

RIA

# The Review of International Affairs

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## **Foreword**

### **Honouring the RIA's 75th Anniversary**

It is with great honor and enthusiasm that we present the latest issue of *The Review of International Affairs (RIA)*, marking the commencement of a new editorial chapter and celebrating a significant milestone in the history of our esteemed journal. As the newly appointed editorial team, with Dr. Nenad Stekić as Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Nevena Šekarić Stojanović as Deputy Editor-in-Chief, and Pavle Nedić, MA, as Secretary, we are privileged to steer this journal into a new era of academic rigour, insightful analysis, and meaningful contributions to the field of international affairs.

This volume holds particular significance as it coincides with the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of *The Review of International Affairs*. Over the past seven and a half decades, RIA has solidified its reputation as a distinguished platform for scholarly discourse, providing a venue for expert analyses, policy discussions, and theoretical reflections on global affairs. Published entirely in the English language, RIA has consistently drawn contributions from esteemed scholars across the globe, diplomats, and policymakers, making it an essential source of knowledge and a bridge between academia and decision-making circles.

The global political landscape continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace, with recent events demonstrating the persistent and complex nature of international relations. Chief among these developments is the reelection of Donald Trump as President of the United States, an event that heralds significant shifts in U.S. foreign policy and international strategic considerations. Trump's return to the White House has already prompted widespread speculation regarding the United States' future engagements on the global stage, particularly concerning its stance toward Russia and Ukraine. Given the ongoing conflict and geopolitical contestation in Eastern Europe, the U.S. approach will likely influence the trajectory of diplomacy, security alliances, and broader international stability.

Ukraine remains at the center of global strategic calculations. The recalibration of U.S. foreign policy under the second Trump administration may bring about substantial changes in how Washington perceives and interacts with both Kyiv and Moscow. While the previous administration under President Joe Biden maintained a firm commitment to supporting Ukraine against Russian aggression, it remains to be seen how the newly elected leadership will navigate these diplomatic and military challenges.

Simultaneously, the role of military force is becoming an increasingly dominant factor in global politics. In an era where power projections and security considerations shape state interactions, military strength is once again proving to be a decisive variable in international affairs. The shifting balance of power, rising defense expenditures, and the reconfiguration of alliances underscore the need for nuanced and strategic analyses of military capabilities and doctrines. As such, this volume of

*The Review of International Affairs* engages with these pressing issues, offering insightful perspectives on the dynamics of military power and security strategies in contemporary international relations.

This issue consists of five articles and one book review, each offering critical insights into the pressing challenges facing the global order. The articles selected for this volume address key topics relevant to international security, geopolitical shifts, and diplomatic strategies, providing both theoretical and empirical contributions to the field. Additionally, the book review presents an in-depth analysis of a recent publication that holds significant relevance for scholars and practitioners alike.

As we embark on this new volume in 2025, we extend our deepest gratitude to our contributors and reviewers for their dedication to maintaining the high standards of the *Review of International Affairs*. Our commitment to fostering rigorous academic dialogue remains steadfast, and we take pride in offering a platform that not only reflects the complexities of contemporary international relations but also informs policy and scholarly debates worldwide.

Furthermore, we invite scholars to contribute to future issues of RIA. We welcome high-quality submissions that offer fresh perspectives, empirical research, and theoretical advancements in the field of international affairs. The journal remains committed to facilitating academic exchange and fostering dialogue on crucial global issues that shape our present and future.

As we celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of RIA's establishment, we acknowledge the rich history of this journal and its contributions to the academic and diplomatic communities. It is our sincere hope that this volume continues the tradition of excellence that RIA has upheld throughout the decades, further solidifying its prestige as a leading publication in the domain of international affairs.

On behalf of the editorial team, we wish to express our appreciation for the continued support of our readers, authors, and reviewers. We look forward to an engaging and thought-provoking volume, and we remain dedicated to advancing scholarly discourse in international relations.

Dr. Nenad Stekić  
Editor-in-Chief  
*The Review of International Affairs*

## DONALD TRUMP 2.0: MAIN CHALLENGES, STRATEGIC OPTIONS, AND THE “NEW” GRAND STRATEGY OF THE UNITED STATES

Stevan NEDELJKOVIĆ<sup>1</sup>, Dragan ŽIVOJINOVIĆ<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The victory of Donald Trump in the US presidential election of November 5, 2024, has reignited academic debate concerning the future grand strategy of the United States. This paper seeks to contribute to that debate by analysing the current global context and evaluating the strategic options at Washington’s disposal. Specifically, we address two central research questions: first, what strategic options are available to Donald Trump, and second, which grand strategy will likely be chosen by the 47th president of the United States? We argue that, despite the unconventional nature of Trump’s first presidential term, his strategic priorities have remained broadly consistent with those of previous administrations, particularly regarding the preservation of US primacy and the maintenance of a favourable balance of power in key regions—the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and the Persian Gulf. The paper further explores the dominant strategic options available to Trump, including isolationism, offshore balancing, selective engagement, and deep engagement. We predict that Trump is unlikely to significantly alter the grand strategy from his first term, opting instead for selective engagement. Methodologically, the paper employs content analysis, comparative methods, and genealogical analysis to examine Trump’s strategic options within a dynamic global context.

