget is that before the discovery of the Americas, India and the Indian Ocean were at the centre of a sophisticated world system, also called the Indic System. As G.V.C. Naidu puts it, "Let us not forget that for nearly two millennia, the Indian Ocean has been at the centre of much of global political, economic, and cultural activity, with India as the chief contributor and facilitator of these interactions. Even though none of its myriad kings and emperors ever possessed a great navy, with the possible exception of the Cholas, never once did India's status come under threat" (Naidu, 2013, 236). The structures, patterns, and traditions of the GMS have been there for a long time. They just have to be strengthened, and this is exactly what Russia and the United States want to do in the IOR. The durable security of Russian Eurasia depends upon that.

Conclusion

Eurasia. A confusing, ambiguous, and inspiring concept, as all middle spheres are. These middle spheres and spaces are keys to a balanced and peaceful world order; in other words, they are the shock absorbers and conflict interrupters. Eurasia is only one-half of the world's main shock absorber system; it is a land-based system. The other half is the Indic system, the sea-based mirror reflection of the land-based core of Russian Eurasia. Europe's 30-year, well-sequenced plan with China seems to have been to take over core middle spaces at the expense of Russia, India, and, to a certain extent, the United States. Furthermore, strategic and geopolitical initiatives like 17+1 and the Belt and Road Initiative were designed to stifle the Russian Sphere by isolating it from the Indian Sphere, a repetition of a British classic of the 19th century. Those planning to attack the land-based core could simultaneously attack the sea core, the Indic System, sending the balanced world order into an unpredictable spiral of whirlwind and war. From this point of view, both Russia and the United States have a strong interest in

revivifying the Indic system, which, by its nature, is also the Global Middle Sphere. That, however, is easier said than done. There has to be intensive strategic and industrial coordination between the leading countries of the Indian Ocean Region — Russia and the United States. Securing the global multipolar world order is synonymous with securitizing the Indian Sphere. As military superpowers, Russia and the United States know that for this order to take root and be sustained, the predatory extremes should be kept outside the Indian System for the foreseeable future. That said, things could radically diverge if Russia decides to make a formal alliance with China and the United States restricts itself to the West, in which case the Global Middle Sphere would come under the leadership of India.

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The Security Situation in Eurasia and China's Policy Advocacy

LIU Minru[1] and YU Xiaoqiu[2]

Abstract: Eurasia is undergoing momentous changes not seen in a century. Competition between great powers in Eurasia has led to a reshaping of the geopolitical and security structures as well as international relations established and continued since World War II. China has proposed initiatives, including the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI), which support common security, comprehensive measures, cooperative dialogue, and sustainable security in Eurasia. Multilateral dialogue and consultation mechanisms in Eurasian security will help to maintain peace and stability in this region.

Keywords: GDI, GSI, GCI, sustainable security, non-traditional security issues.

Introduction

The post-Cold War era has brought about drastic and profound changes to the world's economic and political order, including international relations within the Eurasian continent. This transformation has led to reshaping the geopolitical and security structures as well as relations between nations that have been established and continued since World War II. The Asia-Pacific region has witnessed competition, tension, and confrontation between China and the US. To counter China, the US has formed the AUKUS security

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alliance with the UK and Australia and established the QUAD mechanism with Japan, Australia, and India. In Europe, Russia has been involved in a year-long "special military action" in Ukraine, resulting in unprecedented comprehensive sanctions by the US and the EU against Russia and military assistance to Ukraine. Finland has become a new NATO member, and Sweden is applying to join NATO, while Ukraine is seeking EU membership. Local conflicts, instability, and crises have also emerged in Central and Western Asia, such as the Azerbaijan-Armenia dispute and the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border conflict. The Ukrainian crisis has led to a global energy and food crisis and created a new refugee problem in Europe, hindering the world's economic and trade recovery post-COVID-19 and the prospects for stability and peace within the Eurasian continent.

As a major country located on the Eurasian continent, China is closely monitoring the changing geopolitical security structure in the region. With the current momentous changes of a kind not seen in a century taking place, China has proposed several global initiatives, including the Global Development Initiative (GDI, Xinhua 2021), the Global Security Initiative (GSI, Xinhua 2022), the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI, Xinhua 2023), as well as the Chinese Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukrainian Crisis ([MFA] 2023). These initiatives aim to promote globalisation and multilateralism and find solutions to global sustainable development, long-term security, and regional conflicts.

The Security Situation on the Eurasian Continent: Reviewing and Evaluating

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the breakout of the Gulf War and significant changes in the political landscape of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. The resulting events led to the 15 republics of the Soviet Union becoming independent and Eastern European countries regaining their autonomy in politics, economics, military, and diplomacy. These events marked the end of the over 40-year-long Cold War era, which was characterised by ideological opposition between the United States and the Soviet Union as well as economic and military confrontation between the East and the West. The normalisation process of Sino-US relations and Sino-Soviet relations made it possible for the Asia-Pacific region to bid farewell

to long-term instability and conflicts caused by the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the US containment of China.

The world has entered a more open and faster-developing post-Cold War era marked by accelerated economic globalisation. Europe and the Asia-Pacific regions are undergoing economic reconstruction, cooperation, and rapid growth. However, the post-Cold War era has seen regional instability and security issues arise from geopolitical and economic structural changes as well as ethnic, religious, and historical factors. These issues replaced the periodic crises of the Cold War period, which were characterised by tense confrontations between major powers. Examples include the Arab-Israeli problem in the Middle East, the strife between Iran and the Gulf states, tribal conflicts in Central Africa's Great Lakes region, the crises in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula, etc.

In the early 21st century, the 9/11 attacks directly challenged the United States' position as the world's only superpower and its security strategy, leading to changes in relationships between major countries and the geopolitical and security situations in the Eurasian region. The US pursued a global anti-terrorism security strategy and launched the Afghan and Iraq wars. Faced with the grave threat of international terrorism, major countries worldwide coordinated and jointly fought against international terrorist activities. Some countries on the Eurasian continent established regional security organisations, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, to deal with international terrorism threats from groups such as Al-Qaeda. While the threat of international terrorism became the main security issue on the Eurasian continent, regional conflicts and hotspot issues eased after the Cold War. For some time, countries emphasised economic openness and market-oriented reforms, leading to the rapid development of global trade liberalisation processes. The result was significant growth in the world economy and trade, ultimately promoting stability on the Eurasian continent.

The 2008 US subprime mortgage crisis sparked the first global financial and economic crisis of the 21st century, which spread from the US to Europe and developing economies worldwide. Due to the impact of the crisis, coupled with the US's Iraq War, the democratic transformation in Iraq, and the US's greater Middle East democratisation plan, the "Jasmine Revolution" broke out in many Arab countries from 2011 onwards. Syria

fell into chaos, Libya's Gaddafi regime was overthrown, and Yemen suffered from the civil war between the government army and an armed faction supported by Saudi Arabia and Iran, respectively. Relations between Israel and Iran became increasingly tense. Amid turmoil in the Middle East, the extremist group "Islamic State" emerged and carried out a string of terrorist attacks. The wars in Syria, Libya, and Yemen brought serious refugee problems to the European Union, which was in an economic crisis. The serious threat of Islamic extremism and international terrorism also catalysed the rise of far-right nationalist political groups within some European countries, such as Germany, Italy, and Austria, and allowed populism, racism, and xenophobia to reassert themselves. At the same time, the nuclear development issues of Iran and North Korea also increasingly attracted the attention of surrounding countries and generated pressure and sanctions from the US and Europe on the two countries.

In the second decade of the 21st century, the slow recovery of the world economy and major differences between Atlantic countries on global and regional issues such as climate change, trade tariffs, and NATO's role, as well as internal crises within the European Union, further aggravated disorder in Eurasian politics, economy, and international relations. In 2014, the Crimean crisis and Russia's exclusion from the G8 group led to trade and financial sanctions imposed by the US and the European Union on Russia, resulting in the deterioration of relations between the US, Europe, and Russia, which directly affected the political, economic, and security relations between the Central and Eastern European countries and the US, Russia, and the European Union. The relationship between Russia and Ukraine continued to deteriorate.

In 2017, the Trump administration assumed power and introduced the goals and principles of "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) and "America First," reshaping the United States' economic, military, and international trade relations. The US ended its global counter-terrorism strategy and turned to promoting the great power competition strategy and the Indo-Pacific strategy. China was perceived as a primary "strategic competitor" by the US, which led to increased pressure on China in politics, trade, science and technology, diplomacy, the military, and public opinion. This change marked a departure from the "engagement policy" with China pursued by eight US presidents since the 1970s and has resulted in a reversal

in the relatively stable relationship between China and the United States over the past 40 years.

After the Crimea crisis, which led to both US-Russia relations and Europe-Russia relations worsening, there has been a gradual reversal of geopolitical and security relations established after the Cold War in the Asia-Pacific region. The Biden administration in 2021 continued the great power competition strategy and Indo-Pacific strategy of the Trump administration, viewing China as the primary threat to the US economy and security and the "main challenger" to the US-led international order. The administration strengthened and updated security and military alliances in the Asia-Pacific region, issued the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and utilised the Taiwan and South China Sea questions to contain China in the Indo-Pacific region.

The global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic from 2019 to 2022 has caused negative impacts and partial disorder to economic recovery and social life in many countries, and each country has taken different measures of "self-protection". There has been a significant reduction in people-to-people communication, trade logistics, government-level communication, and exchanges at all levels between countries and regions, leading to disagreement and contradictions in policy-making due to mutual misunderstanding. Globalisation and the world's economic recovery have further hindrances. The military conflict between Russia and Ukraine broke out in February 2022. It is the first time a large-scale and long-term armed conflict has occurred on the European continent since World War II. The structures and frameworks of the geopolitical, economic, and security situation in Eurasia have shifted since the post-Cold War era. International relations and security defence in Central and Eastern European countries, as well as Nordic countries, were reshuffled as well. It also caused, directly and indirectly, changes in the geopolitical and security relations of the Asia-Pacific, Central Asia, and Middle East regions.

Looking back on the evolution of Eurasian geopolitics and security issues over the past 30 years since the end of the Cold War and analysing the current crises and conflicts, we can draw the following conclusions:

Firstly, Eurasia is undergoing momentous changes not seen in a century. The various security issues and crises faced by Eurasia are a continuation of the geopolitical, economic, military, and international relations changes

that took place during WWI, WWII, the Cold War, and the post-Cold War globalisation period. On the one hand, these issues involve deep-seated factors such as ethnicity, religion, history, culture, and territorial boundaries. On the other hand, it was influenced by the disintegration of old empires over the past century, changes in the balance of power of traditional great powers, and changes in the domestic political systems of various countries (This includes the political system changes within the countries of Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as the transitions from the Russian Empire to the Soviet Union and then to Russia). It also encompasses the political system changes in Germany and Japan after World Wars I and II, respectively, as well as the alliance-balancing and confrontational methods of traditional European diplomacy and security.

Secondly, the main factors that led to the increase and complexity of geopolitical and security issues in Eurasia after the Cold War were the competition, intervention, and struggle of the major powers in the region. While inherent conflicts and disputes in the different Eurasia regions also play a role, the United States is the primary driving force influencing and shifting the geopolitical and security landscape in the region. Following the Soviet Union's demise and the transition of Central and Eastern European countries, the US shifted from a defensive stance during the Cold War to a more proactive and aggressive posture, aiming to strategically reshape Europe, Central Asia, and the Indo-Pacific. The US targets countries such as Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea and tries to change their political regimes by exerting pressure on these countries in order to create a new Eurasian order and advance its political, economic, and security interests in Eurasia. The US wants to maintain its status as the world's sole superpower after the Cold War and its dominance over Eurasia and global affairs.

Thirdly, in this context, "national security" has become more vital in major power competitions and confrontations, with expanding means to maintain it. Military competition and defence expenditures are rising globally, particularly in Eurasia. In December 2017, the Trump administration raised the status of economic security in its National Security Strategy, redefining international economic, trade, and investment relations and calling for restructuring the global supply chain to reduce dependence on China. The administration also pursued a decoupling strategy and excluded Chinese high-tech companies from the US, citing national security

concerns. The Ukrainian crisis led the EU to seek energy and economic security, reducing its dependence on Russia for oil and gas.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has recently released its annual report on world military expenditure for 2022. The report indicates that world military expenditure has increased for the eighth consecutive year, reaching a new record of US$2.24 trillion. The European countries reported the largest military expenditure increase in the past 30 years, with Central and Western European countries' military expenditure totalling $345 billion, exceeding the early post-Cold War period for the first time. In the Asia-Pacific region, India and Saudi Arabia's military expenditures ranked fourth and fifth globally, respectively, with $81.4 billion and $75 billion. Japan's military expenditure reached $46 billion (SIPRI 2023). The generalisation of national security means and the rise in the level of military competition have intensified mutual distrust and confrontation among major powers, increasing the risk of military conflicts.

Fourthly, there is a lack of dialogue and negotiation mechanisms that cover a wide range of security issues in both Europe and Asia. Since the end of the Cold War, economic and trade investments between Europe and Asia have continuously increased, resulting in the establishment of more frequent dialogues, exchanges, and cooperation organisations and mechanisms such as the China-EU High-Level Dialogue (2007), Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries (CCCEEC, 2012), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB, 2015), the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRFIC, 2017), the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU, 2015), the EU-ASEAN Dialogue (1994), the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM, 1996), the United States-ASEAN Summit (UAS, 2016), the Central Asia-EU Summit (CES, 2022), and the Organisation of Turkic States (OTS, 2009). Three international forums and organisations have been established to address security issues in Eurasia: the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO, 2001), which focuses on anti-terrorism and security cooperation; the Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD, 2002), which addresses Asian security issues; and the Munich Security Conference (MSC, 1963), established during the Cold War but updated for the modern era. Given the increasing security issues and regional instability in Eurasia, the major powers, relevant countries, and regional organisations must engage in multilateral security dialogues and consultations to seek ways to ease and resolve conflicts. However, given the

significant differences in geopolitical and security issues between Europe and Asia (Yu Xiaoqiu 1999), it is not easy to form a comprehensive, inclusive, and consultative mechanism for multilateral security dialogue and cooperation.

China's Basic Policies on Security and Development in the Eurasian Region

As a large country located in the Eurasian region, China recognises that its stability and development are directly impacted by a secure international environment, particularly in the Eurasian region. This region includes China's partner ASEAN countries, Central Asia, East Asia, West Asia, and major European countries such as Germany, France, and Russia, which China values highly, as well as regional organisations like the European Union and many other developing countries that China always supports. China aims to promote economic cooperation with countries in the Eurasian region and maintain a peaceful environment in the region.

Globally, the world is currently undergoing accelerated momentous changes not seen in a century due to a new round of deepening technological revolution and industrial transformation, as well as a significant adjustment in the international balance of power. In Eurasia, the double impact of the ongoing pandemic and geopolitical conflicts has made economic recovery much more difficult. The development gap between countries continues to widen. Trends of change and turmoil show no signs of abating, with unity and division interactions intensifying. However, at the same time, crises also contain hope. Eurasian countries should be more conscious of strengthening unity, fostering more active cooperation, and firmly maintaining peace and security.

To realise the vision of replacing conflict with peace, confrontation with development, containment with cooperation, and decoupling with win-win cooperation globally, including in Eurasia, China proposed ten years ago the concept of building a human community with a shared future and the initiative of jointly pursuing the Belt and Road. Over the past two years, China has also proposed the Global Development Initiative (GDI), Global Security Initiative (GSI), and Global Civilization Initiative (GCI), striving to provide more international public goods. These initiatives contain unique worldviews, values, development concepts, security concepts, and cultural perspectives

that China has formed during its modernization process, reflecting the classic wisdom of Chinese traditional culture. Analysing China's initiatives and practices to maintain international security highlights some of China's basic ideas and positions regarding the security and development of Eurasia.

Common Security, Comprehensive Measures, Cooperative Dialogue, and Sustainable Security in Eurasia

Security issues have significant implications for world peace and the well-being of people across all countries. Currently, the security situation in the Eurasian region is quite severe. The Ukrainian crisis has caused the local conflict to drag on for more than a year. Non-traditional security issues such as energy, food, and refugee crises caused by the spillover of the conflict have become increasingly serious. Their negative impact spread to most countries on the Eurasian continent. Under the shock of the Ukraine crisis, the security situation in the Eurasian region faces some prominent problems.

In response to these challenges, Eurasian countries must consider common issues, such as which kinds of security ideas are beneficial to the whole region and how countries can accomplish common security.

To address these issues, China has proposed the Global Security Initiative, first announced by President Xi Jinping at the opening ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference on April 21, 2022, and later reiterated during the 17th Group of 20 Heads of State and Government Summit on November 15, 2022. The Chinese government released the Global Security Initiative Concept Paper in February 2023, presenting a comprehensive explanation of China's security concept, its long-term goals, implementation paths, and fundamental methods for achieving common security.

The foundation of China's security concept is the new common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security approach. It comprises four fundamental elements: common security, comprehensive measures, cooperative dialogue, and sustainability.

Joint Efforts to seek Eurasian Security

China firmly believes that humanity forms an inseparable security community, and countries must jointly maintain regional security while

respecting and safeguarding the reasonable security concerns of others. China's approach to Eurasian security is based on the following principles:

Firstly, the security of each country and the common security of humanity are interdependent and indivisible. The security rights enjoyed by countries and their security obligations are complementary and indivisible.

Secondly, the security interests of all countries are equal. Regardless of their size, strength, or wealth, every country should enjoy equal rights to pursue their own security while respecting the legitimate security concerns of others.

Thirdly, any country's legitimate and reasonable security concerns should be identified and respected. Security differences between countries should be adequately addressed and resolved.

Comprehensive Measures to address Traditional and Non-traditional Security Issues

In today's era, security issues have an expanded and nuanced connotation with an extension that incorporates traditional and non-traditional security factors, which are interwoven and inseparable. In traditional military warfare, non-military means are increasingly used as important auxiliary tools in war and sometimes even play a critical role in influencing the outcome of the war. In this context, maintaining Eurasian security necessitates comprehensive planning and measures, which means that countries need to address traditional military security and strategic stability but also meet non-traditional security challenges and threats, including economic, financial, technological, energy, food, and terrorism.

On the one hand, as previously mentioned, traditional security issues have long been present in the Eurasian region, and hotspot-sensitive issues have arisen from time to time. The ongoing military conflict between Russia and Ukraine represents a significant security challenge to peace and stability in this region. China's position on this issue has remained resolute, advocating for a political solution to the crisis. In February 2023, China proposed a 12-point basic proposal for a political solution (MFA 2023b), providing specific suggestions for resolving the crisis on five levels.

At first, regarding international consensus, China advocates for respect for every country's sovereignty without double standards. China calls for the removal of Cold War mentalities and the prevention of the formation of

opposing camps. Secondly, with respect to the conflicting countries, China supports Russia and Ukraine in restoring direct dialogue as soon as possible to reduce the escalation of tension and ultimately reach a comprehensive peace agreement, and it emphasises the importance of peace talks as dialogue and negotiations are the only viable way to resolve the conflict. Thirdly, China encourages and intensifies humanitarian aid to the people of both countries, supporting civilian safety, conflict victims, women, and children, and creating favourable conditions for the exchange of prisoners of war. Fourthly, to avoid a nuclear crisis, China insists that nuclear weapons must not be used or fought in nuclear wars, maintains the security of nuclear power plants, reduces the risks of nuclear wars, and opposes the use of biochemical weapons. Finally, in terms of non-traditional security, China proposes the cooperation initiative on global food security, calls for stopping unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction against other countries, works to ensure the stability of global industrial and supply chains, and assists in postwar reconstruction. Strategic stability on the Eurasian continent relies on the collective efforts of all Eurasian countries. All countries must work together to prevent conflicts from escalating.

On the other hand, the impact of non-traditional security factors and issues on the security situation in Eurasia is becoming increasingly apparent. With globalisation since the beginning of the 21st century, various factors from fields such as economics, finance, biology, and data have spread globally. Non-traditional factors increasingly affect international security, with threats in areas such as ethnic and religious conflicts, terrorism, transnational crime, environmental security, network security, energy and resource security, food security, major epidemics, and natural disasters. These threats affect domestic security but can also spill over from one country to neighbouring countries or entire regions, sometimes even challenging global security. All countries need to prioritise counter-terrorism cooperation, jointly safeguard data security, biosafety, supply chain stability, and technological chain stability, and maintain non-traditional security such as food and energy security.

Seeking Security through Cooperation and Consultation

Dialogue and consultation are effective ways to resolve differences and conflicts, and all countries could use political dialogue and peace

negotiations to achieve security. Seeking peace through cooperation represents the most advantageous solution for all parties, instead of zero-sum games. The Cold War mentality is not feasible. Eurasian countries need to strengthen strategic communication, enhance security and mutual trust, resolve conflicts, and manage differences. Major powers need to adhere to fairness and justice, assume their due responsibilities, support equal consultation, and strive to promote peace talks and mediation. The international community needs to support any efforts conducive to a peaceful resolution of crises and create favourable conditions for dialogue and consultation between conflicting parties.

Promoting Sustainable Security

"Stability brings a country prosperity, while instability may well plunge it into poverty." (This is classical wisdom from China's fine traditional culture.) Security and development are interconnected. They mutually influence and restrict each other. Economic development serves as the foundation of national security, and national and international security lend their basic support to safeguarding development. Some experts even argue that sustainable security and sustainable development will become the two major issues in the world in the next 30 years or beyond (Liu Jiangyong 2019, 4).

China's concept of sustainable security provides a uniquely Chinese approach to maintaining global security. In the process of globalisation, polarisation and acute social conflicts caused by imbalanced development often become the root causes of the deterioration of the social security situation in certain countries in the Eurasian region and further affect the security and stability of neighbouring countries and regions. At the national level, prioritising development efforts that focus on improving people's lives, narrowing economic inequalities, and reducing social conflict are effective ways to strengthen the foundations of security. Promoting sustainable development is a key factor in addressing non-traditional security issues. At the international level, if a group of countries become wealthier while others remain in long-term poverty and backwardness, this will become a challenge in achieving peace and stability in Eurasia. A common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security strategy can help reduce suspicion and hostility among countries, mitigate security costs resulting from mutual

contention and arms races, and ensure that high-quality security remains accessible to all nations. Countries could strive to pursue security through development and seek development through security.

In September 2021, President Xi Jinping proposed the Global Development Initiative during his keynote speech at the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. The initiative called on the international community to accelerate the implementation of the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, pursue more robust, greener, and more balanced global development, and create a global community of shared development. The Global Development Initiative is committed to development as a priority, a people-centred approach that benefits all, innovation-driven development, harmony between humanity and nature, and results-oriented actions. It prioritises cooperation in eight areas: poverty reduction, food security, COVID-19 response and vaccines, climate change, green development, industrialization, the digital economy, and connectivity (Xinhua 2021). Since the proposal of the Global Development Initiative, it has received positive responses from the international community, with over 100 countries expressing their support. In January 2022, the United Nations established the Group of Friends of the Global Development Initiative, with more than 50 countries joining (Wang Yi 2022).

China's efforts have demonstrated that its development has promoted economic growth in many Eurasian countries and also made crucial contributions to security and stability in the region. China puts forth a balanced and inclusive development model and proposes the establishment of an Eurasian development partnership with equality, balance, benefits for all, and inclusiveness, aiming to resolve conflicts through development, eliminate insecurity, promote security through development, achieve sustainable security, and build lasting peace.

Exchange and Mutual Learning with Civilizations instead of Estrangement and Conflicts between Them

Various cultural trends are surging worldwide, leading to frequent ideological conflicts that can easily escalate into security threats. In March 2023, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the Global Civilization Initiative during his keynote speech at the CPC in Dialogue with World

Political Parties High-Level Meeting. The initiative advocates respect for the diversity of world civilizations, insisting on equality, mutual learning, dialogue, and inclusiveness between them. The initiative calls for replacing estrangement with exchange, clashes with mutual learning, and superiority with inclusiveness in relationships among civilizations.

In the development history of world civilization, there is no universal standard of civilization that applies everywhere in the world. Samuel Huntington, a famous American scholar who raised the concept of the clash of civilizations, also pointed out clearly that "In the world of multiple civilizations, the constructive road is to abandon universalism, accept diversity, and seek commonality" (Samuel Huntington 1996, 304). A civilization should not measure others with its own standards or impose values on others. Each civilization is an indispensable member of the global family, and different civilizations should respect each other's equality and diversity while promoting civilised exchanges that are different but harmonious, inclusive, and accommodating, and avoid using differences in social systems, ideologies, and development models as an excuse or inducement for conflict.

Conclusion

Since the Ukrainian crisis persists and geopolitical crises and conflicts on the Eurasian continent continue to grow, regional security and stability face severe challenges. Urgent attention is needed to ease the situation, and in the meantime, these hotspot issues of Eurasian security need to be resolved. From China's perspective, efforts can be made to maintain regional security in Eurasia at the following three levels:

Firstly, at the overall level of the Eurasian continent, it is crucial to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, adhere to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, take the reasonable security concerns of each country seriously, and support efforts conducive to resolving crises peacefully. (During the video summit between Chinese, French, and German leaders on March 8, 2022, Xi Jinping proposed the "four shoulds" approach for addressing global challenges.) All countries should strengthen their unity and actively engage in dialogue and consultations

based on equality, rationality, and practical attitudes. This approach can lead to a reasonable path to resolving crises through political means.

The stability of the Eurasian continent relies critically on major-country relations. In order to maintain Eurasian security, it is necessary for major powers and international organisations, such as China, Russia, France, Germany, and the European Union, located on the Eurasian continent, to actively shoulder this crucial responsibility. Central and Eastern European Countries located in hotspots, such as Ukraine, Poland, and Serbia, need to strive for rationality and calmness. They should not give up efforts at dialogue but leave room for peace.

Secondly, in terms of Eurasian security mechanisms, existing regional multilateral security organisations and their dialogue and consultation mechanisms should promote true multilateralism and address regional security, development, and stability issues more effectively. These mechanisms should facilitate peace talks, mediate conflicts, and prevent crises and conflicts from spreading to neighbouring territories. It is necessary to initiate multilateral security dialogue and consultations between the major powers, relevant countries, and regional organisations. In response to security challenges and changing situations in Eurasia, efforts should be made to explore new methods and mechanisms for resolving conflicts and establishing an effective governance mechanism for Eurasian security.

Thirdly, from China's own perspective, as a major country at the eastern end of the Eurasian continent, China has always acted as a fair, just, trustworthy, and responsible major state. China is willing to play a greater role in resolving hotspot issues in Eurasia. Since the onset of the crisis in Ukraine, China has maintained objectivity and impartiality while actively promoting peace talks. China is willing to make efforts to push for peace talks as long as they are conducive to restarting the process.

In addition, as China embarks on its new journey towards a great country and national rejuvenation, it is committed to playing a significant role in maintaining peace, common development, and security order in Eurasia, as well as contributing to international public goods. Upholding the concept of building a human community with a shared future, China will further promote the joint pursuit of the Belt and Road Initiative to make significant contributions to peace and security in the Eurasian region.

To achieve this, China advocates collaborating on critical areas to maintain overall security on the Eurasian continent, as follows:

Upholding the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, supporting the UN's efforts to prevent conflicts, and supporting post-conflict countries in developing peacebuilding work;

Promoting coordination and benign interaction between major Eurasian countries and creating a pattern of major-country relations that features peace, stability, and balance;

Adhering to the "nuclear war cannot be won and must not be fought" consensus to reduce the risk of nuclear war;

Encouraging dialogue and negotiation to achieve political resolution of regional hotspot issues, such as the Ukrainian crisis;

Supporting and enhancing regional security cooperation mechanisms and architectures centred around the ASEAN and striving to create a global security initiative experimental zone;

Building more platforms and mechanisms for exchange and cooperation among Eurasian countries to enhance non-traditional security governance capabilities concerning anti-terrorism, cyberspace, biology, and emerging technologies.

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Sino-Russian Challenges to American Hegemony: Are We Moving Towards a Multipolar World Order?

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Abstract: The current state of international relations and the global order is characterised by growing conflicts and rivalries between the United States of America, the declining hegemon, and the rising non-Western powers, first and foremost, China and Russia. Russia's "special military operation" to "demilitarise" and "denazify" Ukraine has galvanised and united Western allies against the attack on the international "rules-based" order. Dominated by the US, the West seeks partners and client states to support its actions against Moscow. On the other hand, Washington, D.C., aims to contain Beijing, nudging European and other partners to limit Chinese expansion, both political and technological. The countries of the so-called Global South seek their own interests and do not uncritically follow American positions. Practically all the states of Africa, Asia, and Eurasia have not allied with the West in their struggle against Russia. The war over the future of the planetary order, the conflict between the unipolar and multipolar forces, has been going on for some time, and unless the US and its allies win, the world is heading towards polycentrism and multipolarity.

Keywords: war, world order, hegemony, multipolarity, Russia, China, US, Ukraine.

Introduction

The current state of international relations and the global order is characterised by growing conflicts and rivalries 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

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Vladimir Putin announced a "special military operation" to "demilitarise" and "denazify" Ukraine. Russia's invasion has unified the Western world. Among their elites, there is a fear that 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, they are mobilised in support of Ukraine. 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 US "imperial system", and that it represents the start of World War III. 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 recognise it" (Glasser 2022). I argue that the latest conflict in Ukraine is just a very clear and public manifestation of the struggle where Washington, D.C., strives to remain the only or the main hegemonic power in the world, while Russia, China, and other regional players seek a more balanced state of affairs.

One could also speak of the possibility of the emergence of polycentric governance in the world. As a general definition, "polycentric" governing occurs when "many centres" address a given policy concern. While the diffuse "decision points can be scattered across multiple scales (local, national, regional, and global) and various sectors (public, private, and hybrid), the participating organisations in a polycentric arrangement often have overlapping mandates, ambiguous hierarchies of authority, and no ultimate arbiter. Continual creation and reconstruction of institutions and relationships among them also tend to make polycentric governing processes quite fluid" (Koinova et al. 2008). Polycentrism persisted even during the Cold War as Third World countries sought to shape global norms surrounding national independence and non-alignment. Today, another scenario is possible: a "polycentric order" with multiple centres of authority where the US is the leading power but not the hegemonic one. The war over the future of the planetary order, the conflict between the unipolar and multipolar forces, has been going on for some time, and unless the US and its allies win, the world is heading towards polycentrism and multipolarity.

From the End of the Cold War and the End of History to Global Conflict

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was followed by the peaceful dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The post-1991 world was dominated by the West, with the US at the top and being highly unipolar. At that time, there was not a single country or alliance left in the world that would offer a global alternative to the democratic political system and capitalist mode of production. Despite the fact that the US and Western powers gave Russia written assurance in 1990 against Northern Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO) expansion, former communist countries in Europe were quickly integrated into NATO (Wiegrefe 2022, Goldman 2023, National Security Archive 2017, Shifrinson 2016) and later into the European Union (EU). In academia, the final triumph of the liberal idea and the end of history were debated. In 1994, the Uruguay Round of trade liberalisation was concluded. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) became the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995. After tough negotiations, China joined the WTO in November 2001. Thereafter, it quickly integrated into the capitalist economy, actively trading with the US, the EU, and the rest of the world. Globalisation was the new economic order, and the US dollar continued to be the currency of choice. Developing countries aimed to progress trading in the international marketplace. Ideologically, since the early 1990s, globalisation has been linked with the triumph of political liberalism and has been seen as a mechanism for disseminating liberal norms and values beyond the "historical West" to the rest of the world.

Optimism about the prospects of peace and cooperation in the world was the dominant mood around the globe. Meanwhile, the US pursued a grand strategy of maintaining its global hegemony by engaging in regime change, toppling down regimes, and nation-building, using military force around the world with international partners and alliances, from NATO in Kosovo in 1999 and Afghanistan in 2001 to the "Coalition of the Willing" in Iraq in 2003, and the United Nations (UN) resolution approved forces in Libya in 2011. The US dominated the world and Europe, even though leading European intellectuals such as Jacques Derrida and Jürgen Habermas sought autonomy for the EU in relations with Washington, D.C. Despite successes, there were many crises that the US and the West mishandled. The rejection of the proposed Treaty for Establishing a

Constitution for Europe in 2005 was followed by a crisis in the Eurozone, the rise of sovereignist and populist political forces, Brexit, a migration crisis, the victory of Donald Trump, and the emergence of illiberal positions among leaders of several, mainly Eastern European states. Western powers failed to find a convincing answer to the challenges of the global financial meltdown of 2008–2009 and the "Arab Spring" of 2011–2012 (Mearsheimer 2019). The fight against radical Islamism has not fully eradicated this threat. In Syria, the West could not topple Assad's regime after Russia came to his aid. President Joe Biden decided to hastily withdraw American troops from Afghanistan at the end of the summer of 2021.

In recent years, Russia and China have become more influential and confrontational in international politics. While Moscow's proposals for a new Security Treaty for Europe, a joint Russia-NATO missile defence system, and offers to establish formal relations between NATO and the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation were rebuffed, NATO gradually expanded east. In 2014, following the toppling of President Viktor Yanukovich and the establishment of an anti-Russian government, Russia acted decisively by annexing Crimea and helping Donetsk rebels fight Ukraine, ultimately forcing Kiev to accept the so-called Minsk Peace Agreements. For Moscow, this was a necessary reaction following the Euro-Maidan Revolution and statements about Ukrainian plans not to extend the base lease for the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea, to join NATO, and to install policies to limit Russian cultural and linguistic rights. Kiev did not change course, as in February 2019, Ukraine's constitution was amended to make NATO membership an obligatory governmental goal. In March 2021, Volodymyr Zelensky, who was elected President on a pro-peace platform in 2019, adopted the Crimean Platform, a programme to secure the return of Crimea to Ukraine by any means necessary, including unspecified military measures.

At the end of 2021, Russia demanded a radical overhaul of Europe's security system that had emerged over the past twenty years, based on the central role of the US and NATO in the system. After the US unilaterally withdrew from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 2019 and the Antiballistic Missile Treaty in 2022, Moscow did not want NATO to expand in Ukraine. Placing antiballistic launch systems in Romania and Poland as part of the US project to create a global missile defence system

was already a serious issue for Russia, as these launchers could also accommodate and fire offensive nuclear weapons at Russia, such as nuclear-tipped Tomahawk cruise missiles (Abellow 2022, 16). Putin and other Russian officials addressed the danger of a lack of response time if Ukraine was incorporated into NATO and the Alliance stationed nuclear-capable missiles there and asked for concessions from the West. As tensions between Moscow and Washington, D.C., rose in the late fall and winter of 2021- 2022, Russia amassed a significant number of troops on the borders with Ukraine. On December 17, 2021, Moscow submitted two drafts to European security treaties, one addressed to the US and the other to NATO, demanding no further NATO enlargement, no deployment of weaponry or military forces on Russia's borders, and NATO's return to the force posture of May 1997. Neither Washington nor its European allies could give Russia the security guarantees it wanted, rejecting Moscow's proposals in January 2022 and reiterating that NATO's eastward expansion was nonnegotiable as sovereign states had the "right to choose their security arrangements" (Stoltenberg 2022).

The US promised to continue dialogue if Russia de-escalated its forces on Ukraine's border. On the other hand, the Ukrainian Army had a large force preparing to reconquer territories lost to the Donbass rebels in 2014. According to Russian claims, "half of Ukraine's regular Army was deployed there by the end of 2021" (Roberts 2022, 6). On March 24, 2021, Zelensky issued a decree for the recapture of Crimea, while in October 2021, the Ukrainian Army conducted air operations in Donbass using drones, including at least one strike against a fuel depot in Donetsk (Episkopos 2021). As tensions rose with the military buildup on both sides, diplomacy was focused on finding solutions based on the so-called Minsk Agreements. Thus, on February 7, 2022, during his visit to Moscow, Emmanuel Macron reaffirmed to Vladimir Putin his commitment to the Minsk Agreements, a commitment he would repeat after his meeting with Volodymyr Zelensky the next day. However, on February 11, 2022, in Berlin, at a meeting of political advisors of the leaders of the "Normandy format", the Ukrainians refused to apply the Minsk Agreements. Instead, according to various reports, including those of OSCE observers, the Ukrainian Army intensified its shelling of Donbass starting on February 16, 2022. Moreover, in his speech to the Munich Security Conference on February 19, 2022, Zelensky threatened the Ukrainian re-acquisition of nuclear weapons.

Mass evacuations and general mobilisation began in the Donbass region following aggravations along the "line of contact," a front line that had remained static since 2014. Although Biden warned that Putin was planning to try to fabricate a pretext for invasion, including by making false claims that Ukrainian forces had attacked civilians in the Donbas region (Risen 2022), according to various sources, the large, significantly increased bombardment of Russian separatists' positions in Donetsk in February 2022 provoked Moscow's recognition of the independence of the breakaway regions of Donbass and, subsequently, an invasion. Thus, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) maps show a significant rise in artillery strikes in the independent republics of Donetsk and Luhansk since February 16, 2022 (OSCE 2022). While the Western media remained silent, explosions documented by the OSCE increased from 76 on February 15 to 316 on February 16, 654 on February 17, and 2,028 on February 20 (Gala 2022). As David C. Hendrickson pointed out, the great majority of the shelling originated from the Ukrainian side of the ceasefire line (2022). It is plausible to say that Putin reacted to this escalation. On February 21, 2022, Russia recognised the independence of the two Donbass Republics and signed friendship and assistance treaties with them. On February 23, 2022, the two Republics asked for military assistance from Russia, and two days later, Vladimir Putin invoked Article 51 of the UN Charter, which provides for mutual military assistance in the framework of a defensive alliance. Credible US intelligence sources indicate that Putin only made a final decision shortly before the invasion began, and the haphazard and uncoordinated nature of the early stages of the campaign corroborates this claim (Risen 2022). Certainly, Russia could have begun its aggression even without this escalation, but "after more than 14,000 casualties in fighting between Ukrainian nationalists and pro-Russian separatists in Donbas before the February 24th invasion, it is hard to argue that Russia's concerns were groundless" (Goldman 2023).

In any case, Russia's attack on Ukraine is a threat to the Western-based international order. Moscow's aggression has mobilised the West. In essence, the US and its allies see the war in Ukraine as an existential conflict between democracies and autocracies. At the 2023 Munich Security Conference, US Vice President Kamala Harris said that the war had "far-reaching global ramifications", while German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock stressed that anything less than a complete Russian defeat and withdrawal would

mean "the end of the international order and the end of international law" (Walt 2023). While American and European attention is now mostly focused on Russia, China is also considered a strategic risk. This has been a fact for quite some time already. President Trump has begun, and Biden has continued to impose sanctions on China. Once Washington, D.C., started the struggle with Beijing, Brussels followed. Despite negotiating since 2012 and an agreement in principle by the European Commission at the end of 2020 to conclude a trade pact, the European Parliament decided to freeze the ratification of the comprehensive investment deal with China and now considers Beijing a strategic enemy. Indeed, despite all the drama and monumental international consequences of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict, it is China, not Russia, that is still considered by US politicians as the main strategic challenge and threat to the national interests of the United States and the West as a whole. In his National Security Strategy, Biden outlined his view of global competition with China and the American desire to "work in lockstep with our allies and partners and with all those who share our interests" (Strategy 2022). Predictions of an armed conflict have been made. In an interview with *The Financial Times*, James Bierman, the highest-ranking United States Marine Corps General in Japan, declared that the US is "setting a counter-China theatre" in the Asia-Pacific region (Hille 2023). US Air Force General Mike Minihan sent a memo to the officers he commands that predicts the US will be at war with China in two years (Kube 2023). Washington, D.C., says that Beijing wants to be ready to invade the self-governing island of Taiwan by 2027, and the US is the island's chief ally and supplier of weapons (Copp 2023).

China and Russia on the Rise challenging the American Order

For more than a century, an extreme concentration of economic power allowed the West, despite representing a small minority of the world's population, to initiate, legitimise, and successfully advocate policy in the economic or security realm (Stuenkel 2016). Yet, nowadays, the American-led international order is not the only game in town. The West is slowly losing the capacity to set the agenda on a global scale. According to US CIA Director William Burns (2019, 7): "Great power rivalry is back: China is systematically modernizing its military and is poised to overtake the US as the world's biggest economy, slowly extending its reach in Asia and across

the Eurasian supercontinent; Russia is providing graphic evidence that declining powers can be at least as disruptive as rising ones, increasingly convinced that the pathway to revival of its great power status runs through the erosion of an American-led order…Meanwhile, a quarter century of convergence towards a Western model is giving way to a new form of globalisation, featuring a new diversity of actors and the fragmentation of global power, capital, and concepts of governance."

China, Russia, and other emerging powers "do not accept the dual structure of the liberal international order in which the United States enforces the rules but is not bound by them" (Diessen 2021, 209). Russia is against the Western-backed rules-based order, which introduces divisions between liberal democracies and "authoritarian powers", introducing the ethical categories of "good" and "evil" into international politics, making it very ideologized. For Moscow, the promotion of the "selective combination of rules, unilaterally employed, is with the aim of circumventing multilateral, collective decision-making, and international legal instruments and processes based on the UN Charter as a core of the post-war order" (Ibid., 16). 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 2022a). 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 organisations, 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 that correspond to their national, cultural, and confessional identities" (Lavrov 2018).

Shortly before the start of the full-scale Russian attack of Ukraine in February 2022, Putin and Xi signed a statement proclaiming that there were "no limits to Sino-Russian cooperation". In February 2023, after meeting Beijing's top diplomat, Wang Yi, in Moscow, Putin said that Russia and China are reaching new levels of cooperation, adding that he awaits a visit from Chinese President Xi Jinping. Wang told Putin that the relationship between China and Russia would "not succumb to pressure from third parties" and pledged to deepen strategic cooperation with Moscow (Sorgi 2023). Indeed, both Moscow and Beijing favour changing the world order. From the Russian perspective, the existing system of international relations and security is unfair and discriminating against the rival emerging powers, and, therefore, it has been endeavouring to strengthen its security, protect its sovereignty, and multiply its military potential through cooperation with other partners, first and foremost within the military alliance, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) (Zemanek 2022, 7). The West's support for the 2014 coup in Ukraine "ended the remaining illusions in Russia about a gradual integration with the West to construct a Greater Europe" (Diessen 2021b, 19). Instead, Moscow seeks regional economic cooperation through the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU or EEU) trade bloc. Russia aims for independence from financial institutions dominated by the West and a transition to settlements in national currencies or the creation of regional exchanges for trading those goods, where Russia will remain an important player in Asian markets. Following the Ukrainian invasion and Western sanctions, Moscow seeks the gradual formation of a new infrastructure for trade and economic cooperation between Russia and its Asian and Eurasian neighbours.

As the international system shifts from unipolarity to multipolarity for the countries of the Global South, China and Russia present economic and political alternatives to the dominant American model. Moreover, realising the "difficulty of single-handedly taking on the United States and its allies, the Chinese and Russian governments are increasingly finding common ground in their world views" (Suri, 2022, 237). Indeed, with the rise of China and Russia, countries around the world have alternative suppliers of development assistance, military security, and public goods—in effect, countries now have "exit options" from US hegemony (Ikenberry 2020). Following the introduction of a new set of EU sanctions in 2022, Moscow

has delinked from the EU, seeking better cooperation with Eurasia. Already in the making since 2014, the push for the concept of Greater Eurasia got full support from Moscow. The Greater Eurasia concept aims to "decouple from the West's geoeconomic instruments of power and develop global governance based on a balance of power where Russia develops strategic industries, transportation corridors, and financial instruments beyond the control of the US" (Diessen 2021, 213). Thus, for example, Russia, together with Iran and India, is speeding up efforts to complete a new transport corridor that would largely cut Europe, its sanctions, and any other threats out of the picture. The International North-South Transport Corridor (NSTC) is a land-and sea-based 7,200-km-long network comprising rail, road, and water routes that are aimed at reducing costs and travel time for freight transport in a bid to boost trade between Russia, Iran, Central Asia, and India. In December, a major new Siberian gas field (Kovykta) was launched to help drive a planned surge in supply to China through the Power of Siberia pipeline carrying Russian gas to China. With recoverable reserves of 1.8 trillion cubic metres, the field is the largest in eastern Russia (Reuters 2022). Russia also plans to construct another major pipeline, the Power of Siberia 2, via Mongolia, with a view to selling additional gas to China. The new Eurasian pipeline infrastructure will enable Russia to supply both the East and the West from the same oil and gas fields. If relations improve in the future, clients from Europe willing to buy Russian energy cheaper than American or other alternatives will be competing with Asian buyers.

The Chinese and Russian geoeconomic decoupling from the US is "resulting in the construction of a new autonomous Eurasian supercontinent uniting Europe and Asia by reorganising strategic industries, transportation corridors, and financial instruments" (Diessen 2021b, 20). Beijing and Tehran established their comprehensive strategic partnership when Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping visited Iran in 2016. In 2021, China and Iran signed a 25-year partnership agreement whereby China will provide investments and economic and security services worth $400 billion over 25 years in return for a steady supply of oil from Iran to the Chinese economy. Other provisions included the creation of a special mechanism to aid banking transactions between the two countries in yuan; intelligence cooperation and developing information infrastructure for a 5G telecommunication network; working to make Iran the centre point of the

Silk Road's commercial route in the Middle East instead of passing through the Arabian Peninsula; and military, defence, and security cooperation, including training, research, and interaction on strategic issues (Rasanah 2023, 7). Most recently, in February 2023, China and Iran agreed to deepen their partnership, increasing coordination under multilateral platforms such as the UN, the SCO, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Iran is to become one of the first new members of BRICS+ and is about to conclude a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Beijing is also taking leadership of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), focusing on infrastructure development, especially from China's western provinces to the Pakistani deep-sea ports of Gwadar and Karachi.

China is reimagining the world as a single, complex network of supply chains and trade arteries. Fueled by commodities from around the world, the country is becoming the keystone of the global economy and the principal engine of globalisation. As observers like Robert Kuttner point out, the country has attained the status of a "global economic superpower" (2018, 207). This also shows the bifurcation of the world into two parts, wherein China is trying to create a new cost-effective alternative and challenge the established order. The alternative order is already in the making; it includes, among others, institutions such as the BRICS, a coalition of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (as an alternative to the G7), the New Development Bank, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (to complement the World Bank), the Universal Credit Rating Group (to complement Moody's and S&P), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Eurasian Economic Union, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, BRICS countries' the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), China Union Pay (to complement Mastercard and Visa), CIPS (to complement SWIFT), and many other initiatives. Beijing wants to operate in a more favourable strategic environment in multiple domains. Across emerging economies, Chinese-led globalisation has already begun displacing America's "rules-based order". Combined with Beijing's systematic push to expand its influence in multilateral rule-setting institutions and, in some cases, to create new ones, these roads seem to lead towards a regional or perhaps global ecosystem that would disadvantage the United States.

Throughout the world, China is amassing levers of influence. In Africa, Beijing is an important contributor to infrastructure construction and trade

for many nations. China competes with the US for influence on the continent. Following the US-Africa Summit organised by Biden in Washington in December 2022, in January 2023, the new Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang went on a tour to Africa, visiting five diverse countries — Ethiopia, Gabon, Benin, Angola, and Egypt — and the headquarters of both the African Union and the Arab League. Qin signed documents in many fields, including debt cancellation, reassuring African partners that China-Africa economic relations would be revitalised. Qin supported Africa in playing an active role in international cooperation, stating that China would support the continental countries in increasing the representation of Africa in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and other international organisations (RFI 2023). In March 2023, China facilitated talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which resulted in an agreement between the two regional powers to re-establish diplomatic relations and reopen their embassies within two months. Riyadh and Tehran agreed to activate a security cooperation agreement signed in 2001, respect state sovereignty, and not interfere in each other's internal affairs. Wang Yi, China's most senior diplomat, commented that Beijing would continue to play a constructive role in handling hotspot issues and demonstrate responsibility as a major nation (Al Jazeera 2023).

Beijing even promoted a "peace plan position paper" for ending the Ukrainian conflict (China's Position 2023). Suggesting that "dialogue and negotiation are the only viable solution to the Ukraine crisis", China's paper centres around the following 12 aspects: respecting the sovereignty of all countries, abandoning the Cold War mentality, ceasing hostilities, resuming peace talks, resolving the humanitarian crisis, protecting civilians and prisoners of war, keeping nuclear power plants safe, reducing strategic risks, facilitating grain exports, stopping unilateral sanctions, keeping industrial and supply chains stable, and promoting post-conflict reconstruction. On the one hand, the document openly condemns the use of nuclear weapons, calls for a military de-escalation, and claims that China will continue to play a constructive role in this regard. Yet, on the other hand, in raising opposition to "Cold War mentality", the paper categorically suggests: "The security of a region should not be achieved by strengthening or expanding military blocs… The legitimate security interests and concerns of all countries must be taken seriously and addressed properly. […] All parties should oppose the pursuit of one's own security at the cost of others' security, prevent bloc confrontation,

and work together for peace and stability on the Eurasian Continent". The document confirms that China stands with Russia in the ideological confrontation between Moscow and the West. Thus, the paper notes that "[r]elevant countries (the US and its allies) should stop abusing unilateral sanctions and 'long-arm jurisdiction' against other countries". At the same time, the rhetorical formulation that "all countries, big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, are equal members of the international community" underscores China's attempts at positioning itself as the leader and main voice of the Global South against hegemonic powers (Bruni and Carrozza 2023). While Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, called the position paper "an important contribution", Russia reacted positively to Beijing's efforts, and Ukrainian President Zelensky offered a muted response, saying Kyiv needed to "work with China" on approaches to put an end to the year-old war. The US and its Western partners snubbed the proposals while warning against Beijing's increasing closer ties to Moscow.

Under the Beijing-led BRI, over 150 countries and organisations that make up roughly 70 percent of the global population and over 50 percent of global GDP participate, with Latin America added as a "natural extension of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. Most of the members of the BRI are countries in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, Central and East Asia, and Central and Southeastern Europe. Under this framework, China is to invest about $1 trillion in loans and other funds in developing critical infrastructure, including ports, airports, highways, railways, pipelines, and power plants, making it the world's largest official creditor (Wei 2022). The size of the investments and infrastructure envisioned will be enormous, with some estimating it to be seven times bigger than the US's Marshall Plan to rebuild post-World War II Europe (Hillman 2020). Envisioned as a "global infrastructure drive to promote greater economic linkages, the BRI seeks to position China at the centre of key economic supply chains" (Suri 2022, 233). Within the BRI, China focuses on making free trade agreements (FTAs) with other nations and building special economic zones (SEZs). Overall, the BRI has the potential to meet the long-standing needs of developing countries and spur global economic growth. The BRI is designed to advance an array of Chinese economic, political, and geopolitical interests while filling a vital need in many countries for reliable sources of power and better infrastructure. The BRI and the Digital Silk Road (DSR) projects aim to

integrate financial markets and connect nation-states with a string of next-generation digital infrastructure and satellite coverage.

The normative side of China's digitalization vision does not differ from Beijing's emphasis in international law on the concept of sovereignty; hence, in the digital world, there is a focus on what it calls "cyber sovereignty," strong data localization requirements, and censorship. China's preferred norms of "internet sovereignty" and prioritising the collective "right to development" over individual human rights are promoted at the UN Group of Governmental Experts, the World Internet Conference, and the South-South Human Rights Forum. Indeed, Beijing is quite active in international forums to promote this model of internet governance as a globally accepted norm. Chinese internet experts cooperate with their counterparts in Africa, Russia, and the Middle East on how to shape up internet controls and crack down on illegal activities and dissent online. On the one hand, on the global stage, China has been unequivocal on the importance of multilateralism and national sovereignty. Yet, on the other hand, China exhibits a flexible and functional approach to international law where it seeks to advance interpretations of international law and the development of new international norms that reflect China's values and advance its interests, neither of which are necessarily fixed. While in certain aspects of international law China looks for exceptions, thus ignoring UNCLOS (the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas) in the South China Sea, for example, in other, Chinese-initiated fora, such as the Asia-Pacific Space Cooperation Organisation, the China-conceived Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the newly created Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and the China-EU Comprehensive Agreement on Investment, it appears to largely reproduce the norms and practices of existing international institutions.

During the annual Boao Forum on April 21, 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". In February 2023, Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang officially released the GSI Concept Paper, fully elaborating ideas and principles, clarifying cooperation mechanisms, and underscoring China's responsibilities and firm determination to safeguard world peace by listing 20 major cooperation

directions. The GSI affirms the central role of the UN in addressing conflict by promoting "harmonisation and positive relationships" 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 for global security governance (GSI Concept Paper). The GSI emphasises the role of the UN as the principal forum 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. In order to realise this vision, China will hold high-level GSI-related events and invite various parties to discuss security matters.

In September 2022, during his address to the UN General Assembly (UNGA), Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi presented China's Global Development Initiative (GDI) as a pathway to accelerate implementation of the 2030 agenda. The GDI marks a significant departure in China's development narrative because it presents a normative framework for China's engagements. China asserts that the 2030 agenda is off track, with the GDI laying out and advocating its vision with six accompanying principles (a people-centred approach, development as a priority, benefits for all, innovation-driven development, harmony with nature, and action-oriented approaches), eight priorities (poverty reduction, food security, COVID-19 and vaccines, financing for development, climate change and green development, industrialization, the digital economy, and connectivity), governance arrangements, and actions. The launch of the GDI does not suggest China is replacing or diminishing the BRI. The BRI and GDI are best seen as parallel tracks. While the BRI is economic growth-oriented, the GDI is development-oriented. The BRI delivers hardware and economic corridors, while the GDI focuses on software, livelihoods, knowledge transfer, and capacity building (Mulakala 2022). The BRI is market-oriented, where enterprises play a key role. By contrast, the GDI is public-oriented, delivering grants and development assistance. While the BRI's pathways are mostly bilateral and regional, involving MOUs with partner countries, the GDI promotes diverse partnerships with multilaterals, NGOs, and the private sector. China's National Development and Reform Commission is the main coordinating agency behind the BRI, whereas the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the China International Development Cooperation Agency drive the GDI. China's August 2022 announcement of debt relief to 17 countries may indicate a willingness to engage in greater debt diplomacy. The recent debt relief agreement reached between China and Zambia was also a positive sign.

Chinese initiatives such as the BRI and the GSI are a geopolitical rebirth of the world into a global form. China, Russia, and their allies clash with attempts by Western actors who oppose the idea of multipolar global architecture and are pushing for reforms at the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and many other global institutions that are perceived to have become structured in a manner sympathetic to the US and its allies rather than emerging economies. Beijing believes that an equitable international economic order must be preserved by all focusing on principles such as "an equitable division of labour, encouragement of competition, anti-monopoly, protection of property rights and IPRs, promoting entrepreneurship and the free flow of production factors, fair distribution, a strong social safety net, and ensuring macroeconomic stability" (Devonshire-Ellis 2022). The opponents of US hegemony insist on the creation of an alternative model and a multipolar world.

Conclusion

The Russian attack of Ukraine is just a very clear and public manifestation of the struggle where the US, supported by its junior Western partners, strives to remain the only, or the main, hegemonic power in the world, while Moscow, Beijing, and other regional players seek a more balanced state of affairs. Although discussions over the justness of the international system and the potential for the development of a polycentric world have intensified since last February, the conflict between the unipolar and multipolar forces has been going on for some time. Russia, China, and other actors aim to end the supremacy of the Western world based on five pillars: institutional-financial, military, technological innovation, and cultural-ideological. On the other hand, the US and its allies have been trying for some time to hamper Moscow's and Beijing's initiatives, diplomacy, and economic and technological development. The US and Europe are defenders

of the so-called "rules-based liberal world order", and the two others are seen as contesting it.

Much of the world is wary of taking sides. Practically all the states of Africa, Asia, and Eurasia have ended up in that Global Majority, the totality of countries that make up 85 percent of the world's population that have not allied with the West in its struggle against Russia. Fewer than 40 of the 193 UN member states have imposed sanctions on Russia, while fewer than 30 have pledged military assistance for Ukraine. "Non-alignment" offers governments avenues to boost their autonomy in foreign and energy policy. One can argue that following the Russian attack of Ukraine, the world has been divided into the Western liberal world and the conservative forces. In the first group, we find the US, the 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 alternatives. 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.

At the moment, it is difficult to imagine a decisive victory for either of the two camps. What would the consequences of the end of the US-led postwar order be for the future of world politics? Europe and the United States would need to adapt to the new realities of global politics, which will combine liberal functions with other features. The future of the world will be more consistent with diversity and pluralism in its norms, means of communication, and leadership. Different value systems will coexist in the world, diverging on issues such as understanding gender, sexuality, individualism vs. communitarianism, drugs, gun control, the death sentence, and abortion, not to mention larger ideological constructs like the balance or the role of the state and the various religious teaching[s]. A victory for the US-led West in Ukraine could mean the democratisation of Russia and further pressure on other non-democratic countries to follow that path. The defeat of Moscow could also lead to the rise of more nationalistic leaders in Russia and further antagonism; it could also lead to nuclear Armageddon. In any case, the times are very exciting, and the world is on the cusp of serious changes.

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China's New Initiatives and the Shaping of Eurasia's Strategic Environment

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Abstract: The United States retreat from Afghanistan and Washington's incremental China-containment pressure in the Indo-Pacific, as well as the beginning of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, have presented an important challenge for Beijing's shaping of a strategic environment in Eurasia favourable to its key domestic, regional and global interests. China faced an increasing threat to its territorial integrity and sovereignty (Xinjiang, Taiwan), to its key role in the global supply chain (Western de-coupling), to its maritime transport routes (increased U.S. military oversight in the South China Sea) and to its land routes through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor into the Arabian Sea port of Gwadar (terrorist attacks of the "Balochistan Liberation Army" in retreat from Afghanistan). Furthermore, Beijing needed to address the question of instability in Central Asia, its energy security in the Middle East with Saudi-Iranian tensions still on, and to tackle the issue of threats of Western sanctions over its cooperation with its closest strategic partner, the Russian Federation. Despite the COVID-19 restrictions taking their toll on both China's economic and diplomatic outreach, Beijing decided to push farther with its strategic undertakings. Thus, in addition to the expansion of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS in 2023, China presented three new initiatives in line with its flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – the Global Development Initiative (GDI, 2021), the Global Security Initiative (GSI, 2022) and the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI, 2023). Building on

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the concepts of shaping and strategic narrative, this article looks at how Beijing involved its initiatives to pursue the shaping of the strategic environment and norms in Eurasia and beyond, pushing past the Western constraints of the "rules-based order" (RBO).

Challenging the constraints of the "rules-based order"

Under the presidency of Xi Jinping since 2013, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has stepped up its international power role, incrementally adding global political and security features to the world's second largest economy. Inside China, this meant a strategic change from the early 1990s Deng Xiaoping's policy of "hide capabilities and bide time" (*Tao Guang Yang Hui*) into the policy of "striving for achievement" (*Fen Fa You Wei*) implemented by Xi. Arguing for the change, leading Chinese international relations scholar Yan Xuetong claimed, already in 2014, that the new policy "shows more efficiency in shaping a favourable environment for China's political rejuvenation", increasing "both international political strength and the political legitimacy of a rising power", and, as opposed to Deng Xiaoping's policy, focusing on strengthening political support rather than economic gains (Yan 2014, 153). Globally, Beijing's new policy led to the acknowledgement that the transition towards multipolarity was in higher gear. The "early days" of this transition - Russian President Vladimir Putin's speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference, Beijing's outstanding reaction to the 2008 global economic crisis, the formation of BRICS (2009-2010) – were giving place to new order-changing initiatives in which China had a premier role. The first and most prominent of them – the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – was launched by Xi shortly after he became president. While focused on international economic and infrastructure development, the BRI led to what Yan Xuetong had hoped for – an extended geographical network of political partnerships – and, accordingly, the expansion of Beijing's "interest frontiers", requiring foreign policy and security activities to protect them (Ghiselli 2021, 1).

However, China was not expanding its "interest frontiers", nor implementing the BRI, just for the sake of seeking more economic power or indeed global power. Beijing assessed that the new initiatives were needed

to break the United States' "first island chain" (neo)containment policy in the Asia-Pacific, to provide reliable maritime and land routes through Eurasia and the Indian Ocean, and to secure its ever-increasing energy imports from Russia and the Middle East. Perhaps most importantly, it was intended to protect the fundamentals – territorial integrity and sovereignty – from separatism, terrorism and various forms of "colour revolutions", following a decade of protests: Hong Kong (from 2004), Tibet (2008), Xinjiang (2009), and the transfer of "jasmine" protests following the Arab Spring (2011). Moreover, the threat from Taiwan's "unilateral declaration of independence" (UDI) – which featured highly after the victory in Chen Shui-Bian from the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in Taipei in 2000 and 2004 – was alarming Beijing after the United States and the European Union masterminded the UDI by Albanian separatists in the Serbian province of Kosovo and Metohija in 2008.

Despite gaining economic clout, China was thus facing growing challenges, to which it needed to respond by shaping the strategic environment in geographic areas of key importance to its interest frontiers. Shaping involves creating a "more favourable" international environment by changing relationships, characteristics and behaviour of other actors, primarily through attraction, legitimacy and persuasion (Wolfley 2021). In line with these attributes, and in order to achieve the objectives, a country needs to project its strategic narrative as means of political actors in international relations to "shape the opinions and behaviour of actors at home and overseas" (Miskimmon et al 2013, 248). In turn, to align the words and deeds of the strategic narrative, and thus achieve the desired shaping, a country practices statecraft - "organized actions" governments take to change the "external environment" or "policies and actions of other states" to suit their objectives (Holsti 1976, 293). Aligning the strategic narrative with the objectives of shaping and means of statecraft is key to legitimize the power status in the international arena, be it at the regional or global level.

Yet, the dominant global power can allow other international powers to achieve these objectives only insofar as they fit its own strategic narrative and the international environment which it had shaped in its pursuit and maintenance of hegemony. As result, the United States, as the leader of the post-Cold War "unipolar moment", started to shift its policy of engagement with Beijing to the policy of containment of its rise. After a slow start of

Barrack Obama's "pivot to Asia" in the early 2010s, the arrival of Donald Trump in the White House in the mid-2010s sharpened and sped up the containment policy through tariff wars, sanctions, restrictions for investment and technological procurement, as well as strategic communication aimed at undermining Beijing's capacities, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. His successor Joseph Biden pursued in the early 2020s the policy of containment with bipartisan support, charged with pushing U.S. businesses and countries worldwide to "de-couple" from China, and to fight for the preservation of the Western-led "rules-based order" (RBO) challenged by Beijing.

On its part, China relentlessly pursued its strategic objectives: the preservation of its territorial integrity and sovereignty; the breaking of the U.S. containment policy in the Indo-Pacific; the securing of its transport routes and energy imports; the expansion and protection of its "interest frontiers"; and the challenging of the RBO through initiatives harmonized with the transition towards multipolarity.

Crafting the strategic environment

The transition towards multipolarity is marked by "uncertainty and the fight for legitimacy of states in international relations" (Mitić and Matić 2022, 251). The underlying cause of this uncertainty is the tension in the assessment of the precariousness of the RBO between Western actors which believe it can still be preserved - albeit slightly modified to accommodate new realities - and non-Western actors which believe it is ripe for more profound, norm-changing challenging. Furthermore, the transformation of orders is "most often accompanied by wider destabilization and breaking out of a series of regional conflicts or even a global conflict" (Proroković 2018, 342). Thus, the competition over crafting favourable strategic environments – "the set of global conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect the employment of all elements of (U.S.) national power" (Training and Doctrine Command 2012, 2). To craft favourable environment, states vie for trust, legitimacy, and power using strategic communication through which they form, project and sustain a persuasive story about the international system, their own role and action. They project military, economic, political and cultural power through strategic communication as

a system of coordinated activities aimed at advancing their mission through persuasion and promotion of a certain type of behaviour (Mitić and Matić, 2022, 251). To do so, states and organizations forge "strategic narratives" as "a means for political actors to construct a shared meaning of the past, present and future of international relations in order to shape the opinions and behaviour of actors at home and abroad" (Miskimmon et al 2013, 248). Strategic narratives describe the desired outcomes and seek to persuade other stakeholders to follow and assist in achieving them. Short-term objectives can be achieved by "structuring the responses of others to developing events" (Freedman 2006, 22), while long-term objectives imply that getting other actors to pick up the narrative "can shape their interests, their identity, and their understanding of how international relations works and where it is heading" (Miskimmon et al 2013, 3). The strategic narrative thus needs to unveil how a political actor or state conceives world order, its identity within the order, as well as the policies it intends to perform to legitimize this identity (Miskimmon et al 2013). Then, in the process of strategic communication, it needs to perform shaping through aligning words (geopolitical storylines/framing) and deeds (statecraft repertoires/geopolitical scripts).

Shaping has been intrinsic to every global power. Through centuries, in seeking to "shape the international system in accordance with its own values" (Kissinger 1994, 17), or more recently, in exercising soft power "to shape the preferences of others" (Nye 2005, 5). Shaping, of course, does not exist outside the historical context. Political actors are "free to make choices, but their choices are shaped by the structures and history they and their predecessors have made", and thus the "interactive shaping of choices is also a sequential process" (Rasler and Thomson 1989). Or, as Krasner argues, "once an historical choice is made, it both precludes and facilitates alternative future choices" (Krasner 1984, 225). Thus, for example, for current Eurasian affairs it is important to source current security shaping in past "imperial legacy" (Mankoff 2022). In terms of security environment, "military shaping" is key, and it implies "the use of military to proactively build a more favourable environment by changing military relationships, the characteristics of other militaries, or the behaviour of allies" through attraction, socialization, delegation and assurance (Wolfley 2022). Wolfley argues that "shaping relies primarily on attraction, legitimacy, persuasion, and positive incentives and less on uses or threats of force" (Wolfley 2021).

Thus, shaping requires the use of persuasion by words and deeds. In terms of words, shaping requires "geopolitical storylines" as sets of arguments which provide "a relatively coherent sense-making narrative for a foreign policy challenge" (O'Tuathail 2002, 619). To boost these storylines, political actors apply "frames" to provoke reactions of the public on the element of reality they are accentuating or hiding. They do so through "strategic framing", as an integral part of strategic communication which seeks to "use message frames to create salience for certain aspects of a topic by including and focusing attention on them while excluding other aspects" (Hallahan 2008, 4856). Strategic framing can be applied by both governments and activist groups, but at every level of the process, what is evident is intention (Mitić 2018, 123). As far as deeds are concerned, in international politics, states practice "statecraft" – "organized actions governments take to change the external environment in general or the policies and actions of other states in particular to achieve the objectives set by policymakers" (Holsti 1976, 293). States use four types of statecraft instruments – military, political, diplomatic and cultural - to "influence others in the international system - to make their friends and enemies behave in ways that they would have otherwise not" (Goddard et al 2019, 306). Furthermore, states use "sets of repertoires" as "more limited toolkits in use, whether by particular states, in relations among specific states, or in specific settings" (Goddard et al 2019, 310). These sets of statecraft repertoires align with what O'Tuathail calls "geopolitical scripts" – "tacit set of rules for how foreign policy actors are to perform in certain speech situations, and how they are to articulate responses to policy challenges and problems" (O'Tuathail 2002, 619). These scripts need to be flexible enough to harmonize, depending on the situation, context or development, with the set of statecraft repertoire a state can employ. Furthermore, they must make sure to connect the words and the deeds, and "to close the say-do gap" as one of the key elements of successful strategic communication (Mitić 2018, 143).

The evolution of Beijing's strategic assessment

Seventy years since first presented by then Prime Minister of China Zhou Enlai in December 1953, the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence continue to be the official basis of China's foreign policy engagement. The Five Principles – mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity,

mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence - were included in the 1982 Constitution of the PRC, and Beijing has, since the transition towards multipolarity, called to "build the new international order" on their basis (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PR of China 2023a). However, during the Cold War period, the Korean War (1950-1953) and the border conflicts with India (1962), the Soviet Union (1969) and Vietnam (1979) weakened Beijing's capabilities to project power regionally and globally (Lanteigne 2020). On the other side, after two uneasy decades since the formation of the PRC, from the early 1970s, Washington saw Beijing as a partner in Soviet containment, and assisted in its economic rise through globalization, particularly after Deng Xiaoping's policy of "reform and opening-up" and the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1979. This engagement continued even after the 1989 events on Tienanmen square. In the early 1990s, as the U.S. was boasting about its Cold War triumph and losing interest in China as balancing power against the Soviet Union, Beijing reached extraordinary economic growth and settled its border disputes with Russia and the Central Asian states. Beijing hosted the signing of the formation of the "The Shanghai Five group" (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) in 1996, a precursor of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization launched in 2001. Rising production also meant expanding the urge to guarantee energy security, as China became dependent on oil import from 1993, a problem it tried to resolve by rounding up the establishment of diplomatic relations with all countries of the Middle East (Erickson and Collins 2010, 90).

However, Beijing's relations with Washington soured as the U.S. "unipolar moment" metastasized into the 1999 NATO aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, with the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, the killing of three Chinese journalists and the wounding of 20 employees. The public outcry in China strengthened anti-Western sentiment and left a "scar of deep mistrust" between Beijing and Washington (Lampton 2014, 118). In the aftermath, China adopted its "New Security Concept", which, according to Ghiselli, aimed to "improve the view towards a multipolar world order as a response to the US global dominance, especially after the bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in 1999 by the US aviation brought fear to the top of the Chinese civilian and military leadership of the onset of a new era of the US unilateralism" (Ghiselli 2021,

23). Officials of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) saw the bombing as a "lethal blow to the slowly recovering authority of the UN", which will "negatively affect the security environment in Asia", predicting future American unilateralism in the Taiwan Strait and the Korean Peninsula (Ghiselli 2021, 51-52). China became worried about the formation of U.S.-led "coalitions of the willing'" and the implications it might have on international interference on the questions of Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang (Pang 2005, 88). These worries were strengthened following the election of the independentist leader in Taipei, Chen Shui-Bian in 2000. Furthermore, as "colour revolutions" started to flourish around the Russian Federation ("Rose revolution" in Georgia in 2003, "Orange revolution" in Ukraine in 2004, "Pink revolution" in Kyrgyzstan in 2005), Beijing witnessed increasing pressure of protests on its territory: in Hong Kong from 2004, in Tibet in 2008, in Xinjiang in 2009. Furthermore, despite strong warnings by Moscow and Beijing, Washington and Brussels orchestrated the "unilateral declaration of independence" by Albanian separatists in Kosovo and Metohija in 2008, nine years after the NATO aggression, and in yet another violent breach of international law regarding Serbia's southern province.

Another challenge for China and its global economic power projection was the challenge to its transportation routes. While a more assertive positioning on the question of the Paracel and Spratly island chains in the South China Sea was to be expected, Beijing also sent its first "anti-pirate task force" in the Gulf of Aden in 2008. Part of the Suez Canal shipping route between the Arabian and Mediterranean seas, the Aden Gulf had been a scene the previous year of attacks or hijacking of more than 250 civilian ships, during which 50 Chinese seamen had been taken hostage by Somali pirates (Zhao 2022). Years later, it would be clear that this operation had also its implications for the demonstration of power projection of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) far from China's coast (Henry 2016). In 2009, China performed its largest overseas evacuation up to then, by airlifting 1,300 Chinese citizens from Kyrgyzstan following deadly ethnic clashes (Xinhua 2010). Yet, this operation appeared minor in size the following year, in early 2011, when China evacuated 36,000 citizens from Libya ahead of the Western bombing. In the aftermath, the "People's Liberation Army Daily" published an article arguing that the events in Libya marked a "turning point for Chinese foreign policy" – a "crisis in a third country had never impacted Chinese interests abroad as much as this one" and "interest

frontiers" – as "the geographical space that is defined (and constantly redefined) by the evolution of China's interests and the threats to them – had never been so far from its geographical borders" (Ghiselli 2021, 1). Ghiselli argued that the need to protect these "interest frontiers" had become a "powerful factor in the equation of Chinese foreign policy", causing the "transformation of the Chinese foreign and security policy machine" and "expansion of China's security footprint overseas" (Ghiselli 2021, 1).

In parallel, the U.S. was becoming more critical of the PLA moves in the South China Sea – including the deployment of anti-access, area-denial (A2/AD)-type weapons - and increasingly worried about China's growing interconnectedness between economic and military power. Washington reacted by publishing the Air-Sea Battle Doctrine in 2009-2010, aimed at countering and confronting China's growing military capabilities (Ford, 2017), and by claiming through U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that the South China Sea was a matter of U.S. national interest. Such moves set the scene for Barrack Obama's "pivot to Asia", but also irritated Beijing.

Chinese foreign policy scholars increasingly discussed about the limits of foreign policy and security non-interference. Critics of the concept of non-interference considered the times had changed since 1953 and that China's global stature and interests had expanded far away from its geographic borders. They argued that China should be more assertive in defending its own, and the interests of its allies. On the other side, defenders of the concept of non-interference feared a change might be counter-productive for the fight against Western interference in Chinese own internal matters, and that it might appear repulsive to its neighbours. Chen argued that the debate led to a "loose consensus" for a "modest pragmatic adjustment of the non-interference policy", following the concepts of "constructive" and "creative" involvement that must be clearly distinguished from Western-style interventionism (Chen 2019, 90-92). Furthermore, Chen argued that the thought of Chinese realists became dominant over two other currents among Beijing's foreign policy scholars – the anti-Western view of Marxism with Chinese characteristics, and the globalist view of liberalism with Chinese characteristics. In turn, the realist school divided between defensive and offensive realists. Defensive realists expressed worry about China's capacities to have a more active role in global hotspots, while offensive realists considered that Beijing should be more assertive in the use of its

power and diplomatic influence, both to promote its own and the interests of its allies (Chen 2019, 95). One of China's most prominent foreign policy scholars, Yan Xuetong, himself an offensive realist, argued in favour of shifting from the economic profit of Deng Xiaoping's "hide capabilities and bide time" to a policy of "striving for achievement" which allows for more political allies in the international arena. Yan argued that the difference between the two concepts was that, as opposed to the earlier policy which focused on China's own economic gains, "striving for achievement" centered on political support and morality which was strengthening the political legitimacy of a rising power (Yan 2014, 153). On the other side, Chen argued that the consensus on keeping the non-interference principle, albeit modified, allowed Beijing to "float above some of the world's difficult trouble spots without getting sucked into messy political disputes" (Chen 2019, 99). He mentioned the case of the conflict in Ukraine from early 2014 on, where Beijing argued for the preservation of territorial integrity and non-interference, while at the same time underlying the West should take into account Moscow's legitimate concerns over Ukraine (Chen 2019, 99).

Nevertheless, upon becoming president, Xi actively promoted the policy of "striving for achievement". He immediately launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – aimed at developing the transportation infrastructure in developing countries, but also at assisting China's resilience to potential transport route denial by the U.S. and its allies. The BRI was also a demonstration of China's vitality and superior performance during the global economic crisis, and an example of why the old economic ways of the RBO were in need of serious reform. The sheer geographic scope of the BRI meant it would impact a large part of the world, but particularly Eurasia. New road and maritime routes implicated going in various directions. To the north, the possibility of the North Sea Route, to be developed by Russia, as a possible solution for the vulnerability of China's passage through the Strait of Malacca, its primary choke point on the Suez Canal route, which blockade would endanger both China's trade and its import of crude oil. To the west, a road corridor through the Central Asian states, despite the geographical obstacles and the security concerns. To the southeast, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a 3,000 km infrastructure network connecting China's Xinjiang with Pakistan's deep water port of Gwadar in the Arabian Sea, as another option for overcoming the possible Strait of Malacca choking point. Further to the southeast, the building of thousands of kilometres of roads and

railroads in mineral-rich Africa, including the 2018 railway between Addis Ababa and Djibouti, home since 2017 to the PLAN first overseas military base, which significantly increases its power projection in the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. With the creation of the "16+1" cooperation format in Central and Eastern Europe, the purchasing of the Mediterranean Piraeus port in Greece, its potential linking to the transport infrastructure projects through Serbia into Hungary and Central Europe, Huawei's 5G network advances, and Chinese investment in Western European strategic industries and security-relevant infrastructure, the U.S. and the rest of the West became worried. Indeed, Beijing had demonstrated that "there are many authentic ways to maintain the BRI countries connected in security and defence policy, other than classical military alliance or through an international organisation" (Đorđević and Stekić 2023, 65).

The negative Western tone on the BRI and China's foreign policy increased from the mid-2010s. The BRI was growingly framed as "illiberal", "disruptive", "divisive" and "geopolitical", while the strategic obstructive strategic narrative incrementally progressed from questioning of intent and worry towards warning about the "BRI threat" and call to action against BRI-related projects (Mitić 2022a, 33-34). In Washington, China was treated as a "sharp power" that "pierces, penetrates or perforates the political and information environments in the targeted countries" (National Endowment for Democracy 2017). In Brussels, such framing was putting strain on cooperation of EU member and candidate countries (Zakić and Šekarić 2021). The Western strategic narrative put an emphasis on two particular groupings of frames. The first one was based on "systemic ills", or flaws which Western authors considered as "endemic to China's political and economic structures, values, rules, norms and practices, and considered as inherent and embedded in the BRI": from fostering "elite capture", "non-transparency", "corruption", "illiberal practices" to problematic investments and exploitation of low levels of resilience (Mitić 2022a, 38-42). The second grouping was related to China's "geopolitical ambition", or related China's "geostrategic objectives in its rise to global leadership": from "sowing division" within the West, to "using malign influence", "entangling partners with debt traps", and using propaganda and disinformation through anti-Western "wolf warrior" discourse (Mitić 2022a, 42-44).

This tone coincided – although it was not necessarily directly related – with the arrival of Donald Trump in the White House in 2017. Trump's administration designated China as a "strategic competitor", instigated a "tariff war" with Beijing, imposed sanctions and restrictions on Chinese officials and entities, lobbied Central and Eastern European countries to ban Huawei from 5G networks, reinvigorated the China-containing Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) format (United States, Japan, India, Australia), and increased arms sales to Taiwan, including F-16 fighter jets. Furthermore, the administration took a particularly harsh line towards the Communist Party of China (CCP), blaming it for the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Trump's administration summed up its strategic approach to the PRC in a document in which it claimed that, while the U.S. had expected an engagement with China would lead to its "emergence as a constructive and responsible global stakeholder", it became evident the CCP had "chosen instead to exploit the free and open rules-based order and attempt to reshape the international system in its favour" (White House 2020). Defying expectations, Joseph Biden only reinforced Trump's policy. His designated Director for China at the National Security Council (NSC), Rush Doshi, elaborated the key elements of Biden administration's strategic narrative on China. He argued that China's "strategies of displacement" of the U.S. evolved in three phases: from blunting American power over China itself after Tienanmen and the collapse of the Soviet Union (1989-2008), to diminishing U.S. power through building regional hegemony in Asia following the global economic crisis (2008-2016), and since, in the third stage, "expanding its blunting and building efforts worldwide to displace the United States as the global leader" (Doshi 2021, 4) Doshi's words translated into a U.S policy which Biden's State Secretary Anthony Blinken defended by arguing that "we cannot rely on Beijing to change its trajectory. So we will shape the strategic environment around Beijing to advance our vision for an open, inclusive international system" (Blinken 2022).

China's new initiatives and shaping of strategic environment

Despite facing the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on one side, the threat of containment and de-coupling on the other, and the overall U.S. policy of "shaping the strategic environment around Beijing", China did not go on the defensive. Rather, Beijing boosted existing and launched new global initiatives, pushing its own shaping strategy, particularly in Eurasia.

Belt and Road Initiative

Recapitulating in September 2023 the first decade of the BRI launch, The Economist, not too kind to the initiative since its inception, underlined that 10 years ago "no one predicted that the project would become a defining feature of (Xi's) foreign policy and dramatic symbol of China's rise as a global power", and that "the West was in for a shock" (The Economist 2023a). The British magazine further underlined that "in many ways the BRI has lived up to the hype" as "more than 150 countries, accounting for almost 75% of the world's population and more than half of its GDP, have signed on to the scheme" (The Economist 2023b). According to Chinese figures, the BRI has helped the GDP share of emerging and developing countries in the world to increase by 3.6 percent through some 3,000 projects, and it will lift 40 million people out of poverty by 2030 (Embassy of the PR of China in Grenada 2023). In Africa alone, the initiative has led to the construction or refurbishment of "over 10,000 kilometers of railway, up to 100,000 kilometers of roads, nearly 1,000 bridges and almost 100 ports" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PR of China 2022a). Through promoting BRI connectivity, China has boosted connectivity to the rest of the world for landlocked countries in Asia, such as Laos, Nepal and Kazakhstan. Same in Africa, with Ethiopia, where the 2018 railway between Djibouti and Addis Ababa, constructed under the BRI, has helped the country link to the Arabian Sea and China's maritime transport route – providing a major boost for the country's successful 2023 bid to join BRICS.

Throughout Eurasia, the China-Europe Railway Express has opened a new Asia-Europe land transport route, with a particularly important role since the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted global supply chains. With the conflict in Ukraine intensifying since early 2022, there were worries that the corridor linking China and Western Europe through the Russian Federation would be threatened. Yet, figures paint a different picture. In the first seven months of 2023, more than 1.08 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEU) of freight have been transported between China and Europe through the route, a year-on-year increase of 27 percent (Blair 2023). The trip from Shenyang, in northeastern China, to Duisburg in the heavily industrialised Rhine-Ruhr region, the economic heartland of Germany, lasts 12 days. Along the route, ten overseas terminal stations have been set up, including Moscow. Transit countries, such as Mongolia and Belarus, have

considerably profited from transportation income. Indeed, in just a few years since its 2017 launch, the route has become an important part of China's BRI aim to reduce its dependence on potential Strait of Malacca blockage.

Yet another part of this strategy has been the CPEC corridor connecting China's Kashgar to Pakistan's Gwadar in the Arabian Sea. With the development of the Gwadar warm-water deep-sea port, it has become a connectivity regional hub, with benefits not only to China and Pakistan, but also Afghanistan and Central Asia. Gwadar has a key location at the entrance of the Strait of Hormuz, between Oman and Iran, one of the world's most important oil chokepoints, with the passage each of day of 17 million barrels of oil per day, an equivalent of 20 to 30 percent of the world's total consumption (Strauss Center for International Security and Law 2023). Thus, its additional importance China's energy security.

In Europe, BRI-affiliated projects have become showcases: as a key hub for BRI's maritime entrance into Europe, the Piraeus port in Greece has been transformed from decaying to Mediterranean premier and one of Europe's top five, increasing its capacity from 1.5 million TEUs to 6.2 million in 13 years since China's COSCO acquired its majority stake (Xinhua 2023a). Along with successful infrastructure projects in Serbia, and the perspective of the Belgrade-Budapest high-speed railway - tying the Mediterranean to Central Europe along Corridor X - the case of Piraeus has maintained the interest for the China-Central and Eastern European Countries (China-CEEC) format, originally the "16+1", despite the decision by the Baltic countries to exit the network under Washington's influence.

The BRI has also allowed China to demonstrate during the COVID-19 pandemic its "mask and vaccine diplomacy". China built upon its BRI-affiliated Health Silk Road (HSR) to launch the "Initiative for Belt and Road Partnership on COVID-19 Vaccines Cooperation" with 28 countries, with the aim of narrowing the global immunization gap (Liangtao et al 2022). Although geopolitical competition, Western constraints and accusations of "exploiting the pandemic" affected its full reach, the "mask and vaccine diplomacy" had a considerable positive impact on the projection of China's soft power, in the Global South in general and in Asia in particular.

Although not directly linked, the BRI helped China with its diplomatic battle over Taiwan. Its policy of de-recognitions of Taiwan has been particularly successful since 2017, with eight countries cutting ties with

Taipei – in Africa, the Pacific and Latin America - thus leaving the number of recognizers to 13 - mostly small island states, the Vatican, and Eswatini as the only remaining African recognizer.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization

China has seen the SCO as a mechanism to create an Eurasian security network without Western interference, a particularly important platform for multilateral discussions on security matters, and as a springboard for bilateral military cooperation. Furthermore, it provides to Beijing a possibility to get support for its key principles during SCO summits – including on unilateral sanctions, bloc and ideological confrontations (Khaliq and Latif 2023). In SCO expansion, together with Moscow, China sought to find a balancing act. This was already the case with the 2017 expansion to India – also member of BRICS – and Pakistan – a key country for the BRI connectivity. A similar act has been in process over expansion to Iran and Saudi Arabia. While Teheran had been in the waiting room for over a decade, it entered the SCO in 2023 only in parallel with the granting of status of "dialogue partner" to Riyadh. While Beijing intensified its military cooperation with Saudi Arabia, it participated in joint naval exercises with Iran and Russia in the Gulf of Oman. In further proof of security architecture shaping in the Middle East, the SCO officially granted dialogue partners in 2023 also to Egypt and Qatar, while green light for the same status was given to Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait. With the membership of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, Belarus' entrance in the 2024 pipeline, the observer status for Afghanistan and Mongolia, "dialogue partner" status for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Turkey, the Maldives and Myanmar, the SCO is closing its geographic gaps in Asia and the Middle East, while at same time expanding scope and mechanisms of cooperation. It is indeed sending a signal of what Doshi would call a "strategy of displacement" of the U.S.

BRICS

The BRICS decision on enlargement at the 2023 Johannesburg summit was, besides being historical, a symbol of the epochal changes in the direction of multipolarity. It can be perceived as a diplomatic victory for

Beijing and Moscow, which have been the key proponents of enlargement, while at the same time being considered in the West as key challengers to the RBO. Indeed, BRICS was founded in the context of the 2008 global economic crisis, at the outset of the transition towards multipolarity. While Western critics have put an accent on the economic asymmetries and disparities among BRICS countries, as well as to the geopolitical efforts to counter the G7, Beijing's perceptions could be interpreted in Yan's "moral realist" terms of primacy of seeking long-term political partners over immediate economic profit. The inclusion of the six new BRICS members appeared odd to some analysts. Yet, it is well grounded in China's strategic thinking and its initiatives. The inclusion of Iran and Saudi Arabia follows the SCO path of "parallel" acceptance of two key partners in the Middle East. The Saudi Arabian case is evident for its importance as largest oil exporter to China and key member of OPEC+ (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries plus other oil-producing countries). However, it is also highly symbolic for the process of de-dollarization, yet another strategic interest for Beijing supported at the BRICS summit, given that the petrodollar had been founded after a 1974 deal between U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Riyadh.

Ethiopia's case is yet another showcase of China's thinking about BRICS enlargement as the country's capital is connected by the BRI-built railway to Djibouti, home to the PLAN first base in Africa and a strategic point for the Suez Canal and the Arabian Sea. This link gives further depth to China's entry into Africa, where the competition over resources has greatly increased after the West imposed sanctions on Russia. Finally, the international public attention given to BRICS and its enlargement provides a strong impetus to China's strategic narrative as rising global power: China is against alliances, but is not against challenging the RBO. It is not against the G7, but it is against the G7 norm-setting for the RBO.

Global Development Initiative

Despite, being in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic and facing increasing U.S. pressure, Beijing launched in September 2021 the first in a series of three global initiatives. The Global Development Initiative (GDI) was launched as a credible opportunity to encourage the achievement of the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) of the UN Agenda 2030. Set in

2015, the SDGs were lagging behind worldwide due to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rising geopolitical tensions and the overall crisis of the neoliberal economic model. While compatible with the BRI, the GDI focused on tackling uneven and inadequate environment, and proposes cooperation in eight areas: poverty alleviation, food security, pandemic response and vaccines, financing for development, climate change and green development, industrialization, digital economy and connectivity in the digital area (Center for International Knowledge for Development 2023). However, one of the key elements has been its immediate linking to UN multilateralism. The GDI was presented at the UN General Assembly, and it received in a record time the support of up to 100 countries within the Group of Friends of the Initiative, followed by the meeting of the Group at the UN Headquarters in New York. By linking its initiative to the UN from the start of the process, China showed not only its focus on multilateralism, but also the width of global support for its initiative. Thus, it set the scene for the GDI to be perceived as an UN-centered multilateral effort, rather than a geopolitical project – a labelling the BRI had received from the West. To the contrary, it was the Western BRI-countering efforts which could now be perceived as geopolitical. The Partnership for Global Investment and Infrastructure (PGII) was inaugurated by the G7 in 2022 with the aim of competing with the BRI (Lemire and Mathiesen 2022). The EU integrated its BRI-combating Global Gateway initiative into the PGII, which strategic narrative focused on the superiority of values over the BRI. However, as with the BRI, the Western initiatives are once again a step behind the Chinese in the width of global support, as well as scope and pace of implementation. Thus, when he announced at the BRICS summit in Johannesburg the launch of a 10 billion U.S. dollars special fund to implement the GDI, Xi Jinping was already able to proclaim the fruition of 200 cooperation project in Asia, Africa, the Pacific and the Caribbean island countries, as well as the launch with UNESCO of the "GDI for Africa's future" action plan (CGTN 2023).