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## Introduction

When sirens sounded in Kyiv at dawn on February 24, 2022, and bombs began to fall across Ukraine, the last remnants of faith in the world we thought we knew were shattered. That world, which had seemed defined by the hope and optimism that followed the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, now felt distant. The end of the Cold War sparked dreams of a more peaceful, cooperative international order. Yet, recent history has been marked by a series of crises that have repeatedly shaken the foundations of the international order. Adam Tooze (2022), a Columbia University professor, uses the term “polycrisis” to name such an environment. In his view, “With economic and non-economic shocks entangled all the way down, it is little wonder that an unfamiliar term is gaining currency—the polycrisis. A problem becomes a crisis when it challenges our ability to cope and thus threatens our identity. In the polycrisis, the shocks are disparate, but they interact so that the whole is even more overwhelming than the sum of the parts” (Tooze 2022).

Some of the most defining moments of the 21st century include the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Global Financial Crisis in 2007-2008, Russia’s invasion of Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea, the war in Ukraine starting in 2014, and the global upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. These events challenged the notion that a unipolar world dominated by the United States would prevail. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 stands out as a particularly pivotal moment. It signals the return of great power competition, a shift from the relative stability many hoped would define the post-Cold War era.

The United States has faced several key questions in recent years, one of the most pressing being how to respond to Russia’s aggression in Ukraine. After nearly three years of war, it is clear that the Biden administration has made its stance known: While American troops are not directly involved in the conflict, the US has provided extensive economic, military, intelligence, and logistical support to Ukraine. According to Jonathan Masters and Will Mellow (2024), US assistance to Ukraine has exceeded \$175 billion, with intelligence support being challenging to quantify but crucial to Ukraine’s efforts. Although Ukraine is not part of any formal US security arrangements, the support has been pivotal in Ukraine’s survival as an independent state and in restoring Washington’s credibility among its allies.

The second important issue was the US presidential election on November 5, 2024. While domestic policy issues have traditionally been the key drivers in elections for nearly half a century, recent polling data (e.g., Brenan 2024, Pew Research Center 2024) and focus group findings (The New York Times 2024) revealed that foreign policy played a decisive role in the choice between Donald

Trump and Kamala Harris. Voters faced a critical decision: whether to reduce America's global engagement or continue the policies of the Biden administration, particularly its handling of the war in Ukraine. According to polling aggregators like RealClearPolitics (2024), only about 40% of Americans approved Biden's approach to the war, while 54% disapproved. These sentiments about US foreign policy significantly impacted the election results, ultimately leading to Donald Trump's victory as the 47th president of the United States.

Trump's election victory raises another critical question: what will be the grand strategy of his new administration? However, before addressing that, it is worth considering whether Trump had a grand strategy during his first term. Scholars have debated this issue (see, for example, Brands 2017/2018, Brands 2018b; Porter 2018; Dombrowski and Reich 2017; Trapara 2017; Simić and Živojinović 2019; Ülgül 2020), with some arguing that his foreign policy was more tactical or characterised by "ad hococracy" (Appelbaum 2017), a term Richard Haass used to describe Trump's approach. While this article cannot provide an in-depth analysis of whether Trump indeed had a grand strategy from 2017 to 2021, we will conclude that there was, in fact, a somewhat coherent vision or theory about how America could "produce security for itself" (Posen 2014, 1). Trump believed this could be achieved by focusing solely on national interests rather than global ones, adopting a transactional approach to foreign policy, avoiding American involvement in "endless wars", and maintaining a favourable balance of power in key regions.

In the well-known strategic framework of *ENDS-WAYS-MEANS + CONTEXT*, Trump changed the methods or approaches ("**ways**") to achieve the objectives, but the other two core elements, **ends** and **means**, generally remained the same. The goal of the United States remained consistent from 2017 to 2021, as it was during the Obama administration: preserving US primacy in the global order and maintaining a favourable balance of power in key regions (Indo-Pacific, Europe, and the Persian Gulf). Therefore, the strategy followed by Trump was essentially the same as that of Obama and Biden, which Robert J. Art (2004) refers to as selective engagement. Eight years later, Donald Trump faced a crucial decision again: which approach to global politics and which grand strategy should he choose? Given his character and previous experiences as the 45th US president, the answer may not be too difficult to deduce, but this will be explored further in the following chapters.

This paper addresses two important questions. Given the post-Cold War history of the United States grand strategy, particularly from 2017 to 2021, we seek to answer the question of what strategic options Donald Trump has at his disposal. Additionally, we aim to answer the question of which grand strategy the 47th US president will rely on during his second term. We will primarily use content analysis methods, comparative analysis, and genealogical analysis to

answer these questions. The paper will be divided into four sections: the current strategic context, contemporary understandings of the concept of grand strategy, the dominant strategic options available to Trump, and our forecast for the US grand strategy from 2025 to 2029.

## The Current Global Strategic Context

Each US president inherits a world shaped by the actions and decisions of their predecessor, which is composed chiefly of known facts and conditions—what we call *known knowns*. However, every administration also faces new challenges and possibilities arising during the president’s time in office, which fall into the realm of the unknown. In Strategic Studies, these are categorised into three types: *known knowns*, *known unknowns*, and *unknown unknowns*. Donald Rumsfeld, former US Secretary of Defence under Presidents Gerald Ford and George W. Bush, defined these categories as follows: “*Known knowns* are facts, rules, and laws that we are certain about. *Known unknowns* are gaps in our knowledge that we are aware of, but we know these gaps exist. The most challenging category, however, is *unknown unknowns*—gaps in our knowledge that we don’t even know exist” (Rumsfeld 2012, xvi).

The United States of America is still the only country with a global strategic presence and global power projection capabilities. During the Biden administration, the United States was in line with what he proclaimed at the beginning of his mandate as the “America is back” approach (The White House 2021). That means the US will maintain the international liberal order and actively participate in international relations. One way or another, the United States is involved in all pressing problems and present at all hot spots in the world. Global challenges will undoubtedly confront Donald Trump’s second administration, favouring the “America First” approach. While Trump’s “America First” policy emphasises prioritising domestic interests, it is important to recognise that even from a national interest standpoint, “America First” should not mean “America ignores”.

As Fareed Zakaria notes, “Any attempt at a grand strategy for today must also begin with an accurate appraisal of the world” (Zakaria 2008a). In this spirit, we will briefly outline the key characteristics of the current strategic context. To do so, we will draw on Joseph Nye’s framework for analysing the international system (Nye and Welch 2017, 50). First, we will examine the structure of this context, followed by an exploration of its process. Nye sees structure as “the configuration of units within a system. Structures characterise how units relate. Realists consider the distribution of power the most important structural feature of the international system; constructivists emphasise its social dimensions (e.g., norms, rules, and identity relationships)” (Nye and Welch 2017, 398).

The concept of *process* is significantly more complex, and Nye defines it as “the patterns and types of interactions between the units of the system” (Naj 2006, 62). According to Nye, “the distinction between structure and process at any given time can be illustrated by the metaphor of a poker game. The *structure* of a poker game is in the distribution of power, that is, how many chips the players have and how many high cards they are dealt. The *process* is how the game is played and the types of interactions among the players. (How are the rules created and understood? Are the players good bluffers? Do they obey the rules? If players cheat, are they likely to get caught?)” (Nye and Welch 2017, 50).

When discussing structure, one of the most important aspects is power distribution in today’s world. Power polarity is a central topic in international relations, referring to “the number of especially capable powers at the top of the international system” (Wohlforth 2022, 415). So, there may be different configurations of power: “A multipolar system is one in which there are three or more roughly evenly matched poles at the top of the state system; in bipolarity, there are only two; and in unipolarity, only one state meets the basic criteria of polar status” (Wohlforth 2022, 415). Some scholars, like Richard Haass, Ian Bremmer, and Randal Schweller, argue about a non-polar or G-Zero World (Haass 2008; Bremmer 2012; Schweller 2021).

The issue with today’s world is that power distribution is not as clear-cut as it once was. Instead, we are experiencing a pluralistic distribution of power in international relations, with strong proponents of different power structures: multipolarity (Mearsheimer 2017), bipolarity (Lind 2024), and unipolarity (Brooks and Wohlforth 1999; 2016), even in its “partially unipolar” form (Brooks and Wohlforth 2023). In our view, we have some mixed situations in which the world is much more multipolar in the process but still not multipolar in the structure (Simić and Živojinović 2022).

Regarding the current global strategic context process, several key characteristics will matter in the second Trump administration. Since “processes of interaction include such things as diplomacy, negotiation, trade, and war” (Nye and Welch 2017, 398), we will follow that pattern.

**Negotiation** and **diplomacy** are crucial elements in any strategic context and within the international system as a whole. They are not merely foreign policy tools available to states, which is the ordinary way we view them (Dimitrijević and Stojanović 1996; Vukadinović 2005). Rather, diplomacy serves as a mechanism for maintaining the international system itself. White (2001, 388) explains, “Diplomacy in world politics refers to a communication process between international actors that seeks, through negotiation, to resolve conflicts short of war”. What we are currently witnessing, however, is a lack of communication—or, at the very least, an insufficient level of communication—between the

prominent global actors. This includes the absence of even “Cold War-style” back channels, once vital for maintaining dialogue and managing tensions.

Vladimir Putin became increasingly isolated from the West during the Biden administration, particularly after the invasion of Ukraine. Meanwhile, the level of cooperation between China and the United States, the two most powerful countries in the world, has not reached an adequate level. That is evident from statistics provided by Yan Xuetong (2024), one of China’s leading IR scholars. According to Yan, “Under the Obama administration, there were more than 90 official channels for dialogue between the two governments. By the end of Trump’s first term, there were none. Trump will likely suspend the nearly 20 channels with China that the Biden administration has established and may replace them with new channels directly under his oversight, rather than through high-ranking bureaucrats” (Xuetong 2024).

Regarding **trade** and economics, there is a growing debate about the “end of globalisation”, or at least the decline of its hyperphase (Patel, Sandefur, and Subramanian 2024). They argue that “globalisation occurs when international flows of goods, services, capital, technology, and ideas increase rapidly”. Hyperglobalisation, they explain, is essentially globalisation on steroids. From the late 1980s, three key factors drove the exponential rise in these flows: a sharp decline in the cost of transporting goods and communicating across borders, political leaders’ adoption of globalisation-friendly policies, and, perhaps most fundamentally, the end of the Cold War (Patel, Sandefur, and Subramanian 2024). What complicates things right now is the crisis or neglect of factors two and three. Namely, regarding “globalisation-friendly policies”, the international economic context is much more protectionist and regional than global, especially in the United States.