Global Civilization Initiative

XI Jinping announced the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) in March 2023, calling for the respect of diversity of civilizations, the diversified paths to modernization and people-to-people exchange. His arguments suggest an

opposition to Westernization as the only model of modernisation, and to Western values as universal. The appeal of these ideas is particularly high in Asia, where a number of countries have created their own sustainable models of development and modernization, without necessarily aligning with Western norms of the RBO. Same with the idea of protecting the diversity and heritage of traditional values. In a clear reference to the West, Xi called to "refrain from imposing their own values or models on others", "from stoking ideological confrontation" and from "feelings of superiority" (Xinhua 2023b). As with the GDI, Beijing sought and obtained support at the multilateral level, as the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, Miguel Angel Moratinos, called for close coordination between the GCI and the United Nations (UNAOC 2023). The GCI principles are in line with Chinese principles of soft power, which Beijing projects through four main channels: promotion of Chinese language and culture institutes, external communication, educational exchanges and large-scale public diplomacy (Repnikova 2022). A particular point of focus in Chinese soft power projection has been neighbouring Central Asia, where Beijing uses the mix buoyant nostalgia of Silk Road imagery and modern people-to-people exchanges: it opened 12 Confucius centres, broadcasts 24-hour programmes in local languages, devotes important resources for scholarships, technical assistance and state-of-the art vocational training via its Luban workshops, named after Lu Ban, the father of Chinese architecture. On the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations with the Central Asian states, Xi Jinping in January 2022 announced a number of initiatives aiming to boost Beijing's soft power in the region: increasing in the next half-decade the number of sister-city pairings with five Central Asian countries to 100, providing 1,200 government scholarships to their students and offering 5,000 seminars and workshops to their professionals in various development fields (Xi 2023). In the security area, these efforts have included training of personnel and exercises in bilateral and multilateral formats, carefully balanced with Russia's traditional military presence in the region. They have also allowed for more robust BRI and security presence. At the first-ever China-Central Asia summit, held in May 2023 in Xian – the origin of the ancient Silk Road route – Xi urged the Central Asian states to implement the principles of the GDI, but also to help "strengthen capacity building on law enforcement, security and defence, support their independent efforts to

safeguard regional security and fight terrorism, and work with them to promote cyber-security" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PR of China 2023).

Global Security Initiative

Among China's three new initiatives, the Global Security Initiative (GSI) has received the most public attention worldwide. Xi Jinping announced the GSI two months after the beginning of Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, at the Boao Forum for Asia Conference in April 2022, and set outright the context of his proposal: "changes of the world, of our times and of history are unfolding in ways like never before" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PR of China 2022b). China's president received support from Moscow for the idea of the GSI, and on his first trip abroad since the COVID-19 pandemic, he presented the idea at the SCO summit in Samarkand, receiving support from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (Freeman and Stephenson 2022). He continued to garner support at the multilateral level – proposing it at the UN level on the occasion of the International Peace Day – and at the G20 Bali summit. Yet, the main presentation of the GSI occurred on February 21, 2023, when the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs published its "Concept paper", with six core concepts and principles, 20 priorities of cooperation and five platforms and mechanisms of cooperation. The six core concepts and principles were in line with China's long-standing vision of global security. First, the need for a new vision of security – common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable – a concept which had already been introduced by Xi in 2014. It calls for the respect of security of every country, peaceful negotiation and political dialogue, as well as coordination and cooperation in security governance. Second, the respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries, firmly supported by China in its Five Principles for Peaceful Coexistence. Third, deep commitment to the principles of the UN Charter, underlying that "the Cold War mentality, unilateralism, bloc confrontation and hegemonism contradict the spirit of the UN Charter and must be resisted and rejected". Fourth, commitment to indivisible security, taking the legitimate security of all countries seriously and arguing that "security of one country should not come at the expense of that of others". Fifth, commitment to peaceful and negotiated solutions instead of war and unilateral sanctions, including calls to countries to "strengthen strategic

communication, enhance mutual security confidence, diffuse tensions, manage differences and eliminate the root causes of crises". Finally, sixth, commitment to security in both traditional and non-traditional domains, which have become intertwined, particularly in the fields of terrorism, climate change, cybersecurity and biosecurity. Furthermore, the Concept Paper outlined the "Priorities for Cooperation" – including conflict hotspots – as well as "Mechanisms of Cooperation", focusing largely on the UN and other multilateral initiatives and networks in which China had been participating (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PR of China 2023c). In a bold strategic communication move, Beijing presented three days later, on the occasion of the first anniversary of Russia's operation, its "Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis". The plan underlines in its first point the preservation of territorial integrity and sovereignty, yet added that "double standards must be rejected", a clear poke in the direction of the RBO, and a reference to the different treatment of cases of territorial integrity of Ukraine and Serbia, which territorial integrity the West breached by masterminding the 2008 UDI of the Albanian separatists in Kosovo. The second point of the plan argues against "Cold War mentality" and security "at the expense of others", including that "the security of a region should be achieved by strengthening or expanding military blocs". The clear reference to NATO's expansion towards Russia as the source of the conflict in Ukraine adds to Beijing's stand on its own harsh opposition to the U.S.-led China-containment policy in the Indo-Pacific through military partnerships and networks creating the base for a future "Asian NATO". This point, together with point 10 reference to opposition to "the abuse of unilateral sanctions" particularly irritated Western officials.

However, the Western states were not the primary target of China's strategic communication of the GSI. This was particularly evident when, two weeks after the presentation of the Concept paper, Beijing hosted a stunning shuttle diplomacy success, bringing together Iran and Saudi Arabia to re-establish diplomatic relations. While it was in itself surprising, the indicators for such development could be seen in the last several years of balanced treatment and parallel inclusion of the Riyadh and Teheran in the SCO, and a bit later, into BRICS. Beijing wanted to make sure that its diplomatic success was a "successful application of the GSI" (Global Times 2023a) and that it would have "exert far-reaching influence on other hotspot issues" (Global Times 2023b). The Iran-Saudi Arabia deal boosted the GSI

and led to more acceptance in the Global South in the coming months. In the West, the reception of the GSI was harsh, as it was labelled "anti-US", "anti-NATO", and a "manifesto for an alternative system of international affairs to the current 'rules based' order led by the United States and its partners in Europe and the Indo-Pacific" (Schuman, Fulton and Gering 2023). China, in turn, has continued to use the GSI and harshly criticize the U.S. and its allies for trying to create a series of China-containing alliances: from AUKUS (Australia, UK, US), to the QUAD, the U.S.-South Korea-Japan trilateral summit in Camp David, the deal on new U.S. bases in the Philippines and a new 10-billion dollars package of military assistance to Taiwan. China has answered to the trend of U.S. containment by extending further its "interest frontiers", as witnessed by the bilateral security agreement with the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific, the joint drills with Russia and South Africa in the Indian Ocean, as well as with Russia and Iran in the Gulf of Oman. Furthermore, the GSI allows for cooperation on joint efforts to tackle the terrorist threat. This is particularly relevant for the case of the terrorist threat from the "Liberation Army of Baluchistan" on the China-CPEC corridor in Pakistan, around Gwadar, as well from the "Islamist Movement of Eastern Turkistan" in Afghanistan's Badakhshan, affiliated with Al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations, and threatening to destabilize Xinjiang (Mitić 2022b).

Conclusion

Faced with increasing U.S. attempts to shape the strategic environment "around Beijing", China's statecraft reinvigorated existing and launched new global initiatives. China's main goals of shaping a favourable strategic environment are in line with the protection of its fundamental national interests, the expansion and defence of its ever-growing "interest frontiers", and the projection of its global economic, political and security power. These have included: protecting territorial integrity and sovereignty; breaking the constraints of U.S. containment in the Indo-Pacific; securing energy imports and key maritime and land routes; preserving its key role in the global value chain; and challenging what it perceives as decaying RBO in favour of multipolarity.

China's initiatives have demonstrated an important role in the shaping of a strategic environment which facilitates its key interests. First, in line with the proclaimed policy of "striving for achievement", they have strengthened the multilateral width of political partners and the depth of global issues in need of new or alternative models and policies. Second, they have demonstrated China's capacity to align words with deeds, reinforcing its strategic communication. Third, they have allowed for concrete responses to strategic challenges, such as the U.S. containment policy in the Indo-Pacific or security challenges in Central Asia. Fourth, they allowed for the demonstration of China's pro-active diplomatic statecraft at the global level. Fifth, they further expanded China's "interest frontiers" and their protection – from Eurasia to Africa and beyond. Finally, they have strengthened China's strategic narrative about the need to challenge the RBO and favour policies and norms which can more adequately reflect and sustain the transition towards multipolarity.

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The Third Offset in East Asia and its Challenges

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Abstract: Comprehensive military strategy often charts the course for establishing a state's grand strategy. In the case of great power politics, such reasoning is deemed essential if such states wish to preserve their position among other great powers in world politics. The development of military strategy is governed by the politics, economy, institutions, threat perception, and technological capabilities of a state. After the Second World War, technological capabilities gained prominence in comparison to other elements of military strategy. The advancement of technology, both domestically and abroad, played a crucial role in shaping the evolution of military strategy during the Cold War era in the US. These transformations in strategy were characterised as "offsets", reflecting a dynamic interplay between technological innovation and military strategy. The two prior offsets in US military strategy were enacted during periods in which Washington perceived a relative increase in Soviet power, particularly in the European theatre of operations. Technology was deemed the primary means by which the US could counteract this power imbalance. These shifts in military strategy were thus necessary adaptations to maintain a strategic advantage over the adversary. The recent conceptualization of a third offset strategy reflects the continued development of these ideas within the American military establishment. In the following analysis, we will examine the various aspects of the third offset strategy and the potential challenges the strategy may face in East Asia.

Keywords: Armed Forces, East Asia, Military Strategy, Third Offset.

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Introduction:
A retrospective on Two Previous Offsets
in US Military Strategy

During the Cold War, the United States formulated two strategic concepts, intending to adjust its military strategy and armed forces in response to the increasing capabilities of the Soviet army. The shifts in US military strategy were primarily concentrated in the European theatre of operations, encompassing diverse elements of offensive and defensive aspects of military doctrine. The overarching objective of these changes was to "offset" the mounting Soviet military capabilities and enable the US armed forces to better prepare for a possible conflict.

The first offset started to take shape during the Korean War, when the American administration recognised the need to rely more heavily on nuclear technology in order to contain Soviet expansion, given the impracticality of amassing conventional troops throughout Eurasia. The Korean War also offered a limited-scale illustration of the potential nature of a conventional conflict with the Soviets. Furthermore, the prospect of matching the Soviet forces in a conventional ground conflict in Europe appeared unrealistic for the US armed forces of that era. The Kremlin, possessing the capability to assemble a larger fighting force, could have swiftly overwhelmed the Western allies before Washington could react and establish a fortified line of defence. Moreover, the Western countries were not keen on the idea of building a large-scale army that would take away manpower from the industry and potentially overburden the state economy with more military expenses (Bitzinger 1989, 4-5). As John Foster Dull put it bluntly, "If economic stability goes down the drain, everything goes down the drain" (Gaddis 2005, 132).

The initial offset strategy revolved around countering the conventional Soviet threat with nuclear weapons. In other words, the Eisenhower administration pursued an asymmetric strategy that involved employing nuclear strikes against a potential adversary. This approach was deemed economically beneficial and provided Washington with a technological advantage over its rivals. During the 1950s, the US was capable of producing more nuclear warheads than the Soviet Union while also having long-range bombers such as the B-47 Stratojet and B-52 Stratofortress, as well as military

infrastructure that enabled the US Air Force to reach Soviet territory (Grier 2016, 58).

The first offset was, to a greater extent, propagated by Eisenhower's "New Look" policy (Wolk 2003). In brief, the policy can be described as a top-down endeavour by the military and political leadership to implement changes in the armed forces that would enhance operational efficiency without increasing military expenditure. The development of new weaponry, such as the hydrogen bomb, alongside the formidable capabilities of the US Air Force made nuclear weapons an appealing instrument that could possibly fulfil the objectives of the "New Look" policy (Condray 1998, 33-55).

The logic behind the new policy, which was also reflected in the first offset, is that reliance on mechanised and manoeuvre warfare would be substituted with nuclear weapons. In essence, the strategy could be characterised as "massive retaliation". The Eisenhower administration intended to leverage its technological and nuclear superiority to compensate for the shortage of troops and tanks in the event of a conflict with the Soviets. The administration believed that an overpowering nuclear strike would be enough to compel and deter a larger conventional adversary from initiating hostilities (Jackson 2014). Leveraging advanced technological capabilities, particularly in air power, the US armed forces acquired the ability to execute a decapitating first strike that would put the adversary's forces out of action, thereby eliminating the possibility of a second strike or prolonged warfare. These strategic concepts exerted a profound influence on political leadership and how resources were subsequently moved. Nuclear material production witnessed a sharp upsurge, while the Air Force emerged as the principal instrument for securing the success of the new strategic concept. In essence, the first offset embodies Eisenhower's vision of achieving strong first-strike capabilities through the deployment of nuclear weapons, including both strategic and tactical weapons, while simultaneously establishing robust defensive capabilities, such as early warning systems, to mitigate the threat of an adversary's nuclear strike (Rosenberg 1983, 29-33).

One of the chief issues encountered with the first offset was the Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal, which underwent modernization and gained increasing capabilities over time. This development compelled US policymakers to recognise that a nuclear strike might precipitate a retaliatory

decision by the adversary, which could escalate into a full-fledged nuclear confrontation between the two superpowers. As the "nuclear gap" between the Soviets and the US began to narrow, it became apparent that nuclear coercion was viable only as long as the US retained nuclear supremacy. However, such an approach was also dangerous since maintaining nuclear primacy required attacking those nations that aspired to achieve nuclear parity with the US. This perspective entailed heightened risks in foreign policy that could spiral out of control and potentially produce an undesired nuclear exchange between powers. Moreover, employing the threat of nuclear annihilation for any reason other than in cases of existential danger was simply implausible (Jackson 2014).

President John F. Kennedy regarded Eisenhower's "New Look" strategy as rigid and hazardous for both American and European interests. To this end, Kennedy's administration introduced a new strategy known as "Flexible Response", which offered greater flexibility in responding to potential communist aggression by providing a range of options beyond a massive nuclear retaliation. While this strategy was apparently geared towards promoting peace, it ultimately paved the way for US military involvement in Vietnam (Gentile 2021, 11).

During the 1960s, the prospect of employing nuclear weapons against a rival power became progressively more complicated. The Cuban Missile Crisis, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and ultimately the period of Detente restrained political aspirations related to the preventive or active use of atomic bombs. Additionally, Soviet technological advancements enabled them to keep up with the Allies' capabilities, both in terms of nuclear arms production and delivery systems, including Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) (Wohlstetter 1974; Marshall 1972, 40-41). Such political and technological circumstances gave impetus to the development of conventional armaments and the ideas that later embodied the concept of the second offset in US military strategy.

The Yom Kippur War, similarly to the Korean War, served as an example of what a conventional war would have looked like between the superpowers, albeit on a smaller scale. The speed and lethality of this war offered the US military a valuable lesson in modern warfare. Organisational agility appeared crucial, as the large amount of resources was only useful if they were readily available for combat. Richard Lock-Pullan points out that

the October war underscored the importance of precision and swiftness, necessitating a focus on technological proficiency since the battlefield became increasingly swift and deadly (Pullan 2003, 489-499). In addition to technological aspects, the combat and organisational capabilities of soldiers constitute crucial factors that influence the ultimate outcome of a modern war. According to the Pentagon's analysis of the October War, the Israeli Defence Forces were able to overcome numerical disadvantages on the battlefield through effective planning and good combat skills exhibited by their soldiers. The report further underscored that NATO troops would likely encounter comparable challenges when confronting the Warsaw Pact forces in the European theatre (Transue 1974, 27-28).

Although the ideas behind the second offset were relatively new, the problems that the US armed forces were facing were the same. Specifically, the threat of a substantial Soviet incursion into Western Europe, wherein the US would be unable to deploy sufficient military assets to match the Communist bloc on a one-to-one basis, loomed large. Therefore, the new vision of the US armed forces emphasised not only the incorporation of state-of-the-art technologies but also the implementation of enhanced, rigorous training regimes aimed at improving any battlefield deficiencies (Pullan 2003, 500). The need to enhance the military's capabilities was further underscored by significant changes made to the recruitment system in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, which drastically reduced the pool of available manpower that was once at the army's disposal.

The fundamental premise of the second offset strategy, akin to its predecessor, entailed a strategic approach that leveraged technological advancements as a means of achieving a force multiplier effect. This strategy was pursued by five successive American administrations during the 1970s and 1980s (Tomes 2014). As Defence Secretary Harold Brown explained in his annual report to Congress, "*Technology can be a force multiplier, a resource that can be used to help offset the numerical advantages of an adversary. Superior technology is one very effective way to balance military capabilities other than by matching an adversary tank-for-tank or soldier-for-soldier*" (Brown 1981). This idea was in stark contrast with the American concept of war two decades earlier. Whereas the Allies had triumphed over the Axis powers in the Second World War through sheer industrial capacity, the revised strategy vis-à-vis the Soviets prioritised quality over quantity. The integration of

cutting-edge technologies on the battlefield was intended to grant a qualitative edge to the US military and offset the Soviet forces' quantitative advantages (Perry 2003, 3).

In addition to technological advancements, the armed forces acknowledged the need to institute novel doctrinal and organisational measures. This entailed the optimisation of organisational structures with respect to doctrine, planning, and bureaucratic configuration in order to harness the full extent of their capabilities (Jensen 2018, 309). One such development was the "Air Land Battle" doctrine. To a greater extent, the doctrine was intended for the European theatre of operations, with the aim of enabling the military to match the power of Soviet forces. Furthermore, the doctrine sought to leverage the latest technological innovations and emphasise agility, initiative, depth, and synchronisation. In essence, the doctrine stipulated that enemy forces should be attacked in depth with fire and manoeuvre while synchronising other operational aspects on the battlefield, as well as having the ability to swiftly shift operational focus to exploit the enemy's vulnerabilities. As some analysts have noted, the "Air Land Battle" doctrine was suitable for the existing force structure while also having the capacity to accommodate future evolutions (Gessert 1984, 54).

Some of the technological advancements of the second offset constituted significant investments that remain in active use by the US armed forces, as well as other militaries worldwide, to this day. The second offset strategy fostered the development of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) platforms, precision-guided munitions, and stealth technology for aircraft. Examples of systems that resulted from the second offset include AWACS, ATACMS, precision-guided munitions (PGMs), and various stealth technologies implemented on contemporary fighter jets. The impact some of these weapons had on the conduct of battlefield operations and how they were conceptualised was profound. Marshall Ogarkov, head of the Soviet General Staff during the 1980s, declared that PGMs correctly implemented on the battlefield could achieve effects roughly equal to those of tactical nuclear weapons (Manea 2018). In addition to technological advancements, the second offset also prompted organisational improvements and transformed the approach to battle planning and execution. Enhanced communication technologies facilitated more efficient

planning and enabled "real-time warfare", a capability that was soon demonstrated during the Gulf War (Martinage 2014, 14-16).

In contrast to the first offset, the US managed to field-test the second one, albeit not against the intended adversary. William J. Perry, a former Secretary of Defence, defines the Gulf War as a decisive victory that was made possible by superior military technology as well as better training and organisation of coalition forces. Perry argues that the coalition forces' use of advanced military equipment, such as communication, command and control systems, defence suppression, and precision guidance, enabled them to engage in combat with minimal losses. Moreover, this equipment provided coalition forces with precise information and situational awareness on the battlefield, allowing them to eliminate adversarial troops with remarkable efficacy (Perry 1991, 66-82). Other authors, such as Thomas G. Mahnken and Barry D. Watts, also confirm the technological superiority of the collation forces, especially emphasising air power and its effect on the battlefield (Mahnken and Watts 1997, 159). The success of the second offset demonstrated during Operation Desert Storm was soon depicted as a Revolution in Military Affairs. Moreover, these ideas and the impact of technology on warfare were deep enough to prompt other military programmes in the late nineties and early 2000s, such as the F-22 and F-35 combat aircraft, as well as concepts such as information dominance and network-centric warfare (Gentile 2021, 18).

The Idea of the Third Offset

Over the past two decades, the modernization of the Chinese armed forces has been impressive, to say the least. The development of the Chinese armed forces was evident across the spectrum, in terms of acquiring new high-tech weaponry and military equipment as well as implementing new doctrines and military strategies. While the full extent of the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) modernization cannot be comprehensively addressed in this article, certain significant changes are noteworthy. Notably, since the conclusion of the Cold War, the Chinese military budget has expanded exponentially, growing from 11 billion dollars in 1989 to approximately 223 billion dollars in 2023 (CSIS 2015). The modernization of the People's Liberation Army Air Force has been a significant undertaking,

with notable changes in the numbers and generations of combat aircraft. During the 1990s and early 2000s, the majority of the Chinese combat aircraft fleet was comprised of second-generation models. However, in the last decade, a significant shift has occurred, with fourth- and fifth-generation aircraft constituting the majority of the Chinese Air Force (Shlapak 2012, 192). Additionally, there has been a visible increase in strategic bombers and large aircraft, enabling improved strategic airlift and power projection capabilities. The ground forces of the PLA have also undergone modernization efforts, with a focus on force structure, training, and troop deployment.

The modernization efforts of the Chinese armed forces have been a cause for concern in terms of the regional balance of power and the United States' position in East and Southeast Asia. Of particular note has been the rapid development of Chinese strategic and naval forces. The Chinese "Second Artillery" has been able to produce a range of short, medium, and long-range ballistic missiles, allowing Beijing better control over a significant portion of the littoral space in the East and South China Seas. The development of anti-ship ballistic missiles, popularly known as carrier killers, is considered a "disruptive revolutionary innovation" that could significantly impact the American conception of power projection in the region (Erickson 2013, 17; Mahnken 2011, 301). These modernization efforts are viewed as a potential threat to the US presence and strategic interests in East Asia.

The Chinese naval forces have also undergone significant modernization with the acquisition of a large number of new warships. The modernised Chinese navy is now equipped with state-of-the-art cruisers, frigates, and destroyers and has the added capability of three aircraft carriers, including a domestically produced carrier, which is a testament to the progress of the Chinese military industry (Stojanović and Šaranović 2021). The modernization of the Chinese navy has also emphasised improving amphibious operations and joint operation capabilities as well as overall organisational capabilities (Cole 2010, 146). These modernization efforts complement Chinese military deployments on islands and reefs in the South China Sea, which have significantly enhanced China's ability to control the maritime domain in this region. The military infrastructure built by China on these islands has the potential to mitigate many of China's deficiencies in terms of naval deployment and area control (CSIS). The United States' naval

dominance in the region depends not only on its naval capabilities but also on its control of the main "access points" to the area inside the first island chain. By stationing troops and military equipment on these islands, China can alleviate some of the issues and potentially deny access to hostile actors in the region, thus improving control over the South and East China Seas.

The rapid and extensive modernization of the Chinese armed forces has prompted a reassessment of the United States military strategy in the Asia-Pacific region. This development, while just one facet of the People's Liberation Army's modernization efforts, highlights the growing concern among US officials regarding China's expanding military capabilities. In response to this perceived threat, the third offset strategy was formulated to leverage technological advancements as a means to maintain American military superiority. Specifically, the use of unmanned aerial and naval systems, AI, computer-assisted human operation systems, and AI-enabled battle networks were identified as key components of this new strategy. It is important to note that this shift in strategy and focus on technology is in part a response to the US military's recent experiences in the Middle East, where it was primarily engaged in counter-insurgency operations. The third offset, besides technological aspects, has highlighted the need for changes in doctrine and organisation to better address more conventional threats.

The third offset strategy is largely attributed to the ideas put forth by Robert O. Work, a former US Deputy Secretary of Defence during both the Obama and Trump administrations. In his book "*20YY: Preparing for War in the Robotic Age*", Work argues that the United States' ability to project power and dominate force-on-force encounters has declined due to the mastery of high-tech military capabilities by rival powers. These adversaries employ various instruments and weapons that enable them to operate across different domains of war. In order to overcome these challenges and maintain technological superiority, the US armed forces must explore new avenues for modernization. According to Work, the key to unlocking a new military-technological revolution lies in collaboration with the civilian sector, which leads to the production of modern high-tech machinery (Work and Brimley 2014, 36).

The mentioned technological and organisational changes should not be perceived as separate developments but rather as complementary, where technology can augment human deficiencies and make more powerful battle

networks. Robert Work states five elements of technology that are seen as crucial aspects of this strategic endeavour. First, machine-learning algorithms can supplement and improve data processing from various sensors, providing better information for logistics and maintenance. Second, certain decision-making authorities can be automated and delegated to machines, such as in cyber defence, electronic warfare, and missile defence. Third, integrating all levels of military deployment into a unified information grid will allow better organisation down to the squad level of command. Fourth, further implementation of various unmanned systems can improve the success of military operations. Fifth, the new generation of weapons that will be used should interact with the overall information network (Manea 2018).

Work also mentions two new concepts, such as Raid Breaker and the Multi-Domain Battle concept, which should further propagate the overall high-tech ideas of the third offset. The Raid Breaker system is envisioned as a method that can counter the seeming parity of PGM among adversaries. The idea behind the system is to develop high-end sensors and follow-up equipment that can intercept hostile precision projectiles, forcing the enemy to fire increasingly dense and expensive salvos of guided munitions. In other words, the Raid Breaker system should provide a way to win the guided munitions salvo competition at a reasonable price. The Multi-Domain Battle concept strives to secure cross-domain supremacy. In other words, if the US armed forces are contested in one domain, novel technologies should allow them to achieve an advantage by employing forces from other domains, including air, sea, and ground (Manea 2018).

Though the third offset strategy is focused on delivering new technological solutions, it also builds on some previous ones. We should keep in mind that the offset strategy is designed to make the most cost-effective solution; therefore, we can see conversions of some older technologies for modern battlefields. For example, the well-known guided artillery shell "Excalibur", used by the army since 2007, is getting a naval variant. The naval variant should be very similar to its ground predecessor but epic in terms of guidance-system electronics, which will provide the navy with a "precision guided missile" at a discount. Though artillery shells cannot substitute for missiles entirely, primarily in terms of effective range, they can help out the navy by providing support for the ground troops ashore as well as destroying fast attack craft that are usually armed with anti-ship weapons (Freedberg 2016). The proposed

modernization of the B-52 strategic bomber is poised to enable it to undertake contemporary missions with modern weaponry. In particular, the concept of the "arsenal plane" envisions a large aerial platform that can carry an array of missiles designed to engage multiple hostile targets. Former airmen argue that the B-52 is a highly capable aircraft that can handle heavy payloads, making it suitable for the deployment of hypersonic missiles that are set to play a critical role in the development of future strategic weapons (May and Pietrucha 2016). The announcement of the B-21 *Raider* also suggests that the US armed forces are preparing to tackle challenges that are in line with the idea of great power rivalry. The plane closely resembles the B-2 *Spirit* and should be able to accomplish the same tasks with greater efficiency (Lopez 2022).

In addition to technological advancements, countering the rise of rival powers also involves doctrinal changes and shifts in military posture. The Air-Sea Battle doctrine, although predating the third offset strategy, serves as a complementary initiative at the operational level. Furthermore, the authors note that the Air-Sea Battle doctrine should be viewed as a model of the Air-Land Battle doctrine, which was developed during the second offset strategy to deter Soviet expansion in Europe. Like its Cold War predecessor, the Air-Sea Battle concept is primarily intended to address the evolving military balance between the United States and its rivals, an ongoing process in the Western Pacific (Tol 2010, 6-8).

The Air-Sea Battle doctrine is a critical initiative intended to mitigate the dangers posed by anti-access area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities, which have become a crucial aspect of Chinese military strategy in the East and South China Seas. It aims to provide a framework for avoiding large-scale preemptive strikes that could render the air and naval forces of the US incapacitated, along with its auxiliary capabilities such as information and logistical networks. More importantly, the doctrine is designed to address how the US armed forces can overcome these challenges and preserve their freedom of action, particularly in terms of power projection. The US armed forces are likely to encounter a range of issues in the Western Pacific, such as an inability to ensure the secure flow of information, the potential for facing numerous long-range precision missile strikes from China, difficulty initiating timely and cost-effective counter-attacks, an inability to conduct air strikes against critical time-sensitive targets or those located well inland, as well as the likelihood of facing intensive surface and submarine warfare

along with the utilisation of autonomous unmanned vehicles. The Air-Sea Battle doctrine is, therefore, a critical response to these challenges, as it seeks to address the tactical and strategic issues associated with modern naval warfare while enhancing the US military's ability to project its power effectively in contested environments (Tol 2010, 34-47).

The authors have envisioned the Air-Sea Battle concept as a two-stage campaign that includes both traditional approaches to war as well as the implementation of modern, high-tech machinery. While the first stage of the campaign is focused on sustaining the initial strike and achieving initiative across all domains, the second stage is meant to give the US armed forces a better position for prolonged conflict (Tol 2010, 53-77). Various aspects of the third offset that Work had talked about could be integrated at the operational level of the Air-Sea Battle doctrine. For example, classifying and detecting mobile targets in the open sea as well as initiating a strike on them require precise sensors that can provide timely information in a contested space. In such a scenario, electronic and cyber warfare would, to a greater extent, dictate the speed and quality of decision-making, which would also impact the pace of military operations on the battlefield. Having superior information technology that can mitigate some of these threats can have a great impact on both securing one's own informational space as well as disrupting the adversary's. The ideas of AI, machine learning algorithms, and a new generation of PGMs would also improve the overall offensive-defensive balance the doctrine is trying to achieve. Defence against a salvo of modern precision missiles can be supplemented by delegating some of the decision-making authority to the machine, potentially improving the reaction time and precision of the counter-strike. On the other hand, conducting offensive missions, such as striking strategic targets inland, would also require modern platforms that could avoid an adversary's defences and sensors. Although the Air-Sea Battle doctrine predates the third offset, the goals it seeks to achieve are largely aligned with the ideas proposed by Work and his colleagues from the Department of Defence.

The Third Offset and its Challenges

Robert Work's perspective on international relations diverged from that of Obama's first administration, which sought to resolve differences with China and encourage it to become a responsible stakeholder in the

international community (Friedman 2019). The initial strategy did entail cooperation and engagement with China, as some former officials stated. Namely, the US was aware of the new political circumstances in the region and was trying to adapt to them accordingly. Even in the military domain, the US armed forces were trying to improve cooperation with their Chinese counterparts (Pejic 2021, 313-314). However, by the end of Obama's first term, the US had shifted its view of China from a potential partner to a competitor. The strategy of engagement did not yield the desired results, as the rebalance policy towards Asia was viewed as a potential containment strategy by Beijing. On the other hand, some US officials suspected that rapprochement with China was being interpreted as a signal of weakness by the Chinese leadership (Gentile 2021, 24). When President Trump came into office, the idea of great power competition as one of the primary objectives of national security became clear, which was later galvanised by defence secretary Mattis remarks: "*Great power competition — not terrorism — is now the primary focus of U.S. national security*" (Baron 2018).

The seemingly new ideas of great power competition among some members of the US administration are not exactly "novelties" in the American political discourse. The concept of great power competition, specifically the potential for US-China rivalry, has been predicted by scholars and academics for decades. One such individual is Paul Kennedy, who cautioned against the potential impact of a growing China and its potential exertion of power over both regional and global political affairs (Kennedy 1987, 447-458). John Mearsheimer shares a similar vantage point, emphasising that all great powers strive to maximise their power potential in order to feel secure. In such an environment, conflict between the US, as a power that wants to maintain its position in international politics, and China, as a power that strives to expand its sphere of influence, is more likely (Mearsheimer 2001). Graham Allison, building on the ideas set forth by Robert Gilpin, also comes to somewhat similar conclusions. Examining historical circumstances that led to war between Athens and Sparta, that is, between rising and status quo powers, Graham Allison tells us that conflict between the US and China is probable (Allison 2017; Gilpin 1983).

Nuno Monteiro is probably the author who, with greater precision, envisioned the problem between the US and China in terms of the employment of different strategies and what these strategies might invoke.

Monteiro argues that unipolar power is not "hyper-aggressive", nor does it see an imminent threat in every other potential power. However, unipolar power will react when it senses that other rising powers are developing their own power projection capacities or strategies that can hinder unipolar power's power projection (Monteiro 2014). In other words, the US will be prone to react to a rising power when the challengers start making gains in these aspects of military power. Although this is an oversimplification of Monteiro's theory, it does explain why Washington's politics towards China became more frantic during the last ten years. This type of great power behaviour is not novel and has been consistently observed throughout history. Joseph Parent and Sebastian Rosato, examining the great powers of the 19th and 20th centuries, have made a convincing argument about how balancing works and how great powers perceive power accumulation among their rivals, which supports Monteiro's theory. Parent and Rosato suggest that while maritime powers may exhibit a relatively slower response to power accumulation, they are quick to identify the threat posed by the development of larger naval fleets by other powers. In these circumstances, maritime powers are likely to adopt balancing strategies aimed at curtailing their rivals' rising power potential (Parent and Rosato 2015).

It is not hard to conclude that the third offset strategy is primarily targeted at China, which has emerged as a primary contender for the United States' interests in East Asia. The strategy, much like its predecessors, aims to provide a cost-effective framework to counter China's growing military power in the region. Additionally, the strategy is envisioned to allow the United States to uphold its key strategic goals in the region, including ensuring political stability, access to regional markets, freedom of navigation, and preventing the emergence of hostile powers. While these objectives can be pursued through peaceful means, great powers are likely to have a contingency plan in place in case diplomatic efforts fail. The third offset, therefore, represents such a plan. However, there are certain challenges that could impede the future development of this strategy.

One of the prominent challenges associated with the implementation of the third offset strategy is the complex economic relationship between the US and China, particularly with regard to technological proliferation. Implementing new hostile policies against China will not be the same as it was during the Cold War against the Soviet Union. The cooperation between

the US and Chinese economies is wide-ranging, and firms from both countries have invested large amounts of capital in each other's markets, seeking more financial gain. The global economy as a whole was also a beneficiary of such industrial cooperation, making products and services more affordable for consumers. Implementing measures or policies that would decouple the US from the Chinese markets will not be an easy task, nor will it be welcomed by other participants in the global market. This is especially evident in the IT sector, where large US corporations have based their production lines in China. Although this was a highly profitable endeavour, it allowed China to develop its own high-tech industry and catch up with the rest much quicker than previously anticipated.

The issue of technological proliferation poses a significant challenge to the implementation of the third offset strategy. Unlike during the Cold War era, when the government had more centralised control over trade and industry, today's high-tech companies have extensive trade and economic relations on the global market. Consequently, controlling the transfer of high-tech products from the US to China has become an arduous task. According to analyses conducted by RAND, Beijing has been able to leverage global trade to reverse engineer and implement US technical solutions in their combat systems, thus enabling them to close the technological gap with the American defence industry at a faster pace (Gentile 2021, 26).

The problem represents a serious issue for Washington, particularly in light of China's burgeoning production of cutting-edge military technologies such as fifth-generation combat aircraft, drones, missiles, and naval systems. The gravity of the situation was underscored by the recent US ban on the export of microchips to China. The Biden administration's imposition of restrictions on microchips and microchip manufacturing equipment represents the latest in a series of measures aimed at curtailing the export of high-tech products to China, a trend that began during the Trump presidency. As noted by some IT analysts, the United States shows no signs of easing its restrictions as technology continues to advance. In essence, Washington seeks to maintain and potentially widen the technological gap with Beijing in the hope of degrading the Chinese high-technology sector (Yoon 2022).

The doctrinal concept of Air-Sea Battle presents another crucial issue that requires consideration. Engaging in long-term conflicts that necessitate the consumption of significant quantities of high-technology systems is non-sustainable. In contrast to previous eras where great powers could deploy vast amounts of armament during hostilities, potentially overwhelming their adversaries, the feasibility of such tactics with modern weaponry is uncertain (Vracar and Saranovic 2018). The production of modern weapon systems, such as fifth-generation aircraft and precision missiles, involves the utilisation of various resources, a skilled workforce, and specialised industrial capabilities. Furthermore, there is a genuine risk that certain components of weapons and platforms will be manufactured by other countries or even a rival power, adding to the complexity of the production process. In a conventional war, the loss or wastage of modern military hardware increases the likelihood of becoming stuck in a quagmire, as evidenced by the Russian armed forces' failed invasion of Kiev last year. Additionally, without the clear possibility of timely renewal of modern weapons and equipment, the whole operation slows down, thus giving the opponent enough time to recuperate and possibly reorganise for counterattacks. Therefore, gaining and sustaining proper initiative in a modern conflict with the ability to conduct a decapitating strike is a very important aspect that can determine the overall victory.

Finally, the issue of maintaining a leading position in terms of both conceptual military strategy and material-technological capabilities against rivals poses a challenge. With the rapid dissemination of information and ideas between states, the Chinese military frequently updates its strategic guidelines to address potential issues in conducting warfare. Many of these guidelines are aimed at the American armed forces and their position in East Asia, with the intention of effectively subduing them. Some of the ideas proposed in the third offset, such as the importance of AI, have also been recognised as strategic assets by the Chinese leadership (Nelson and Epstein 2022). In addition, the concept of quick and decisive victory, which requires strong initiative during combat operations, is also present in Chinese strategy. The need for decisive strikes on enemy forces is one of the more prominent aspects of the Chinese deterrence strategy, which has been in place for at least two decades. Maintaining a competitive edge against such adversaries will require constant innovation and adaptation, both in terms of technology and strategy (Pejic 2022, 21-22).

In the current international environment, achieving a strategic breakthrough that could catch the enemy off guard is a challenging task. Rather, a more practical approach to strategy would be to pursue a "layered development" of different sectors through better cooperation and integration. Despite the aforementioned challenges, the third offset tries to address these issues by employing new technologies that are not focused on producing greater destruction capacity as much as making weapon systems and military equipment more reliable, precise, and cost-efficient.

Concluding Remarks

During the Cold War, the United States underwent significant changes in its military strategy due to the development of technology. These changes were known as offsets in military strategy, which were implemented when Washington perceived the Soviet Union as a greater military power, especially in the European theatre of operations. Technology was the primary instrument the United States relied on to maintain a competitive advantage over its adversaries. The third offset, conceptualised in the past decade, largely reflects the ideas present among American strategists during the development of the previous two offsets. The latest offset represents a necessary shift in the United States military strategy to maintain a technological, doctrinal, and organisational edge over its rivals.

The offset strategies during the Cold War era represented a significant shift in the United States military strategy, encompassing not only technological advancements but also organisational and doctrinal changes. Political decision-making was primarily influenced by threat perceptions of the adversary's military might and the consequences of directly engaging with such capabilities. The American military strategy during the Cold War sought to implement cost-effective solutions in order to establish favourable positions for potential conflict with the Soviet Union. Despite these strategies never being enacted against the intended opponent, they did produce modern military capabilities that continue to be employed by the US armed forces to this day.

The genesis of the third offset strategy is somewhat similar to the previous two, and it can be attributed to the changing international landscape and the evolving nature of threats to American national security.

In response, the US government, led by the Pentagon, has recognised the need to shift its strategic focus from unconventional threats to the rise of other rival powers. This shift has required changes in terms of technology, doctrine, organisation, and overall approach to new developments in international politics. While it is difficult to determine whether the third offset is still regarded as the primary strategy for the military establishment, given that the original architects of the concept are no longer in government, the ideas proposed by Robert Work and his colleagues have undoubtedly had a significant impact on how the US perceives other powers in global politics. In essence, the third offset has laid the groundwork for the future modernization of the US armed forces while also placing the political mindset back on the track of great power rivalry.

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How is Security Transforming in Southeastern Europe?

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Abstract: Countries generally recognised as forming the core of Southeastern Europe include Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, and the former Yugoslav states. Some interpretations also include Moldova, Greece, and the European part of Turkey. During the Cold War period, it could be recognised as a sub-region due to its role as a kind of strategic balancer in the inter-bloc structure of international relations in Europe: Albania (until 1961), Romania, and Bulgaria were parties to the Warsaw Pact; the SFRY was among the leaders of the Non-Alignment movement; Greece and Turkey were members of NATO. From the point of view of military and political security, they formed a European "testing ground" on which various plots of inter-bloc confrontation were clearly traced and managed. Even though the region lost this role with the collapse of the bipolar IR system, its military and political significance and geopolitical orientation have been growing in importance over the past decade for both the West and Russia. This was reflected in the fact that the EU and NATO offered and consistently implemented European and Euro-Atlantic perspectives for all Southeastern European states, launching projects in order to increase infrastructural connectivity both in the sub-region and between pan-European corridors. Also, they gained more influence in the wider Eastern Mediterranean by training and recruiting loyal political and military elites, inter alia, at the level of integration groups and regional international organisations.

Keywords: Southeastern Europe, NATO, Russia, Regional Security.

Introduction

For Russia, NATO's expansion to the East in the 2010s triggered an unhinged spring effect when the decades-long irritation from an interaction

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in which the other side was deaf to Russia's geostrategic concerns came to the surface. For Moscow, Southeastern Europe has turned from a region viewed as a space for developing pragmatic, primarily economic cooperation into a zone of geopolitical confrontation, where it is constantly having to "beat back" Russian foreign policy interests, face the West's open desire to squeeze out any Russian initiative, and efforts to denigrate Russia's historically generally positive image among the population. The latter is the most important strategic objective for the West, the instrumental embodiment of which has been the fight against "corrosive" Russian influence in the region (NATO 2022). Nevertheless, not a single nation in Southeastern Europe positions itself as an antagonist towards Russia. That has become surprisingly evident for the West after February 24, 2022, and despite the fact that the launch of the Special Military Operation in Ukraine had a significant impact on the perception of Russian leadership action, it has not become as critical as it could have been and as the NATO and EU leadership probably expected.

Data from sociological polls at the end of 2022 in Moldova showed that people viewed Russia as a valuable economic partner on par with the EU (67%) and slightly less important as a political partner (59%). According to most of the population (59%), the neutral international position guarantees security for the republic. More than half of the population does not consider Russia a threat and would vote against NATO membership (IRI 2022). Even though the perception of Russia as a security threat has increased in all Southeast European countries, more than half of the population in Romania and Bulgaria, while considering NATO a strategic partner, nevertheless believe that the US is dragging them into a war with Russia (Globsec 2023). Greece continues to have one of the highest levels of those who sympathise with Russia no matter what and one of the lowest levels of those who unequivocally condemn (Pew Research 2022). In Montenegro and Serbia, majorities believe that the US and NATO are to blame for the Ukrainian crisis, and the level of support for Russia among the Serbian population has increased markedly. The number of Macedonian citizens who believe that it is important for the country to maintain good relations with Russia has not changed over the past three years (about 53%) (IRI 2023).

Looking ahead, it is worth noting that until the early 2010s, Russia did not lay down a confrontational approach in the scenario of interaction with

the EU in Southeastern Europe and did not plan to increase its influence in the region to a level comparable to that of Brussels. It seems that even today, Russia's presence in the Balkans can relatively easily become a bargaining chip in the general issue of restructuring European international relations after the end of the Ukrainian crisis (which does not call into question the importance of Moscow remaining one of the key international actors in solving Serbian ethno-territorial problems and observing those standards of strategic security that Russia considers principal).

However, taking into account internal factors, the existing sub-regional international order in Southeastern Europe turns out to be fragile, given its external stability and even predetermination. In addition to the classic and common systemic socio-economic problems in all countries of the region, the internal factors that lead to the emergence of real security threats include high polarisation of societies (including political ones), the presence of interstate disputes and ethno-territorial contradictions, which are increasingly used as a tool of political blackmail, the growth of the market for the production and sale of weapons, including shadow weapons, and general militarization.

Military-strategic and Infrastructural-logistical Modernization in Southeastern Europe

NATO's enlargement in Southeastern Europe as the main mechanism of military-strategic cooperation had different justifications for different countries in the region. At the first stage, NATO membership was seen more as a necessary complement to subsequent accession to the European Union and, thus, formed a package proposal for the "reintegration into Europe" of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In this logic, Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovenia became members of the Alliance in the 2000s, which was caught up in the Central European wave of EU and NATO enlargement. With regard to the rest of the post-Yugoslav space, the formula "accession to the EU through NATO membership" was refined by arguments about the need to neutralise security threats, regional stabilisation, and reconciliation through the creation of a common framework of membership in a politico-military alliance. This approach, among other things, legitimised the maintenance of an international

peacekeeping contingent in Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Kosovo (including the American base "Bondsteel") even after the end of the "hot phase" of the civil wars. It was adopted in one way or another by all the republics of the former Yugoslavia. Croatia (2009), Albania (2009), Montenegro (2017), and North Macedonia (2020) have joined the North Atlantic Alliance.

The NATO enlargement project in Southeastern Europe is thus in its final stages, with Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and Moldova formally outside the Alliance. However, contrary to the fact that these territories geographically represent only a small gap on the NATO map, their possible reversal towards Russia, or at least their distancing from NATO with the successful completion of the Special Military Operation in Ukraine, disrupts the coordination and predictability of strategic manoeuvring on the Alliance's southeastern flank. In a scenario where these countries remain outside the Alliance, only Romania separates Russia from the Mediterranean by land. Importantly, the likelihood of all three countries joining NATO in the short term is negligible; Moldova's fate is unlikely to be determined before the Ukrainian crisis is over. Serbia maintains military neutrality in accordance with the 2020 National Security Strategy. Bosnia and Herzegovina's membership is unrealizable if the Republic of Srpska is part of the country.