Geoffrey Gertz (2024), former Director for International Economics at the National Security Council under the Biden administration, believes we are witnessing the end of the administration’s “small yard with a high fence” policy. According to that policy, “sensitive technologies should be kept within a yard, protected by a high fence of trade and investment controls. But the yard should be small, limited to a narrow set of advanced technologies with military applications, while broader commercial trade and investment with China would continue” (Gertz 2024). Under this approach, competition and cooperation coexisted. However, this middle-ground strategy is now reaching its end because Trump 2.0 will probably renew trade wars not just against China but against some allied countries as well. Furthermore, the third factor—the end of the Cold War—has given way to more “hot wars”. The number of such conflicts is increasing daily. According to the NGO Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED), “Political violence increased by 25% globally in 2024 compared to

2023, with one in eight people exposed to conflict and 223,000 people killed” (Euronews 2025).

That brings us to the third key characteristic of the current international context: the question of **war**. Donald Trump’s first presidency was marked by his “No new wars” approach, a policy in which he took great pride. However, in the second term, he will face the challenge of managing two major ongoing conflicts—one in Ukraine and another in the Middle East—while the crisis over Taiwan in East Asia looms large. Historian Niall Ferguson warns that “the rhetoric of populism and nationalism has a historical tendency to spill over into violence—not just riots, but sometimes civil war and even full-blown war between states” (Ferguson 2025). What makes this particularly dangerous is the fact that “violence is most likely to occur when economic volatility strikes and where empires are in decline, leaving multi-ethnic societies without robust political institutions” (Ferguson 2025). Adding to this volatile mix are “three epochal challenges right now: runaway artificial intelligence, climate change, and spreading disorder from collapsing states” (Friedman 2024). Given these factors, the possibility of global conflict is higher than at any point since the fall of the Berlin Wall more than 35 years ago.

### **Different Meanings of the Term Grand Strategy in International Relations**

“Grand strategy” is a widely used term in international relations, yet it often lacks precision. Lawrence Freedman, the “patriarch” of Strategic Studies, is entirely correct when he notes that “the literature on grand strategy is now vast, and new contributions come rapidly, often in the form of proposals for the sort of grand strategy a country—usually the United States—should adopt. At the same time, the concept appears to lack firm theoretical foundations” (Freedman 2021, 25) and, in some respects, is losing its focus (Freedman 2021, 26). Similarly, Thierry Balzacq and Ronald R. Krebs, the editors of the Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy, begin their book by stating that “grand strategy is arguably the highest form of statecraft” (Balzacq and Krebs 2021, 1). Yet, they conclude by acknowledging that in “a fractured world—where structures of authority have broken down, politics has become polarised and tribal, and populist authoritarians find fertile ground—the end of the obsession with grand strategy could be its silver lining” (Krebs 2021, 685-686).

Some even argue that we are witnessing “the end of Grand strategy” (Drezner, Krebs, and Schweller 2020). According to them, since we live in an uncertain and ever-changing environment, “Grand strategy is not well suited to an entropic world. Grand strategic thinking is linear. The most direct path between two points is not a straight line in today’s world of interaction and



complexity. A disordered, cluttered, and fluid realm is precisely one that does not recognise grand strategy's supposed virtue: a practical, durable, and consistent plan for the long term. To operate successfully in such an environment, actors must constantly change their strategies" (Drezner, Krebs, and Schweller 2020, 112).

What is certain is that the term "grand strategy" entered the field of Strategic Studies in the early 20th century. Precisely, between 1906, when British strategist Julian Corbett used the term "major" or "grand" oppositely to the term "minor", and the First World War, which was a "game changer" and real watershed in the field of Strategic Studies and international relations in general. (Freedman 2021, 25-26). In their writings, J.F.C. Fuller and Basil Liddell Hart expanded the concept of strategy beyond military tools to consider what was necessary for a nation to succeed in modern warfare (Freedman 2021, 30-31). After flourishing during the Cold War as a key concept in strategic studies, the term "grand strategy" became a real "buzzword" after the end of the Cold War. According to Freedman, this shift occurred because "just as the post-First World War embrace of grand strategy reflected dissatisfaction with an overly narrow view of what strategy entailed, the post-Cold War embrace reflected a more ambitious agenda for international security. This agenda required addressing a broader range of nonmilitary factors in order to marginalise war as an instrument of statecraft" (Freedman 2021, 34).

For the purposes of this article, it is important to establish an operational definition of grand strategy. In 1991, Yale historian Paul Kennedy offered what is likely the most comprehensive definition of grand strategy up to that point. In a book that he edited, Kennedy stated, "The crux of the grand strategy lies therefore in *policy*, that is, in the capacity of the nation's leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and nonmilitary, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation's long-term (wartime *and* peacetime) best interests" (Kennedy 1991, 5). Since the real world is full of "frictions", in a Clausewitzian sense of the word, every strategy has its limits. It is more art than, as he said, "mathematical science" (Kennedy 1991, 5). Another prominent understanding of grand strategy, particularly after the Cold War, comes from John Lewis Gaddis. In numerous lectures, articles, and books, Gaddis has argued that strategy—and grand strategy, in particular—is always about the relationship between ends and means. Specifically, in his lecture from 2009 he said, "Grand strategy is the calculated relationship of means to large ends. It is about how one uses whatever one has to get to wherever it is one wants to go" (cited in Friedman Lissner 2018, 62).