At the same time, it cannot be denied that the degree of integration of Serbia and BiH into NATO structures is quite high. Both countries have been participating in the Partnership for Peace Programme since 2006. In 2015, Serbia signed the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), which, among other things, implies granting diplomatic immunity to NATO forces while they are on the territory of the republic. In 2016, Serbia and the Alliance concluded a Logistical Support Agreement. In 2018, the first NATO exercises were held on the territory of Serbia. At the same time, NATO implements traditional officer development programmes aimed at practicing interoperability and shared values and supervises cybersecurity programmes, i.e., sets the contours of future interoperability in strategically important areas.

Despite the continued resistance of the Republic of Srpska against the move towards NATO membership, Bosnia and Herzegovina also has a very dynamic engagement with the Alliance. The IPAP was signed in December

2018, and in February 2021, it was decided to establish a ministerial commission responsible for implementing the reforms prescribed by the plan. The issue of deepening cooperation with NATO is one of the key issues for the functioning of modern BiH. Both the Croats and the Bosniaks predictably favour early accession to the bloc, while for the Bosnian Serbs, this issue is even more sensitive than for Belgrade. It is related not only to historical memory but also to the ownership of military facilities, the transfer of which to the central administration in Sarajevo would seriously reduce the degree of real autonomy of the Republic of Srpska.

The states of Southeastern Europe have no comparable cooperation with other major international actors or organisations in the military-strategic sphere in terms of the depth of their ongoing or envisaged cooperation. Of the entire region, only Serbia, relying on its military neutrality, is also an observer at the CSTO PA and has participated in joint military exercises with Russia and Belarus over the years. In addition, Belgrade has strategic partnership agreements with Russia and China. Russia's role as a guarantor of the Dayton Agreements on Bosnia and Herzegovina and peace in Transnistria remains a key tool for ensuring strategic influence in Southeast Europe. It enables Moscow to contain NATO's ambitions regarding two geographically bordering territories in the Southeast European sub-region. That is not much objectively, but given the explosiveness of the situation in both BiH and Transnistria, Russia's presence does not allow either NATO or the political elites of the sub-region to discount their own and sub-regional interests.

If we turn to the issue of the consolidation of military infrastructure, we can note an increase in the number and equipment of NATO and US military facilities in Southeastern Europe in recent years. Romania remains the anchor point, but its infrastructural connectivity with the rest of the region has been strengthened. In October 2020, the US and Romania signed the 2020-2030 Defence Cooperation Roadmap, which includes cooperation in cybersecurity, military modernization, and multisphere operations in the Black Sea. At the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid, US President Joe Biden announced that the United States would replace a rotational brigade combat team in Romania. On July 23, 2020, the headquarters of NATO's Multinational Corps Southeast was established at the Joint National Training Centre in Cincu. The NATO Enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group was

established on May 1, 2022, by converting the multinational elements of the NATO Response Force previously deployed to Romania and transforming them into the Collective Defence Battle Group in June 2022 (Zverev 2023).

Over the past two years, the Mihael Cogalniceanu Air Base, the 90th Air Base Otopeni, the 86th Air Base of the Romanian Air Force in Fetesti, the Deveselu Air Base, and the Constanta Naval Base have been strengthened, including with new and experimental equipment. Since 2021, the US Air Force has been working to turn Kimpia-Turzii Air Base into a new US and NATO hub in the Black Sea region (Zverev 2023). Bulgaria is an important infrastructure element in Southeastern Europe because there are four joint US-Bulgarian bases: Bezmer and Graf Ignatievo air bases, Novo Selo Proving Ground, and Aitos Logistics Centre (Burgas area).

The remoteness of the Bulgarian-Romanian infrastructure from other European centres was one of the incentives for Albania, Northern Macedonia, and Montenegro to integrate into NATO as soon as possible and to expand their military infrastructure. For example, the former Soviet airbase in Kuchova, Albania, is to be operational by 2023. In May 2022, in connection with Russian actions in the Northern Black Sea region, Albanian Prime Minister E. Rama proposed to station a part of the NATO contingent at the Albanian Navy base Pasha-Liman in the Mediterranean Sea (TASS 2022).

During 2022, the peacekeeping contingent in Kosovo was strengthened in terms of equipment, and the equipment of Priština units was improved, including through training under the guidance of instructors from the second largest US military base in Europe, Camp Bondsteel (Rossiya Segodnya 2023). Following Skopje's accession to NATO in 2020, joint exercises of the Alliance member states are being held at the Krivolak polygon (Military Times 2023). In 2023, the largest NATO exercise in the Western Balkans region was held in Montenegro. In October 2021, Greece and the US signed an updated Mutual Defence Cooperation Agreement, under which the US gained access to three more military bases in addition to the existing one on Crete (Alexandropoulis, Volos, and the training centre in Litokhoro) (Anadolu 2022). In addition, rumours are actively circulating in the press that after the May-June 2023 Greek parliamentary elections, the US requested access to all Greek ports for the potential transfer of military contingents and equipment to Europe.

In recent years, the issue of increasing infrastructure, logistics, and transportation interconnectivity in Southeastern Europe has also gained significant momentum. Attention to this issue is especially noticeable in the EU and US mediation in establishing political interaction between the countries of the region, where dialogue along the lines of North Macedonia-Greece, North Macedonia-Bulgaria, and Serbia-Albania takes centre stage.

Five of the ten trans-European transport corridors — IV, VII, VIII, IX, and X — pass through a large part of Southeastern Europe.[2] Corridors VIII and X are of fundamental importance in sub-regional connectivity because they effectively cross all countries in the region.

The geographical position of North Macedonia is important for the provision of Bulgarian and Serbian destinations. To a great extent, therefore, the US supported the "Treaty of Friendship" between Bulgaria and North Macedonia on August 1, 2017, which, among other things, implies the establishment of joint logistics and infrastructure chains (Sofia-Skopje),

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[2] Corridor IV. EU-Southeast Europe connectivity. Road; rail; Danube ferries; airports; ports; combined transport. Berlin, Dresden, Nuremberg (Germany) – Prague, Brno (Czech Republic) – Vienna (railroad) (Austria) – Bratislava (Slovakia) – Gyor, Budapest (Hungary) – Arad, Craiova, Bucharest, Constanta (Romania) – Sofia, Plovdiv (Bulgaria) – Thessaloniki (Greece) – Istanbul (Turkey).

Corridor VII. A route down the Danube from Germany to the Black Sea; connected to the North Sea via the Rhine and Main. Germany – Austria – Bratislava (Slovakia) – Hungary – Croatia – Serbia – Ruzhe, Lom (Bulgaria) – Moldova-Ukraine – Constanta (Romania).

Corridor VIII. Subregional route from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. Road; rail; combined transport at Bitola; Durres, Tirana (Albania)-Skoplje, Bitola (Macedonia)-Sofia, Dimitrovgrad, Bugras, Varna (Bulgaria).

Corridor IX. Connects the north and south of Europe. Road; railroad; Helsinki (Finland) – Vyborg, St. Petersburg, Pskov, Moscow Kaliningrad (Russia) – Kiev, Lyubashevka, Odessa (Ukraine) – Chisinau (Moldova) – Bucharest (Romania) – Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipeda (Lithuania) – Minsk (Belarus) – Alexandropoulis (Greece) – Dimitrovgrad, Ormenio (Bulgaria).

Corridor X. Austria to Thessaloniki and Igoumanitsa in Greece and Istanbul in Turkey. Road; rail; Salzburg, Graz (Austria) – Zagreb (Croatia) – Belgrade, Nis – Veles, Saloniki – Bitola (Macedonia) – Ljubljana, Maribor (Slovenia) – Budapest (Hungary) – Belgrade (Serbia) – Novi Sad – Nis – Sofia (Corridor IV – Istanbul) (Bulgaria) – Veles, Florina, Via Egnatia

which increases Bulgaria's influence in North Macedonia (Entina, Pivovarenko and Suchkov 2019). The signing of the Prespa Agreement between Skopje and Athens in 2018 was astonishingly quick amid more than two decades of deadlocked negotiations. The Prespa Agreement between Skopje and Athens in 2018 made it possible to integrate North Macedonia into NATO without delay, when it became critically necessary for Washington. Thus, the Greece-North Macedonia-Bulgaria strategic interaction seems to be developing organically. For Serbia, access to both Greek and Albanian ports also lies through the territory of North Macedonia and the two transportation corridors mentioned above. In this regard, it is important for Belgrade not to aggravate contradictions with Skopje.

The second key objective of the EU and NATO is to increase connectivity and interaction between Belgrade and Tirana. It is addressed through intensifying political dialogue. Until recently, the "Open Balkans" initiative played an important role here. This project, also known as the Balkan "mini-Schengen", was launched in 2019 by the presidents of Serbia, Albania, and Northern Macedonia. Formally, like a number of other projects in the region (European integration itself, the Berlin Process, the Brdo-Brioni Dialogue, etc.), it aims to create a common economic space and reduce regional contradictions. The "Open Balkans" was endorsed by the US but met with moderate support from the EU, as its objectives overlap to a large extent with its sub-regional brainchild, the Berlin Process of 2014. Without denying the importance of the economic component of the initiative, it is noteworthy that, in geostrategic terms, the progressive development of Serbian-Albanian interaction may provide Belgrade with an alternative access to the Mediterranean via the Albanian port of Durres. In addition, the regional airport in Niš in the south of the country (as close as possible to Macedonia, Bulgaria, and the border line between central Serbia and Kosovo and Metohija), where the Serbian Air Force base is currently located, has an agreement reached in 2022 on reconstruction and a threefold increase in passenger traffic. The realisation of these projects would increase the importance of Belgrade in the regional transport and logistic dimension.

At the same time, Belgrade has an extremely vulnerable position in the dialogue between Serbia and Albania; its strategic efforts can be undermined at any moment. Thus, in July 2023, Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama already announced the freezing of interaction with Serbia due to the

growing tensions in Kosovo (Al Jazeera 2023). Notably, the stalemate in negotiations between Belgrade and Priština over Kosovo's status has had little effect on progress on the Niš-Priština-Drač highway, which will link Corridor X with the Skopje-Priština and Sarajevo-Podgorica-Valona roads.

It is also noteworthy that, in recent years, there has been an active restoration and opening of new air harbours not only in Serbia but also in the whole of Southeastern Europe. In Albania, an international airport in Kukes was opened, and the construction of another one in Vlora was announced. In the Republic of Srpska, Belgrade promised to invest in the construction of an international airport in Trebinje. In Romania, Brasov-Gimbav International Airport opened in June 2023. Moldovan authorities announced that they will rehabilitate the former military airfield in Marculeshti by 2025 (Aviation Exporer 2022).

Even the above trends indicate that Southeast Europe is gradually becoming a logistically connected region, which transforms its former buffer geostrategic status into an integral part of the European and Euro-Atlantic infrastructure. Moreover, with the beginning of the Special Military Operation, a number of decisions have been taken to replace NATO rotational forces with permanently based forces. On the other hand, the sub-region is gradually regaining its historical role as a transit territory, where the Republic of Serbia occupies the central place, as it did centuries ago, due to the peculiarities of its geographical position. All of this would paint an idyllic picture of the gradual rapprochement of Southeastern Europe with its western part if it were not for the movement towards all-encompassing militarization, both through the militarization of consciousness and through the escalation of conflicts and contradictions and the growth of the arms trade market, which in a number of countries traditionally has not only a legal but also a shadow dimension.

The trend towards the escalation of pre-existing interstate and interethnic contradictions is not surprising. This part of Europe is full of frozen and unresolved conflicts: Transnistria in Moldova; the reliance on the Unitarist sentiments of a part of society and elites in Chisinau and Bucharest, which comes into open contradiction with the sentiments of another part of society; the Kosovo issue in Serbia; the deadlock with the development of a de facto international protectorate of Bosnia and Herzegovina; the Macedo-Greek and Macedo-Bulgarian contradictions; and Serbian-Croatian relations, which are

extremely dependent on the sentiments of national political elites. In this regard, the Ukrainian crisis coming directly to the northern borders of the sub-region, as well as its obvious geopolitical component expressed in the confrontation along the Russia-West line, could not but activate the phobias and fears of various segments of society, previously shaded by the non-alternative of European integration.

Domestic Factors of Escalation in Southeastern Europe

The escalation of internal or long-standing tensions can be observed in virtually all countries in the region. The evolving crisis in Kosovo and Metohija and the increasingly dysfunctional governance system in Bosnia and Herzegovina are on the radar.

The intensifying crisis in Kosovo and Metohija is partly triggered by the Russian special operation (SMO) in Ukraine, though it definitely served as a pretext for radicalising the official positions of both Belgrade and Priština and caused a narrowing of the foreign policy manoeuvres available to A. Vucic. First, since the arrival of Kosovo's self-proclaimed Prime Minister, A. Kurti, in 2020, the possibilities of reaching a compromise between Belgrade and Priština, even with international mediation, have sharply decreased. On the one hand, this is due to the fact that Kurti is the first career politician in self-proclaimed Kosovo. He achieved success and recognition on the barricades under the slogans of independence and refusal to make concessions to Belgrade. On the other hand, since the early 2010s, the instrument for reaching agreements through the international mediation of the EU has been European integration. By the end of the second decade of the 21st century, it became obvious that not only Priština but also other countries in Southeastern Europe would not become members of the integration union in the short term. That gave A. Kurti the opportunity to use Priština's European integration perspective as a blackmail mechanism in his dialogue with both Brussels and individual European capitals. Secondly, Priština's disregard for the requirement to form communities of Serbian municipalities, as stipulated by the Brussels Agreements of 2013, with the rather calm attitude of Brussels itself, which until 2023 limited itself to formal condemnation of the inaction of the authorities of the self-proclaimed republic, gradually led to a new round of violence against the

Serbian population of the province by the Kosovars, who in one way or another feel their impunity. Finally, it cannot be denied that the emergence of the radical A. Kurti was beneficial to A. Vucic to a certain extent as well: from 2019 and until the beginning of the SMO, he was betting on contrasting the image of a "treaty-capable" Belgrade with the "ungovernable" Priština, knowing perfectly well that this is an opportunity to further delay the final decision on the status of Kosovo and Metohija, which, whatever it may be in the end, due to various circumstances may not be acceptable to the majority of the Serbian population.

The start of the Russian SMO confused the cards, first of all, for the Serbian side, although to date the Kosovars have not achieved what they had hoped for. Taking advantage of the fact that Belgrade refused to join the anti-Russian sanctions, A. Kurti began to actively exploit the card of Russian "corrosive" influence in Serbia and the need, under this pretext, to solve the issue of Kosovo's final status as quickly as possible and without concessions, with subsequent, or better, simultaneous, granting it membership in a number of international organisations (primarily the Council of Europe and NATO). To attract the attention of Western actors against the backdrop of the Ukrainian crisis, provocations against the Serbian population of the province have become more frequent since the spring of 2022, which naturally led to a bilateral escalation of tension, but it was more demonstrative than real.

In turn, official Belgrade found itself in an extremely difficult position. To all appearances, the massive support for Russia and the blaming of the United States and NATO for the development of the Ukrainian crisis were the result of the Serbian population's hope for justice, which had not completely faded into oblivion. In these conditions, it is difficult for Mr. Vucic not only to impose sanctions against Russia but also to agree to the conditions set by international mediators regarding the Kosovo issue. At the same time, it is important to fulfil the request of the most active part of society to continue Serbia's European path, as well as to maintain economic stability and an investment climate. Thus, the only way out of the situation for A. Vucic is a further escalation of hostile rhetoric towards Priština with de facto conditional acquiescence to the growing violence against the Serbian population of Kosovo and Metohija.

But the danger of this path is obvious: the situation around Kosovo is controllable at the level of individual political decisions and international agreements but uncontrollable at the human level. Thus, the Kosovo issue turns from a seemingly predetermined issue waiting for a convenient political moment to be resolved into an explosive point.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, events are also not going well. The creeping revision of the Dayton Accords, which was set in motion back in the late 1990s when the High Representative, under the 1997 "Bonn Powers", was given virtually unlimited ability to intervene directly in the process of state governance, has not resulted in the emergence of a civil rather than ethnic BiH. To a large extent, this was the result of the "pupation" of the internal political system and the extremely low socio-economic base in the country. In such internal conditions, all emerging resources were naturally distributed within the ethnic group. The situation has been reproduced over the years, and as a result, the security of investments, including external ones, is also ensured mainly within the ethnic group; there are practically no investment projects that would link the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the same time, the reliance of Western NGOs on funding projects dedicated to inter-ethnic dialogue, complex pages of history, etc., has in fact led to attempts to rewrite history, taking advantage of the political conjuncture and placing all the blame for the civil war on the Serbs. The condemnation of the Srebrenica events in the Serbian Parliament in 2008, the accession of Montenegro in 2021 to the qualification of those events as genocide, the receipt of life sentences for the leaders of the Republic of Srpska, along with the acquittal or transfer to the courts of national jurisdiction of the most odious figures among the Bosnian Muslims and Croats, contributed greatly to this.

Thus, by the early 2020s, the internal political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina was extremely tense. The incumbent High Representative, K. Schmidt, has not been approved for his position by the UN Security Council as a result of the protests of the Russian and Chinese sides. His powers were also not recognised by the Republic of Srpska, but his actions were unilaterally legitimised by the second entity of BiH, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. During his year in office, K. Schmidt managed to repeatedly use the "Bonn Powers". In the fall of 2022, he launched the repeal of the RS Law on Immovable Property of the Republic. Despite the fact that

Banja Luka did not recognise the decision, the initiative formally succeeded, as the BiH Constitutional Court declared the law null and void. In October, in an attempt to manage the crisis already within the Federation of BiH, which unfolded in the framework of the election campaign, it de facto satisfied the demands of the Croats, who for many years had cited the fact that, due to the overall preponderance of the Bosniak population, their electoral rights were infringed by prohibiting them from sending their representatives from a canton to the House of Peoples of FBiH if the number of these people in the canton is less than 3%. And in the spring of 2023, K. Schmidt again used his authority to avoid the fiasco with the formation of the government of the Federation of BiH by allowing the approval of the government with the mandatory consent of one vice president instead of two, as it had been before (Eremin 2023).

Formally, all these steps open the way to building a centralised Bosnia and Herzegovina. For example, they make it possible to move away from the paradigm of solving all domestic political issues by finding consensus among the major national parties. They increase the role of smaller parties and movements, including by increasing their blackmail potential. However, this path has already been followed by Serbia in the early 2000s and Montenegro in the last few years. The inability to reach an ideological compromise, the close connection between the political establishment and economic resources, and the high degree of influence of external forces on internal processes in all these countries have led and will lead in Bosnia and Herzegovina to an even greater deterioration of the socio-economic situation and the gap between the objectives of the political forces and the needs of the population. Thus, the order to create more Western-loyal and manageable political forces throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina may be fulfilled, but their ability to ensure effective modernization will still be very low.

It is also important that the course of centralisation in BiH and the discursive conflict of the High Representative with the leadership of the Republic of Srpska leave M. Dodik less and less room for maneuver. If in all previous years he used the discourse and certain steps on the possible withdrawal of the RS from BiH as a blackmail and exclusively political tool, then after the start of the Russian SWO and the aggravation of the situation around the Serbs of the region in connection with their position in support of Russia, the growing erosion of the Dayton Accords leaves him no other choice

but to centralise BiH and weaken the major party structures, or to withdraw from it. It is noteworthy that, in light of the launch of the negotiation process on the possible membership of partially recognised Kosovo in the Council of Europe, it may turn out that the unsettled international status of a number of state entities will not be an obstacle to NATO membership. In this case, the potential withdrawal of the Republic of Srpska from BiH would no longer seem as unacceptable to the West as before. The possible precedent of Kosovo's membership in the CoE or NATO would allow the Federation of BiH to be included in the Alliance while preventing the strengthening of both Banja Luka and Belgrade, as the complex territorial configuration of the RS does not favour this. Instead of the conditionally "failed" American peacekeeping in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in this case, the West will get an instrument of constant pressure on the Republic of Serbia even after the resolution of the Kosovo issue.

A significant factor influencing the resilience of the Southeast European region to external impacts and risks is the level of polarisation of attitudes in the societies of these countries. An outstanding example against the background of all others, as mentioned above, are the Serbs, among whom impressive shifts in public opinion have been recorded in 2022-2023. 83% are against the imposition of sanctions on Russia; 69% believe that NATO is to blame for the Ukrainian crisis; and only 42% support EU accession, with the understanding that 83.5% will be against it if the price of accession is the abandonment of Kosovo. In Montenegro, more than half of the citizens still perceive the US and NATO as the most negative among all significant external actors; 64% do not support sanctions against Russia; and the same number of citizens consider NATO the main culprits in the Ukrainian crisis. At the same time, two-thirds of the population see Montenegro's future in the EU, and a majority supports the pragmatic technocrats who came to power in 2023 in favour of a Montenegro without a national majority (NSPM 2023).

In Moldova, 64% of the population throughout 2022 believed that the country was moving in the wrong direction, and 48% believed that the socio-economic situation had seriously deteriorated during 2022 (IRI 2022). These are the highest figures for the last ten years, even though M. Sandu's pro-European and currently anti-Russian government is still in power and a solid majority voted for her in the last elections.

To summarise, while in the countries discussed above the main rift within society is formed on the issues of relations with Russia and NATO, with a general bet on European integration or at least movement in its direction in the absence of alternatives, in Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, Northern Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina described above, internal crisis trends due to socio-economic reasons play a significant role. Bulgaria held its fifth parliamentary election in April 2023. Another crisis and the sixth extraordinary election were avoided by reaching an agreement on the rotating post of prime minister. The mechanism will be applied for the next one and a half years. It is assumed that during this period, Bulgaria will be able to cope with internal political disagreements and the deterioration of the socio-economic situation caused, on the one hand, by the severance of economic ties with Russia and, on the other hand, by the application of the principle of "conditionality" in Bulgaria by Brussels. Now, it is used not only politically (Bulgaria has not become a member of the Euro Zone or Schengen since January 2023) but also economically: in pursuit of reforms, the EU regularly blocks money tranches from the common fund for economic recovery to Sofia.

The situation in Romania is similar. In the spring and summer of 2023, the country was hit by a wave of general strikes, from education and health care workers to transportation workers, judges, and civil servants. This in itself sets a negative trend for the upcoming parliamentary elections in 2024. Taking into account the real militarization of Romania by NATO forces in the light of the Ukrainian crisis, the unionist sentiments of a growing part of the Moldovan population and political elites in Bucharest, as well as the continuing decline in living standards in Romania itself, we can predict the degradation of the system of public administration and the shift of the leadership and political elites towards egregious decisions and gestures to mix all those internal problems that have been accumulating in the country for years.

In terms of its set of internal problems, Albania remains an "island of stability". The clan structure of society, rigidly maintained even today, forms a network of corrupt ties and arrangements that, for decades, have formed the basis of the system of governance. In this sense, Tirana lacks the prospect of social revolt and upheaval but is vulnerable to the growing ambitions of, first and foremost, the political elites of self-proclaimed Kosovo and, to some

extent, the growing influence of Macedonian Albanians. Both trends are only marginally developing under Tirana's control and auspices. In the medium term, the shift of the political centre of the Albanian world to the predominantly Muslim communities of Kosovo and Macedonia will radicalise not only sentiments within Albanians but also affect the religious balance in the sub-region.

Finally, the population of North Macedonia is extremely depressed. Leaving aside the complexity of the process of identity formation in the context of its contestation by almost all neighbours, it can be stated that NATO membership and EU candidate status have not improved the country's socio-economic indicators. Economically, Macedonia does not have the advantages of a maritime location like Montenegro, for example, and the real economy has virtually no domestic growth points. Economically, Skopje has been an integral part of the all-Yugoslav complex since socialist times, performing a number of intermediate functions in production chains. In the years since the collapse of the SFRY, it has not been possible to create its own real economy. Mass protests of both a political and economic nature take place in the country on a regular basis.

The demands related to rapprochement with the EU also cause polarisation in society. Thus, after the name change, which opened the way for Skopje to join NATO and the EU, there was a demand to change the constitution and include a provision on national minorities, including Bulgarians. This is opposed by 65% of citizens. An even higher percentage (69%) is against revision of history in exchange for EU membership. 51% of citizens believe that the Russian SMO was provoked by NATO. 32% of the population would support an alternative to the EU (the EAEU is given as an example) (IDSCS 2023). Contrary to some movement towards EU membership, 43% of the population believes that Macedonia is becoming less and less stable. In parallel, a large part of the population does not believe that Skopje has prospects of becoming a member of the EU in the foreseeable future (IRI 2023). The statistical data regarding Macedonia quite clearly confirm the political and economic amorphousness and the feeling of powerlessness in the face of external factors that the citizens have. Given the existing ethnic and interstate problems, this may become a factor in both the escalation of tensions and certain disintegration.

Conclusion

To summarise, we can state that external and internal factors in the transformation processes in Southeastern Europe are in contradiction with each other. In the external dimension, the region is undergoing the final phase of inclusion into the orbit of the North Atlantic Alliance. Against the backdrop of the Ukrainian crisis, there is an arm pumping of its border borders, primarily Romania, as well as the transition of transportation and logistics routes under the control of the US and NATO in the cases of Romania, Greece, Albania, and partly Bulgaria. In addition, through various projects, including those of an economic nature, a project to increase the infrastructural connectivity of the region is underway. At the same time, the completion of the Euro-Atlantic project in Southeastern Europe through the inclusion of Serbs in it seems unlikely. The most realistic scenario is the blockade of the Serbian population through the inclusion in NATO of partially recognised territories without full statehood (the so-called Republic of Kosovo and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Domestic trends have a significant impact on the stability and predictability of international relations in the sub-region of Southeastern Europe. Their key characteristic is the apathy of the population of all the countries in the region without exception regarding the prospects of socio-economic development and the strategic future of the state against the background of growing aversion to other ethnic groups within each country and beyond its borders. The attitude towards the so-called collective West and Russia and the prospects, real and imagined, that they can offer remains a significant factor in public sentiment. Thus, it seems that the outcome of the Ukrainian crisis may have a decisive impact on the future shape and development trajectories of the Southeast European region. Its historical status as a buffer zone, a space at the crossroads of Europe, may play an important role in this process.

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NATO in the Balkans:
Consequences and Perspectives

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Abstract: Despite the fact that the Balkan states, excluding Greece and Turkey, were not members of NATO during the Cold War period, this military alliance has maintained a high level of interest in the Balkan region. The Balkans represents a contact zone between Europe and the Middle East, and, in this context, it is seen as a bridge connecting a broad strategic line from the Baltic in the North to Anatolia in the South in this post-Cold War unipolar system. With a more aggressive approach and a number of initiatives, NATO has managed to create deep influence in the Balkans and become a key factor in regional security. Nevertheless, NATO is facing numerous challenges that threaten its position in the Balkans and create problems for the perspectives in the region. Some of those challenges were created by NATO's bad estimates and wrong approach in previous decades. First among those challenges is the issue of Kosovo. In light of the ongoing transformation of the structure of the world political system, this issue is taking on a totally new dimension.

This paper consists of five parts. After the introductory part, where the goals of the research are described, there is a second part that explains the reasons why NATO has a long-term interest in the Balkans and how that has manifested in NATO's role during the civil war in Yugoslavia. The third part is dedicated to NATO's expansion in the Balkans, and the fourth part is dedicated to deliberations on the consequences and perspectives of that process. The fifth part is concluding remarks,

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including predictions of future events after the escalation of the Ukraine crisis.

Keywords: NATO, Balkans, NATO's expansion, war in Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Russia, China.

Introduction

In the past quarter of a century, NATO's actions in the Balkans have received the greatest attention from authors who considered that the integration of the Balkan states into NATO was useful. Thus, the impression was not only that there were no different views but also that the expansion of NATO to the Balkans was unquestionable and irreversible (Zagorcheva 2012, 7–31; Katchanovski 2011, 304–319; Polak & Hendrickson and Garrett 2009, 502–514; Morelli et al. 2009). At the same time, the leitmotif was constantly running through that it was primarily in the interest of the Balkan actors, who, by joining NATO, should become "exporters of security" and stop being "importers of security" (Đukanović and Dašić 2021, 325–333; Jano 2023, 50–69). Is this really so?

Relying on realist theories and using the comparative method, this paper problematizes the issue of NATO's actions in the Balkans and the perspectives that appear on the horizon after the escalation of the Ukrainian crisis. In this context, relevant literature from the fields of political science, history, strategic studies, and military sciences is used, as well as primary sources embodied in documents of international organisations and testimonies of individuals.

NATO: Interest in the Balkans and Actions During the Breakup of Yugoslavia

Willi Wimmer, a member of the German Bundestag with decades of experience (from 1976 to 2009) and vice president of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (1994–2000), addressed a confidential letter on May 2, 2000, to Gerhard Schroeder, the Federal Chancellor. The public will be informed about the contents of this document only later, with some delay. The occasion for the address was Wimmer's attendance at a closed conference in Bratislava in April 2000, organised by the US State Department

and the American Enterprise Institute (Foreign Policy Institute of the Republican Party).

The main topic of the conference was NATO expansion and the Balkans. "The conference was attended by very high political representatives, as indicated by the presence of a large number of prime ministers, as well as ministers of foreign affairs and ministers of defence from that region. Among the many important points that were discussed, some of the topics deserve to be highlighted: 1) The organisers of the conference demanded that the international recognition of the independent state of Kosovo be carried out as quickly as possible among the allied countries; 2) The organisers stated that the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is outside any legal order, and above all outside the Final Document from Helsinki; 3) The European legal order is an obstacle for the implementation of NATO's plans. In this sense, the American legal order is much more suitable for application in Europe as well; and 4) The war against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was waged to correct the wrong decision of General Eisenhower during the Second World War. That is why, for strategic reasons, American soldiers must be stationed there and thus compensate for what was missed in 1945" (Wimmer 2015, 17). Also, the letter states some other conclusions of the conference: "7) During the current expansion of NATO, it would be appropriate to re-establish the territorial situation in the area between the Baltic Sea and Anatolia, as it existed at the time of the Roman Empire when it was at the peak of its power and occupied the largest territorial expanse; 8) Therefore, Poland must be surrounded from the north and south by democratic states as neighbours, and Romania and Bulgaria must provide a land connection with Turkey. Serbia (probably to ensure the uninterrupted military presence of the US) must be permanently excluded from European development; 9) North of Poland, complete control over St. Petersburg's approaches to the Baltic Sea should be achieved; and 10) In any process, the right of peoples to self-determination should be given priority over all other provisions or rules of international law" (Ibid.).

As expected, the publication of this document attracted the most attention in Serbia since point 1 discusses the "independence of Kosovo", which was "loaded" long before any status negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina began and before the full implementation of Resolution SB UN 1244 (1999) that regulates the status of Kosovo (essential autonomy within Serbia), but

also because of the announcement that "Serbia must be permanently excluded from European development" (UN SC 1999). However, it is even more interesting that the "independence of Kosovo" and all other proposed measures fit into a clearly defined strategic goal: the expansion of NATO to the Balkans in the context of projecting a new "territorial situation" from the Baltic Sea in the north to Anatolia in the south (Mitrović 2008, 9–14; Komarčević & Pejanović and Živojinović 2016, 431–444). The Balkans is apostrophized as a very important geographical area. That is why it is necessary to correct General Eisenhower's mistake from 1945 and station military forces in the Balkan states. Maybe Eisenhower thought that the Balkans were less important or that control of the area could be maintained by other means without the deployment of military forces! The non-deployment of military forces influenced the constant appearance of suspicion among American strategists towards communist Yugoslavia. This remained evident even after the 1952 signing of the official agreement on the Balkan Pact between Belgrade, Turkey, and Greece. "There is a fear in the US that Yugoslavia may abuse its military aid and alliance with Greece and Turkey and contribute to the weakening of the Western defence system by playing the role of a Trojan horse and Soviet exponent" (Bogetić 2001, 190). If there were American military bases in Yugoslavia or if Yugoslavia became a member of NATO, trust would be greater; that is, American dominance in the Balkans would be more secure. This way, since there was no such thing, only Turkey and Greece became NATO member states in the Balkans.

"The Balkan Peninsula represents a contact zone between the Adriatic and the Black Sea waters in a narrower geographical sense (along the west-east axis), i.e., the Central European and Middle Eastern continental areas in a broader sense (along the northwest-southeast axis). Domination over the Balkans made sense in the context of limiting the maintenance or a long-term penetration of the Russian influence in the border area (which represents the first step in the process of ensuring its borders) at the Caucasus-Black Sea direction (newly created independent states Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Ukraine, as well as USSR allies at the time, Romania and Bulgaria) and for uninterrupted planning of activities in the Middle East" (Ponomareva and Proroković 2021, 120). The process of NATO expansion in the Balkans is shown in Table 1 (Table compiled according to Proroković 2018, 557–579).

Country	In NATO since	Geostrategic significance for NATO
Greece	1952	Securing a position in the Eastern Mediterranean; surveillance of communist states in the immediate vicinity (Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Albania); control of Otranto; harmonisation of foreign and security policy with Turkey in order to prevent the outbreak of a large-scale interstate conflict; further securing control of the Dardanelles and the Bosporus.
Bulgaria	2004	Access to the Black Sea coast; control of the strategic direction from the Adriatic to the Black Sea; ensuring access to the Middle East; approaching the southwestern border of Russia.
Romania	2004	Access to the Black Sea coast; control of the strategic direction from Central Europe to the Danube Delta; border control to Ukraine; approaching the southwestern border of Russia.
Slovenia	2004	Securing a position in the northern Adriatic; control of the strategic direction along the Sava valley to the confluence with the Danube.
Albania	2009	Securing a position in the southern Adriatic (control of Otranto); control of the strategic direction from the Adriatic to the Black Sea (through the territory of Kosovo and/or North Macedonia to Bulgarian ports).
Croatia	2009	Securing a position in the central part of the Adriatic waters; control of strategic routes from the Pannonia Plain (Hungary) to the Adriatic Sea (most pass through the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina); control of the strategic direction along the Sava valley to the confluence with the Danube.
Montenegro	2017	Establishment of the Adriatic Troika by linking with Albania and Croatia, whereby NATO fully ensures the communication route from the Gulf of Trieste to the Peloponnese; control of the southern branch of the Belgrade – Bar traffic route.
North Macedonia	2020	Completion of control over the southern route of the strategic direction from the Adriatic to the Black Sea; Control of the "Balkan vertical" – a key regional traffic route (Athens – Thessaloniki – Skopje – Nis – Belgrade – Budapest) that stretches through the Moravian-Vardar valley.

What was missed in the Cold War period has been made up for in the post-Cold War era. After the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the US quickly established contacts with almost all Balkan countries, signed military agreements, and established its military bases. And all that under the umbrella of NATO integration. The Yugoslav crisis also served them well for that. NATO's participation during the Yugoslav civil war, or, to be more precise, NATO's participation in the Yugoslav civil war, was set in stages, from Croatia through Bosnia to Kosovo. After the signing of the Washington Agreement between Croatian President Franjo Tuđaman and Bosnian Muslim leader Alija Izetbegović (with the mediation of the US and the personal involvement of Bill Clinton) in March 1994, the Croatian-Muslim conflict was politically ended and, in the military-operational sense "brought under control". Simply put, there was no longer a threat of continued hostilities that could threaten the new partnership between Zagreb and Sarajevo, which was reached with the support of Washington. That is why both Zagreb and Sarajevo are directed against Belgrade. Of course, with the support of Washington. Until then, Zagreb and Sarajevo could count on the political support of the US with occasional military actions that went in their favour, but in the spring of 1994, the door was opened for full military support from NATO. Normally, the US, as a key member of NATO, insisted on the multinational dimension and allied solidarity and initiated future operations to be carried out more under the auspices of NATO and less as unilateral activities of the US itself.

The first concrete results were already visible in August and September 1995. First, NATO participated in the Croatian military-police operation "Storm" from the planning stage to the immediate bombing of the positions of the forces of the Republic of Srpska Krajina (RSK): from surveying the terrain and the deployment of the RSK forces through the destruction of the radar centre near Knin to the bombing of the Udbina airport. Certainly, this is not a popular topic within NATO, so it was not frequently discussed. Portuguese General Carlos Martins Branco, then an official in the UN structures in Bosnia and Herzegovina, explains: "Tuđman managed to do what the fascist Ustasha state NDH failed to do during the Second World War: to permanently expel the Serbian population from Krajina". This brutal ethnic cleansing leads us to reconsider the hypotheses of genocide, given the indiscriminate executions and the evidence of large-scale murders of defenceless civilians" (Branco 2021). Apparently, even the allies who

prepared "Oluja" and helped in its execution are not proud of what they have done. And how could they?

In September of the same year, NATO bombed the Republic of Srpska in an operation with the code name *Deliberate Force* (Owen 2000). Although two-thirds of the raids were carried out by US Air Force planes (2,318 out of a total of 3,515), the air forces of Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Turkey, the Netherlands, and Spain also participated directly in the operation. In fact, sporadic confrontations between NATO aviation and the anti-aircraft defence of the military forces of Bosnian-Herzegovinian Serbs occurred continuously from the beginning of 1994 (NATO 1995). Namely, in April 1993, according to the decision of the UN, NATO started *Operation Deny Flight* to ensure a no-fly zone over Bosnia and Herzegovina (UN SC 1993, 1-2). In February 1994, NATO aviation intercepted six planes of the Army of the Republic of Srpska, and four were shot down. On the other hand, in April 1994, Serbian forces shot down one French and one British plane each over Goražde, which bombed infantry positions of the Republic of Srpska Army, while in June 1995, an American F-16C plane was also shot down.

The bombing of Serbian positions was supposed to change the balance of forces on the ground, disable anti-aircraft defence, reduce military potential, and thus create a more favourable environment for the Croatian-Muslim side. Interestingly, it was only partially successful; i.e., the later Paris-Dayton Peace Agreement nevertheless created a two-entity structure in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with the Republic of Srpska as one of the two entities. In practice, this meant a kind of (con)federalization of the country, even though the US intended to create multi-ethnic cantons with a strong central government in Sarajevo. The high point of NATO's engagement was the events of 1998-1999, which included the preparation and execution of aggression against the FR Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), which represented direct assistance to the Albanians of Kosovo and Metohija to later unilaterally declare the so-called Republic of Kosovo (Krga 2022, 47-61). Acting without the approval of the UN Security Council, with a very problematic argument for the start of the air campaign (but also the preparation of the ground forces for the attack on the FR Yugoslavia, which did not happen anyway), since it turned out that there were no war crimes that served as a reason for the bombing, in violation of public international law, NATO actually got involved in the business of reshaping space and

violently changing existing borders. NATO used military forces directly without any hesitation to conduct operations that could have helped it fulfil strategic goals. Since the Serbian factor got in the way of achieving strategic goals, the projected image of the Serbs has continuously been unfavourable since 1994. With the support of Croatia, Operation Storm was carried out, which was the largest ethnic cleansing operation on the soil of Europe after the Second World War (ethnic cleansing of the Serbian population). Then airstrikes on the Army of the Republic of Srpska created a more favourable environment for the Croat-Muslim coalition in B&H (in the tactical, operational, and political sense), the separatism of the Kosovo-Metohija Albanians was finally supported by the aggression against the FR Yugoslavia, and the process of changing the borders of internationally recognised and sovereign states began. The last thing in the series shows that NATO's engagement in the Yugoslav civil war was primarily motivated by its strategic goals. If NATO's goal was to rely on UN regulations and respect the internationally recognised borders of the newly created states (that was the rationale for engagement in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, although that rationale can also be discussed, especially in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, bearing in mind the fact that the referendum on "independence" held in 1992 failed because a qualified majority did not vote for it), then there would never be an operation against the FR Yugoslavia and the so-called "independent Kosovo" as a consequence. It was necessary to correct Eisenhower's mistake from the Second World War, to make up for what was missed, and to strengthen the positions of NATO from the Baltics to Anatolia in the new post-bipolar world, and, in that context, to support first the Croats and Bosnian Muslims, then Albanians, and leave the FR Yugoslavia outside of any legal order. The ending in Kosovo fits well with points 3 and 10 that Wimmer communicated to Schroeder: "The European legal order is an obstacle to the implementation of NATO's plans." In this sense, the American legal order is much more suitable for application in Europe as well. And in this connection: "In every process, the right of people to self-determination should be given priority over all other provisions or rules of international law". NATO shaped and established a new legal order in Europe, and then, in international relations, the rules defined during the Cold War were no longer valid. The Balkans served as a test field for determining the new function of NATO, and the civil war in Yugoslavia

served as a means to gather experience and show others how they would end up if non-cooperative.

Expansion of NATO to the Balkans

NATO's interest in the Balkans as an important geographical area caused the presence of this military alliance in the breakup of Yugoslavia. Involvement in the breakup of Yugoslavia was not a goal in itself; it was for the new states that emerged from that breakup to be incorporated into NATO. In the years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, NATO was more focused on the Baltic and Central European regions. Candidates for admission were Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland, which joined NATO in 1999. Balkan states – Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovenia (although Romania and especially Slovenia often emphasise that they do not belong to the Balkan space) –joined NATO during the so-called "fifth enlargement" in 2004 (together with Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Slovakia). There was a special framework "2+2" for the gradual admission of Bulgaria and Romania, during which Turkey and Greece as "old members" supported this process (Karaosmanoglu 1999, 213–224).

However, despite the fact that the process of NATO expansion did not start with the Balkan states, after 2004, it turned into a purely "Balkan thing". Since then, NATO has expanded only and exclusively in the Balkan Peninsula and not anywhere else until 2022 (Proroković 2023b, 53). Then, after the escalation of the Ukraine crisis, the decision was made to extend invitations to Sweden and Finland (Wall & Monaghan and Morcos 2022). Croatia and Albania became new members in the sixth enlargement in 2009, Montenegro in the seventh in 2017, and North Macedonia in the eighth enlargement in 2020. Only Serbia and B&H remained outside of NATO. Nevertheless, NATO is an important security factor in these two countries as well. This is not only because of the fact that both Serbia and B&H are surrounded by NATO states. Regarding Serbia, NATO forces are deployed within the KFOR Mission and the International Military Presence in Kosovo and Metohija. Annex XI, *Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement,* of the so-called Ahtisaari's Plan, explains the position of the International Military Presence that was under NATO's responsibility. This plan in February 2008 became the basis for the unilateral declaration of

"independence" and an integral part of the "Constitution of Kosovo". Thus, Article 1.8 specifies that "The International Military Presence will work under the authority and political control of the North Atlantic Council and the NATO command", and Article 2.1 clarifies that "the Chief of the International Military Presence is the supreme authority regarding the interpretation of the aspects of the Comprehensive Proposal concerning the International military presence". Since the head of the International Military Presence is under the authority and political control of NATO, it can be concluded that the International military forces in Kosovo should "fulfil their responsibilities, including the use of necessary force" (Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement 2007, Article 2, Paragraph 2.2a); they have "the right to free movement throughout Kosovo in every aspect" (Ibidem, Paragraph 2.2b); they can "reinstate immediate and full military control over the air space" (Ibidem, Paragraph 2.2c); they can "undertake inspection activities in accordance with established goals and tasks" (Ibidem, Paragraph 2.2d); and they have right to "undertake actions to support the fulfilment of their own mandate that is consistent with the Comprehensive Proposal" (Ibidem, Paragraph 2.2e).

Given all the above mentioned and in line with Article 2.3, institutions and organs of Kosovo have to guarantee to the International Military Presence the "status, privileges, and immunity rights" that were before given only to the KFOR members. Having all this in mind, NATO is completely excluded from any civil, institutional, or political control in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija. According to the established legal order within the "supervised independence" which is defined in the Comprehensive Proposal, the highest possible form of influence on NATO structures, either by the International Civilian Presence or by the institutions in Pristina, are "consultations" and "coordination", and the head of the International Military Presence does not even have a formal obligation to submit a report on his work to any civilian official (Ibidem, Anex XI, Article 1, Paragraph 1.4).

The responsibilities of the international civilian representative are defined in such a way that everything related to the functioning of the International Military Presence is excluded from them, so the representatives of the international civilian mission do not even have the formal right to ask questions that encroach on the scope of work of the military structures in

Kosovo. A member of the negotiation team of the Republic of Serbia during "negotiations on the future status of Kosovo", between Belgrade and Pristina in the 2006-2007 period and a former judge of the Constitutional Court of the FR Yugoslavia, Aleksandar Simić, in his analysis of the Comprehensive Proposal, states that "NATO itself does not allow any kind of control by the international civilian authority, even if it were European and certainly not one from Kosovo". He concludes that "historically, until now, states created military alliances, and that is how NATO was formed, but careful analysis of Ahtisaari's proposal, and especially provisions of Annex XI, opens the question of whether the world is for the first time faced with the effort of one military alliance to create its own state in which civilian structures would not limit their military power" (Simić 2007, 14–15). Essentially, NATO is a sovereign master in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, and not only in a military-political sense but partially in a legal and formal sense.

Regarding B&H, there is also not only a military-political but also a legally-formal dimension to the NATO presence. In Annex I–A of the Paris-Dayton Peace Agreement entitled "Agreement on Military Aspects of the Peace Settlement", in points B and C, it is explicitly said: (B) "It is understood and agreed that NATO may establish such a force, which will operate under the authority and subject to the direction and political control of the North Atlantic Council ("NAC") through the NATO chain of command. They undertake to facilitate its operations. The Parties, therefore, hereby agree and freely undertake to fully comply with all obligations set forth in this Annex. (C) It is understood and agreed that other States may assist in implementing the military aspects of this Annex. The Parties understand and agree that the modalities of those States' participation will be the subject of agreement between such participating States and NATO" (General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1955, 5).

During the implementation of the "Dayton Rules", NATO has decreased its presence in B&H, and in accordance with that, international military missions have changed their names, mission goals, and number of personnel. After UNPROFOR, IFOR was formed, then SFOR, and it was succeeded by EUFOR Althea (The European Union Force in B&H 2023) in 2004. Although this operation is presented as the European Union Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina, things are somewhat different from the formal

and legal sides. For this mission, the European Union Military Staff is using NATO's Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) as the EU's Operational Headquarters (OHQ) and is working through the Deputy to the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, a European officer.

Therefore, Serbia and B&H are not in NATO, but NATO is present in part of the territory of Serbia and in B&H. It should also be remembered that B&H's entry into NATO was blocked by one entity: the Republic of Srpska. The mood in the other Croat-Muslim entity is completely different.

NATO has become a key factor in the regional security of the Balkans, regardless of the fact that two Balkan countries are still not members of the Alliance. (Proroković 2023a, 294-295)

Consequences and Perspectives of NATO Activities in the Balkans

However, despite the fact that NATO has undoubtedly become a key factor in regional security in the Balkans, thus correcting Eisenhower's mistake, it cannot be claimed that NATO can implement its intentions without any problems. Despite everything, as already mentioned, the two Balkan countries are not members of NATO. Among other things, it is the result of NATO's actions during the Yugoslav civil war and the extreme deployment against Serbia and the Serbs. Observing public opinion surveys in Serbia, in which it can be seen that for more than a decade and a half, more than 80% of respondents are against joining NATO, it becomes clear that this trend will continue. This mood cannot be changed overnight, nor is there a government that will make decisions against the will of more than 80% of the population (Nova srpska politika misao 2022). Perhaps an even bigger problem for NATO is in B&H, where even a quarter of a century after the signing of the Peace Agreement, there are almost daily political battles about the (in)functionality of the Dayton system, the vital interests of the three nations, and the constitutional competences of the two entities.

In all those struggles, NATO sided either with the Croat-Muslim coalition, with the Croats, or on some occasions with the Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims, but never and nowhere with the Serbs. In the Serbian corps in B&H, NATO is perceived as a participant in daily political upheavals aimed at derogating the positions of the Serbs in B&H and the

Republic of Srpska as an entity, and not only as a participant in the war that ended in 1995 (Kecmanović 2007).

Bearing in mind the geographical position of Serbia, the elements of soft power and cultural politics, thanks to which it maintains its influence in the immediate environment despite everything that has happened since the breakup of Yugoslavia, the strength of the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as the geographical distribution of the Serbian population (which, despite ethnic cleansing, persecutions, and pressures in certain countries, inhabits all the former Yugoslav republics in smaller or larger numbers), this is a problem for the legitimacy of NATO in the region. Somewhere this problematization of NATO's legitimacy is expressed more (for example, in Montenegro), somewhere less so (for example, in North Macedonia), but its existence is evident. The case of Montenegro is special in all respects since it can turn into a NATO "nightmare". Namely, the entire process of Montenegro's independence from Serbia was connected with NATO's ambition to continue the fragmentation of the Balkan space and the further "drawing in" of new members. At the 2006 referendum, which was full of irregularities, the "establishing of independence" was voted with a "slight majority" (the qualified majority for the decision was 55%, but for dissolution of the State Union voted 55.49%). The result is that Montenegrin society remains permanently polarised. In a polarised society in which the overwhelming majority was against joining NATO, a referendum was not allowed, and the decision to join the Alliance was made by a simple majority vote in Parliament. That simple majority was scrapped again in the parliamentary elections, which were also full of irregularities, but no one in the western part of the world looked back on it since the elections had a very clear purpose.

At the same time, recognising that the "Serbian factor" is the most important in hindering the Euro-Atlantic integrations (where special attention is paid to the actions of the Serbian Orthodox Church), in agreement with Milo Đukanović, the stabilocrat who governed Montenegro for three decades (either as president or as a prime minister), Western structures are investing in the project of building a hybrid Montenegrin nation that will be based on an extreme anti-Serbian discourse (Raković 2019). This has ultimately led to the downfall of Milo Đukanović, the collapse of the entire project, and the entry of Montenegro into a fierce institutional and political

crisis that has been ongoing since 2020. There is no doubt that the decision to join NATO lacks legitimacy, as well as that NATO itself encouraged operations inside Montenegro (building a hybrid nation) or operations related to its foreign and security policy (shameful recognition of the so-called Republic of Kosovo in October 2008), with which the overwhelming majority of citizens of this country do not agree. How, then, can Montenegro remain in NATO? The answer is simple: it will be forced to do so. Montenegro does not have sufficient power potential — military, economic, or political — to lead an independent policy. Joining NATO has so far been a one-way street, even for bigger and more powerful players in international relations than Montenegro. Therefore, Montenegro cannot be the first country to withdraw from NATO. However, the situation is completely schizophrenic, and it must continuously produce political consequences and tensions and destabilise the country as long as NATO exists.

In somewhat different form and at a lower intensity, similar phenomena can be seen in North Macedonia. "At the same time, in order to strengthen the position of Albanians in the Balkans, Washington is actively lobbying for Albania's accession to NATO. However, this puts in a completely new context the pronounced separatist aspirations of the Macedonian Albanians. In order to prevent the "Bosnian" or "Kosovo" scenario in Macedonia, American foreign policy starts to be oriented towards "drawing" this country into NATO. Thus, NATO becomes the only guarantor of maintaining territorial integrity. However, "drawing into" NATO could not be done easily because Greece was blocking it and demanding that this former Yugoslav republic change its name. Finally, a solution was found by changing the name of the state to the Republic of North Macedonia. But, as in the case of Montenegro, there is no support from citizens for that step. North Macedonia is emerging as a solution due to NATO expansion. Instead of this being the solution, two new problems have automatically arisen. First, Macedonian society remained polarised, and interethnic tensions between Slavic Macedonians and Albanians became more pronounced (Albanians supported the name change 100% in the referendum because that undermines Macedonian identity). Secondly, since this "blackmailing policy" has brought results to Greece in its treatment of (North) Macedonia, Bulgaria has started applying the same method. Sofia is blocking the continuation of negotiations between North Macedonia and the EU until the identity issues are resolved (including the issue of the name of the

language, which Sofia claims is only a dialect of Bulgarian!). Bulgaria's aggressive policy towards North Macedonia, led by the defence minister Krasimir Karakachanov, has provoked reactions from Greece and Serbia, which see it as a revival of old plans for the country's "horizontal division" between Sofia and Tirana. In this way, Greece is getting involved in this crisis again" (Prorokovich 2022, 9–10).

Probably the biggest challenge for NATO in the Balkans is Kosovo! First, this is an example where all the rules established in the bipolar Cold War order were violated. Therefore, it was a reflection of the American unipolar world, in which NATO was supposed to serve as a military instrument for the establishment of a new order. With the departure of the American unipolar world into history, is NATO also leaving? At the moment, there is no clear answer to that question, but such an outcome cannot be ruled out. How bad the NATO approach is, related to the change of Cold War principles on the inviolability of borders, was shown during the escalation of the Ukrainian crisis. While at the same time criticising Russia for organising a referendum in Crimea (2014) or later in the southeast of Ukraine (2022), NATO strategists not only unquestioningly supported the "independence of Kosovo" but also exerted active pressure on Serbia to agree to it. Simply put, the mistake NATO made in Kosovo is disproportionate to the importance of Kosovo for NATO. Over time, NATO's position in Kosovo became no longer part of the solution but part of the problem.

Second, the breakup of Yugoslavia was eventually formalised according to the so-called "Badinter rules". The former borders of socialist republics became the new borders of independent states. Kosovo and Metohija, or, in the earlier stages of communist Yugoslavia, Kosovo, was only an Autonomous Province within Serbia. Kosovo did not have the right to self-determination, regardless of the fact that at the meeting in Bratislava in 2000, point 10 stated that such intentions must be supported. Because of that, now that everything else is open, the borders of all the former Yugoslav republics are called into question. If something does not always apply to everything and everyone, then it is not a rule. The Badinter's principles simply do not apply since February 2008 (Proroković 2020, 281–298). NATO expected that by putting pressure on Serbia, Belgrade would agree to its wrongdoing, thus putting an end to this procedure. But that expectation was naive. The open

and aggressive violation of Badinter's principles put into question the future of B&H and North Macedonia in the first place, but possibly of other Balkan actors as well.

Third, NATO tried to expand its influence by fragmenting space, creating new dependent state-like creations that were not capable of defending themselves. On the one hand, in the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, it brought them the correction of Eisenhower's mistake, the deployment of troops, and the firm political control of the entire area. However, at the same time, it brought them the creation of odium against NATO not only in Serbia but also in the entire Serbian ethnos space. The legitimacy of NATO has been called into question, and this is again a much bigger issue than the importance of the expansion of NATO to the Balkan states during the previous years.

On the other hand, dependent state-like creations have become classic clients of the West, and in that context, NATO. These countries are completely dependent — militarily, politically, and economically — on the will of others. In a historical period when a new "strategic line" had to be projected from the Baltic to Anatolia, when we lived with Francis Fukuyama's laconic statement about the "end of history" and with the conviction that unipolarity would last forever, the prevailing opinion was that from the constant expansion NATO and the EU could make good money (new markets with new consumers for American and Western European companies, new natural resources for exploitation, new labour cheaper than in the West, etc.), even if that territory would have to expand to small Balkan States (Fukuyama 1992). However, with the great economic crisis, the pandemic and its consequences, and ultimately the dramatic rise in the prices of energy and fuel, it turned out that these state-like creations are increasingly turning into "dependent territories", entities that must be subsidised. That is why these clients have increasingly started to represent a cost for the West and, in that context, for NATO. Kosovo, although not a country in the full sense of the word, has become an illustrative example to describe this process. No matter which way you look at it or analyse the situation in relation to Kosovo and Metohija, for NATO, it is just an expense that can no longer be justified.

NATO did become a key factor in regional stability in the Balkans, but in order to reach that point, it had to pay a very high price. Eisenhower's

mistake, looking at things on the ground from NATO's point of view, has been corrected. However, looking at political matters from the point of view of the Balkan peoples, it remains unclear to what extent and with what consequences. It seems that NATO no longer has at its disposal instruments with which it could strengthen its position, and it is extremely uncertain how the weakening of its position can manifest itself in political reality and regional security. Given that NATO is having issues with legitimacy, a lack of public support, double standards, violations of laws and values that NATO itself endorses, and an increase in expenses that is steadily rising, it is apparent that the Alliance's position is deteriorating.

Conclusion: The Balkans with NATO and after NATO

Although at first glance it seems that NATO, as a key factor in regional security, has ensured its long-term influence in the Balkans, this can also lead to the wrong conclusion. NATO's interest in stationing its forces in the Balkans and then bringing all the Balkan states into membership has existed for a long time. This interest was realised by the direct involvement of NATO in the civil war in Yugoslavia, which took place gradually but also ended with a drastic and dramatic measure: the aggression against the FR Yugoslavia. Despite the fact that the NATO forces (as expected) won, by all accounts, an unequal war with the Yugoslav army and Serbian police, the consequences of this act remained and are very difficult to correct. Actually, they may turn out to be impossible to correct. On the one hand, by joining the war and, finally, through aggression, NATO managed to assert itself at the beginning of the 21st century as not only a key but, in political practice, the only factor in regional security. What NATO says is how it is done. State leaders could offer resistance and influence the partial adoption of their own amendments, but this could not change NATO's set strategic goals. On the other hand, NATO has become a victim of its own politics. First of all, the circumstances in the international environment, and therefore also in the security environment, have changed. Two decades after the NATO aggression against the FR Yugoslavia, an event that was supposed to represent the pinnacle of American preemptive action in Europe and send a message to everyone else that either they would be obedient or they would be bombed, almost nothing was the same in world politics. It was not the same in the Balkans, either. Taking advantage of the mistakes of NATO and

the EU, Russia and China returned to the game as increasingly important regional security actors. Russia, with strong support for the respect of international law in B&H and Kosovo, did not allow the Dayton structure to be changed or the disempowerment of the Republic of Srpska, just as it did not allow the circumvention of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999) or the gross violation of Serbia's territorial integrity. China, through investments during the implementation of the Belt and Road megaproject, managed to fill all the holes left behind by the EU, which purposefully avoided improving certain sectors in the economies of the Balkan countries. By 2020, thanks to previous acquisitions and expansion into the Balkans, NATO remained a key factor in regional security, but it was no longer the only one in Balkan political practice. In addition, the problem for NATO is the lack of legitimacy, since the expansion process was not carried out by democratic methods, and during the race to achieve certain goals, all kinds of politicians and all kinds of policies were supported. Then, there is the open question of what will happen in the Balkans with the weakening of NATO, its withdrawal, or its potential disintegration. The existing regional construction was built in accordance with American interests at certain historical moments. For some, it meant reaching historical results and fulfilling historical justice, and for others, it meant falling into historical catastrophe and injustice.

The potential to require a review of certain processes induced or supported by NATO is already on the table. This primarily refers to Kosovo and the decision to unilaterally declare "independence" in February 2008. How can NATO prevent this? How can it even answer that? Is NATO ready to defend its projects in the Balkans with force? What price is it willing to pay for the maintenance of client states that have become completely dependent on it? What is the strategic importance of the Balkans in the new geographical redistribution of the world and the shaping of a multipolar order?

The thesis of a strategic line from the Baltic to Anatolia remains just a dream, difficult to achieve, and, in the current circumstances, too expensive. At the same time, by starting the offensive in Ukraine, Russia (with the open or tacit support of the main non-Western actors) accelerates the transformation of the world political system and initiates the adoption of new rules of the game by which world politics will function. In such circumstances, the prospects for NATO action in the Balkans are not bright.

If the strategy of total opposition to Russia continues, NATO can assign the role of a new military base to the Balkans as an integral part of the Eastern European battlefield against Russia. NATO could organise continual pressures and provocations towards the Russian interest zone from the Balkans, which would manifest in different ways. There are three problems with this approach.

First, falling into the status of a military base in the long term leaves the already economically and socially vulnerable Balkans in a phase of "incompleteness". Lagging behind Western European countries will become more pronounced. Who will invest in the military base? How would economic and social activities be organised in conditions of permanent insecurity? The Ukrainization of the Balkans, according to the matrix seen during the past eight years, is the only thing that can be offered. There will be money, of course, for arming against the Russians, building military infrastructure, spreading propaganda, and raising Russophobia. For the rest, there will not be any money. If we also take into account the rise in prices of energy and food products, inflation, and the expected decline in living standards on a continental scale, the picture becomes even more bleak.

Second, it is under question how capable and ready NATO and the EU are to organise the East European battlefield, and especially the Balkan battlefield. A debacle in Afghanistan, failures on the "Russian border" and in the Middle East, along with the essential show of weakness in Ukraine, where there was readiness to fight against Russia to the last Ukrainian but not seriously help Ukraine when the war broke out, are not great recommendations. The complexity of relations in the Balkan regional (sub)complex should also be taken into account; the circumstances are significantly different from the situation in the Baltic. NATO and the EU could not implement the planned de-Daytonization of B&H and force Serbia to accept the Albanian separatist creation; they could not even push through the looting of church property in Montenegro, and now they will mobilise all the Balkan nations for an exhausting "hybrid war" against Russia! Impositions, threats, and intimidation can no longer help in this case either. This could only lead to the collapse of the state "systems" accustomed to a clientelist relationship that implied little work and more obedience.

Third, it is extremely naive to expect that there will be no Russian countermeasures. According to some elements, the conditions in the Balkans

are even more favourable than in Ukraine for the expansion of Russian activities in several directions! Falling under the status of a military base means that the conflict or escalation between two sides will take place in that geographical area. It cannot be expected that only one side will use that geographical area to transfer its own activities to the foreign territories of the enemy. This can destabilise the region to the limit, deepen inter-ethnic and inter-state tensions, and also weaken public trust in state leadership. Chaotization, therefore, becomes complete and comprehensive.

Therefore, the stabilisation of the Balkans, both in the near term and in the long term, must be thought of in a different way. Falling into the status of a military camp must be avoided. With the addition that this status would last for a long, long time and that the final outcome is impossible to predict. Certainly, at this moment, it seems naive or utopian to discuss some new form of Balkan confederation, Balkan union, or Balkan alliance. It is neither in the interest of NATO or the EU, nor is there a critical mass within the "system" of the Balkan countries to realise such a project. It will not even be in Russia's interest if the orchestrated joining of most of the Balkan countries to anti-Russian hysterical measures continues. But, at the same time, it is irresponsible and disturbing not to think about alternatives and to silently observe the epochal changes taking place. If there are no alternatives, if there is no reaction to the changes, the Balkan people and the Balkan states will become mere objects of geopolitics, not subjects that will be able to influence their own destiny even to a limited extent. A sustainable solution can be sought in a new way of connecting beyond the foreseen "bloc division", with security guarantees from both Western actors and Russia, while also projecting the special roles of Turkey and China and patiently solving internal and regional open issues in a completely new framework. Where there are no solutions, postpone them until further notice and take intermediate steps to reduce the potential for conflict. With such an approach, a matrix for wider integration in Southeast Europe could be built, which would include Turkey and Ukraine after the end of the war.

Despite the fact that this attitude seems naive and utopian, it should be remembered that after wars, there are always negotiations. After an armed conflict, some negotiate from the position of the winner, some from the position of the loser, and agreements are made accordingly. The current armed conflict will not end as planned in the West. The escalation in Ukraine

is contrary to all their strategic plans. With NATO, the Balkans is not becoming any more stable or secure, nor will it have a more certain perspective. The Balkan issue, for sure, does not have the capacity to "tear down" NATO. However, the Balkan issue has the capacity to help breakdown NATO, and when it comes to breaking down the credibility of this military alliance or its decomposition, one of the ways is by showing which mistakes that it made in its approach have caused significant consequences for NATO itself and for regional security as well.

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Rethinking Bulgaria's Euro-Atlantic Choice

Irina YAKIMOVA[1]

Abstract: The article aims at rethinking Bulgaria's Euro-Atlantic choice made by our country in the first decade of the post-socialist transformation. Tracing back in time the origins and evolution of the concept of Bulgaria's accession to the Western integration space, the author highlights events that have formed the broad outlines of the process while searching for possible explanations of why things have gone wrong in the long run. Against this background, the issue of the expedience of the country's geopolitical reorientation from the East to the West is also brought forward from a historical perspective as well as from a contemporary perspective. The author pays due attention to the role of the "international factor" and the correlation between the dynamic development in the field of geopolitics and the negative ideological evolution of the concept of "opening" to the West.

Keywords: transition, transformation, Eastern Europe, Bulgaria, EU, NATO.

Bulgaria's Euro-Atlantic choice was made in the second half of the 1990s in the effort of the Bulgarian post-socialist state to refute the pro-Soviet "satellite syndrome" by replacing it with the new "European civilizational values". The present article aims to outline the historical parameters of this process while analysing its contemporary geopolitical implications by means of political science. The text examines exclusively the "case of Bulgaria", regarded in the mandatory broader international context. Therefore, the research is multi-layered and multi-aspect, without striving to be fully comprehensive in every factological issue appearing in it. Thus,

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the main focus is the place of Bulgaria in the post-Soviet world order, with the reasoning purposefully oriented towards clarifying the role and influence of the "international factor" in formulating Bulgaria's foreign policy decisions. The main findings are focused so as to provide a most unbiased answer to the question of what provoked our country's post-socialist "opening" to the West and how its hasty implementation into economic and political practice led to a number of short-sighted management decisions that already require revision and reassessment.

In order to achieve a comprehensible logical sequence in the text to follow, it is necessary to "rewind the tape" by recalling the original motivation of Bulgaria's integration into the transatlantic political-economic and military-political space. The concept of the Bulgarian reorientation from the East to the West emerged from the party directive to discover a "tactical alternative" to the already disintegrating structures of the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance and the Warsaw Treaty Organisation. The official "green light" to this end was given by the adoption of the so-called "July Concept" in 1987 in the light of Soviet "perestroika". In the geopolitical environment of the late 1980s, the implementation of the "tactical alternative" meant searching for ways of reorientation towards enhanced cooperation, initially in the field of foreign trade and later in that of foreign policy, with the institutions and structures of the Western European integration space (International Relations 1988, 3–5). The then ruling Bulgarian Communist government had no other "winning" option, as CPSU Secretary General Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of reforming the Soviet-type model of the state socialism had one leading long-term consequence for Bulgaria, namely depriving it of its privileged position as the military-political and economic "centre" of the Eastern bloc while gradually pulling it afar to the "peripheral" zone of the geopolitical "buffer" space between the East and the West. Thus, finding itself in an unexpected state of "transition" between the economic systems and the dynamically changing external and internal socio-political situation, the country was pushed once again into chaos and forced to start its most recent search for a new place in the changing power balance between the global geopolitical players (Kalinova and Baeva 2002).

The accession to the European and transatlantic integration communities became a top state priority after all the other possibilities for finding

alternative foreign trade and policy partners proved to be inconsistent. The "exotic" options for closer cooperation with the Arab countries, Japan, or China, as well as the attempts to establish "individually based" relations with the Federal Republic of Germany as a key representative of the geopolitical space beyond the "Iron Curtain", turned out to be lacking in long-term perspective for various reasons in the status quo before 1989, as well as immediately after the "velvet revolution" and the change of power it pretended to bring.

If, for example, we were to consider the "Middle Eastern dimension" in Bulgarian foreign policy from those years, we would notice that maintaining contacts with countries like Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Algeria was actually pursued to achieve several very specific goals, which included support for the decolonization process, demonstration of the achievements of the ideology of state socialism as well as securing the geopolitical positions of the USSR and the "socialist East" over those of the US and the "capitalist West" in the region. However, Mikhail Gorbachev officially declared denunciation of the "spheres of influence" at the end of the 1980s, rendering this political line meaningless. As for China, Japan, and the Federal Republic of Germany, in all three cases it was a question of unsuccessful management choices due to the direct collision with the global geopolitical interests of the USSR. With China, because of Zhivkov's attempt to use the nuanced differences between the "Chinese" and "Soviet" models of socialism to criticise Gorbachev's concept of the "perestroika"; with Japan, due to the fact that, in an effort to quickly acquire Japanese technological know-how, Bulgaria was on the verge of revealing secret product information and Soviet patents in the field of military-technical industry; with the Federal Republic of Germany, because of the unrevoked decision to deploy US missiles on its territory, despite the ongoing disarmament negotiations and Zhivkov's attempt to use this country as an intermediary in the diplomatic talks with the EEC "behind Moscow's back" (Filipova 2008; Kandilarov 2014, 510-568; Marcheva 2016, 541-544). Therefore, the ruling elites, before 1989 and in the first post-socialist decade either, demonstrating impressive continuity in their views about the future development of the country and regardless of their party colouring, began to regard the option of an accelerated "return to the West" as a panacea for solving the accumulating problems in the fields of economy and national security. A little-known and somewhat reluctantly admitted truth, even by

scholars and experts, for example, is the fact that it was as early as 1986-1988 when official relations with the then EEC were established. That happened through the two-stage exchange of verbal notes between the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Petar Mladenov, and the European Commissioner for External Relations, Willy de Klerk (see DAMFAa 113-128; and DAMFAb, 5). The party-political regime skilfully took advantage of the momentum of mutual recognition between the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance and the Western European economic integration institutions (JD, 1988). On the other hand, although not yet at an official bilateral level, the first attempts to contact NATO representatives were made within the framework of the negotiations between the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Warsaw Pact on disarmament issues held in Stockholm from January 1984 to September 1986 and later on in Wien on February 17, 1987 (Baev 2010, 380-382). We could not speak yet, however, of a sharp breaking up of all the ties within the socialist integration model. At that point, even countries with the most advanced reforms towards political liberalisation and the introduction of free market mechanisms, like Poland or Hungary, were not fully prepared for such a radical step (Baeva 2019, 64), despite the fact that it was there that the US foreign propaganda funds were spent most lavishly in order to achieve "an ideological break-through" against the Soviet influence. According to available diplomatic sources of the period, preserved in the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, in 1985 and for propaganda purposes in Poland, only the US National Endowment for Democracy (a non-profit foundation dedicated to the growth and strengthening of democratic institutions around the world) allocated as much as 600,000 USD (DAMFAc, 81-84). The comparative amount allocated for the same "anti-Soviet" propaganda in Bulgaria was not small either, estimated at up to circa 200,000 USD, but the momentum of inter-bloc relations in the Soviet sphere at that time was still strong, and the process of its self-destruction had not yet reached its final stage. On the other hand, exclusively dissolving the "Bulgarian case", it was particularly hard for Socialist Bulgaria to break up with the USSR, given the decades-long policy of "comprehensive rapprochement" with Moscow (Baeva 2017, 21-39), which could serve as an explanation of why the management programmes of the first transition governments after 1989 contained just vaguely defined calls for maintaining "a balance of relations" with all Bulgarian external partners, stating at the same time that the country

should remain "open" to "everything useful and valuable created by modern civilization" (GD 1990, 596). Only when the military-political and political-economic structures of the Eastern Bloc were officially disbanded in the summer of 1991 was the need to find an urgent and adequate alternative for Bulgaria's future development inevitably put on the agenda.

The dilemma seemed to be partially solved by the progress of the talks on mutual cooperation with the institutions of the European Economic Community (Nikova 1992, 273; Yakimova 2019, 289). The decisions of the 14th Extraordinary Communist Party Congress (January 30, 1990-February 2, 1990) served as a "political catalyst" in this regard, with the party delegates officially denouncing the Soviet Communist Model and adopting instead the Western European Social Democratic Concept (Kandilarov 2010, 154–157). That was a move with unequivocal implications at the international level. It created the necessary prerequisites to finalise the negotiations on the long-prepared Agreement on Trade and Commercial-Economic Cooperation between Bulgaria and the EEC, signed on March 8, 1990. Soon after Bulgaria received observer status in the European Parliament, it was invited to the PHARE Programme (September 17, 1990) and became a member of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (September 26, 1990), and submitted its application to join the Council of Europe. Much more complicated, however, seemed to be the situation in the national security field, where the disappearance of the protective rear of the Warsaw Pact became a serious challenge that could not be overcome (at that historical stage) otherwise than by establishing close interaction with the structures of the transatlantic military-political space (Baeva 2019, 68). In popular language, this imperative found a simple and easily understandable expression in the slogan that Bulgaria was building "a road to Europe". The latter was broadly used as a major propaganda instrument, especially by Prime Ministers Filip Dimitrov (November 1991-October 1992) and Ivan Kostov (1997-2001), President Petar Stoyanov (1997-2002), or by the Chairman of the Atlantic Club, later Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Solomon Passi. In their public speeches, the building of "a road to Europe" often appeared as inevitably linked with the necessity of making a new "civilization choice" and adopting "the Euro-Atlantic values" (see, for example, Stoyanov 1997; Passi 1996).

There is something that should be explicitly stressed in the abovementioned context. The more Bulgaria embarked on the Euro-Atlantic negotiation process, the more its political elite became dependent on the so-called "Western factor", being obedient to decisions and even directives coming from far beyond Bulgaria's state management environment and the geographical territory of the country. Even before the Bulgarian "velvet revolution" of November 1989, the dissident movement in the country relied almost entirely on US financial and material support. It would be enough only to mention here the actions and direct interference of US Ambassador Sol Polanski in the political turmoil of the early 1990s, which were not kept secret but, on the contrary, were openly welcomed by the Right-wing opposition represented by the Union of the Democratic Forces (UDF). There is a document kept in the archives of the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs containing the direct accusation that the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Lyuben Gotsev addressed in the autumn of the turbulent year 1989 to the US participants in the Meeting on Environmental Protection of the Council for Security and Cooperation in Europe held in Sofia from October 16 to November 3, 1989. The dissidents used the international spirit of that meeting and its wide Western media coverage to organise a demonstration in the park space in front of the Kristal Confectionery in Sofia on October 26, 1989. After they were scattered by the militia forces, the Deputy Minister expressed his displeasure at the activity of the American Ambassador Sol Polanski himself and other US Embassy officials in Sofia among the informal dissident groups opposing the regime (DAMFAd, 131). Following November 10, 1989, Ambassador Sol Polanski was already a frequent participant in the crowded demonstrations of the UDF, and he and his successors in office firmly supported the actions of the opposition in its struggle to assert its political positions (see Ludzhev 2012, 97, 112, 115). Later on, the trend became a matter of common practice, leading to the point when the expansion of the cooperation scope with the Western integration structures and institutions gradually turned Bulgaria into a target rather than a subject of foreign policy. Actually, there was little new in an international state status like that, as the country had already experienced the "brotherhood relationship" with the other socialist states within the Eastern Bloc, and just like then, the pace of integration rapprochement after the fall of the Iron Curtain was in a way proportional to the process of

"opening" the Euro-Atlantic space itself to closer cooperation with the European East.

From a "Western" perspective, the framework of relations with the former Soviet satellites could be considered established, in its broad outlines at least, with the adoption of several "milestone" political documents in the early 1990s. Striving to attract the Eastern European countries to the "transatlantic" sphere of influence, in compliance with Zbigniew Brzezinski's concept of the rearrangement of the "Grand Chessboard" in the aftermath of the Cold War, which excluded every possibility of a spatial vacuum in Central and Eastern Europe (Brzezinski 1998, p. 91), the European Council published its Rome Summit Conclusions in mid-December. The summit's decisions introduced a special form of close interaction with the European East, the so-called "European Association Agreements" (ECPC, 1990). Meanwhile, at NATO level, the North Atlantic allies adopted their Message from Turnberry (June 8, 1990), followed soon after by the London Declaration (July 6, 1990), both documents stating one and the same priority goal: to "reach out to the countries of the East, which were our adversaries in the Cold War, and extend to them the hand of friendship" (LD 1990, §4; MT 1990). These gestures of what then looked like an unconditional partnership, however, were soon complemented by a number of additional criteria the Eastern European candidate countries had to complete in order to obtain full membership status. Thus, for example, in the official documents from the meetings held at the highest European level in those years, we can read that the future cooperation with Eastern Europe is going to be determined not just by the generally expressed intention of each country, but also by the specific progress in building "democratic institutions" guaranteeing the "rule of law" and "human rights", by the presence of functioning market relations and the competitiveness of the candidate's economy, and by the speed of harmonisation of national legislation with the relevant legal norms of the "acquis communautaire" (AC, 1993). On the other hand, in the field of military cooperation and security, the North Atlantic Council also brought forth a series of recommendations for "modernization" of the Eastern European armies, implying no more, no less, the complete destruction of "obsolete" Soviet weapons and their replacement with technology that is "compatible" with and "meets" the NATO standards (PPFD 1994; PPID 1994). It was namely the strict implementation of these same criteria that outlined the new state-

political doctrine of the Bulgarian post-socialist transition, the latter being built entirely on the premise of rejecting the "Communist past" and the necessity of making a "new civilizational choice" by adopting "Western values" and development models.

It should be stressed that in this regard, Bulgaria made no exception from the rest of the former Soviet satellites in their quest to "return to Europe", from which their elites believed they had been forcibly separated when being geopolitically incorporated into the Eastern Bloc in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. However, as more and more time passes, the "Pro-Western" choice Bulgaria made two decades ago begins to look somewhat static, unduly axiomatic, and somehow outdated. As we know from Hegel's popular thesis, human history never stands still; the wheel continues to turn, and events repeat periodically in a kind of imaginary spiral, but always with an upgrade. The history of Bulgaria's post-socialist transition is a most symbolic confirmation of this theory. And, if the transition seemed to have come to an end quite naturally in a geopolitical sense with Bulgaria's admission to NATO in 2004 and a little later to the EU in 2007, from a present-day perspective, it is hard to admit that such statements cannot stand up to the unbiased verification of the historical development. In the 30 years that have elapsed since the turning point of 1989, the geopolitical picture in the Eastern part of Europe has evolved beyond recognition, and currently we once again appear to be standing at a historical crossroads where neither the East nor the West are the same anymore. In fact, as early as in the decade immediately following the collapse of the Eastern European socialist integration model, the newly formed Russian Federation turned to the political philosophy of Neo-Eurasianism, which gradually became the foundation of its foreign policy doctrine. With the beginning of the new 21st century, Moscow directed its attention to the creation of a "new Eurasian empire" built around the geopolitical axes of Moscow-Berlin-Paris to the West, Moscow-Beijing to the East, and Moscow-Tehran to the South (Dugin 1997, 162). It was namely this ideology that presupposed the voluntary withdrawal from the Eastern European space at the expense of the progressive mastery of the Eurasian "heartland" (Mackinder 1904, 421–444). And while the ruling elite in Washington continued to boast about what still looked like their unconditional victory in the Cold War and, on that ground, considered it their implicit right to act as a "global arbiter" of the "American" world order (Kissinger 1997, 705-733; Brzezinski 1994, 158–159; Brzezinski

2004, 126, 150), the Russian Federation gradually regained the positions of influence which the former USSR had renounced and started consolidating around itself new economic and political alliances. After a decade of ideological wandering, the political debate in Russia was finally raised to a new point where the main challenge was to find a proper answer to the question of how to build the new modern state identity while reconciling it with the "Soviet past". It was in this context that Alexander Dugin proposed his theory of the new "Eurasian" way of Russia's future development (Dugin 2014), generally opposing Alexandr Shevyakin's implicit thesis of the necessity to re-establish the deliberately and untimely destroyed USSR (Shevyakin 2010), both of them thus building the philosophical foundations for more "modernistic" thesis, like, for example, that of Prof. Darina Grigorova, who brings forth the idea of an entirely new geopolitical future for Russia based on its "imperial" and "Soviet" past (Grigorova 2018). In the process of implementing this task in the field of foreign policy, Russia initiated the creation of new generation international structures, such as the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Apart from that, a series of bilateral agreements for economic and military-political cooperation with China, India, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey were signed. The post-American world order is already established with its new realities and spheres of redistributed influence. Within its framework, Russia's geopolitical importance could be defined as, if not superior, at least fully equal to that of several other major spatial players (Bachev 2022, 10, 18). So, we are currently witnessing not just the general transformation of the system of international relations but also the global restructuring of the architecture of international security. The first diplomatic legitimation of this large-scale process was the meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his American counterpart, President Joe Biden, in the early summer of 2021. This meeting was a sign that Washington, albeit reluctantly, recognises the Russian Federation as its equal antagonist in the international arena for the first time since the collapse of the USSR. Everything that the world has observed afterwards — the denouement of the military clash in Syria, the tension over Iran's nuclear programme, the outburst of the conflict in Ukraine, the Taiwan issue — are just the different practical dimensions of the modern confrontation between the West and the East, which is becoming increasingly complex and much more multi-layered if compared to the confrontation between the two superpowers and their "satellite" military-

political blocs in the decades of the Yalta-Potsdam status quo. The major result of this new geopolitical opposition is the gradual but sustainable shift of the global centre of historical development in an Eastern direction. The process is unprecedented, not just since the end of the Cold War but since the time of the Great Geographical Discoveries, and it is high time to admit the plain facts. Whether we like it or not, after the total dominance of the "Rimland" for more than half a millennium after the collapse of the Byzantine Empire in the 15th century, the contemporary global geopolitical "centre of gravity" is once again shifting to the core of the "Heartland", namely, to the heart of Eurasia. Thus, the "end of history", announced by Francis Fukuyama in the early 1990s, turned out to have been a fundamental new beginning of processes that developed with unexpected historical dynamics in less than 30 years, placing the political elites throughout the world before the imperative for a mental readjustment and urgent adaptation to the inevitable changes at all three spatial levels, global, regional, and national. The existing international system, with its familiar structures of economic integration and security, has never been that close to its actual collapse as it is now. And if those structures had no alternative since the disappearance of the Council of Economic Assistance and the Warsaw Pact Organisation in the early 1990s, at the beginning of the 21st century, they are already somewhere there. The alternative economic exchange system and security are already in an advanced stage formation stage beyond the Euro-Atlantic area. And that is an objective process that will determine all global vectors of development, at least for the next fifty years.

Taking into account all the above-mentioned, it appears that the time has come for careful reconsideration of the geopolitical choice the Bulgarian political elite made during the 1990s to break all ties with the its traditional foreign partners in the East, namely Russia, the post-Soviet states, and the Arab countries, and seek new counterparts in the West, i.e., Western Europe, the United States, the European Communities, and NATO, instead. In the dynamically changing surrounding world, the more time elapses since the Eastern European "velvet revolutions" of 1989–1990 with their now outdatedly sounding ideological quests, the more the revision of theses and interpretations becomes inevitable, posing (or maybe it would be more precise to use the term "revive") some fundamental questions like, for example, whether Bulgaria has been prepared enough for the status of a full member of the transatlantic community structures and institutions.

Against this background, the age we are living in has already raised certain serious doubts about the effectiveness of the economic integration of Bulgaria into the European Union, particularly in light of the hard recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and the introduction of European sanctions against the Russian Federation after its special military operation in Ukraine. First of all, there is the general issue of the initially negotiated conditions of our accession to the EU and the doubt of whether some of the so-called "negotiation chapters" had not been prematurely closed, needing urgent reopening in the changed political-economic European environment. Several particular issues arise in this context, concerning mainly the deadlines for closing the nuclear power plant in Kozloduy and the coal-fired power stations (in compliance with the European Green Transition), the deadlines for the introduction of the free market requirements directed at liberalisation of electricity prices for business and household consumers, as well as the cases of the electricity distribution companies and water transmission network ownership (currently both sectors are fully owned by foreign private companies and foreign state-linked structures) (Bachev 2022, 79-80). In the sub-field of agriculture as well, several outstanding disproportions, arising directly from the poorly protected Bulgarian national interest during the pre-accession negotiations, should be properly corrected. It would be quite enough to mention here just the fact that, as an EU member, Bulgaria has voluntarily agreed to comply with Article 34 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU), regulating the free movement of goods within the Community. During the years, this has created huge imbalances in the goods supply of the biggest retailer supermarkets operating in Bulgaria, like Billa, Lidl, Kaufland, Carrefour, and Fantastico, which prefer selling foreign goods rather than those of domestic Bulgarian origin. In an attempt to protect Bulgarian producers, on April 14, 2020, the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria adopted Decree No. 70, which obliged retailers to favour domestic food products (DCM 2020). The result was unequivocal, as only several months later, in October of the same year, the European Commission asked Bulgaria to remove the mandatory supply of local products in hypermarkets or it would refer the matter to the Court of Justice of the EU. The motivation of the EC was incontestable: the actions of Bulgarian authorities had led to a violation of the EU common market (ECMIPKD 2020).

On the other hand, many negotiation chapters seem to need reopening because expected fast macroeconomic development of Bulgaria after the accession year 2007 looks imperfect, if not totally unsuccessful, if we were to compare some basic figures. The notorious among experts, though still not as publicly popular Bulgarian politician and Facebook influencer Kiril Gumnerov, has recently posted several tables containing interesting data about the economic situation in Bulgaria at the beginning of 2007 and, later, in the fourteen years of Bulgaria's EU membership. The data are collected from the corresponding technical documentation of the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Statistics Institute and lead to highly negative conclusions about a permanent recession trend in key economic sectors, like fruit and vegetable production (Fig. 1) or industrial development (Fig. 2).

Figure 1: Decrease in fruit and vegetable production (2007-2020/2021)

	Total production for 2007 (Accession year)	Total production for 2020/2021 (Fourteen years after Bulgaria's accession to the EU)
Grapes	376 000	178 000
Tomatoes	213 000	115 000
Peppers	157 000	51 000
Potatoes	386 000	192 000

Source: Ministry of Agriculture and Food (Gumnerov 2023a; Gumnerov 2023b)

Figure 2: Decrease in the total number of employed
in the field of industry (2008-2020)

Employment by industrial sector	2008	2020	Decrease in the number of employed	Decrease in %
Employed in the non-financial sector	2 219 261	2 091 074	- 128187	- 6%
Employed in the mining industry	29854	20084	- 9970	- 32.8%
Employed in the manufacturing industry	623 652	491142	- 132 510	- 21 3%
Employed in the construction industry	255 523	145 165	- 110 362	- 43.2%
Employed in the production and distribution of electrical and thermal energy, as well as gaseous fuels	36122	31146	- 4976	- 15.5%
Employed in the field of administrative and support activities	82762	104883	Rise by + 22 121	+ 26 7 % (Administrative staff)

Source: National Statistical Institute (Gumnerov 2023c)

Apart from the specific economic issues, there is another major one arising directly from the current international tension created by the conflict in Ukraine. In light of the development of this military crisis, the official anti-Russian propaganda at the highest political and state levels has become increasingly aggressive and lavishly funded, as revealed by a recently declassified US State Department report for the fiscal year 2021. According to the report, which provides very detailed information about the various programmes supported by the Fund for Countering Russian Influence (CRIF), established in compliance with the provisions of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), the sum allocated for Bulgaria amounts to 47,709 USD, which are to be used for all sorts of activities directed to combat "Russian influence" (USSDIR 2022, 16). Even

before these striking revelations, however, the constant "anti-Russian" political and media speaking had already brought forth once again to the public agenda the long-muted "pro" and 'anti"-NATO debate. Posed for the first time in the early 1990s in the direct context of the strained bilateral relations with Moscow and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the "NATO issue" evolved fast into a priority argument for fierce political confrontation even before the end of the first post-socialist decade. Influential military representatives like the army generals Dobri Dzhurov, Hristo Dobrev, Lyuben Petrov, Stoyan Andreev, or the Prime Ministers Andrey Lukanov and Zhan Videnov, in their political programmes (both referred to the concept of "equidistance" from the East and the West) (see GP 1990, 697-700; GP 1995-1998, 712. 732) argued that Bulgaria needed new security guarantees after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, but at the same time avoided to directly "promote" the necessity for a NATO-membership. During the 1990s, the debate engaged large public circles, entering a particularly heated phase when the North Atlantic Alliance's air forces attacked the former Yugoslavia in the spring of 1999. The ruling Bulgarian political elite had already submitted the country's formal membership application two years earlier (on February 17, 1997). However, the greater part of society openly declared its position against such a step, demonstrating its disagreement with the unprecedented act of military aggression against our neighbour to the West. According to the preserved archival information, more than 30,000 Bulgarians gathered in Sofia to demonstrate against the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia on April 20, 1999 (OMDA 1999), and there were several other crowded demonstrations throughout the tense winter and spring months of 1999. However, with the permanent establishment of Bulgarian Euro-Atlanticists in power and the imposition of the concept of accelerated accession to the Transatlantic space in the first years of the 21ˢᵗ century, the reasonable voices expressing reservations about NATO membership were gradually silenced, purposefully deprived of a public platform. The media were "taken over" by the propagandists of the pro-Atlantic idea, and topics about, for example, the comparison between the positive and negative sides of Bulgaria's membership in the EU or NATO were branded "taboo" and permanently dropped from public attention. Literally until yesterday.

However, nowadays, the situation has changed a lot. The dynamic and multi-layered development of the political-economic and military-political

processes in Europe, the Balkans, and throughout Eurasia makes it necessary to urgently rethink all the parameters of Bulgaria's Euro-Atlantic choice. Our country is neither technically prepared nor is it in our national interest to take a side in military conflicts that do not concern us in any respect. That has nothing to do with the principle of European solidarity, and it was a general mistake to try to apply this principle to the Ukrainian war. Instead of involving itself in it, no matter how this involvement is being (not very successfully) masked as only "humanitarian" or only "technical support", Bulgaria should act as a mediator to find a peaceful solution. This is a completely feasible role, regardless of the complex geopolitical transformations taking place before our eyes, and its implementation depends not on the predetermined spatial position of Bulgaria but almost entirely on the proper will of the Bulgarian political elite. The "external factor" has its inevitable influence, of course, as it has always had back in time, but in our modern environment, this influence is multidirectional enough, constantly changing, and far from imperative to serve as a convenient excuse. And the part we, the analysts and experts, the historians and political scientists, are to take in the general process is to provide the necessary scientifically based theses and arguments for formulating the Bulgarian national interest and its international protection with a clear political position.