Despite these contributions, there is considerable methodological, ontological, and epistemological confusion regarding the term "grand strategy". Two essential articles, one by Nina Silove (2018) and the other by Rebecca

Friedman Lissner (2018), provide an excellent review of the ongoing debates and challenges within the field of grand strategy.

Silove recognises that “the problem with the concept of grand strategy is that it has evolved to have three distinct meanings. First, scholars use grand strategy to refer to a deliberate, detailed plan devised by individuals. Second, they employ it to refer to an organising principle that individuals consciously hold and use to guide their decisions. Third, scholars use the term to refer to a pattern in state behaviour. As shorthands, the three uses may be thought of, respectively, as “grand plans”, “grand principles”, and “grand behaviour” (Silove 2018, 29). In the context of the United States, grand strategy as “grand plans” can be seen in documents like “the Harry Truman administration’s NSC-68 document” (Silove 2018, 37). Grand strategy as “grand principles” is exemplified by the strategy of containment employed by the US against the Soviet Union during the Cold War (Silove 2018, 40). Lastly, grand strategy as “grand behaviour” could refer to the strategy of “global hegemony”, often associated with what is commonly termed “liberal hegemony”, a strategy the United States pursued after the Cold War (Mearsheimer 2018, 1-12; Mearsheimer 2019, 26).

For the purposes of our article and research question, we are more inclined to adopt the model proposed by Rebecca Friedman Lissner (2018, 50). She distinguishes “between three component research agendas within the grand strategy literature: those that treat grand strategy as a variable, process, and blueprint”. The “grand strategy as variable” agenda provides a prism through which academics may study the origins of state behaviour, with particular attention to the perennial question of how agency and structure interact to produce grand strategic outcomes. The “grand strategy as process” agenda foregrounds the importance of grand strategising, whether as a governmental strategic planning process or a more generic mode of decision-making. Finally, the “grand strategy as blueprint” agenda proffers broad visions in hopes of influencing future governmental behaviour (Friedman Lissner 2018, 53). In practical terms, this means that “grand strategy as a variable” primarily describes state behaviour, while “grand strategy as a process” is both descriptive and prescriptive. On the other hand, “grand strategy as blueprint...outlines prescriptive broad visions for grand strategy, particularly in the United States” (Friedman Lissner 2018, 57).

Given the ongoing debate in the United States after the end of the Cold War about how to manage American power, an issue that began with the famous “Defence Planning Guidance” of the George H.W. Bush administration in the winter of 1992 (Brands 2018a), it is crucial to understand how the Trump administration will approach this issue.



## **The Grand Strategy of the 47th US President: What Are the Strategic Options?**

Like previous US presidents from Harry Truman to Joseph Biden, Trump faces several global strategic options, each slightly or fundamentally different, offering a distinct vision for America's role in global affairs. The list of potential US grand strategies is vast and includes isolationism (see, e.g., Kirkpatrick 1990; Bremmer 2015), offshore balancing (see, e.g., Layne 1997; 2002; 2006; 2009; Mearsheimer and Walt 2016), restraint (Posen 2014; Priebe et al. 2024), retrenchment (see, e.g., Popescu 2014; Dueck 2015), selective engagement (Art 2004), cooperative security (see, e.g., Art 2004; Payne 2012), deep engagement (see, e.g., Brooks, Ikenberry, and Wohlforth 2013), primacy (see, e.g., Monten 2007; Wertheim 2020), and dominion (Art 2004).

The strategies mentioned above are not entirely mutually exclusive and share many points of overlap. This has led Priebe et al. (2024, 137) to categorise all possible strategies after the Iraq War (2003) into two broad camps: restraint and deep engagement. However, this article will analyse four potential US grand strategies: modern isolationism or neo-isolationism, offshore balancing, selective engagement, and deep engagement. These strategies represent the most sharply defined proposals for US grand strategy and have strong historical roots in American foreign policy. For this reason, we believe that focusing on these four strategies is justified.

### ***Modern Isolationism as a US Grand Strategy***

The isolationist impulse has always been present in American society. Before World War I, whether the United States should engage more significantly in global affairs was not even up for debate. The US followed the wishes of its Founding Fathers, best encapsulated by the 6th president, John Quincy Adams, who expressed that America should not "stand under other flags" and should not go abroad "in search of monsters to destroy" (UVA Miller Center n.d.). Of course, alongside its historical legacy, the lack of power motivated the United States to pursue a cautious foreign policy, often labelled as isolationism.

During the Great War, President Woodrow Wilson faced the challenge of sending the US Army across the ocean, preventing German dominance in Europe, and creating a world safe for democracy. After Europe's freedom was defended, contrary to Wilson's wishes, isolationist sentiments in Congress prevailed, and the US once again withdrew from global politics. However, even then, isolationism did not mean a complete retreat into a "Fortress America". American exports doubled during World War I and continued to grow in the post-war years. The US organised the Washington Naval Conference (1921-

1922) and participated in the London Naval Conference (1930). It co-sponsored the Kellogg-Briand Pact, which renounced war as a political tool. Additionally, a contingent of 1,000 American soldiers was stationed in the Chinese city of Tianjin from 1912 to 1938. The US was directly involved in the Russian Civil War (1917-1923), and Washington controlled a significant number of territories outside the Western Hemisphere.

Opposition to US global engagement did not disappear before and even during World War II. In September 1940, a broad coalition of Democrats and Republicans, communists and anti-communists, retirees and students, and industrialists and farmers formed the America First Committee. The primary goal of this group was to prevent Washington from entering World War II. The committee believed that the US was blessed by its geography and that the Monroe Doctrine defined the limits of necessary engagement. One of the committee's most influential members, Charles Lindbergh, articulated two dimensions of the isolationist strategy: "An independent American destiny means, on the one hand, that our soldiers will not have to fight everybody in the world who prefers some other system of life to ours. On the other hand, it means that we will fight anybody and everybody who attempts to interfere with our hemisphere" (Longley 2022). However, after the attack on Pearl Harbour, President Franklin D. Roosevelt convinced the American public and political decision-makers that leaving isolation was both a realistic and justifiable course of action.

During World War II, the United States ventured across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, and there was no turning back. The prophetic words of the renowned strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan (1890) came true: "When the opportunities for gain abroad are understood, the course of American enterprise will cleave a channel by which to reach them". The US abandoned isolationism in style, leveraging both hard and soft power to shape international institutions and the global order to its advantage. However, even though isolationist sentiment was largely overshadowed by the Soviet threat after World War II, it never entirely disappeared. In fact, in 1972, George McGovern secured the Democratic Party's presidential nomination with the slogan *Come home, America!* This message not only addressed domestic issues such as racism and economic hardship but also called for an urgent withdrawal from Indochina and a reduction in military spending.

The Cold War ended, and with the dissolution of the Soviet threat, the isolationist impulse in the United States resurfaced. The argument made by Jeane J. Kirkpatrick (1990, 40) was that America should return to being a "normal country in a normal time". She argued it was time to "give up the dubious benefits of superpower status and become again an unusually successful, open American republic" (Kirkpatrick 1990, 44). In other words, the US should relieve itself of the burdens of global leadership and focus on

addressing its domestic challenges. Isolationism as a potential grand strategy for the US is not without logic or support, even if presented in a more modern form. Even critics of isolationism have acknowledged its appeal. For example, Krauthammer (1990, 27-28) considers it a popular and natural call, noting that such a conclusion is not only based on geography but also on history: “America was founded on the idea of cleansing itself of the intrigues and irrationalities, the dynastic squabbles and religious wars, of the Old World”.

Although isolationism, or modern isolationism as a grand strategy, does not have significant support among decision-makers, its role in the debate over potential US strategies has not disappeared. In fact, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the renowned magazine *Foreign Affairs* published its March-April 2020 issue with the headline “Come Home, America?” The message was the same as that of McGovern almost half a century earlier, with the only difference being, though not insignificant, the question mark at the end. Contemporary isolationism is significantly different from the 18th-century version, and today’s arguments for isolationism as a US grand strategy would likely sound blasphemous to the Founding Fathers. One of the key proponents of modern isolationism is Ian Bremmer, president of a firm that advises global leaders and companies. In his book, Bremmer (2015) outlines three strategic options available to Washington: Indispensable, Money-ball, and Independent America.

Among the three options, Bremmer (2015) chooses “Independent America”, which represents a modern isolationist approach. He summarises his arguments as follows: not all global problems are America’s problems, and the US cannot be the world’s policeman; America’s appetite for conflict has only grown since the Cold War, while faith in the US Constitution and its founding principles has declined; superhero-style foreign policy poisons American democracy; unfavourable trade agreements, such as NAFTA, have negatively impacted the US economy; it was not power that made America exceptional, but freedom; and military spending has become overly burdensome, among other points.

In short, modern isolationism does not mean complete disengagement from all affairs across the Atlantic and Pacific. Still, it calls for a drastic reduction in America’s global footprint and a refocusing on domestic issues. Modern or neo-isolationism would answer the question “Come home, America?” affirmatively, but it would not foresee a complete and quick withdrawal, as such a move is unrealistic. The world today is very different from the 19th century, and technology and the current level of interdependence make disengagement from world affairs almost impossible.

A grand strategy of isolationism would have several key characteristics: unilateralism, specifically the application of a non-interventionist doctrine and unilateral distancing from issues beyond the Western Hemisphere; a focus on

domestic challenges such as the economy, education, infrastructure, healthcare, immigration, and so on; a reduction in military spending and the withdrawal of US forces from bases around the world; and the retention of complete freedom of action, without the constraints of alliances like NATO or international institutions such as the United Nations. However, it is essential to note that isolationism is a strategy whose swift implementation would not be feasible. Given Washington's existing security, economic, and political networks, transitioning to isolationism would take years, if not decades.