It is a challenge, of course. It is a challenge to find and bring forth as proof the right archival documents to show the interrelationship between the events of the recent past and the developments of the surrounding present. It is also a challenge to remain as impartial as possible about the dynamic world processes, particularly in a media and public environment that constantly generates distorted information and bans all alternative viewpoints. But this is what makes the charm of being a researcher of modern history: to remain immune to attempts at manipulation and faithful to the mere facts.

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Regional cooperation as an instrument of conflict resolution and security in Eurasia

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Abstract: In this book chapter, the importance of regional organisations in the management and resolution of ethnoterritorial conflicts, which rose up especially after the Cold War, is studied. The research aims to reveal an exploratory analysis within the scope of the qualitative research method. In this way, it is aimed at emphasising the potential contribution of regional cooperation and regional organisations to the security and peaceful resolution of conflicts, whose impact on conflict resolution has been somewhat overlooked. The aim of this study is to explore the possibilities and capabilities of regional organisations in conflict management and to draw attention to the success and failure factors in their new roles as conflict managers in the international system.

Keywords: regional cooperation, international organizations, ethnopolitics, regional security, Eurasia.

Introduction

Contrary to what was predicted, the end of the bipolar world order was not the end of the history of conflicts and actually paved the way for us to encounter the most brutal face of another type of armed conflict. The power vacuum created by the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc caused the peoples here to face great chaos in all areas of life. Particularly, while the political and economic chaos has fed micro-nationalism, it has revealed different types of ethnic-based conflicts that are increasing and spreading on a global scale. Ethno-territorial conflicts are one of them.

In ethno-territorial conflicts, which is one of the types of ethnicity-based conflicts, the conflict between ethnic groups arises from a regional factor. For this reason, the contentious region and territoriality that are the subject of the conflict play a decisive role in ethno-territorial conflicts. In this study,

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the importance of regional cooperation in the resolution of ethno-territorial conflicts and the re-establishment of peace in the geopolitical area called Eurasia is mentioned. In conflict management and conflict resolution, the influence of more global-scale international organisations such as the UN and NATO and the role of more micro-scale regional organisations, whose members are composed of regional states and which have emerged to address common regional problems, have been compared.

The role of international organisations such as the UN and NATO in research on the resolution of conflicts with micro-nationalism and ethnicity-based conflicts, which increased rapidly after the Cold War, was frequently mentioned. Scientific research on the contribution of international organisations in this field has been very limited. Apart from the EU and OSCE, which are regional organisations, other regional formations in Eurasia escape attention. It is seen in academic research on the roles of international structures such as the UN and OSCE in conflict resolution that, although an important step has been taken in the resolution of the conflicts in which these structures take charge, no definite results can be obtained in the stages of definitively ending the conflict and re-establishing peace.

At this point, we can consider the Nagorno-Karabakh problem the most striking example. Although there were gradual and partial ceasefire processes with the support of the OSCE in the long-lasting conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, the contentious region between Azerbaijan and Armenia, concrete steps could not be taken for the final resolution of the conflict. The Eastern Ukraine issue is also an unmanaged process despite all the efforts of the OSCE, and this process eventually turned from ethnopolitical conflict to ethno-regional conflict and then to international conflict. The efforts of the United Nations under the peacekeeping mission were also not sufficient to end the conflicts. Even though the Macedonian-Albanian conflict seems to have been resolved in the context of the Ohrid framework agreement, in fact, the conflicts continued after the date of this agreement. For this reason, while regional cooperation for the resolution of conflicts started to gain importance over time, the proactive efforts of regional organisations such as the EU, ASEAN, CSTO, and SCO began to be seen. Regional organisations such as the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Organisation of American States (OAS), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU) are defined as important conflict prevention actors in their regions. (Swanström 2005; Walter 1999; Kim and Merican 1997)

Article 52 of the United Nations Charter authorises regional organisations, through regional action, to address issues relating to the maintenance of regional international peace and security, provided that such action is consistent with the purposes and principles of the United Nations. Article 53(1) expressly states that "The Security Council shall, when necessary, use such regional arrangements or institutions for enforcement actions under its jurisdiction", but this and other relevant articles of the United Nations expressly recognise the role of regional organisations in conflict resolution. However, some natural limitations have been introduced. First, regional organisations are geographically constrained by narrow conflicts, as opposed to those with a wider scope and potential impact. Second, regional organisations will be expressly subject to the United Nations Security Council, which has supervisory authority over regional actions and, if necessary, the right to supersede regional efforts.

For most of the Cold War era, regional organisations played these limited roles in conflict management. However, with the transition to the post-Soviet era, regional organisations began to assume increasingly diverse and, in some cases, primary roles in conflict management. From the beginning of the 1990s to the present, there has been a dramatic increase in all kinds of regional conflict management activities (Diehl 2008), and Hensel states that since the early 2000s, the interest of regional organisations has increased with the increase in research on conflict management. (Hensell 2002)

The increase in both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the conflicts has made it difficult for the United Nations to undertake the success of conflict resolution and to tackle the negative consequences of conflicts on its own. In this context, it has expanded the role of regional organisations. Unfortunately, the United Nations has not been successful in the management and resolution of conflicts in places such as Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda, where conflicts up to the stage of ethnic cleansing are high. In the mid-1990s, regional organisations and sub-regional bodies began to emerge, willing to take on the task of filling the void.

Compared to global-scale international organisations, it is clear that regional organisations can be much more effective because they have more information on local characteristics, are recognised locally, and are open to cooperation with countries bordering or close to the conflict area. Ultimately, when a conflict in a region cannot be resolved, it will necessarily begin to pose a direct threat to regional stability and security. This will lead to the formation of a chaotic environment that draws not only the conflicting parties but also the neighbouring states directly into it. Thanks to their

economic or political ties with the parties to the conflict and their role in promoting cooperation and development in their regions, regional organisations have more flexibility than international global organisations (Swanström 2005). For this reason, it is considered important to reveal the effects of regional organisations in creating a safe and peaceful regional and international environment with conflict management and resolution.

Focusing on an in-depth analysis of the role of regional organisations in conflict management (conflict prevention), conflict resolution, peace-building, regional security, and stability, this exploratory study focuses on "how" and "why" questions. What are the reasons behind the mission undertaken by regional organisations in the conflict zone, and how do success or failure factors emerge in the realisation of this mission? The framework of the study was drawn with a comparative research method definition when a research idea was born to examine a neglected subject within the framework of certain phenomena and to create predictions.

The Role of Regional Organisations in the Resolution of Ethno-Territorial Conflicts

Regional organisations can ensure the continuity of security and stability with their activities, whose operational levels may change according to local conditions and needs, in conflict management and resolution or in the process of peace reconstruction (Cox 1971). Regional organisations can also establish norms on a variety of issues, such as the Organisation of American States (OAS) democratization norms, that can promote stability, conflict-free relations, and security in their regions. The democratization norms of the OAS stipulate that it can be involved in conflict management by intervening in an unconstitutional regime change that may disrupt regional stability. In response to the 2000 military coup in Ecuador, the OAS issued a statement condemning the coup and calling for the reinstatement of the democratically elected head of state (Cooper and Legler 2001). Another example of regional organisations establishing norms calling for an end to the conflict is the statement issued by ASEAN in 1992 to resolve conflicts surrounding the Spratly Islands and the South China Sea. Such an exemplary situation shows that regional organisations can take normative decisions and declare these decisions to potential conflict parties if they deem it necessary in cases of conflicts that destabilise security and stability.

Regional organisations may reconsider issues by pressing conflicting parties to make mutual concessions and find a point of consensus. They

can offer alternative suggestions for solutions (Hopmann 1996). Regional organisations can prevent the militarization of possible conflict groups by establishing various norms regarding armament. The Arms Control and Territorial Security (ACRS) formation in the Middle East, despite its failure, is a notable example. The ECOWAS Monitoring Group deployed in Liberia in 1990 has allowed us to see concrete steps that a regional organisation can take to "keep the peace". In the event of threats to regional security, the deployment of a "peace force" consisting of lightly armed units to monitor the ceasefire in the conflict zone, provide humanitarian aid, and support the post-conflict process can be achieved through cooperation between all or a few of the states in the region. The ending of the Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020, with the initiatives of Turkey and Russia, and then the deployment of the Russian Peacekeeping Force in the region can be evaluated within this framework. Here, the instrumentalization of regional cooperation in the direction of conflict resolution and security is seen by both the powerful actors in the region and the regional organisations formed by the regional states.

Regional and global organisations are able to impose a particular solution in a particular conflict – Kosovo (Lepgold and Weiss 1998). Since trying to impose a certain solution will require the deterrent effect of a strong military operation, it is thought that the success rate of such a method is directly proportional to the organic bond of the structure that carries out the operation with the conflict zone. In a determined, strong military intervention for the resolution of the conflict, the dynamics of the conflicting parties and the conflict factors must be very well analysed. In other words, the third party's ability to analyse the conflicting parties in terms of socio-political, socio-cultural, and socio-psychological aspects will enable them to predict their reactions to the imposed solution proposals. The reliability of these predictions will determine the success rate of the solution process. Bennet states that regional organisations are more advantageous than the United Nations because their membership is more homogeneous (Bennett 1991). Indeed, since the members have veto rights in the decisions of global organisations such as the UN, there may be failures in the processes for the resolution of conflicts due to delays. In the Kosovo crisis and the intervention process in the conflict, NATO took a unilateral decision to exclude the United Nations from its military operation in Kosovo. NATO officials defined the military intervention carried out under the "Unification for Peace Decision" as "Europe's own answer to Europe's problem". Behind this unilateral and separate operation of NATO from the UN is undoubtedly the prediction that Russia and China can use their veto rights to block the

UN resolution. Regional organisations appear as important actors that play an active role in conflict resolution, maintain peace and stability, and are based on regional cooperation. Drawing attention to the contribution of regional organisations to conflict prevention, Young explains the intervention of a regional organisation in conflicts as follows:"A regional organisational intervention is a concrete action, whether political, economic or military, undertaken by a governmental or intergovernmental actor of the international system whose purpose is primarily to influence the direction, duration or outcome of an internal/civil or international conflict." (Young 1967, 34)

Accordingly, factors such as historical background, social and economic development, institutional political power, and security threats of conflict are the factors that shape the response of regional organisations to conflicts. Since the impact of these factors is different for each phenomenon, it is clear that the dynamics, capabilities, and institutional culture of regional organisations will also be different. Indeed, when we compare the ethno-regional conflicts in the Eurasian geopolitical region included in this study, the main causal factors behind each phenomenon are different. When we compare the Kosovo and Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts, the uniqueness of the conflicts in the context of the unique characteristics of the Balkans and the South Caucasus Regions and, of course, the structural differences of the regional organisations emerge. In this context, while the EU's role as a solution provider for an ethno-regional conflict in the Balkan Peninsula in southeast Europe is effective, it is relatively unlikely that the same EU will show the same success in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Contributions of regional organisations to conflict resolution will be in line with their abilities developed through cooperation between the member states of the organisation. Swanström states that these capabilities are also developed thanks to the cooperation of member states with international organisations such as the UN, NATO, and the WTO (Swanström 2005). Jones, on the other hand, argues that the quantitative multiplicity of the actors striving to prevent conflict will bring along difficulties in coordination (Jones 2010). Coordination in conflict resolution is inversely proportional to the number of actors. In other words, as the number of actors playing a role in the resolution of the conflict increases, coordination among the actors towards a solution will become more difficult.

On the other hand, protecting the delicate balance between regional organisations, conflict management, and the sovereign rights of the state or states that are parties to the conflict is an issue that needs to be clarified

(Carment and James 2000). For this reason, the roles of organisations such as the ASEAN in conflict resolution have been limited (Swanström 2005). As an exception to this limitation, the OSCE is a different example. Among regional organisations, only the OSCE can rise above national sovereignty for conflict prevention (Elliason and Rydberg 1998).

The correct management of a conflict's probability and the continuous development of new strategies for resolving an ongoing conflict are important in ensuring a successful transition to the peace reconstruction process. The dynamism and intensity of conflicts are different in each case. Undoubtedly, the difference in phenomena also depends on regional peculiarities. For this reason, it is thought that strategies should be developed considering the specificity of the conflict and regional factors in the resolution of conflicts. Developing new strategies depending on the subjective conditions of the phenomenon in question undoubtedly requires flexibility in structural changes. It is clear that global organisations do not have such comfortable mobility during such changes. This is related to the excess number of member states, the fact that the members are not in a single region, and the slower progress of the procedural processes. Regional organisations, on the other hand, can act more dynamically, especially according to the conditions in their regions. Here, the change in the structural character of the CSTO in relation to the Kyrgyz-Uzbek conflict shows that a regional organisation is flexible to rapid changes when necessary. The intervention of regional organisations in the ethno-regional conflict between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, the sub-ethnos of a super-ethno (Turkish), has become mandatory, and in this direction, the CSTO will include not only external interventions but also internal interventions in the mission of providing regional security.

The strategy (or policy) to be followed in the management and/or resolution of ethno-regional conflicts may include factors such as minimising regional inequalities, economic development, and increasing efficiency in corporate governance. These elements can be made much more effective with the support of regional cooperation and regional organisations. Such structural methods are not only preventive or end violence in the management and resolution of a conflict but also ensure sustainable peace (Lund 2009). It is worth remembering that structures for international cooperation such as the EU, ASEAN, AU, OAU, OAS, SCO, CSTO, and EEC are regional organisations that have contributed to regional security and stability by playing a role in conflict management, either directly or through structural methods.

The potential effects of such regional organisations in conflict resolution can be explored through strategies based on regional cooperation, such as diplomacy (multi-directional, such as direct interstate diplomacy, diaspora diplomacy, and diplomacy of leaders), mediation, and the development of early warning and early action mechanisms through tools such as international political economy analysis and macroeconomic measures. As is known, early warning and action mechanisms require the development and commitment of important skills such as diplomacy, mediation, negotiation, problem solving, and technical assistance (Collins et al. 2006). The intervention tools of regional organisations are the organisation's field of activity, resources, and current potential. The ability to use these tools for the resolution of an ethno-territorial conflict in its own region directly depends on the character of the cooperation between the member states.

The point that draws attention here and needs to be emphasised is, in fact, whether the management, resolution, and post-conflict role of a regional organisation in a conflict in its own region is equally or nearly as effective in conflicts outside its own region. The argument put forward in this research indicates the opposite of this proposition. If a regional organisation, as its name suggests, is a formation that has been created with the aim of cooperation or solidarity among the states in its region, the basic mission of this organisation will develop within the framework of the dynamics in its region. In this context, it will have a regional character, and therefore, it will approach the problem in a different region from its own subjective perspective. In addition, since a regional organisation will act in line with the cooperation and mutual interests of its member states, it will give priority to its own regional interests regardless of the issue.

Although the sample area of the research is the Eurasian geopolitical area, considering the uniqueness and specificity of different regions in this wide area, it cannot be expected that each of the regional organisations will contribute equally or similarly to each phenomenon in this area. It is argued that the efforts for the stability and security of Eurasia can only be successful when the international formations in different regions of Europe and the Asian continents are supported by the argument that they will offer more proactive and effective solutions to the conflicts in their own regions. If we remember the founding story of the EU, we can see that the European states that were destroyed after the Second World War needed to come together in order to stand up again, and within this framework, they soon laid the foundations of a cooperation organisation. The member states of the European Union have come together to solve their own common issues

and the problems they interact with on a regional scale, rather than solving conflicts or problems on a global scale. As another example, various regional formations that emerged in the post-Soviet space after the USSR can be considered. The main purpose of regional organisations such as the Eurasian Economic Union, CIS, CSTO, and SCO is to create policies and action plans for the common problems of the countries in the region that are members. In 2001, the European Council approved the "EU Programme for the Prevention of Severe Conflicts", aimed at building the Union's capacity to take consistent early warning, analysis, and action, while conflict prevention is one of the main objectives of the Union's external relations. With the article "European Security and Defence Policy should be integrated with all relevant aspects, including development, cooperation, and trade", security problems, instability, and conflicts that emerged in the Balkans and Eastern Europe after the disintegration of the USSR and Yugoslavia are prioritized. Ultimately, the resolution of these conflicts, which have the risk of spreading to central Europe, will eliminate possible threats to the security of the region (Europe).

The efforts of the EU to resolve the Macedonian-Albanian ethnopolitical conflict in 2001 can be evaluated in this context. The EU's investments in civil conflict prevention capabilities, such as early warning systems and financial mechanisms, have been important strategic tools in conflict management and resolution. The EU's regional (Macedonia and Kosovo) and global-scale conflict resolution efforts in different regions (Mali, Rwanda) are generally aimed at the fight against international terrorism, the stability of the member states, the countermeasure against the problem of international migration, and the security of EU citizens, which are directly related to the security of the EU. The fact that the conflicts in Africa are in the former colonial regions of the EU member states explains the reason for the EU's perception of a security threat. Although the Kosovo conflict did not attract the attention of the EU in its early stages, the problem grew over time, forcing the organisation to take a role in the resolution of the conflict. However, the EU's attitude towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been more passive than "forced determination". Although the OSCE Minsk group did not take an active role in the negotiations, it was limited to waiting for a consensus to emerge between Armenia's "self-determination" and Azerbaijan's "territorial integrity" theses. The difficulty of reconciling these two opposing theses on the common point (perhaps it would be more accurate to say its impossibility) caused the Nagorno-Karabakh problem to not be resolved for many years and the conflict to continue. On the other hand, despite the failure to reach an agreement on the final status and final

solution between Serbia and Kosovo, the EU has become the main actor in gradually resolving the conflict in different ways since 2008 (Hughes 2009).

The Kosovo Constitution, adopted in June 2008, was prepared with the help of experts from the EU and the US. The fact that Nagorno-Karabakh is regionally different from the local composition of the EU or from the regions with which it directly interacts may have led to the disintegration of the OSCE and the EU's focus on conflict resolution. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was ultimately resolved not with the initiatives of the EU and the OSCE but directly with the efforts of the regional actor states (Russia and Turkey). In addition to the losses suffered by Azerbaijan and Armenia during the conflict, the political, economic, and social stability and security of the South Caucasus region, as well as the neighbouring states, were inevitable to be negatively affected.

After the Kosovo crisis, the EU reshaped its approach towards Southeast European countries and developed the Stability Pact for Southeast Europe. This development has changed the perception of the region as a part of Europe and not as a near-abroad region. In addition, the EU paved the way for the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) and EU membership for the countries in this region. The EU has claimed to develop relations with this region, establish peace, and contribute to post-conflict reconstruction as its objectives (Glenny 1999). The EU sees enlargement as its most important instrument and contributes to peacebuilding, stability, prosperity, the rule of law, human rights, etc. The development of the regional approach and EU integration have been crucial tools that have made the EU an important actor in the post-conflict environment in Kosovo. Even though there were attempts to resolve the Eastern Ukraine issue with the efforts of the OSCE, the Minsk Agreements, and the Normandy Quartet, they could not be successful. The ethno-political conflict that started in 2014 has gradually turned into an ethno-regional conflict. Since 2022, it has gained an international character with the military operations of Russia. When the Eastern Ukraine problem is compared with the Nagorno-Karabakh problem, the Minsk and OSCE processes are similar. The OSCE has not been successful in the management and resolution of both conflicts, and in our opinion, it is more likely that the solution of the Ukraine problem will be possible through the initiatives of regional states and cooperation organisations in the region, not through different regional or global organisations, as in the Nagorno-Karabakh example. When the four (4) ethno-regional conflicts (Kosovo-Macedonia, Kosovo-Nagorno-Karabakh, and Nagorno-Karabakh-East Ukraine) examined in the study are compared

in pairwise groups, there is a relationship between the success of the EU, OSCE, CSTO, CIS, and SCO in conflict resolution and regional factors. There appears to be a direct relationship. Although the relative failure of the OSCE in its attempts to resolve ethno-regional conflicts in the post-Soviet space is criticised, the flexibility of the organisation, which has fifty-seven (57) members, becomes dependent on the political situation, thus limiting its contribution to conflict resolution. Similarly, conflicts between member states remain one of the most important challenges to the success of the EU and its role in conflict prevention in the post-conflict phase.

In the academic literature of international relations and political science, peacekeeping organisations are usually understood as various peacekeeping and "coercive" measures carried out by the United Nations or any other third party for the purpose of resolving the consequences of an armed conflict. Sometimes "peacekeeping" is defined as a broad, general, and imprecise term to describe any activity of the UN and other international political organisations that has anything to do with establishing, strengthening, or expanding opportunities for peace. This means:

 – monitoring the conduct of elections;
 – establishment of civil and/or police defence in countries where there is a conflict;
 – organisation of events for the delivery of humanitarian aid;
 – monitoring compliance with ceasefire agreements;
 – separation of the parties to the conflict. (Kolobov et al. 2011)

Apparently, the scope of the term "peacekeeping", which took on its narrowest context in the post-Second World War, should be broadened. In today's political context, meaning of the term "peacekeeping" expresses an unrealistic goal. When the meaning of the term "peacekeeping" comes to mean the provision of international peace organisations only to high-pressure the parties in conflict and control compliance with the signed ceasefire, that is an understatement.

It is possible to offer some suggestions about the role of regional cooperation in conflict resolution, stability, and security in Eurasia. Concrete steps taken thanks to the active policies and cooperation initiatives of Russia and Turkey in the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which is one of the ethno-regional conflicts, have shown the importance of "political dialogue" for the management and peaceful resolution of such conflicts. It is thought that other countries and regional organisations in the regions of conflict will play an important role in "strengthening the political dialogue",

especially by undertaking negotiation and mediation missions. Regional cooperation ensures that communication channels are kept open and dialogue is maintained between the conflicting parties. This can increase understanding between parties, help build trust, and reduce tension. It is important to promote and maintain political dialogue between regional actors. Political meetings held regularly between the countries of the region ensure that regional security problems are discussed, the conflict parties come together, and the disputes are resolved through peaceful means.

Regional cooperation allows for "diplomatic efforts" in conflict resolution, while countries in the region can play a role in mediation or negotiations for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Regional actors can gain an advantage in impartiality by being accepted as reliable mediators between parties and bridging conflicting parties. At this point, it is necessary to mention Turkey's mediation attempts to end the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which has been going on since the beginning of 2022. When Turkey's NATO membership and the opposition to Russia in NATO's general attitude towards the Ukraine issue are examined, Ankara's determination to remain neutral and its solution-oriented efforts, which can be evaluated within the framework of regional security concerns and the importance of regional cooperation, show that states prioritise their regional interests over their global interests. The fact that regional organisations create an environment of mutual trust among the member states and that they can share "intelligence" in this way will create an early warning opportunity that will be effective in the management and resolution of conflicts. In this context, increasing intelligence sharing among the countries in the region can be effective in combating terrorism, organised crime, and other security threats. Information and intelligence sharing can increase regional security through an early warning system, enabling rapid and effective measures to be taken. The establishment of "common security mechanisms" among the countries in the region can create dynamics that support cooperation on security issues.

These mechanisms can offer opportunities for cooperation in a variety of areas, such as confidence-building measures, military cooperation, joint exercises, military inspections, and confidence-building measures. Within the framework of regional cooperation, it is important to implement confidence-building measures in border regions. Joint steps can be taken to improve border security, facilitate border crossings, protect the border from illegal activity, and resolve border disputes. Regional cooperation can increase trust between conflicting parties by providing confidence-building measures and

mechanisms. By focusing on a common understanding of security and common interests, conflicting parties can create a sense of trust and reduce security concerns (Collective Security Treaty Organisation, CSTO).

Regional cooperation promotes a "fair and balanced sharing of resources". In regions where resources are limited, an equitable distribution of resources can help prevent conflict. Economic cooperation and integration play an important role in ensuring regional security and stability. Joint trade agreements, investment incentives, and economic integration projects promote stability by increasing interdependence among the countries of the region (Eurasian Economic Union, EAEU). Countries in the region should establish effective crisis management mechanisms in crisis situations. Measures such as rapid response mechanisms, peace-supporting missions, peacekeeping operations, and mediation in crisis situations are important to maintain regional security and stability. Educational and cultural exchange programmes between the countries of the region enable people to understand each other and increase mutual trust. Youth exchange programmes support interaction between non-governmental organisations and promote regional cooperation and economic, political, and social integration. Joint economic projects, trade, and investment opportunities can increase interdependence and reduce the potential for conflict. Regional integration mechanisms can play a conflict-preventing role by creating common rules and standards. These recommendations can create an effective cooperation framework for regional security and stability. However, since each region has its own unique conditions and dynamics, the implementation of the recommendations should be adapted to suit the characteristics and needs of the region.

Conclusion

In the literature review, it is seen that one factor on which the capabilities of regional organisations depend is the willingness and agreement between member states. When we compare regional organisations to the United Nations and other global organisations, they are faster, more effective, and more continuous in their processes of management, resolution, and transformation of conflicts. Diehl states that bureaucratic processes among the members of global organisations hinder the transformation of conflict or the creation of a sustainable stability and peace process, especially in the UN /Diehl 2008). Considering that regional organisations are the structures created by the states in the region, it will be obvious that they are directly

affected by the negativities of the current conflict and, therefore, they will take a determined stance in order to ensure security and stability as soon as possible. The resolution of an ethno-regional conflict and the establishment of sustainable peace afterwards will, of course, support the security and economic interests of the third-party countries in the region. However, the next more secure area through which civilians or refugees in the conflict zone will primarily pass will undoubtedly be the nearest cross-border. This, in turn, will raise the immigration problem for the third-party states in the region. As a matter of fact, the insolvency of the Nagorno-Karabakh problem has been an obstacle to the economic and social development of the South Caucasus, not only Azerbaijan and Armenia. At the same time, it had negative effects on regional states such as Russia, Georgia, Turkey, and Iran. When we consider the Ukraine-Russia conflict as a more recent phenomenon, the countries in the region are the most affected by this process, excluding the conflicted countries. The conflict in Ukraine, which is at a critical point in Eurasian geopolitics, negatively affects Eastern Europe and Central Europe, as well as the Black Sea littoral states and neighbouring regions (energy and food crises). In the examined phenomenon, it has been determined that regional organisations are more effective in preventing conflict and building sustainable peace by resolving conflict. However, it should be noted that it is necessary for regional organisations to act together with the United Nations in terms of supporting regional organisations in matters where they may be inadequate. Considering that the immediate resolution of the conflict and ensuring regional stability are in line with their national interests, for the member states that are directly exposed to a number of regional problems caused by the conflict, it will be possible to prevent the increase and spread of the conflict thanks to the conflict management and constructive initiatives of the regional organisations in the first phase of the conflict. While perhaps reconciliation can be achieved between the parties to avoid conflicts turning into violence through regional cooperation, leaving all the initiative to the UN may cause an escalation of an avoidable conflict. In this case, it is thought that the responsibility of regional organisations and third-party regional states under the umbrella of regional cooperation in ethno-regional conflicts is too important to ignore.

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Consequences of Internal Destabilisation of Key Eurasian States on Regional Security: A Case Study of the 2016 Coup Attempt in Turkey

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Abstract: The attempted military coup in Turkey in 2016 represents an extremely complex military-political phenomenon that threatened to cause very negative implications for the stability of not only Turkish society but also on a broader regional level. One of the main characteristics of this coup was its suddenness and rapidity in the phase of immediate execution, which is ultimately the main characteristic of these forms of political violence. Although there were many unknowns in the beginning, with the passage of time and multi-layered analyses, the key actors of this failed coup became crystalized, especially those who were "behind the curtain". If, by any chance, the coup had succeeded, it would certainly have represented the foundation of the architecture of new geopolitical relations in the Middle East and Central Asia, which, by all accounts, would have been significantly less favourable when it comes to processes aimed at creating an environment for the greatest possible degree of regional stabilisation in overall social relations. The scientific and social goal of this work is focused to a significant extent on the performance of certain experiences and relevant conclusions, which would contribute to the strengthening of the scientific research fund with the tendencies of its practical usability in terms of protecting society and the state from illegal and violent forms of political struggle such as military coups.

Keywords: Military coup, Turkey, army, constitutional order.

Introduction

A military coup or putsch is an extremely militant form of *coup d'état* carried out exclusively by the national armed forces and not by mercenary or foreign interventionist troops. After the coup, power is exercised by

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military personnel alone (junta), or they predominantly participate in its exercise within the framework of mixed military-civilian governments (Simeunović, 1989, 75). Based on this, it is evident that the coup represents a militant way of violently seizing power, carried out exclusively by the national armed forces, unlike other forms of political coups in which foreign interventionist troops, mercenaries, and other paramilitary formations can participate. It follows that this kind of coup action during the immediate execution has an exclusively national character, although the actors of the coup may be in a public or secret relationship with an external factor that has certain interests in supporting such activity (Parezanović, 2013, 157).

When it comes to the attempted military coup in Turkey in July 2016, it is important to emphasise that it represents an extremely complex military-political process with a much wider and deeper background than just an attempt to forcefully change the government in Turkey. The scope of the afore-mentioned coup was to reach the constitution of a new geopolitical framework not only in the Middle East but also in Central Asia and Transcaucasia, an area of particular interest to the Russian Federation. The fact that there is a tradition of carrying out military coups in Turkey should not be overlooked either. In the 20th century alone, the Turkish army carried out three coups: in 1960, 1971, and 1980. The 1997 coup interfered with the military memorandum when it forced the resignation of then-Prime Minister Nejmetin Erbakan. In fact, since 2003, Erdoğan, as prime minister, has begun to reform civil-military relations in such a way that he has reduced the role of the military factor in the political life of Turkey.

In this context, not a few years pass without the arrests of Turkish officers accused of preparing a coup. For example, in February 2010, by order of the state public prosecutor, more than 200 high-ranking officers of the Turkish army were arrested, including several generals and colonels. In addition, the former deputy chief of the general staff and the air force and navy commanders were arrested on suspicion of planning a coup in 2003. As Turkish media announced, the goal of the conspirators' putsch action under the pseudonym "Hammer" was to prevent further Islamization of the country and strengthen the secularisation of Turkey, all for the sake of destabilising the political and security situation in the country. A statement was also issued that the coup plotters planned to plant explosives in Istanbul mosques to liquidate the holders of high political positions as well as

provoke the Greek army to shoot down a Turkish military plane over the Aegean Sea, which would introduce additional tensions into the already tense bilateral relations between Turkey and Greece (Parezanović 2013).

On the other hand, after a turbulent and controversial political history, Turkey has reasserted itself as a highly significant factor on the world political and economic stage. There is almost no current issue within the world community without Turkey having some indirect or direct role in some way. Turkey has long since stopped dealing only with regional issues in the Middle East and the Balkan Peninsula and strives increasingly to impose itself as an indispensable actor in global international movements and processes. As a country with about 85 million inhabitants and despite decades of internal political tensions, Turkey has developed into a strong military and economic power, which has been especially evident in the last twenty years. Along with economic expansion, Turkey took an increasingly offensive foreign policy course, particularly cautiously reviving and desiring a return to the positions of the former Ottoman Empire, which is why numerous authors rightly qualify such a direction of Turkish state policy as neo-Ottomanism. As a member of NATO, according to the official data of the North Atlantic Alliance, Turkey is second in power, right after the US, which gives it additional foreign policy weight. Although it tried to maintain a neutral position during and after World War II, Turkey balanced between the poles of the Cold War until 1952, when it became a member of NATO. During the Cold War, it played a very important role, and what Cuba represented for the US in the military-territorial sense, Turkey meant for the former USSR. If you look at the geopolitical position of Turkey, even at first glance, it can be established that it is extremely interesting and favourable in every sense. Turkey spans two continents and is surrounded by four seas: the Black, Mediterranean, Aegean, and Marmara. It borders eight countries: Greece, Bulgaria, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. If we consider that Turkey sovereignly rules the northern part of the island of Cyprus as part of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, it is completely clear what kind of geopolitical potential it has. Otherwise, the internationally unrecognised Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus represents a serious point of dispute between not only Greece and Turkey but also the European Union and Turkey. The problem is compounded by the fact that the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is home to over 30,000 Turkish troops, as well as electronic reconnaissance systems that cover the entire Mediterranean and

much of the Middle East. In such a social environment, the conditions for "some action" are almost always created. The character of that action is directly conditioned by other social parameters, primarily political, economic, social, military-security, cultural, religious, and the like. If we consider the turbulent history of Turkey, the complexity of modern Turkish society, and the numerous contradictions that burden it, it is quite understandable that Turkey is still a potential source of crises and conflicts, which cannot always be controlled and channelled (Parezanović 2013) with certainty.

The Importance of Turkey for the Regional Security of Eurasia

As a pivotal "middle power", Turkey can play an important role in fostering regional stability in the Middle East, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans, the Black Sea, and Central Asia. As other middle powers can and do, Turkey needs to forge and refresh regional partnerships and alliances as much as possible rather than fuel enmities and rivalries. The path to Turkey's regaining and extending its influence regionally and globally lies in recommitting to a pro-Western axis underpinned by a Kemalist foreign policy (Colakoğlu 2019, p. 4). In recent times, Turkish politicians, under the leading Party of Justice and Development (AKP), have promised to contribute to the security, stability, and prosperity of a wide range of territories beyond Turkey's immediate neighbourhood, such as Central and South Asia. Turkey's renewed interest in these territories is the result of its desire to play an influential role in world politics. In accordance with the leadership of the AKP, Turkey's new activism towards the Russian Federation, Caucasia, and Central Asia has opened new horizons in its relations with Eurasia. This new foreign policy orientation results from reform and change in Turkey's domestic landscape. Geopolitical justification for a relatively new foreign policy turn towards Eurasia under the AKP was given in a statement by Ahmet Davutoğlu, who said: "Turkey is a country with a close land basin, the epicentre of the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Caucasus, the centre of Eurasia in general, and is in the middle of the Rimland belt cutting across the Mediterranean to the Pacific (Turkish Time 2004)".

Turkey's profile is rising in the region at a time when Eurasian actors face increasingly complex challenges. Eurasia has been considered by Turkish policymakers as a potential area of influence and opportunity since

the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Bearing in mind the historical importance of the Eurasian region for Turkey, its new regional discourse and policy aim to pursue an active foreign policy in order to achieve the goal of a zero-problem policy in its relations with countries in the region. Ankara`s new approach seeks to benefit from closer economic and political relations in order to make Turkey an energy hub through regional energy projects (Bülent & Fidan 2009, 199-200) and to engage with international actors and institutions with the reputation of regional power, which ensures regional stability and security. Trying to transport the region's rich energy resources to world markets via its own territory, Turkey aims to secure and diversify oil and gas transportation to Europe, which is an important aspect of its new policy and geopolitical vision, which includes Eurasia. Bearing this in mind, Turkey is trying to represent herself as a mediator (Lazić 2022) and factor of stability, especially because of so-called "frozen conflicts" in Nagorno–Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Crimea, and Donbas that may cause significant problems for Turkey's pipeline plans. Currently, Turkey continues to develop a strategic partnership with Azerbaijan and Georgia (Erşen & Çelikpala 2019, 590). Also, thanks to engagement during the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh during 2020, the Armistice Agreement, and the Memorandum of Understanding with the Russian Federation, Turkey is trying to affirm itself as a reliable and persistent ally, while at the regional level (Eurasia), it has imposed itself as an actor with growing political influence and a strengthened military presence (Janković & Lazić 2021, 358).

Another priority in Turkish foreign policy regarding Central Asia is to ensure that its states acquire the capacity to establish stability and security at home and develop the capability to effectively cope with regional and domestic problems. In this regard, the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) has played a crucial role as an official development aid organisation (Fidan & Nurdun 2008). Through TIKA, Turkey has provided funds to Central Asian countries since their independence, and its role has only grown under the auspices of Turkey's new foreign policy vision. Substantial development aid and diverse activities in various fields provided by TIKA are important in terms of demonstrating Turkey's vision of sharing its gains with its sister states and communities. Sixty percent of TIKA's USD 702 million in development aid in 2007 went to Central Asia and the Caucasus. These funds sponsored

projects in economic and industrial infrastructure development, the health and education sectors, academic cooperation between Turkish and Eurasian universities, internship programmes in Turkey for Central Asian and Caucasian university students, Turkish language programmes, and the promotion of business and trade (Aras & Fidan 2009).

In the Turkish concept of Eurasianism, much greater emphasis has been placed on the former Ottoman territories than on ethnic identity (Tüysüzoğlu 2014, 97). Turkish foreign policy, rooted in the concept of *Strategic Depth* created by Ahmet Davutoğlu, has been interpreted in academic discourse within the context of the conservative approach that makes reference to the Ottoman territories. Eurasianism, as formulated by Davutoglu, is an initiative that fosters multiculturalism throughout Eurasia as a whole and in the former Ottoman territories in particular; it seeks justification in terms of shared values, issues, and opportunities that bring communities together; and it aims to set up cooperation with the civilizations outside the Afro-Eurasian confluence (particularly Western civilization) in a spirit not of conflict but of shared interest. Also, the Turkish vision of Eurasianism can be considered a "geopolitical approach based on civilization", in view of the emphasis that it attaches to Ottoman heritage and Islamic civilization (Ersen 2003, 16-17). However, it must be noted that Turkey's new foreign policy is rooted in pragmatism and in defining itself with reference to Ottoman heritage and Islamic civilization, since Turkish identity merits reference in the Caucasus and Central Asia. According to previous findings in the literature, neo-Ottomanism assigns Turkey a leading role within the Eurasian paradigm. Turkey structures the neo-Ottoman conception by fostering sound communication and cooperation between Western and Eastern civilizations. Turkey is thus set to acquire the position of a bridge between the Euro-Atlantic world and Islamic civilization (Ersen 2003, 16-17).

Constructive Eurasianism recognises Turkey's *sui generis* character, not in the sense that it is superior to other countries but in the sense that it is inherently and uniquely positioned geographically, culturally, and politically. Per constructive Eurasianism's understanding, Turkey does not try to position itself as a purely Western, Eastern, European, or Asian country. Although established on strong secular foundations, Turkey keeps in mind its position as a leading Muslim-majority country and that many

Muslims around the world look up to Turkey in this regard. In this regard, Turkey plays multiple roles, so it is and must be all of these at the same time (Ertuğrul Tulun & Oğuzhan Tulun).

Turkish policymakers have also demonstrated greater interest in the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the two most prominent symbols of a multipolar world that has been defended vehemently by Russian and Chinese leaders for many years as the antithesis of the Western-led liberal international order. While the BRICS is mainly focused on fostering cooperation on economic, financial, and developmental problems, the SCO has become a strong inspiration for the supporters of Eurasianism in Russia and elsewhere, mainly due to its security-oriented agenda and distinctively regional scope that includes not only most of the former Soviet states but also the major actors of Eurasian geopolitics like China, India, Pakistan, and Iran. In this sense, Turkish analysts tend to make particular reference to Turkey's expanding ties with the SCO whenever they attempt to explore the meaning of Eurasianism in Turkish politics (Ersen 2013). Also, it is more likely that SCO will remain one of the two most important platforms shaping Turkey's Eurasian strategy in the foreseeable future.

Compared to all these other external powers, Turkey enjoys a comparative advantage embodied in its shared ethnic, linguistic, and cultural ties with most states in this region, so it has continued to capitalise on these values. The eighth meeting of the Turkic Council, which took place in November 2021, allowed Turkey to articulate a new vision for the Turkic nations, so one significant move resulting from this meeting was the renaming of the Turkic Council into the Organisation of the Turkic States (OTS), giving it special status among world organisations and affirming pan-Turkism as a binding connection between the member states. In addition, the newly-founded OTS announced the "Vision for Turkic World—2040" as a road map for deepening cooperation over the next twenty years and unveiled plans for a new Turkic Investment Fund to boost investment across the region. The event, as a whole, marked an important development in Turkey's presence in Central Asia, especially if we keep in mind that Turkmenistan agreed to join as an observer. This continued institutionalisation of Turkic connections also attracted Russia, which expressed interest in becoming an observer in the OTS.

The orientation of the AKP government's "new" foreign policy is in accordance with certain principles mentioned above, which direct Ankara's attention to Turkey's neighbouring regions and the various activities that Turkey needs to pursue to develop good relations with them. The major challenge for Turkey comes from the Caucasus and the Black Sea, supplying and transhipping energy, plus concerns over Russia's resistance to NATO's expansion in those regions. With respect to the Caucasian states, there are additional concerns about Azerbaijan-Armenian relations, the Georgian security situation, and the developing relations with Russia. Within the framework of its new foreign policy, while Turkey has an active policy and takes initiative in the region of Central Asia and the Caucasus, it also tries to keep good relations with Iran and Russia, who are the main actors in the region. Apparently, Turkey has adopted a new foreign policy that aims for cooperation, or at least good relations, instead of competition with Russia regarding its relations with the Central Asian countries (Caman & Akyurt 2011, 57-60). Eventually, the Turkish pivot to Eurasia was renewed following Russia's special military operation in Ukraine, which started in February 2022 (Androulaki 2022) and simultaneously shaped a new multipolar world order and represented a catalyst for changes in world politics (Proroković 2022, 751).

All these have led us to the conclusion that Eurasia is an important area of influence for Turkey but also a region that depends to a large degree on Turkish foreign political moves, including security, diplomatic, economic, and energy support. In that sense, Eurasian states are aware that every escalating situation in Turkey can spill over to their territory and have implications for their regional security. One of these events was a failed military coup in 2016, which marked an internal destabilisation that could have been poured onto the region of Eurasia.

The Events that preceded the Military Coup

Observed from today's time distance, it can be responsibly stated that if the military coup had succeeded, it would have certainly further complicated the already tense relations between Turkey, Syria, Greece, Israel, Egypt, and indirectly the Russian Federation, as well as the leading

countries of the Persian Gulf, primarily Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran.

The goal was to militarise Turkey fully and, in alliance with Qatar, to tighten relations in the region of the Middle East and Central Asia as much as possible, with the ultimate goal of displacing the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China from these areas, primarily through breaking their foreign policy and economic cooperation with the states from those regions.

As far as Israel is concerned, two segments of American society have a pronounced interest in the additional tightening of relations between that country and Turkey. The first is the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE Wall Street), and the second is the military-industrial complex. When it comes to the Russian Federation, today it is quite clear that the main goal was the subversion of Russian-Turkish relations, which until the coup and after was done not only by political, economic, and intelligence methods but also by direct military action. One only needs to recall the circumstances of the downing of the Russian Su-24 bomber, the murder of the Russian ambassador in Ankara, and the armed conflicts between Russian and Turkish military units in Syria, where it can be reasonably assumed that there are many more examples that are not available to the general public. In any case, one gets the impression that someone persistently wanted to stop and destroy the Russian-Turkish cooperation, which in the last ten years has received a huge expansion in almost all social areas, starting with foreign policy, the economy, the military-industrial complex, energy, tourism, agriculture, and other strategic branches.

The army in Turkey has all the features of a closed social structure based on strict hierarchy and family inheritance, which is why it can be said that it is a kind of caste. The professional composition of the Turkish army is assembled according to social status. For example, a janitor's son may become a soldier, but he will never rise to a serious rank and will never enter what can be called an elite military circle. Moreover, young men with specific political attitudes passed down from their fathers, grandfathers, etc., also join the army. When it comes to officers, it is the warrior caste. And like any caste, it is strong in its internal positions. Therefore, it is difficult to recruit someone within the caste, and it is almost impossible to infiltrate the ranks of the Turkish army. This explains why Erdogan's special services were unaware of the preparations for a military coup. It is interesting that

even within the military caste, there are clans. That is, the pilots' clan, the tankmen's clan, the naval officers' clan, etc. And it also weakens the Turkish army internally because there is no unity. Specifically, in 2016, pilots and tankers tried to carry out a military coup, and the other officers were initially completely unaware of what was happening (Eliseeva 2021).

It is interesting that two days before the coup, Erdogan signed a law granting members of the Turkish army immunity from prosecution for participating in military and security operations inside the country. That law regulates that the initiation of criminal proceedings against commanders within the Turkish army is possible only with the approval of the President of Turkey, and against lower-ranking officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers, criminal proceedings can be initiated by governors. This law was an attempt by the political authorities to relax relations with the military structures, primarily in light of the engagement of the Turkish army in suppressing Kurdish separatism, but essentially it enabled the full dominance of the political structures over the military, increasing the dependence of the military on the "good will" of the political authorities. However, it later turned out that this law was also one of the triggers for the military coup.

Military Coup

On July 15, 2016, Turkey experienced the most violent military coup attempt in its history. Among the main perpetrators of the bloody coup attempt was the Islamist organisation Gulen, which aimed to overthrow President Erdogan and the ruling party. According to some data, 8,651 soldiers, 171 generals (out of a total of 358 generals), 35 fighter planes, 37 helicopters, 246 tanks, and 3 naval ships (Aslan 2020) participated in the attempted military coup (Tuncay & Balci 2019).

The immediate execution phase of the military coup began on the evening of July 15, 2016, while President Erdogan was on vacation with his family in the Turkish resort of Marmaris. When the coup started, he managed to reach a nearby airport and take a plane to Istanbul. Later analyses established that if the evacuation of Erdogan from Marmaris (about the Turkish army's attack on the hotel where Erdogan stayed with his family, see Milliyet 2016) had begun 15 minutes later, he would certainly

have been captured by a special unit of the Turkish army tasked with arresting the Turkish president (Yavuzer 2021, 52). So, someone informed Erdoğan about the plans for his illegal arrest and isolation, but even today, no official information has appeared in the public. In international political and media circles, there were comments that Erdogan was warned at the last moment by the Russian side about the evil that had been prepared for him in Marmaris. However, there were no official announcements about this from either side.

Not long after that, in the late hours of the night, there were problems with the Internet in the entire territory of Turkey, and access to the most important social networks was blocked. The members of the Turkish army, in armoured and mechanised units, appeared on the streets of Istanbul and soon opened fire on strategic state facilities. At the same time, planes and helicopters of the Turkish Air Force flew over Ankara, which operated on the presidential palace, the parliament building, the general staff, the facilities of the Turkish special service, the police, and other vital facilities (it is interesting that when complex political and security events began in Turkey, Erdogan failed to establish a telephone connection with Hakan Fidan, the director of the Turkish intelligence service MIT, who at that time "was not in a position to answer phone calls", about which Erdogan later spoke publicly in his interviews). At the same time, the Turkish army closed the Turkish side of the border with Bulgaria, Georgia, and Iran. The Chief of General Staff of the Turkish army, Akar Hulusi, was taken hostage by the coup plotters.

Soon, both bridges in Istanbul across the Bosporus River were blocked by military forces (the Bosporus Bridge and the Sultan Mehmed Fatih Bridge). It was actually the main road connection between Europe and Asia. Also, the navigation route through the Bosporus Strait was stopped. The putschists also established control over the international airports in Ankara and Istanbul and, at the same time, closed the entire airspace over Turkey.

After forcefully occupying the most important state and commercial radio and television stations, the army broadcast that it had taken over power in the country. The putschists also announced that a curfew was in effect on the entire territory of Turkey and that all state institutions must inevitably submit to the military command. Practically, the two largest and most important Turkish cities, Ankara and Istanbul, were cut off from each other.

In such a complex political and security environment, the domestic and international public did not know what was happening with the Turkish president, which was a suitable ground for the emergence of numerous misinformations and speculations. At one time, the news was published in the foreign media that, after taking off from Marmaris, Erdogan was forbidden to land in Istanbul. Immediately after that, the plane of the Turkish president continued to Germany, from whose authorities Erdogan allegedly requested political asylum. Also, in the sea of disinformation, there was an announcement that the German authorities refused hospitality to Erdogan and, accordingly, the plane with the Turkish president was sent to Great Britain. A few days later, Erdogan explained in a television interview that on the night they took off from Marmaris, he was informed by the pilot that the control tower at the Istanbul airport was occupied, that the runway was in complete darkness, and that they had fuel for a three- to four-hour flight. Then, according to his statements, Erdogan asked the pilot if he could land on an unlit runway. The pilot said that he could, but that he did not want to risk it. However, considering the state of emergency in the country, despite the risk, they managed to land safely in Istanbul (Daily Sabah 2016).

Then, President Erdoğan "crossed the Rubicon" and managed to address the citizens of Turkey through one of the television channels that, at that moment, were not yet in the hands of the coup plotters. On that occasion, through a phone video call, he called on the citizens to go out on the streets to defend the constitutional order and democratic values and to oppose the coup plotters.

Thanks to the positive reaction of the people, the police, and the part of the army that remained loyal to the state leadership, as well as the largest number of spiritual leaders of the Turkish Islamic community, the putschists were met with strong and massive resistance. This soon resulted in the first defeat of the rebels from the army in the fighting at the Istanbul International Airport, who failed to maintain control over that strategically important airport. A similar scenario happened fifteen minutes later on the Bosporus Bridge. Accordingly, the situation on the ground began to change significantly in favour of Erdogan. Then a schism arose among the putschists.

In the early morning hours, the surrender of military units began. At that time, Umar Dundar, the former commander of the First Army, was appointed as the new chief of the Turkish General Staff.

It is interesting that, due to strained Greek-Turkish relations, the Greek armed forces went into full combat readiness immediately after the outbreak of unrest in Turkey. Since the coup failed, the following morning a Turkish helicopter landed at the Greek airport in the city of Alexandropoulos with eight officers on the run, who were immediately arrested by the Greek security authorities. The Turkish authorities immediately requested that the Greek side hand over the mentioned officers to them, to which the Greek authorities handed over the aircraft after two days, but when it came to the Turkish officers, it took much longer, given that the Greek side complied with the legal procedure and deadlines for extradition.

However, just as every coup or attempted coup carries numerous enigmas, one of the doubts and an insufficiently clarified fact relates to the processes that took place on the critical night at the NATO airbase in Incirlik, Turkey. The following day, the Turkish authorities, after establishing complete control in the country, banned NATO planes from taking off from the mentioned base, where planes of the American and Turkish air forces were stationed. Through subsequent negotiations between the Pentagon and the Turkish authorities, the base became operational at full capacity. The bottom line is that the Turkish side remained suspicious of certain controversial processes that took place that night at the afore-mentioned NATO base.

The Real Situation after the Collapse of the Coup

After the collapse of the coup, the Turkish authorities consolidated the situation and immediately launched a counteroffensive. The procedural and criminal-legal epilogue was embodied in the arrest of over 9,000 people on suspicion of being part of a conspiracy and participating in the organisation and immediate execution of a military coup.

In that extremely turbulent period that reigned in Turkish society, the Turkish authorities, made cardinal mistakes during their "witch hunt" and belatedly recognised the true causes and background of the complex political and security events that engulfed the country in July 2016. As a glaring example of this wandering, one can point out the unprovoked accusation of the Palestinian politician Mohamed Dahalan for the alleged organisation of the military coup in Turkey. Today, it is completely clear

that the disinformation mentioned was planted on the Turkish side by the very party that was the real organiser of the coup for at least two key reasons. The first reason was to direct attention in the opposite direction by diluting the essence and diverting responsibility from the real inspirers and organisers. The second key reason was the fear of certain power centres that Mohamed Dahalan would establish power in Palestine because that would automatically mean the establishment of a new architecture of international relations in the Middle East, primarily in the direction of increasing regional stability and reducing tensions. Dahalan, as an indisputable regional authority, would certainly not have allowed or participated in certain inactions happening in the Middle East today, and that was precisely the cause of this indirect Turkish attack on him. The term "indirect attack" is deliberately used here since it is well known who was actually the main attacker in this case. In addition, in this way, an attempt was made to discredit the United Arab Emirates, considering that Dahalan was in a responsible position within the political system of the UAE, which at that moment was not only a direction in the foreign policy agenda of Turkey but also of Qatar.

However, according to subsequent analyses published by the Turkish authorities and scientific research institutes of the Republic of Turkey, as well as based on the assessments of other international eminent institutions, the following conclusions were reached:

1. The main ideological-political patron of the coup attempt was Muhammad Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish politician currently living in exile in the United States who was one of the close associates and allies of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan until 2013, when they parted ways, nominally due to a corruption scandal but essentially due to an apparatus struggle within the Turkish political order. Since then, Gülen and his followers in the "FETO" movement have been blacklisted in Turkey, and the movement has been officially declared a terrorist organisation by the Turkish authorities.

2. The main organisers and financiers of the coup were the US special services.

3. The immediate perpetrators were a conspiratorial structure made up of officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers of the Turkish army.

In addition to the above, several years before the military coup, a series of events took place that, from today's perspective, can be seen as a potential trigger for the launch of offensive foreign policy mechanisms by the American administration.

- Turkey, after a particularly dominant (subversive) role in the Syrian crisis, gradually distanced itself from that conflict.

- Turkey did not join the aggression against Libya, and at one time, then US President Barack Obama expressed this as a public political criticism against Erdogan and his government.

- Turkey became an observer in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. It is the first NATO country to join this organisation. When Turkey signed the memorandum of accession as an observer, the Turkish representatives did not even mention the Syrian crisis.

- After several decades of attempts to become a full member of the EU, Turkey is still waiting for accession with extremely uncertain (and problematic) terms and conditions.

- Turkey once signed an agreement with Palestine on the joint construction of facilities for the exploitation of natural gas from the Mediterranean Sea.

- European officials, and above all, the then German Chancellor Angela Merkel, condemned the action of the Turkish police against the demonstrators in Taksim Square in 2013, judging that it was an excessive use of force. The Turkish Prime Minister strongly rejected this, warning Merkel not to interfere in Turkey's internal affairs.

- John Kerry, the US Secretary of State at the time, joined the German criticism of Erdogan, which indicates that there has been a certain divergence in American-Turkish relations.

- Various protests in support of protesters and Turkish opposition activists were held across Europe. In the past period, all the organisers of these protests were unequivocally in the function of "globalists". One of the most striking events that attracted the attention of the world public was the protest of the members of the feminist group "Femen" at the Istanbul airport.

• Several years ago, Turkey settled the last installment to the International Monetary Fund and ended 52 years of indebtedness to this financial institution. Moreover, Turkey has become a creditor country of the IMF.

There are several options as to who initiated and organised the military coup. The first option is the Turkish army itself. Furthermore, according to some Western political scientists, Russia was the organiser. As the main arguments, they cite the history of relations and connections between the Kemalists and Soviet Russia, plus the downing of the Russian Su-24 plane, as well as Russia's efforts to change the leadership of Turkey in order to resolve the Syrian issue as quickly as possible. Also, according to the opinion of Western authors, a change of government in Turkey under Russian direction would allegedly call into question the continued existence of the Incirlik NATO base and strengthen Russian positions on the Bosporus Strait. Specifically, the vector of political orientation of one of the most important geopolitical players in the region would change. Furthermore, as stated by EU political scientists, the initiator was Erdogan himself, which partially makes sense. Erdoğan wanted to keep his power and, ultimately, his life. He staged a military takeover to observe how people behaved and who would stand by him within the system. Additionally, the Turkish president had the chance to observe how the international community would respond and act. In addition to the above, many political scientists believe that this coup was initiated by the US. First, Turkey has ceased to be a reliable partner for the United States and has tried to drag NATO into an open conflict with Russia. Turkey "made promises" to everyone: Russia, NATO, the US, and the EU, while at the same time trading with the terrorist organisation "Islamic State". In this sense, there are versions that say this coup was launched by Gülen, who currently lives in the United States. In any case, it is currently impossible to name the specific initiator of the coup, and it will most likely become clearer in about ten years. And as for the economic situation in Turkey after the coup, the Turkish economy has suffered serious consequences. In the future, everything will depend on which course Erdoğan chooses if he remains president: with whom he will be "friends" and with whom he will not. When the Russian plane was shot down by the Turks, NATO stepped back and said, "Solve the problem yourself." However, the North Atlantic Alliance will not try to radically solve things with Turkey because it is about the loss of key straits and military bases, which can certainly lead to the loss

of control over the Black Sea but also over the entire region of the Middle East, primarily over Syria, Iran, and Iraq.

In addition to the above, viewed from today's perspective, it is completely clear that the coup organised by middle-ranking officers who had no connection with the leading parties, the media, or high-ranking officers, who failed to arrest and isolate the highest state officials, or to address the people in a clear and organised manner (with the exception of a short e-mail message read in a television studio, which did not produce a significant mobilising impact), was doomed to failure (Koval 2016).

There are also points of view that say it is quite logical that the coup plotters would not dare attempt a military coup without support from outside, especially the United States. Erdoğan's words that "a group of putschists who encroached on the unity of the nation received instructions from their leaders who live in the United States" warn of that. First of all, the Turkish president alluded to one of the opposition leaders, Gülen, who has been living in Pennsylvania for many years. In this sense, Erdoğan's mention of the US in this context was also a political manoeuvre aimed at using that moment to reactivate the old topic of extraditing Gülen. By the way, Turkey is a heterogeneous country with many different political movements and religious groups supported by various structures in the West, especially the CIA. All these structures are guided by the principle of "divide and rule". In contrast to that approach, the Russian state leadership immediately opposed the coup attempt.

In addition, the military, which has traditionally put things in order in Turkey during political crises, is unable to perform this function. After the 2016 coup, the army was reduced by a third, and many officers were either arrested or given political asylum in one of the European countries. The current military is loyal to Erdogan, just like the business community. Turkish businessmen prefer not to comment on what is actually happening in the country, among other things, because all significant business systems depend on the current Turkish government.

Consequences for the Regional Security of Eurasia

An important phase in Turkey's foreign policy outreach in Central Asia began after the failed coup attempt in July 2016. Turkey's confrontation with

the Gülen movement facilitated a corrective policy that created an opening for a reset to strengthen even further relations with states in Eurasia. In this period of correction, Turkey has developed deeper security links, particularly with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, whereby, in turn, Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev was the first head of state to visit Turkey after the coup (Alrmizan 2022, 30-37). At the same time, some authors used this trend in theoretical discussions as an argument to improve their thesis on how the evolution of foreign policies can be engaged with domestic political goals. Also, scholars achieved consensus that the failed coup played a critical role for Western actors because the perception of the United States as a crucial ally of the Kurds was rising (Kirişçi & Sloat 2019).

When it comes to Russia, a few weeks before the coup, Turkey announced the normalisation of its relations with Moscow, which have been damaged since November 2015, when Turkey shot down a Russian warplane. The first moves, beginning with a personal telephone call from Putin to Erdoğan after the coup attempt and an announcement of the desire of the two leaders to work towards a meeting in a matter of weeks, suggest that the failed coup has speeded up the reconciliation process. At a time when Turkey is well aware of the deteriorating tone in its relations with Washington and Brussels, opening up this channel of dialogue with Russia was a move against being isolated and also a way of sending a message to its trans-Atlantic allies that they should not play with fire. Russia's interest was also clear and not only related to economic matters because the Kremlin was always on the lookout for any opportunity to fan the flames of discord in the trans-Atlantic alliance, especially after the NATO Summit in Warsaw. Therefore, at that moment, Turkey provided the perfect way to go about it (Lecha 2016).

One consequence of the failed coup was Erdoğan's focus on consolidating presidential power while paying the price of reduced involvement in regional conflicts and even having to make more conciliatory gestures regarding Kurdish matters, both within and beyond Turkey's borders. Another matter that should also be considered are the implications of the rapprochement between Ankara and Moscow, including the possibility of some kind of initiative in Syria, eventually dragging in other regional powers. As for the normalisation of relations with Israel, messages exchanged after the coup attempt suggested that the thaw would be continued (Lecha 2016).

Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan urged Kyrgyzstan to crack down on groups linked to the Fethullah Gulen movement that Ankara blamed for a failed 2016 coup, something Bishkek has refused to do. A network of schools and colleges sponsored by the US-based cleric and his supporters has existed for decades across ex-Soviet Central Asia. After the 2016 coup attempt, Ankara asked governments in the region to shut down the network, but some were reluctant. The Kyrgyz president at the time, Almazbek Atambayev, refused to close the schools. However, at a meeting with the new president, Sooranbai Zheenbekov, Turkey raised this question again, insisting that the Gülen network presented a security threat. Despite this, Zheenbekov stopped short of promising to comply, saying the school network was now under the government's control. Kyrgyzstan's neighbour, Kazakhstan, has also refused to shut down Gülen-sponsored schools and renamed them (Reuters 2018).

Unlike Kyrgyzstan, which was sitting on the fence, fellow Turkic state Azerbaijan, for instance, stands firmly among Ankara's best buddies. The country had already begun clearing out Gülen-linked institutions in 2014 after the cleric's very public split with Turkish leader Erdoğan. Following the coup attempt, Baku duly finished the job. Turkmenistan, too, has cracked down on Gülen supporters in the country. Others who joined the anti-Gulen effort late have made up for lost time. For example, according to Amnesty International, Moldova deported seven Turkish nationals who were teachers at a Gülen-linked school in the capital. All of them are believed to be imprisoned in Turkey, where tens of thousands of teachers and civil servants have been jailed over supposed Gülen links since the coup attempt (Eurasianet 2018).

Following Uzbekistan, several countries avoided the infiltration of Gülenists to protect themselves from the threats of Islamization and radicalization. Also, the Uzbek authorities have recalled hundreds of students studying in at least three madrasas and other religious schools in Turkey (Tuna 2021). Besides that, the freeze in Turkey's European Union (EU) accession bid after the July 2016 coup attempt has caused Ankara to strongly pivot towards Central Asia as part of a broader divestment from Western markets. Turkish investors have singled out Uzbekistan as an especially useful economic partner due to its extensive natural gas resources, large textile industry, and robust real estate market. As Uzbekistan suffered

from the pernicious effects of a currency crisis and high unemployment, the Uzbek government responded more favourably to Turkish investment proposals than in years before the coup attempt (Ramani 2016).

According to the statement of Georgian authorities, "military coups are unacceptable for any democratic country" and "Turkey is our strategic partner, and stability in Turkey is very important for us". Georgia's United National Movement (UNM) also made a statement, saying "Peace, stability, and the functioning of democratic institutions in our neighbour and strategic partner is of vital importance for Georgia". Considering the previous, Tbilisi was keen to demonstrate that the country's close relationship with Turkey has strong bipartisan support, especially in light of the parliamentary election coming up in October 2016 (Ajeganov 2016). The considerable urgency with which the Georgian leadership has acted unabatedly, reaffirming its support for the Turkish government and President Erdoğan, should be viewed as a reflection of Tbilisi's unilateral dependence on Ankara's economic prowess. Aside from the European Union, Turkey has been and remains Georgia's single largest trade partner, with a turnover worth USD 777.9 million, a 3% year-on-year increase (Ajeganov 2016). Turkish businesses have invested over USD 1 billion in Georgia's economy in the past 14 years. Georgia and Turkey have also been strengthening a symbiotic relationship as regards military cooperation as well as energy and infrastructural projects, which has them keen on ensuring each other's stability. Regarding energy, Georgia's untapped hydropower potential has Ankara eagerly investing in new projects to help complement its lagging domestic electricity production. The Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and the TAP and TANAP projects, as part of the Southern Gas Stream (SGC) (Ajeganov 2016), also necessitated political coordination after the coup attempt.

Even though the literature recognises the implications of a coup attempt on Turkish foreign policy, there is no evidence from academic sources about potential consequences or scenarios for the Eurasian region derived from internal tensions in Turkey. Based on the above, we can conclude that the coup attempt was a factor in bringing Turkey closer not only to Russia but also to the Eurasian region. However, there is always the question of what the consequences would be for Eurasian countries if the coup had succeeded. According to Avni Ozgurel, "if the coup had succeeded, the name [of the Turkish Armed Forces] would not have changed. But in

practice, it would have been the Fetullah Armed Forces". He also believes that if the coup had not fallen through, Gülen would have been invited to Turkey by the coup's leaders. He would not, however, have taken any official position as state leader, preferring to play his game behind the scenes as he has always been known to do in his life (Sofuoglu 2020). If the coup had succeeded, the US would have used Gulenists to control the political and security situation not only in Turkey but also in other Eurasian countries. Thus, there would be a deepening of the tension between Moscow and Washington, bearing in mind that the US would intensify its efforts to squeeze out the Russian presence and influence in the post-Soviet republics. Besides the repercussions mentioned, Turkey would be a puppet in the hands of the US, without any strategic autonomy in international relations. The main road for Eurasian countries would be Euro-Atlantic integrations instead of cooperation with Turkey, which could possibly include only connections on religious grounds through the Gulenist movement and education. Also, energetic, economic, and other arrangements between leadership in Ankara and Eurasian countries would be questioned, but there is an option that Western actors would monitor such initiatives. The potential scenarios should be the object of research in the future since some observers after the failed July 2016 coup expressed skepticism about Turkey's ability to manage the situation and the possibility of similar situations repeating (Zanotti 2016, 15-16).

Conclusion

The failed military coup in Turkey in 2016 was not only a public manifestation of an extremely violent and illegal attempt to seize power but also represents the first victory of Turkish political over military structures in the recent history of Turkey. In 2016, the Turkish army definitely received a lesson from Erdogan, which it will certainly remember for a long time. Erdoğan prepared for a long time and systematically dealt with disaffected structures within the army. At the same time, he broke conspiratorial relations within the Turkish army, which could rarely accept its position within the constitutional order of the state, often placing itself above the order and the state system. However, despite this, the military coup surprised Erdoğan as well as the entire Turkish society.

There are several significant determinants that characterise this coup. First, the Turkish army has always been the traditional protector of secularism, which does not fit into the model of cooperation with Fethullah Gülen, who is first of all a religious preacher and former imam and only then an opposition politician. The Turkish army was not unified on the night of July 15, 2016, and subsequent analysis showed that an insufficient number of army members participated in the coup. The revolutionary structures did not secure any support among the political parties and citizens of Turkey. Also, the technical-technological expansion of modern forms of communication and information technology did not favour the putschists, who completely ignored the importance of propaganda activities. They focused their engagement in that field only on the mere seizure of radio and television stations and shutting down the Internet, neglecting the importance of psychological and propaganda action through these informational capacities.

It is evident that the major responsibility for the untimely establishment of preparatory actions for the implementation of the coup lies with the Turkish special services, primarily the MIT intelligence service, with whose director Erdogan could not even establish telephone communication in the first hours of the military coup.

After the purges in the army, Turkey today has an army in which loyalty to Erdogan is more important than professionalism and expertise. Certainly, the question of loyalty is at the very top of the list of priorities, if not the most important element in the constitution of the forces responsible for the protection of the constitutional order of each country. But that kind of loyalty must relate to the state, the people, and the political authority. All different interpretations fall within the scope of unconstitutional action. However, regarding the relationship within the Turkish army after 2016, it is evident that it is a question of some other form of loyalty, which will certainly contribute to the additional accumulation of numerous contradictions within Turkish society and the state.

The fact that Erdogan used the failed military coup to carry out personnel purges in the entire Turkish system should not be overlooked, but this did not help him stabilise the internal political scene and achieve complete political dominance. The current ratio of the political forces of the government and the opposition is approximately half-half, with a tendency

for further decline in support for Erdogan. However, crises and conflicts are, conditionally speaking, Erdogan's natural state and periods in which the Turkish president manages very well, which is why the Ukrainian crisis of February 2022 came at the right time for him. With skillful foreign policy manoeuvres in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and then in the Russian conflict against the collective West, he raised the importance and role of Turkey, and thus his role as the bearer of supreme power, in increasingly complex and tense international circumstances.

The failed military coup in Turkey in 2016 indicates the importance of timely establishing all forms of subversive activities for the sake of their timely elimination and preservation of the constitutional order. Elections are a gendered process of government, and democracy is something that must be defended by all means in modern society and the state. Therefore, short periods of carelessness and lack of vigilance on the part of the authorities responsible for the protection of the constitutional order can cause, or rather, allow, very harmful and destructive consequences for a nation or a state. Of course, sometimes the scope of political upheavals can be positive, bringing freedom and progress to a society, but when it comes to the military coup in Turkey in 2016, it should certainly have a dark character, not only in terms of Turkish internal political relations but also much wider.

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Turkey as a stabilising power in Euarasia

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Abstract: One of the founding fathers of geopolitics and geostrategy, Harold Mackinder, asserted that the analysis of "who rules Eurasia, rules the world" applies to the Eurasian power struggle. Although since 2010, the BRICS (Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, the People's Republic of China, and South Africa) countries have been on the rise within the multipolarity of the international system, it has been the first time in history that a non-Eurasian power, the US, has dominated Eurasia for about 80 years. This article will use the rivalry between the US, the Russian Federation, and the People's Republic of China to illustrate the role of Turkey as a stabilising power in Eurasia.

Keywords: US, Euroasia, China, Stability, Russia, Turkey.

Introduction

Although the term "Eurasia", created by joining the words "Avr" and "Asia", describes the continent formed by the union of Asia and Europe geographically, its definition varies and is difficult to ascertain because many states' interests and objectives confluence in this region (Evgeniy, Yilmaz, 2017:17). According to Anıl Çeçen, Eurasia's centre is Anatolia, as well as southern Russia, Moldova, Ukraine, and the Black Sea. From Vienna in the west, encompassing the Caucasus and Central Asia in the east, and extending to the People's Republic of China, including Xinjiang in the south, Eurasia is a wide area that also includes the Middle East. It is located in the middle of Asia, Europe, and Africa (Çeçen, 2015:11).

In the west of Eurasia, the US dominates the small region. There is instability and fragmentation in the vast region in the middle, where the population is low. In the Far East, where the population is dense and China is located, the US can gain control of a small part of the peninsula. In the

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south of Eurasia, there is no stability, and anarchy prevails. There are states with great potential in terms of energy resources, and there is also one state with a large population that can be involved in the struggle for regional hegemony. Eurasia can be described as a "chessboard" where the geopolitical power struggle prevails. There are not only two but also many forces with different cultures and diversity in the encounter (Brzezinski 2022, 53).

Zbigniew Brzezinski sees France, Germany, Russia, China, and India as key "geostrategic players" in Eurasia, apart from the US, in terms of both being at a sensitive point and having the power to move different balances with the behaviours they can display in critical times. He listed Ukraine, Azerbaijan, South Korea, Turkey, and Iran, which he defined as the geopolitical axis, as countries that could develop an effective strategy and be effective in the struggle for Eurasia (Brzezinski 2022, 64-65). In the context of our subject, we will focus on Turkey's stabilising power in Eurasia by referring to the small-scale Eurasian struggle of the US, China, and the RF.

Although it was thought that Turkey would lose its importance after the dissolution of the USSR, Turkey, which was previously seen as an "outpost" and "border, coastal country" by Western countries, has become one of the central countries of the international arena and a leader in the restructuring of Eurasia with its economic and military potential. In addition, after the collapse of the USSR, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia established their presence in the Caucasus in terms of the presence of Circassians, Abkhazians, Dagestanis, and North Caucasian communities, which are some of the communities that make up the Turkish state. It is very important for Turkey to be a neighbour to these countries (Çeçen 2015, 14).

Struggle for dominance in Eurasia

The American Struggle for Domination in Eurasia

After the disintegration of the USSR, Eurasia regained its importance. In the process of globalisation, Western nations believed it was necessary to look to non-Western regions for world dominance, where, in general, China, Russia, India, and Turkic and Muslim states predominate. This was after the US joined NAFTA and the North American Union, and Europe joined the European Union. That has turned Eurasia into a geopolitical struggle area again (Çeçen 2015, 17).

Although world-renowned geopolitical analysts have put forward many theories in the struggle for dominance in Eurasia, what is important today is the effort to establish global dominance, not regional. In this sense, the US has brought its power and superiority to the world as well as to Eurasia with the powers it has in the relevant geography and the influence it has established on the states in Eurasia (Brzezinski 2022, 62). It is possible that the power to become the biggest competitor to the US comes from Eurasia, and just like the expansionist great powers the world has seen so far, the US will need to monitor and control states that can change the balance of power and/or be geopolitically strategically important to maintain Eurasian states' dependence on the Eurasian peoples' obedience (Brzezinski 2022, 62-63).

The fact that Eurasia is a very large geography is in favour of the US. If two big states in Eurasia, the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, are open to cooperating with the US, regional energy will be directed to a very different point. Although the RF and the PRC are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, they have some sensitivities towards each other. The PRC's high population density, high economic growth, impending intervention in the eastern regions, and inclusion of these lands inside its borders are all causes for concern for the RF. As for the PRC, it is uneasy about the RF's desire to develop energy transportation and economic opportunities in Eurasia to its advantage, which undermines their mutual trust (Yılmaz, 2017, 156-157).

"Eurasia is home to most of the world's politically assertive and dynamic states. All the historical pretenders to global power originated in Eurasia. The world's most populous aspirants to regional hegemony, China and India, are in Eurasia, are all the potential political or economic challengers to American primacy. After the United States, the next six largest economies and military spenders are there, as are all but one of the world's overt nuclear powers, and all but one of the covert ones. Eurasia accounts for 75 percent of the world's population, 60 percent of its GNP, and 75 percent of its energy resources. Collectively, Eurasia's potential power overshadows even America's.

Eurasia is the world's axial supercontinent. A power that dominated Eurasia would exercise decisive influence over two of the world's three most economically productive regions, Western Europe and East Asia". Brzezinski wrote that Eurasia is the "chessboard on which the struggle for global primacy continues to be played," where there are many "geostrategic players" and "geopolitical pivots". He added, "How the United States both manipulates and accommodates the principal geostrategic players on the

Eurasian chessboard and how it manages Eurasia's key geopolitical pivots will be critical to the longevity and stability of America's global primacy".

Immediately after the collapse of the USSR, the US initiated Operation Provide Comfort and Provide Comfort II military operations to cause confusion and prevent the domination of the region by rich Germany and Japan, rival Russia, and China. Turkey and Israel played the "Trojan Horse" role in preventing the US from being the dominant power and the Middle East countries from getting stronger and coming together to form an Ottoman Empire (Çeçen 2015, 12).

The Struggle for Domination
of the Russian Federation in Eurasia

Although Russia has strategic weaknesses as it has lost Eastern Europe economically to the EU and geostrategically to NATO, it has been an important power in Eurasia historically and due to its geopolitical pillars. It has the potential to prevent instability arising from the vacuum in Eurasia as an "Eurasian" and "global power" and is determined to struggle under the dominance of Central Asia. Russia is holding a strong hand against China by working with the US and against the US with the rising power China (Davutoğlu 2011, 472-474).

Although it has lost some of its pieces that would enable it to be superior in the game in Eurasia, Russia is a geostrategic player that will increase its influence on the states in the west and east, both by making its presence felt in every sense in the states that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union and by gaining its full power (Brzezinski 2022, 69). Although the Russian Federation, as the new player in the old empire, cannot solve the human and economic problems required by an empire, it has the potential to become a "superpower" with its strong military structure and centralised system. However, at this point, the four areas — Ukraine, Central Asia, the Baltics, and the Caucasus — are of strategic importance, and the Russian state needs time to ensure their development. For this, Russia hopes the US will focus its attention on different places. Russia thought it could solve this problem by turning the attention of the US to the Middle East after the September 11 attacks. Russia, along with China, greatly benefited from the US spending its resources on the war on terrorism after the September 11 attacks (Yılmaz 2017, 181-183).

The Struggle for Domination of the People's Republic of China in Eurasia

Another geostrategic power in Eurasia is the People's Republic of China. China is in a position to become a great regional power that changes the balances in Asia with its ambitions and the choices it makes in this direction due to its idea of being the centre of the world, which has increased in parallel with the development of its economic power. In the case of a "Greater China", it is a player with the capacity to negatively affect Russia due to its relations with the states that emerged after the collapse of the USSR in the west, as well as the fact that the Taiwan issue comes to the fore even more in the Far East (Brzezinski 2022, 69-70). The fact that the PRC is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, despite its demographic structure, politically socialist system, and economic "gradual liberalisation", has made it a great power. This enables strategists like Huntington to see China as the main player in balancing power against the West and as the main point of Eurasian-centred strategies (Davutoğlu 2011, 477-478).

Although China's foreign policy shows status quo tendencies in line with a state that is against revisionist policies by respecting the territorial integrity and independence of other states, it looks like a good participant by adopting participation in international institutions, even though the power politics that it describes as "peaceful ascension" is actually "aggressive". By not showing its hatred towards the West at the moment, China seems to be preparing "strategic defence", which requires not revealing its "hard power" until making sure that it has full dominance as the global power (Yılmaz 2017, 178-179). Before a possible war with the US, China is creating an economic power area with the world's fastest-growing market, the BRICS, gaining security allies with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), increasing its influence over Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India, and thus both taking the "Silk Road" under control and seeking to prevent NATO's eastward expansion. Russia and China resolved their border disputes and agreed to cooperate against the West and increase trust and stability towards each other in 2004.

Having the power to change the balances in the Asia Pacific and the Middle East, as well as being bordered by smaller states compared to the more influential USSR after its collapse, China has made Central Asia a centre where its strategic goals come together (Davutoglu 2011, 477-478). In addition, China tried to follow a policy of eliminating the internal problems it experienced in Central Asia by developing influence in regions such as Eastern Turkestan, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia, where the Uyghur, Kazakh,

and Kyrgyz Turks live (Davutoğlu 2011, 478). However, the fact that China, as well as Russia, needs time to complete its development and Russia does not pose a major obstacle in terms of Chinese interests does not bring the two players against each other (Yılmaz 2017, 183).

Towards the end of the 1990s, the strategic importance of East Turkestan/Xinjiang and Tibet increased even more for China, whose economic growth was increasing. First of all, the underground resources in the region gained special importance in terms of being one of the sources of energy for the Chinese industry, which focuses on continuous production. The separatist movements of Tibetans and Uyghurs, the possibility of Tibet's inclusion in India, and the possibility of East Turkestan/Xinjiang's independence will cause the loss of the exit to Pakistan via the Himalayas, which makes China very uneasy because it is trying to supply oil and natural gas through pipelines from west to east. By following a pro-Pakistan policy in the Indian conflicts, China aims to eliminate its dependence on the Strait of Malacca and the Indian Ocean, from which it obtains most of its oil, and it can reach the Middle East's oil in a more reliable way through Pakistan. India, on the other hand, has entered into competition with China by developing its relations with China's ally Myanmar and is trying to create a balance of power against China with Vietnam, Japan, and the US (Yılmaz 2017, 180-181).

Turkey's Role in Eurasia

After the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc, a geopolitical vacuum emerged in the USSR-dominated areas. This situation further increased the strategic importance of these regions. Central Asia has come to the fore in the global dominance efforts of great powers such as the US, Russia, China, Japan, Germany, France, and England, which are trying to turn the situation in their favour in terms of geopolitics and economy. The presence of regional powers such as India, Iran, Pakistan, Ukraine, and Korea and intra-regional powers such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan has caused Turkey to be one of the most important determining factors in the balance of power and alliance efforts (Davutoğlu 2011, 468-469).

In addition, the fact that the current and possible alliances of Eurasia, EU countries, Japan, Russia, and China require a delicate balance in Eurasia is important in terms of preventing international crises that may affect the world. At this point, Eurasia and especially Central Asia have a very

important place for the US, which can be affected by possible alliances, especially in terms of maintaining its global power (Davutoğlu 2011, 468-470). In addition to realising its geopolitical and political economy goals, the US also wants to prevent the instability arising from the strategic vacuum in the region. However, due to the fact that it is a transoceanic power, it is very costly to provide the military power required by the role of the world's gendarmerie. For this reason, NATO is trying to expand its activity to the east, gain control with organisations such as the OSCE, be active in Eurasia, and establish strategic partnerships and alliances to provide balance. In this context, Turkey stands out both in terms of its geopolitical and geostrategic position and in terms of having effective power relations in Eurasia (Davutoğlu 2011, 470-472).

After the Cold War, the spread of the strategic power struggle from Eastern Europe to the interior of Eurasia, the Balkans, and the Caucasus brought about a change in the NATO mission. With its deep power structure in Asia, Turkey has long been seen as a "strategic partner" for the US, enabling it to make its policies in this geography around Turkey (Davutoğlu 2011, 492-493).

Turkey is a country that has an extremely important geostrategic and geopolitical position at the point that connects economically developed Europe and the Asian and African continents, which are the raw material warehouses. For this reason, Turkey has been an effective power with which both Eurasian and Atlantic countries strive to develop friendly relations in terms of both the transportation of raw materials via the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and the fact that 75% of the world's energy lines are on the transit route (Evgeniy and Yılmaz 2017, 247-249). The instabilities experienced after the Arab Spring made Turkey a reliable power to be supported by the Caucasus, Middle East, and Central Asian countries. Turkey has been the only preferred and advantageous route (Evgeniy and Yılmaz 2017, 248-249).

Stabilising Power in Eurasia: Turkey

Turkey is a stabilising power with its presence in the Black Sea in Eurasia and with its Mediterranean-Black Sea transportation, preventing the states that gained independence in the Caucasus from entering Russian domination, balancing Russia, being a counterbalance to Islamic conservatism, and preventing conflicts in the Balkans. As a power and NATO's outpost, it is an extremely important "geopolitical axis" (Brzezinski

2022, 73). World powers are struggling in the race to have energy resources and dominate in Iraq, Syria, the Caucasus, and its surroundings, and at this point, Turkey's role as the power that can provide peace and stability has strategic importance (Evgeniy and Yılmaz 2017, 250).

Turkey, in the face of conflict or potential conflicts that may turn into conflicts in all its bordering neighbours, works hard both to protect its own national interests and to prevent crisis situations and civil wars not only in the countries where they take place but also in the whole region and, moreover, the world. It develops diplomacy in order to prevent it from happening on a large scale and to provide stability and peace (Altun 2022, 142-146).

Stabilising Power in the Middle East: Turkey

The struggle for dominance between the Middle East, the world's rich oil and natural gas resources, the US, China, and Russia is very important. Dominating this region means having extremely low-priced, long-term energy resources and, in this sense, having the power to direct the world economy (Öztürk 2012, 105). The US has greatly benefited from Turkey's cooperation in this area and the steps it has taken to prevent the influence of China and Russia in this geography, dominate oil resources, prevent the dominance of the great powers, ensure the stability of the collaborating Gulf countries, and protect Israel (Öztürk 2012, 104-106). Turkey is also an extremely strategic player in terms of being on the transit route of the Middle East and the Caspian region, providing energy supply to Europe and the Mediterranean, and forming a safe supply route. The Black Sea and Caucasus regions, where Turkey is located, are geographies where Russia is open to trade and are the points of political conflicts and wars.

After Bashar Assad took over the administration, Turkey tried to develop strategies to provide a peaceful solution through diplomatic means. Thanks to US President George W. Bush, who created trade and visa facilitation, support was provided for the economies of both countries. Turkey brought the two countries to the brink of an agreement. However, due to Israel's sudden attack on Gaza, Turkey could not stand by Israel's intervention in Palestine, although it wanted to contribute to peace, and the negotiations were interrupted (Altun 2022, 151-154).

Turkey's role in the "Astana Process" with Russia and Iran within the framework of the Syria crisis has been one of the important steps towards ensuring the stability of Syria (Druzhinin, İbrahimov and Mutluer 2019, 9).

Turkey as a Stabilising Power in the Ukraine-Russia Crisis

In the 2014 Ukraine crisis, Turkey advocated for diplomacy and communication between the parties since it understood that taking armed action would put additional burdens on both Russia and Ukraine. Defending the geographical integrity of Ukraine in the face of Russia's annexation of Crimea, Turkey stated that it was not possible to accept the annexation and that it would mean a violation of international norms. Over time, Turkey tried to attract the attention of international public opinion so that this issue, which many countries, especially European states, left behind, would not lead to a bigger crisis, a war, especially in the region and internationally in the future (Altun 2022, 173-175).

At the end of 2021, when the Russian Federation started to build up its military, President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had intense diplomatic meetings with the parties, and it was conveyed to the parties that they could meet in Turkey. Since the beginning of Russia's intervention in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Turkey has been one of the few countries that has gained the trust of both countries with its foreign policies. On the other hand, Turkey, which is trusted as a stabilising power with its mediation and support roles in conflict resolution in the region, brought the parties together first at the Antalya Summit and then in Istanbul. In these meetings, Turkey stated that it could be a guarantor country for long-term peace, and meanwhile, it sent teams within the Red Crescent and AFAD to Ukraine for humanitarian aid support. On April 5, the evacuation of people in Mairupol was carried out. In the Ukrainian refugee crisis (based on years of experience with Syrian refugees), after the second phase of the war that started with Russia's intervention in Eastern Ukraine, he warned that the crisis is an important issue waiting for an international solution, both in the region and in the entire international community.

Turkey was also effective in preventing a food crisis in the world due to the fact that Ukraine and Russia, which are the leading countries in grain production, were at war and in the delivery of Ukrainian grain to the world by making an agreement with both countries when famine was about to arise in some African countries (Altun 2022, 175-181). Being aware of the fact that Ukraine will be affected the most by the deaths of its people and the losses in every sense of the war, Turkey has fulfilled its role as a mediator and maintained its stabilising power as the most reliable actor in the region. Turkey has also continued to show its active role in preventing the refugee and food crises that may cause long-term and major problems in the world (Altun 2022, 182).

Unlike the international powers that claim to exist for stabilising purposes but cause instability by disrupting the balance of power and creating power struggles with their presence and policies, Turkey's foreign policy for the last 20 years is a remarkable example of how it can contribute to international peace by mediating and advancing international peace and stability and developing diplomacy for the resolution of conflicts (Altun 2022, 182-183).

Conclusion

The Eurasian region, which consists of the union of Europe, the centre of global politics and economy in the West, and Asia, where the dominance area is on the rise by increasing its economic development in the East, has always been the scene of the struggle of the great powers that want to establish influence. The global power of the US, with its rising power after the Cold War, showed itself in Eurasia, and for the first time in history, a non-Eurasian power became the ruler of Eurasia. However, it is well known that every hegemon's power will weaken over time and leave its place to another order. At this point, geostrategic experts state that the US should make plans for this in the short, medium, and long term. In this direction, the Russian Federation, which was established with the disintegration of the USSR, tries to gain influence in the countries that used to be under the influence of the USSR and to play an active role in Eurasia. At the same time, the People's Republic of China, which is on the rise in the east of Asia, appears to be a serious rival. The interests of these three states converge in Eurasia.

In the process that developed with the Arab Spring, Turkey has provided negotiations for the stabilisation of the countries in the region and has become a regional power that is appreciated and taken as a role model with the relations it has developed with the authoritarian regimes and regional powers in the Middle East countries where power rivalries are experienced. His efforts to host the refugees who fled their countries during the Syrian civil war set an example for the world and received support from the international community. Due to Russia's intervention in Ukraine, the European Union countries that have imposed sanctions on Russia, which is the largest energy supplier in this sense, have turned to different energy supply alternatives. At this point, Turkey has become a very strategic player with its location in the middle of the North-South, East-West energy transmission route, with the Black Sea to the Mediterranean through the Bosphorus crossings, and the Central Asian countries-Caspian Sea-Europe

connections. Turkey, which has always supported issues such as providing humanitarian aid to the Ukrainians in the developing war conditions and accepting refugees, has also played an active role in the delivery of Russian grain to the world by taking an active role in the grain problem with its diplomacy. It is an indication that it is a stabilising power in Eurasia, where competition is experienced.

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European arms control in crisis – understanding the sources, Russian position and future prospects

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Abstract: The paper presents the research on the sources of the crisis and the future prospects for European arms control, taking into account the Russian position on this matter. The crisis of European arms control is approached through the concept of systemic international crises, with the authors claiming that the crisis of arms control in Europe is the result of two-fold crises – one of strategic stability and the other of European security architecture. It also uses a constructivist assumption on the importance of a learning process and perception of threats and causes of crisis, as well as of identities and interests of main actors, the ways they communicate and understand them, and interact in order to create mutually acceptable solutions or resolution of conflicts. The article concludes that if key states of international order do not want to end up in turmoil, chaos, or war, they have to find proper mechanisms for the management of their fears, where arms control proves to be the best option. The build-up of a new arms control architecture in Europe must start with the settlements of the issues of NATO enlargement and territorial integrity of all European states, be followed by strong confidence and security building measures (CSBMs) and negotiations on de-escalation in the bordering regions of NATO and Russia. The nuclear arms control could then be conducted between the USA, European states, and Russia, with a close look and joint approach toward China, India, and other nuclear weapon states.

Keywords: European arms control, Russia, NATO, conventional arms control, nuclear arms control, EDTs.

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Introduction

Has arms control in Europe become obsolete? Certainly not. "A crisis of the world order", as the new Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (2023, point 12) describes the current state of international affairs, opens up a new chapter for arms control in Europe that is still to be written. Maintaining strategic stability and achieving international security and peace would be impossible without coming to a common understanding about how to escape the security dilemma and growing distrust between the main actors on the international stage today. Arms control agreements are one of the expressions of this common understanding and reflect the common will and interest of the actors to achieve and maintain international peace and stability.

This paper deals specifically with European arms control – its crisis and future prospects – as well as the Russian position on it. It explains the current crisis of the European arms control architecture, which culminated with the war in Ukraine in 2022, as the result of two great or systemic international crises: one is the crisis of strategic stability that started in 2001, and the other of the European security architecture that started to emerge after the dissolutions of the Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union (USSR). Both crises are the results of the shaken balance of power among the "basic actors" of European arms control – the United States of America, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the Russian Federation. With the European Union emerging as a separate strategic actor, the arms control equation for Europe could be further extended, but not necessarily meaning complicated, since the EU might play a facilitating role. It also uses a constructivist assumption on the importance of a learning process and perception of threats and causes of crisis, identities, and interests of main actors, and ways they communicate, understand them and interact in order to create mutually acceptable solutions or resolutions of conflicts. It dives into the analysis of the arms control agreements that were applied to Europe, both in the conventional and nuclear fields, which unfortunately no longer exist or serve their cause. It presents the Russian position on arms control, its main principles but also lessons learned that shaped the Russian perspective during the last three decades. The concept of the balance of power and interests remains the basis of the Russian concept of the world order that also influences the Russian position on arms control, usually referred to as "equal and undivided security" for all.