### ***Offshore Balancing as a US Grand Strategy***

Immediately after the end of the Cold War, a dilemma arose regarding the new grand strategy for the United States, the world's sole superpower. Proposed strategies ranged from a return to neo-isolationism to global dominance or primacy (see, e.g., Posen and Ross 1996). Often oblivious to these differences, many failed to recognise that various viable options existed between these two extremes. One option frequently misunderstood as neo-isolationism is "offshore balancing". This concept was introduced by Christopher Layne (1997), although scholars such as John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt (2016) argue that it was, in fact, a strategy the US had practiced throughout much of the 20th century, even if the term itself emerged only in 1997. In essence, the core principles of offshore balancing align closely with US foreign policy throughout much of the past century, where Washington engaged in global affairs only as much as necessary to eliminate the most significant threats to American security while maintaining its primacy.

The modern understanding of the offshore balancing strategy primarily stems from the writings of neorealists. Layne (1997; 2002; 2006; 2009), Mearsheimer and Walt (2016) conceptualised the strategy based on the historical experience of the United States and, as they argue, the disastrous outcomes of Washington's strategy of liberal hegemony or deep engagement after the Cold War. Neorealists do not share identical views on the origins of the need for this strategy or how it should be implemented. Still, their positions are similar enough to suggest a core framework for a grand strategy. When analysing the works of key authors (Layne 1997; 2002; 2006; 2009; Walt 2005; 2006; 2018; Mearsheimer 2014a; Mearsheimer and Walt 2016), one arrives at the common denominator in answering the question of why offshore balancing is the most suitable strategy for the United States: "1) Unipolarity is unstable; 2) Countries like the US or the UK are blessed by geography; 3) If you don't know what's good, go back to the realist core; 4) Balance of power > hegemony; 5) Deep engagement reduces, not increases, security; 6) Ideological crusades are not in the US national interest; 7) The rise of the rest (Zakaria 2008b); 8)

Washington should not *a priori* renounce unilateralism; 9) Offshore balancing is not isolationism; 10) Power is inexhaustible; 11) US hegemony is a double-edged sword (Layne 2002, 233); 12) Not all world regions are equally important; and 13) America first!" (Nedeljković 2024).

The last two postulates form the foundation of the goal that the grand strategy of offshore balancing aims to achieve. The primary US strategic imperative is "to keep the United States as powerful as possible, ideally, the dominant state on the planet" (Mearsheimer and Walt 2016, 72), i.e., to "concentrate on what really matters: preserving US dominance in the Western Hemisphere and countering potential hegemonies in Europe, Northeast Asia, and the Persian Gulf" (Mearsheimer and Walt 2016, p. 71).

According to the advice of proponents of offshore balancing, the United States could achieve this through the following measures: first, by drastically reducing its presence in Europe and the Persian Gulf, while maintaining a military presence in East Asia due to the Chinese threat; second, by maintaining a favourable balance of power and preventing the emergence of a new hegemon in key regions; third, by relying on allies in crucial regions and intervening only when there is a threat to the existing balance of power; fourth, by continuing to strengthen and develop military capabilities to maintain the ability to project power, with the backbone being "robust nuclear deterrence, air power, and—most importantly—overwhelming naval power" (Layne 1997, 113); fifth, the spread of democracy, the promotion of open markets, and the protection of human rights worldwide would no longer be part of US foreign policy priorities (Nedeljković 2024); and sixth, the United States should remain a member and leader of post-WWII initiatives it created, such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation, and the International Monetary Fund.

It should be noted that the proposed strategy is not isolationist, as it advocates for continued US involvement in multilateral organisations and initiatives, as well as a military presence in specific regions and unilateral action when it serves US national interests. On the other hand, it calls for a reduction in American military presence and the US role in making "the world safe for democracy" (Ikenberry 2020). Like selective engagement, offshore balancing fills the space between the extremes of isolationism and deep engagement. The only significant difference from selective engagement is the perception of necessary security commitment.

### ***Selective Engagement as a US Grand Strategy***

Selective engagement stands halfway between isolationism and deep engagement or domination, specifically "between an overly restrictive and an

overly expansive definition of America's interests" (Art 2004, 121). What distinguishes it from isolationism is that it involves defending national interests abroad, while from deep engagement, it recognises that not all important interests can be fully realised. In contrast to offshore balancing, proponents of selective engagement argue that US interests in key global regions are not solely about preventing the emergence of a new hegemon but also about maintaining peace. Robert J. Art (2004, 121), one of the strongest advocates of selective engagement, believes that America should draw on lessons from isolationism and the Cold War to adopt a balanced strategy that lies between the two problematic solutions of isolationism and deep engagement.

Art (2004, 122) outlines six defining characteristics of the grand strategy of selective engagement. First, it is a hybrid strategy that "borrows the good features from its competitors and seeks to avoid their pitfalls and excesses". For instance, it adopts isolationism's reluctance towards war. On the other hand, like deep engagement, it leverages the benefits of military power but without imposing its will on others. Its greatest strength lies in its diversification, which makes it "more resilient, more adaptable, and more effective than the alternatives" (Art 2004, 122). Second, it identifies fundamental goals that best serve the United States in the current era (Art 2004, 121). In other words, it blends core realist objectives, such as security, with liberal values, such as human rights and free trade. Third, it directs US attention to key regions. Like offshore balancing, selective engagement prioritises Europe, the Persian Gulf, and East Asia. These regions are vital for economic reasons, for US security commitments through NATO and other partnerships, and because they harbour the potential for the rise of a new hegemon.