The article concludes that in a contested multipolar international system the states and groups of states would have to find mechanisms for

coordination, if not cooperation, among themselves if they do not want to end up in turmoil, chaos, or war. Among these mechanisms, the arm control agreements prove to be the best option to this end. They must start with the settlement of two paramount political issues for future arms control – the issue of NATO enlargement and the position on the territorial integrity of Serbia (regarding Kosovo) and Ukraine (regarding Crimea and Donbas). This settlement is to be followed by strong CSBMs and negotiations on de-escalation in the bordering regions of NATO and Russia, as well as the conventional arms control that would provide verification measures that underscore mutual cooperation and interaction. The nuclear arms control could then be conducted between the USA, European states, and Russia, with a close look and joint approach toward China, India, and other nuclear weapon states.

Arms control as an international institution and two international crises

Theoretical approach to arms control crisis

The two leading traditions in international relations theory, realism, and liberal institutionalism, hold different assertions regarding the nature of international politics, the possibility of cooperation between states, and consequently, the role of international institutions. Realism maintains that international politics are mired in ceaseless security competition and dilemmas. States pursue their national interests in an anarchical system, and self-help is the only way to survive (Devetak, Burke, and George 2012, 40). Realists do accept that cooperation happens, but recognize its limits, and claim that international institutions cannot be anything more than a reflection of the distribution of power. A realist conclusion is that institutions are not an important cause of peace, and do not play a crucial role in preventing war (Baylis, Smith, and Owens 2020, 244; Mearsheimer 1994, 7-9). Liberalism, on the other hand, explains that there are alternatives to security competition. They ascertain that in complex interdependence, a hallmark of contemporary international relations, international institutions contribute to peace by fostering cooperation and a sense of shared interests (Devetak, Burke, and George 2012, 29 and 55). Institutions, therefore, do not merely reflect the preferences and power relations of states; they themselves shape and alter those preferences and change the behaviour of the units (Keohane 1988, 382; Mearsheimer 1994, 7).

International institutions can be defined as sets of rules that stipulate the ways in which states should cooperate and compete with each other, prescribing acceptable forms of behaviour, and proscribing those which are unacceptable (Mearsheimer 1994, 8). Besides a set of principles and rules that regulate states' behaviour, international institutions also include ideas, patterns of action, and interaction (Holsti 2004, 18-22), as well as identities and interests (Wendt 1992, 401). This means that institutions constrain activities, shape expectations, and prescribe actors' roles (Keohane 1988, 383). Arms control as an international institution can contribute to mitigating the risks of conflict through cooperation between states, and in this sense, it is not fully comfortable with the realist pessimistic viewpoint. Simultaneously, institutionalist claims are not fully rendered into effect either, as it happens that states, from time to time, escape arms control constraints when they perceive them to be disadvantageous. For these reasons, a middle ground seems to be needed to consider the relevance, strengths, shortfalls, and subtlety of arms control. Such an approach might be offered by the "English School," which argues that, despite the existence of anarchy, there is such a thing as an international society, based on common rules, institutions, and norms, and that this establishes and maintains order among states, which are conscious of common interests and values (Devetak, Burke, and George 2012, 245-247). In this international society, security is not provided by the concentration of military power in a superior authority, but rests on a balance of power and international institutions, with a common understanding of the basic principles, practices, and procedures of conduct. However, military balances do not remain stable for long periods of time, but are inherently temporal, and their unsettling effects of change can be mitigated and stabilized through adjustments in armaments (Bull, in O'Neill and Schwartz 1987, 41-43). Therefore, there is recognition that if military balance were to last a longer period of time, this would have to be achieved by efforts of a nature alike to the practice of arms control (Ibid.).

To fully understand why arms control occurs, it does not suffice to take for granted that it represents an international institution that states tend to in order to sustain the balance of power. The practice of arms control itself did not come or occur naturally; rather it was a learned behaviour (Krepon 2021, 3). It is necessary to go beyond the objectivity of international politics and the idea of balance of power and take into account the key actors' interests and positions which leads to the possibility of reaching arms control agreements. The notion of interest and position is best understood by referring to the constructivist theory of international relations. Their

disciples share a number of underlying assumptions with the realist school, foremost that international politics is anarchic, with survival being the ultimate goal (Baylis, Smith, and Owens 2020, 245). However, they introduce a conception of anarchy similar to the one of the "English School," the one "no longer emptied of content," a thick layer of anarchy, comprised of rules, norms, and institutions (Devetak, Burke, and George 2012, 106). According to this view, international institutions are fundamentally cognitive entities that do not exist apart from actors' ideas about how the world works (Wendt 1992, 399). Ultimately, stability is not presumed. Rather, efforts are required for it to be sustained, which is a joint exercise in so much as it relies on the coordinated activities of multiple actors. In this regard, constructivism emphasizes the social and collective efforts that go into making and maintaining the international system, which includes arms control.

The two-fold international crisis of arms control

Not every crisis in the international system is an international crisis. To gain this status, a crisis has to be a *severe or acute crisis, a systemic crisis,* that involves great powers with large-scale destructive capabilities, or a series of interlocking crises that seriously challenges the stability of the whole international system, which is no longer capable to overcome the crisis (Young 1968, 4). In the situation of crisis, normal or ordinary patterns of interaction between nations change significantly, and relationships between the main actors are quantitatively altered compared to the pre-crisis stage (Isyar 2008, 6-7; Young 1968, 6-7, 14). The crisis of arms control is one such crisis, which is why it is of special importance.

An international crisis refers to an urgent situation that breaks the routine processes in a system (Isyar 2008, 1, 2). Although it contains a "turning point", which is usually one single event, like the beginning of a war in Ukraine in February 2022, it is actually *a process* of "acute transition in the state of a certain system or…a decisive or critical stage in the flow of events that together constitute an acute transition" (Young 1968, 6-7). Moreover, an international crisis contains a probability that "large-scale violence" will arise, and a war in Ukraine might turn into a large-scale devastating nuclear war, having in mind the parties involved. But, as Young observed (1968, 14): "The feeling that violence is increasingly likely is often sufficient to catalyse actions leading either to the termination of a crisis or to the development of "rules" and procedures to keep it manageable." Because of their scale, these crises can be resolved only by great powers

themselves, since the very system of existing rules is no longer able to regulate relations and resolve crises. This is exactly why the feeling that we are on the brink of total nuclear war should lead states to develop a new set of rules, procedures, and practices to manage the crises and provide stability.

The arms control crisis is the result of the unforeseen changes in the balance of power in the European continent after the break-up of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact and the changed nature of security threats after September 11, 2001. These events caused a two-fold crisis when it comes to arms control: a crisis of the European security architecture from 1991 onward, which concerns the conventional arms control regime in Europe (underpinned by the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE), the Open Skies Treaty, and the Vienna Document) and a crisis of strategic stability from 2001 onward, which concerns the defensive and offensive strategic and intermediate- and shorter-range nuclear forces and their respective arms control regimes. The first crisis started after the break-ups of the Warsaw Pact and the USSR in 1991, NATO's open door policy and first enlargements, as well as the new interpretations on the use of force marked by the 1999 NATO military intervention on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The strategic stability international crisis started in 2001 with the terrorist attacks on the US, the rise of new asymmetrical threats that questioned the US reliance on mutual vulnerability with Russia, and withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM). It evolved with NATO and the US anti-ballistic missile shields in Europe, the crisis and demise of INF, serious dysfunction of the Open Skies Treaty with the US and Russian withdrawals, and the suspension of the New START. Despite the differences in their principal causes and trajectories of development, these two crises are closely interlinked and have culminated in the 2022 war in Ukraine. This, however, must open a window for new, maybe a comprehensive arms control agreement for Europe, to take place.

All the arms control agreements were based on the principles of parity and reciprocity, as well as policy coordination among two superpowers and blocks – NATO and the Warsaw Pact. With the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the USSR, arms control with a new democratic Russia, or Russia as a new Western partner, first seemed superfluous and unnecessary. In addition, there were views in the West that arms control was no longer necessary with Russia, not because this country was no longer perceived as a threat, but because Russia was no longer equal to the US (Костић Шулејић 2022, 30, 55-56). However, both parties did their best to preserve the existing arms control agreements in light of the mutually desired

cooperation between the USA and NATO, on the one side, and Russia on the other in order to preserve stability both in Russia and in Europe. Both parties continued to behave as if they were equals and the balance of power was not significantly disturbed. Thus, the CFE Treaty was supplemented with the Flank Agreement in 1996, and later amended, while the NATO-Russia Founding Act was signed in 1997. However, the demands of the Eastern European countries, former members of the Warsaw Pact, for membership in NATO, as the primary instance by which they would be consolidated, as well as the already manifested perception that their main threat came from Russia, caused increasingly loud protests of Russia for the expansion to take place. However, with the major expansion in 2004, when the three Baltic states became NATO members and this alliance came to the very borders of Russia, it became clear that it would expand further, which strengthened the Russian sense of threat from encirclement, which she saw, and still sees today, as an existential threat. Bearing in mind the exclusive nature of modern integrations in the European area, the inclusion of the countries of the former Soviet Union in the EU and NATO would mean the exclusion of Russia and its influence from these areas, which created a kind of *win-lose* situation between NATO and Russia (Kostić 2019). The exclusion of Russia from the area of new members of NATO and the EU was reflected in the economic, military-industrial, and energy sectors, where any expansion of these organizations meant a gain for them and a loss for Russia. In addition, the encirclement of Russia from the direction of the Black Sea, which has always been vital for Russian trade and security, would call into question the survival of the Black Sea Fleet and free passage to the Mediterranean, which it saw as a threat to its survival and well-being. In the mix of these geopolitical and geoeconomic circumstances, first in 2014, Crimea was annexed to Russia, and then, the four Ukrainian provinces were declared as part of Russia.

Structure of the Erstwhile Arms Control Architecture in Europe

The arms control architecture created at the end of the Cold War served Europe for almost three decades. It was not only devised to prevent large-scale military conflict and potential nuclear war but also reflected a delicate (and sometimes dynamic) balance of power on the continent. These instruments are here addressed in two categories, depending on whether they are of relevance for nuclear or conventional arms control.

Nuclear Arms Control: The Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty

Between 1972 and 2010 the US and the USSR/Russia signed eight legally-binding agreements that limited and then reduced the numbers and types of deployed nuclear weapons and their delivery vehicles (Woolf 2023, 9). Most of them were not of direct concern to Europe but addressed strategic offensive weapons, including nuclear. This is not unusual, since the talks on strategic offensive arms control included only the two above-mentioned countries. This does not mean that there were no requests to make this process multilateral. As early as the first Strategic Arms Limitation Talks, the USSR strived to include the British and French nuclear forces, but never succeeded in this venture, as the US and NATO were adamant in excluding them from any nuclear arms control agreement, thus retaining a bilateral character of such treaties. For these countries to become part of strategic arms control several preconditions appear: the change of the relevant US/NATO position, their attitude that first reduction of US and Russian arsenals should be significantly reduced in order to gain a rough equality between Nuclear Weapon States which could only then negotiate on equal footing, and a more conducive strategic environment (Kostić 2021, 29-30). On the other hand, the US has been more and more vocal about including China in a trilateral strategic arms control agreement, given the rapid and non-transparent build-up of its nuclear arsenal. But, this country also set its preconditions for the involvement in strategic arms control such as 1) the quantitative reduction of the number of US and Russian nuclear weapons to the level of China, 2) the reduction of the role that nuclear weapons play in the military and security strategies of great powers, 3) the reduction of the role of nuclear weapons as a status symbol of a superpower or great power, and 4) the achievement of multilateral international agreement (not a trilateral one) on nuclear weapons (Kostić 2020, 697). However, what should be kept in mind is that both the US and Russia have constantly repeated that the bilateral arms control has been exhausted and that the centre-piece of nuclear arms control regime – the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT 1968) – in its Article VI states "Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control."

There was, however, one instrument that was directly consequential for security in Europe, and that was the Treaty between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Elimination of

Their Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF Treaty). It eliminated a whole class of weapons that could have caused a nuclear exchange on the European continent, provided the contours for the new security architecture in Europe, and initiated a process that resulted in a densely institutionalized network of arms control and confidence and security-building measures (Kühn 2021, 359; Gassert, Geiger, and Wentker 2021, 13). The INF Treaty was originally meant to solve the "missile crisis" in Europe that came about with the deployment of Soviet intermediate-range missiles in the European part of the USSR, which could potentially target European NATO members. NATO responded by taking a "double track" approach, which meant deploying US missiles of the same range in the territory of European member states and pursuing arms control in parallel to reduce the threat. Despite initial Soviet reluctance to the so-called zero option, i.e. the proposal to dismantle all INF missiles, the negotiations saw a breakthrough in the framework of the Nuclear and Space Talks, which coupled negotiations on INF systems, strategic arms reductions, and missile defence (Krepon 2021, 201-202 and 230). The INF Treaty was signed in 1987 between the US and the USSR, with the objective of abolishing all of their land-based nuclear missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 km (2,692 in total), their launchers and associated support structures. The Treaty also prohibited the production and flight testing of new INF systems or launchers. Its outcomes were distinctly asymmetric, since the USSR destroyed 1,846 missiles, while the US eliminated 846 missiles (Kühn 2021, 359).

For thirty years the INF Treaty worked surprisingly well due to its unprecedented verification system, which laid down rules for defining, counting, and verifying all relevant armaments and accompanying equipment, and for monitoring the final destruction of INF systems. Inspections continued on until mid-2001 when they were replaced by national technical means, a full ten years after the covered INF systems were destroyed (Kühn 2021, 359). The Treaty helped the US and the USSR overcome the conflict and arguably alleviated tensions, relieving Europe of concerns over a nuclear arms competition (Krepon 2021, 257). In the post-Cold War order, the Treaty's value slowly diminished, particularly as the relations between the US and RF started to plummet. Both the US and Russia wanted to see this treaty universalized. By 2010 the US had its suspicion that RF was not in compliance with its obligations. In 2014 the INF crisis reached a new level when the US officially declared that Russia was in violation of its obligations under the INF by developing a ground-launched cruise missile of the prohibited range. Russia rejected these accusations and put forward its own list of grievances suggesting US non-compliance with the

INF Treaty, first and foremost because of its missile defence interceptors that could allegedly be converted into ground-launched cruise missiles (CRS 2019, 2 and 24). In addition to Russian non-compliance, the US leadership, especially during the Trump administration, became more and more concerned that other countries, China, in particular, were not constrained in developing and deploying INF missiles, as well as the fact that the INF Treaty was becoming technologically outdated, as it did not cover sea- and air-launched missiles (Bolton 2020, 160). The fallout could not be avoided – the US declared its intention to withdraw from the treaty on 20 October 2018, suspended its compliance with the INF Treaty on 2 February 2019, and decided to suspend its participation in the INF Treaty and officially withdrew in August 2019, thereby rendering the Treaty void. Russia followed suit but proposed a moratorium on the deployment of this category of weapons in Europe, which she unilaterally follows since the NATO and USA did not agree with such a proposition. However, the production of land-based missiles of the range between 500 and 5500 km, although considered conventional but still dual-capable, is gaining its acceleration and creates possibilities for a new "Euromissile" crisis.

The removal of the INF Treaty is a threat to the arms control system as it might lead to a renewed arms race, involving strategic, intermediate-range, and tactical nuclear and conventional weapons (Arbatov 2019). As Maître (2023) observes, the development of these systems "shows that planning for a missile war in Europe is becoming increasingly relevant for NATO militaries."

Conventional arms control in Europe

At its time, the European conventional arms control system was by far the most advanced regime of its type. It not only significantly reduced the threat of large-scale military attacks, but also contributed to enhancing confidence and mutual reassurance in Europe (Lachowski 2003, 693). The three pillars of conventional arms control in Europe were the Treaty on the Conventional Forces in Europe, the Open Skies Treaty, and the Vienna Document. They have a distinct evolution and were not initially conceived as coordinated mechanisms; however, in combination, they provided an overarching conventional arms control framework, a web of interlocking and mutually reinforcing obligations and commitments. Together they were supposed to reduce the risk of major conflict in Europe, with the CFE Treaty establishing a balance of conventional forces between NATO and the

Warsaw Pact, the Open Skies Treaty providing a transparency mechanism among its member states, and the Vienna Document instituting confidence- and security-building measures regarding military activities (Schmitt 2018, 271). In time, however, with the withdrawals of key actors from the CFE and Open Skies Treaty, and the incoming fading of the importance of the Vienna Document, the state of conventional arms control in Europe dramatically diminished, some even describing it as deplorable (Zellner 2019, 100).

Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty

The CFE Treaty was the first European conventional weapons arms control treaty ever, described as the cornerstone of European security (Bolving 2000, 31; Aybet 1996; McCausland 1995, 2), with the purpose of establishing a secure and stable balance of conventional armed forces in Europe at lower levels, thus eliminating disparities prejudicial to stability and security, and also removing the capability to launch a surprise attack. It was also meant to prevent military conflict and replace military confrontation with a new pattern of relation (CFE, Preamble). The area of application stretched from the Atlantic and the Urals, which means that it covered the European territory of member states of NATO and the former Warsaw Pact, referred to in the CFE Treaty as "groups of states parties". This territory was further subdivided into five geographic zones and flanks. The idea behind the zoning concept was to eliminate the heavy concentration of conventional weapons in Central Europe. In addition, separate zonal aggregate caps were introduced for flank regions to address concerns that there would be a flow of conventional weapons from Central Europe. In this way each alliance was prevented from concentrating conventional arms and equipment close to the borders between them, thereby reducing the possibility of an attack by either side on a short warning. Similarly significant for conventional weapons stability were the individual national ceilings agreed within each group, which was of importance as the block structure was becoming less relevant (Koulik and Kokoski 1991, 5). The parity of the Treaty was achieved by establishing a "dynamic balance of forces", reflected in equal aggregate numbers for all five categories of conventional weapons (which were as follows: 20,000 tanks, 30,000 armored combat vehicles, 20,000 artillery pieces, 6,800 combat aircraft, and 2,000 combat helicopters), which were further trimmed down in smaller regions and the flanks (CFE, Article IV). In terms of verification, state parties had the right to conduct inspections, with a Joint Consultative

Group established to address questions relating to compliance. The implementation of the Treaty was complex, as it required either removing or destroying a vast amount of treaty-limited equipment (TLE). The detailed verification regime which accompanied the treaty text included a number of different types of on-site inspections, in order to verify compliance with the numerical limitations and to monitor the reduction of TLE carried out.

The completion of the Treaty was overshadowed by the deterioration of the Warsaw Pact and the dissolution of the USSR. Even after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the bloc character of the treaty remained, with national entitlements for each member negotiated within the two alliances (McCausland 1995, 3). Serious difficulties also arose when Russia and Ukraine made requests in the early 1990s to be relieved of limitations on the amount of TLE that can be located in flank areas of their countries, arguing their unfavourable position compared to other state parties (McCausland 1995, 3). NATO members recognized that the significant changes to political borders in the flank region raised legitimate questions that needed to be addressed. In the end, they did not scrap the flank concept, nor increase the holdings of TLE, but agreed to reduce the size of the flanks. This decision was codified in the so-called Flank Agreement, which was concluded among the state parties in November 1996, as a legally binding agreement.

The Treaty succeeded in surviving these obstacles, and this was a testimony of its value (McCausland 1995, 1). However, there was still an underlying need to discard the bipolar concept of a balance of forces incarnated in the original CFE Treaty. Moving toward these goals the state parties adopted the Adapted CFE Treaty at the 1999 Istanbul Conference. In it, the area of application remained the same, but it opened the treaty up to new European countries. It was based on national and territorial ceilings, instead of alliance division, because of which the term "groups of states" was removed (Bolving 2000, 33-34; Lachowski 2003, 693-694). However, the Adapted CFE Treaty never entered into force, as NATO members and most other states refused to ratify the Treaty due to alleged Russia's non-compliance with the commitments made at the 1999 Istanbul Summit to withdraw Russian troops from Moldova and Georgia. In response to this, Russia suspended the implementation of the original CFE in 2007, and later on its participation in the Joint Consultative Committee. NATO members, on the other hand, announced the suspension of certain aspects of the CFE Treaty in respect of the Russian Federation (Casey-Maslen 2021, 125). More than a year into the war in Ukraine, in May 2023, the Russian Federal Council approved Putin's proposal to formally withdraw from the CFE

Treaty, which will be finalized in November same year (*Interfax* 2023, *TASS* 2023). As a result of this, the CFE Treaty appears moribund (Casey-Maslen 2021, 125), if not entirely defunct, and probably, the other state parties to the Treaty will question the values of the continuation of their participation in the Treaty (Dunay 2023).

The Open Skies Treaty

The open skies idea was first proposed in 1955 as a transparency and confidence-building measure between the US and the USSR. The idea was revived in 1989 again as a bilateral measure between the two countries, but in time its scope evolved and became multilateralized with the inclusion of other NATO and Warsaw Pact member states (Dunay et al. 2004, 23). However, at the very Open Skies Conference held in Ottawa in early 1990, the negotiations slowly reflected ongoing international changes. Although the bloc structure of negotiations was retained at the Conference, the USSR no longer claimed to speak on behalf of other delegations, while some Eastern European countries were less inclined to see themselves as Soviet allies but more as mediators. The most peculiar feature of the process was visible in reaching the decision on the distribution of overflight quotas when it became clear that parties, including Warsaw Pact members, were primarily interested in overflying the USSR (Dunay et al. 2004, 29). In the end, unlike the CFE Treaty, the Open Skies Treaty was drafted for 23 states, and not two alliances and it was subsequently open to all other CSCE participating States (Dunay et al. 2004, 27-28). Nonetheless, despite there being 34 members at the time, the Open Skies Treaty effectively consisted of two camps – NATO members (all but three – Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia) on one hand, and Russia and Belarus, plus other non-aligned states and countries not formally associated with any military alliance, such as Georgia, Sweden, and Ukraine, on the other (Visualizing the Open Skies Treaty, n.d.).

The Open Skies Treaty was not in itself meant to be a full-fledged arms control agreement but was conceived as a confidence-building and compliance instrument, intent on improving openness and transparency via aerial observation (The Open Skies Treaty 1992, Preamble). State parties were given the right to conduct unarmed observation flights over each other's territory using sensors with a predefined resolution (Graef 2020, 1). The principle of parity was embodied in the rule that each state party had the right to conduct a number of observation flights over the territory of any other state

party equal to the number of observation flights that that other state party had the right to conduct over it (Article III). Likewise, observation flights were meant to be allowed over other states' entire territory at short notice, without the possibility of exempting any part of the territory from overflight (Casey-Maslen and Vestner 2019, 60). In addition, the area of application included not only the land between the Atlantic to the Urals but also the entire territory of the US and the Russian Federation, as well as Canada.

Against its great value, the implementation of the treaty was not devoid of problems, as over time a number of concerns arose, particularly between the US and Russia. The US accused Russia of abating implementation by denying overflights within its 10 km border zone to Georgia, a consequence of the fact that the RF recognized the two breakaway regions of Georgia as sovereign states not parties to the treaty. There was likewise a problem with imposing a 500-kilometre sub-limit for overflights over the Kaliningrad Oblast (Reif and Bugos 2020). Russia had its list of counter-accusations, prominently with regard to the refusal of Georgia to allow Russian overflights, as well as the imposition of maximum flight distance over Hawaii (Schepers 2020, 3). The US announced in May 2020 the decision to leave the Treaty due to Russia's non-compliance and submitted an official withdrawal notice that took effect in November. Even in such circumstances, it was argued that salvaging the Treaty would be beneficial both to European NATO members and to Russia. There were signs that the US might change its decision. Right after taking office, the Biden administration commenced a review of the decision and held consultations with allies and partners, but in the end, no decision was taken to re-join the treaty (Reif and Bugos 2021). The Russians were concerned that the US could have continued access to data obtained by flights over Russian territory, because of which European state parties were requested to reassure in a legally binding way that the data would not be shared outside of the membership. However, it was clear that the balance within the Treaty was altered after the US withdrawal, and in such circumstances Russia's departure from the Open Skies Treaty was inevitable. The decision to withdraw was announced in January 2021 and took effect six months later.

The Vienna Document

The Vienna Document was initially adopted in 1990 and was subsequently reissued in 1992, 1994, 1999, and 2011. It was agreed within the CSCE framework, and it is still handled within the OSCE, by the Forum

for Security and Cooperation (Schmitt 2018, 270). The need for its adoption was evident as the CFE-mandated conventional weapons parity between the two alliances did not include separate provisions relating to the prevention of large-scale deployments of military forces during military exercises from being used in surprise attacks (OSCE, n.d.). Unlike the CFE and the Open Skies Treaty, the Vienna Document is not an international treaty, but a politically binding agreement and a soft law instrument, which means that non-compliance and even violations of its provisions do not constitute breaches of international law (Schmitt 2018, 271-272). Its purpose was to increase transparency on military activities in the OSCE zone of application (Stefanović 2021, 64). Participating States are required to provide each other, on an annual basis, information on their military forces, including with respect to manpower, and major conventional weapons and equipment systems, as well as deployment plans and budgets and notifications about major military activities such as exercises. Verification is *inter alia* conducted through the obligation to host inspections at military sites, up to three per year, in order to check whether military activities are taking place, for what purpose, the validation of the reported numbers of troops and amount of military material, and consultations in case of unusual military activity or increasing tensions (Casey-Maslen and Vestner 2019, 60).

The first years of the Vienna Document were successful. The Vienna Document was enhanced by decreasing the threshold of personnel and battle tanks required for prior notification, expanding the zone of application, and introducing the obligation for states to provide information on command structure, major power systems, and strength and location of forces. Even when challenges occurred, the result was the further strengthening of the process (Schmitt 2018, 272-273). In 2010, the modernization of the Vienna Document was further enabled by instituting a new mechanism for its continuous updating, called the "Vienna Document Plus". This made it possible for the Vienna Document to be reissued again in 2011, in order to take into account technical issues regarding visits (Shakirov 2019, 5-6). At the same time, the first obstacles appeared, as it was impossible to reach a consensus on substantial issues, notably the reduction in the threshold for prior notifications of certain military activity (Schmitt 2018, 277). Mutual threat perception also re-emerged, particularly after the outbreak of the war in eastern Ukraine in 2014. Ukraine made unsuccessful attempts to use the Vienna Document measures in relation to the territories not controlled by the government and an OSCE visit to Crimea shortly before the 2014 referendum was denied (Shakirov 2019, 6). These events

were followed by further failures to update the Document, which were put forward in 2016 and 2018.

The 2011 Vienna Document continued to be implemented, as inspections were being held, and none of the participating States suspended its implementation. However, concerns regarding its application started to pile up, as there were large military exercises on both sides, frequently close to borders and often on short notice, inevitably accompanied by mutual accusations (Rosa-Hernandez 2023). Ultimately, and after the commencement of the War in Ukraine, Russia decided to *de facto* suspend the implementation of the Vienna Document, by refusing to provide information about its armed forces for 2023 (Rosa-Hernandez 2023). In conclusion, the crisis in Ukraine showed that the Vienna Document is essentially a "too weak a tool in a severe crisis situation" (Engvall 2019, 50).

Russian position and the prospects for future arms control in Europe

The overview of the erstwhile arms control agreements gave us a detailed look at the character, structure, status, and problems that arms control is facing in Europe. In this part of the paper, we will analyse the Russian positions in each matter and the prospects of these various categories that were regulated under arms control under new conditions set up after the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. In each case, we will consider the prospects for future arms control in relation to nuclear and conventional weapons, as well as EDTs. What needs to be noted prior to this consideration is that the overall global context and competition that emerged over the interpretations of the rules-based international order hamper the possibility of finding the common ground for any international agreement, including in the sphere of arms control. As the newly adopted Foreign Policy Concept (2023, point 9) states: "The international legal system is put to the test: a small group of states is trying to replace it with the concept of a rules-based world order (imposition of rules, standards and norms that have been developed without equitable participation of all interested states). It becomes more difficult to develop collective responses to transnational challenges and threats, such as the illicit arms trade, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery…The culture of dialogue in international affairs is degrading, and the effectiveness of diplomacy as a means of peaceful dispute settlement is decreasing. There is an acute lack of trust and predictability in international affairs."

Besides, further arms control would not be possible before the war in Ukraine ends, and arms control options would depend on how the war ends (Williams and Adamopoulos 2022, 8; Pifer 2022). Since arms control cannot be managed outside the political and security considerations of one state, these concerns have to be addressed first. Russia remains committed to future arms control, especially for the purpose of maintaining strategic stability by strengthening and developing the system of international treaties and political foundations (arrangements), the prevention of arms race in all domains, and increasing predictability in international relations through CSBMs (Foreign Policy Concept 2023, point 27). This is why we will take a closer look at the Russian position on arms control in fields that were previously covered by the arms control arrangements, as shown in the previous part of the paper, and present some of the future prospects for the new arrangements to take place in the European context.

Principles and lessons learned that affect the Russian position on arms control

During the period after the Cold War, in its strategies and proposals on security architecture in Europe from 2008/2009 and 2021/2022, Russia based its arms control policy on several principles. Firstly, there are principles of cooperation, indivisible, equal, and undiminished security of state parties (USA, Russia, NATO members). For Russia, these principles meant mutual respect for and recognition of each other's security interests and concerns, avoidance of undertaking, participation, or/and support of activities that affect the security of the other Party, avoidance of implementation of security measures adopted by each Party individually or in the framework of an international organization, military alliance or coalition that could undermine core security interests of the other Party. The Russian draft Treaty between The United States of America and the Russian Federation on security guarantees (2021, Article 5) contained the following provision: "The Parties shall refrain from deploying their armed forces and armaments, including in the framework of international organizations, military alliances or coalitions, in the areas where such deployment *could be perceived by the other Party as a threat* (emphasize added) to its national security, with the exception of such deployment within the national territories of the Parties." Moreover, Article 1 of the draft Agreement on measures to ensure the security of The Russian Federation and member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (2021) stated that the parties "shall not strengthen their

security individually, within international organizations, military alliances or coalitions *at the expense of the security of other Parties* (emphasize added)."

Secondly, a principle that nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought, which is rooted in the famous Gorbachev – Regan summit in Geneva in 1985, is one of the basis of all Russia-US strategic and nuclear arms control agreements and is still often heard in the documents and speeches of the US and Russian leaders, as well as other P5 members. It means that nuclear weapons states shall tend to avoid any *direct* military confrontation and armed conflict between them that might lead to nuclear weapon use. However, this principle is nowadays significantly challenged by the principle of humanitarian consequences of any possible nuclear weapon use, thus adjusting the previously mentioned statement that a nuclear war cannot be fought not because it cannot be won, but because of the humanitarian consequences that any use of nuclear weapons would have.

Thirdly, the national principle on the possession, deployment, and expertise of use of nuclear weapons – in the Draft agreements between Russia and the USA and Russia and NATO from December 2021, this principle applied to the: a) deployment of ground-launched intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles outside the national territories as well as in the areas of the national territories of the parties, from which such weapons can attack targets in the national territory of the other Party (these systems were previously forbidden by the INF Treaty in the European theatre), b) deployment of nuclear weapons outside parties' national territories and return of such weapons already deployed outside their national territories, as well as elimination of all existing infrastructure for deployment of nuclear weapons outside national territories of the parties, c) refraining from the training of military and civilian personnel from non-nuclear countries to use nuclear weapons.

In the end, regarding the parties, after 1999 Russia preferred to sign agreements with NATO member states, not with NATO or the EU as unitary actors, which was also the case with the proposed agreements for the new European security architecture. What was missing, however, from the Russian plans were the security interest of smaller states in the European continent, which felt they would be left without protection if NATO closed the door for future enlargements, and the issue of freedom of each state to choose the alliances, including in the security field. That means that Russian security interests should not have precedence over the security interests of other states. However, the solutions to these issues should find a compromise, which was unfortunately lacking for the last thirty years.

The developments in these thirty years have led Russia to learn some lessons. According to the social-constructivist paradigm, the learning process leads to the evolution of the decision-making process and public policies, including the security and defence fields. These lessons include:

1. Lesson learned on NATO enlargement – cooperation with the US or Western Europe will not prevent the NATO enlargement to the Russian borders, which undermines the principle of equal and undiminished security for all, as Russia perceived it.

2. Lessons learned since the NATO intervention on FRY i.e. the use of force in 1999 – the absence of the UN Security Council authorization on the use of force will not prevent the US and their partners from conducting a military intervention anywhere in the world, which undermines the principles of territorial integrity, non-interference in internal affairs and the use of force in the manner consistent with the UN Charter.

3. Lessons learned since 1999 onward "colour revolutions" – regime change might occur through the great support of various groups inside one's country, which Russia considers as an unconstitutional change of power.

Since Russia did not manage to prevent these unfavourable events for her from happening through agreements and cooperation with the West, Russia started to implement the strategy of counter-hegemony, sometimes with other emerging powers, especially China, which has led to the creation of a multipolar world order that lacks universal consensus and is rather contested in nature (Kostić 2018). In the area of arms control this means that, in this shifting period, all sides are taking and consolidating their positions, in order to be prepared to negotiate a new set of international regimes that would reflect new realities and interests.

Nuclear arms control

Regarding strategic nuclear arms control, with the consequences for the European states, is the US position that China must be involved in future nuclear arms control. As the US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan stated in June 2023, "the limits on the U.S. nuclear arsenal in any new arms control arrangement with Russia after 2026 will be affected by the size of and the capabilities in China's nuclear arsenal" (cited according to Bugos 2023). This means that the US will go for trilateralization of strategic nuclear arms control that takes into account the combined Russo-Chinese nuclear forces, although Sullivan emphasized that the US did not need to increase its nuclear forces "to outnumber the combined total of our competitors in

order to successfully deter them" (cited according to Bugos 2023). Even before the New START was signed in 2010, the Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2008, for example, contained a provision that a strategic stability issue can no longer be addressed exclusively within the framework of Russia-US relations. The 2013 Foreign Policy Concept (point 70) also stated that there was "the necessity to transform nuclear disarmament into a multilateral process" and the one from 2016 (point 27f) mentioned *a phased* "reduction of nuclear potentials based on the growing relevance of giving this process a multilateral character".

Since reciprocity and a balance of forces remained the basic principles of US-Russia strategic arms control, and according to Russian previous statements, we can expect that the US demands on the involvement of China be followed by the Russian demands on the involvement of the French and British strategic nuclear forces into the nuclear strategic arms control talks, leading them to further multilateralization. This will be, however, a very hard task to achieve if the Chinese, British, and French preconditions for this involvement remain the same. Since the strategic stability is based on the significant disparity between the USA and Russia, on the one side, and the rest of the nuclear-weapon states, on the other, it would be extremely hard for the US and Russia to accept the lowering of their forces to the level of others in order to start disarmament talks (Kostić 2022, 35). Thus, the future regarding strategic weapons could have several scenarios: 1) increasing the strategic nuclear forces of all nuclear-weapon states having in mind the "strategic circle" effect (Kostić 2022, 224) on the size of nuclear arsenals of all nuclear-weapon states, 2) freeze of existing nuclear arsenals, 3) another round of bilateral strategic arms control agreements among the US and Russia, 4) acceptance of other nuclear weapon-states to adhere to the multilateral nuclear arms control talks on the US and Russian conditions, and 5) at this moment the least realistic, but significant to mention, accession of all nuclear-weapon states to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons that entered into force in January 2021 and 6) also less realistic, bilateral US-Chinese strategic arms control deal.

Regarding the INF systems, the Russian position after the demise of the INF Treaty was that ground-based systems should not be deployed in the areas, including national, from which it could target NATO member states or the US, on the basis of reciprocity. However, prior to this flow of events, both the US and Russia (Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2013, Point 32c), but also some states like France, promoted the universalization of the INF treaty in order to include all countries, but

primarily with China in mind. Even if not universal, France also expressed the position that other arms control agreement that concerns Europe must involve all European states and not be bilateral – between the USA and Russia (ACA 2020). Thus, the future arms control in this field could be: a) unilateral Russian and NATO member states moratorium on the deployment of ground-based INF systems in Europe, b) making a new agreement that would involve the US, Russia, and other European states as well, c) creating a universal mechanism that would end or put a cap on all kinds of INF missile systems.

On tactical nuclear weapons arms control, which is one of the US conditions for new strategic arms control, Russia continued to dismiss the prospects of arms control talks, especially until the US "withdraws from Ukraine" (Bugos 2023). Until 2023 the Russian position on tactical nuclear weapons was the same as with the strategic, i.e. based on the national principle and condemning the US nuclear sharing with European allies. But, since the 25 May 2023 agreement, Russia has formalized a nuclear sharing agreement with Belarus and according to Putin the first nuclear warheads have been delivered to Belarus and there will be more (Bugos 2023). This calls into question the longstanding Russian principle on the deployment of nuclear weapons only on the national territory and might lead Russia to extend its deterrence even beyond Belarus. This, however, only confirms the priority of the principles of equality and reciprocity in conducting the relations with the US.

Conventional arms control

The balance of forces principle continued to lead Russia in its position toward conventional arms control, although the Warsaw Pact was dissolved and the issue of Russian capability to be perceived as an equal partner was raised. During the early years of the new century, Russia wanted to prevent its isolation from the European security system and the development of NATO in that direction. Russia wanted to "fix the imbalances" (The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation 2008, IV. Regional priorities) that occurred in the sphere of conventional arms and armed forces reduction, to ensure bringing the conventional arms control regime in Europe into line with the "current reality" (Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2013, Point 32k) and to adopt new confidence-building measures.

Russian preoccupation was not with NATO as an organization, but with its enlargement to the Russian borders and assumed intention to take global

roles and use the force on its own terms (MID 2010). Thus, Russia tried to limit the deployment and expansion of NATO, its military infrastructure, troops, and weapons systems, both conventional and nuclear, and the assumption of global functions that NATO might take (The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2010). Russia also intended to curb the deepening of the military and economic cooperation between the US and post-Soviet states, especially to prevent the establishment of foreign military bases in the territory of the former Soviet states that are not NATO members. Russian endeavours were concentrated on maintaining the NATO force on the line before the first NATO enlargement in the 1990s. Thus, the draft Agreement from 2021 (Article 4) contained the provision: "The Russian Federation and all the Parties that were member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization as of 27 May 1997, respectively, shall not deploy military forces and weaponry on the territory of any of the other States in Europe in addition to the forces stationed on that territory as of 27 May 1997."

The best modality of arms control in this field for Europe would still be the agreement on non-aggression and limitation of the number of forces in the bordering and flank regions (a kind of a new CFE Treaty) and strong CSBMs. However, prior to this or as part of the negotiating process of one such agreement, there must be a consensus on the political issues regarding Serbia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, as well as future NATO enlargement. If NATO does not want to be in conflict with both Russia and China, together with the states that gravitate toward them, NATO would have to reconsider its policy of extension around these two countries, as well as the possible assumption of global roles that would involve the use of force.

Emerging and Disruptive Technologies

From its onset, Russia was against the US national missile-defence shield that could undermine its strategic forces and tried to preserve the ABM Treaty as long as it could. However, the US withdrawal from the ABM treaty in 2001, due to the changed perception of the nature and actors of threat, marked the beginning of the strategic stability international crisis and, in the wake of the expiration of START I, in 2008 Russian Foreign Policy Concept (III, point 3), Russia expressed opposition to the deployment of weapons in outer space and unilateral actions in the field of strategic anti-missile defence. Instead, Russia proposed the establishment of a system of collective response to potential missile threats on an equal basis. However, these propositions were not acceptable to the US or NATO side, but, instead,

the original plans of the US national missile defence were modified under the Obama administration in order not to be able to erode Russian strategic deterrence. This, however, did not dissuade Russia from developing new kinds of weapons that could undermine the US and NATO defence shield – first of all hypersonic missiles. Together with China, Russia is one of the main promoters of the legally based approach to the prevention of militarization of space and regulation of Internet and information security. Both in space and cyber domains Russia is seeking the achievement of legal instruments that would be based on the principles of sovereign equality, non-interference, indivisible security, and balance of interests. Prior to negotiating such instruments, what has to precede are the CSBMs and mutual understanding of the contested issues in these domains, including the role of the private companies.

Besides space and cyber domains, the nature of conflict has also changed with the development of warfare drones, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and autonomous weapons systems. At this moment, there are no Europe-specific arms control restraints on EDTs. Discussion on their regulation, and potential prohibition, are being conducted predominantly in UN-led bodies and forums, such as the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, the Open-Ended Working Group on Reducing Space Threats through Norms, Rules, and Principles of Responsible Behavior, as well as two working groups operating at the apex of cyber and international security. With regard to missiles and their accompanying technology, apart from being addressed in bilateral arms control instruments between the US and Russia, there are also non-legally-binding instruments, such as the Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missiles Proliferation, and the Missile Technology Control Regime, that are of importance for curbing the spread of missiles and their technology. Again, these instruments are of a more universal nature, and not specific to the European context.

In the long run, the most pressing problems would be encountered when addressing cyber and AI, as they account for "intangible" assets that escape traditional arms control, unlike hypersonic missiles and space systems which have the potential to be subsumed under already existing arms control instruments (Lissner 2021, 11). At the same time, the destabilizing effects of many emerging technologies remain largely prospective, and much still depends on their future development and their potential adoption by militaries. Moreover, they have the potential for future arms control

regimes and be beneficial for verifying compliance with obligations (Lissner 2021, 12).

The mechanisms for the establishment of new security architecture in Europe, that Russia proposed through its draft agreements with NATO and the US in 2021, were the urgent bilateral or multilateral consultations, including the NATO-Russia Council, regular and voluntary exchange of assessments of contemporary threats and security challenges, informing of each other about military exercises and manoeuvres, and main provisions of their military doctrines, using of all existing mechanisms and tools for confidence-building measures. These CSBMs included the establishment of telephone hotlines to maintain emergency contacts between the Parties and a dialogue and interaction on improving mechanisms to prevent incidents on and over the high seas (primarily in the Baltics and the Black Sea region).

Conclusion

This paper tried to offer an explanation of the crisis in European arms control through the concept of international crisis and constructivist theoretical assumptions and to provide for some future prospects for arms control in Europe, both in the nuclear and conventional domains. These prospects we considered by presenting and taking into account the Russian position on arms control. By giving an overview of the erstwhile arms control instruments in Europe, the paper showed the main logic behind them and the reasons for their demise or ineffectiveness. The paper, then, considered the possibilities of a new arms control arrangement in all domains covered by the previous or ineffective treaties, by taking into account the Russian perspectives and principles for arms control.

The current arms control crisis in Europe, which reflects the international crises of strategic stability and European security architecture, and which culminated with the war in Ukraine in 2022, can lead to several scenarios. First is Europe in a proliferation crisis, which leaves Europe in a security dilemma, with the galloping arms race and militarization and without any arms control legal instruments or coordinating mechanisms. The other scenario is Europe in the status of frozen armed capabilities and frozen conflict in Ukraine (together with already existing ones in Moldova, Georgia, and Serbia), where some political coordination and unilateral caps or reductions on weapon possession and deployment would be established among the US and NATO, on the one, and Russia on the other side. And the third scenario is a Europe with a new arms control architecture,

including international treaties, which would reflect new compromises and a willingness to establish a common European security. Regarding the actors, this would include the true multilateralization of a nuclear arms control that would involve France and Britain, but could also involve the European Union as a whole, as well, in both nuclear and conventional domains. It could also take the form of bilateral or trilateral treaties among Russia and certain European states, or Russia, the USA, and a certain interested state. Regarding the content, besides the strategic arms control, new arrangements ought to be made on intermediate- and shorter-range nuclear and dual-capable systems, possibly also with multilateral character, tactical nuclear weapons in some form of arms control (together with the strategic and INF systems or as a separate category), and first of all, the conventional arms control in Europe.

The new conventional arms control in Europe would first have to deal with the increase in confidence and trust among the main actors in the European continent since, otherwise, Europe could not escape further militarization and possible confrontation. It would also have to regulate the traditional armaments, but emerging technologies with warfighting capabilities, as well. An agreement on the basic principles of world order, primarily on the respect of territorial integrity and human rights and on the use of force needs to be found. The freedom of states to choose their alliances and foreign and security policies in a way that is not threatening to others is also one of preconditions for the peace on the European continent. In a contested multipolar international system the states and groups of states would have to find mechanisms for coordination, if not cooperation, among themselves, if they do not want to end up in turmoil, chaos, or war, and arms control agreements are the best option to this end.

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