Fourth, Art (2004, 136) argues that selective engagement is a forward defence strategy. Specifically, this strategy encourages the US to maintain its commitments within organisations such as the Organisation of American States and NATO and through bilateral arrangements with countries like Japan, South Korea, and other essential states. The advantage of this approach lies in several key points: "It deters adverse military actions; it reassures key regional actors and thereby buffers regions from destabilising influences; it enhances regional security cooperation and management; and it facilitates waging war should that become necessary" (Art 2004, 139). Fifth, this strategy includes a set of reasonable rules for using force, such as the principle that war should only be waged for vital interests rather than for every significant issue. It also sets criteria for possible exceptions (Art 2004, 146). Finally, proponents of selective engagement argue that American leadership is essential. They claim that US leadership is the key to preserving primacy while defending vital national interests.



### ***Deep Engagement as a US Grand Strategy***

The grand strategy advocated by proponents of unipolar stability theory, who are closer to realism, such as Stephen G. Brooks and William Wohlforth, as well as by liberals like John Ikenberry, is deep engagement. This strategy is similar to selective engagement, but unlike the latter, it aims to reshape the world in America's image. Brooks, Ikenberry, and Wohlforth (2013) argue that all US administrations since World War II have pursued this strategy to maintain security and prosperity. Key strategic instruments included expanding the liberal economic order and fostering allied relationships with key states in Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia. A good illustration of this strategy is a statement made by US Ambassador to the UN, Madeleine Albright, during the debate on intervention in Bosnia, when she told Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, "What's the point of having this superb military that you're always talking about if we can't use it?" (Brooks, Ikenberry, and Wohlforth 2013, 137).

Deep engagement requires both leadership and the global footprint of the United States, as well as involvement, even when Washington's direct interests are not at risk. This strategy often conveys, sometimes implicitly and at other times explicitly, the idea that the United States should aim to transform the world. Washington should inspire the world to pursue the preservation of peace, democracy, and open markets. In the vision of deep engagement, America is not only exceptional but also an irreplaceable force whose involvement is essential to making the world less threatening to the United States. In fact, this represents a grand strategy that proponents argue America has followed since 1945, when the Cold War ended. Scholars like Joseph S. Nye (1995) believed that America must remain deeply engaged in global affairs. The core idea behind forward presence worldwide is to ensure stability, reduce the need for excessive armament, and deter the rise of a new hegemon (Nye 1995, 91).

Since deep engagement has undoubtedly been the most prominent strategy in US foreign policy since World War II, it has also been the subject of the most criticism. It is often referred to as *global domination* (Mearsheimer 2014b), *primacy* (Mandelbaum 2005), *liberal hegemony* (Mearsheimer and Walt 2016), or *preponderance* (Layne 1997). Although there are specific differences between the above concepts, they also share enough similarities. One of these is that the United States must confront and respond to any threat as soon as it arises. Critics primarily argue that it is too costly and risky, prompts balancing coalitions, and ultimately leads to the erosion of the United States' status as the most powerful global force. For example, Mearsheimer (2014b, 9) somewhat mockingly concludes that the American political elite operates on "the assumption that every nook and cranny of the globe is of great strategic significance and that there are threats to US interests everywhere". On the other

hand, proponents of deep engagement (Brooks, Ikenberry, Wohlforth 2013) respond by arguing that the costs of the US strategy outweigh the benefits, that military dominance fosters economic supremacy, that there are no balancing coalitions on the horizon, and, ultimately, that deep engagement is the “devil we know”, while all alternative strategies are risky ventures.

Every strategy, including grand strategies, must follow the famous formula: *Ends–Ways–Means + Context*. While the grand strategies we have analysed differ in terms of the resources the United States possesses, the ways and the instruments used to achieve their objectives, and even in their analysis of the current strategic context, the goal is the same across all of them: to maintain the US in its current position within the global order. In other words, to remain the only superpower in the international order and the sole regional hegemon.

### **Trump’s “New” Grand Strategy**

When Donald Trump “takes the keys” to the White House on January 20, 2025, the eyes of the entire world will be focused on Washington. Several reasons point to this conclusion. First, the United States remains the world’s only superpower and the most influential country in the international order. Second, fires are raging around the globe, from Ukraine to Gaza, and putting them out will be impossible without Washington’s involvement. Finally, while some world leaders celebrated Trump’s victory, others expressed anxiety and uncertainty after the results were announced. Yet, everyone is still asking whether he will fulfil his campaign promises and what his foreign policy will look like in a second administration. Will he follow the “Project 2025” guidelines from the influential conservative think tank Heritage (Dombrowski 2024)?

Predicting the secrets of the future is one of the most challenging tasks in international relations. The “flocks of black swans” (Taleb 2010) that the world has faced in recent years confirm that it is nearly impossible to predict all the events and changes in the international order. Nevertheless, the absence of reliable forecasting raises questions about the purpose of science itself. Therefore, in this paper, we will dare to attempt to forecast Donald Trump’s grand strategy. We start with the premise that “forecasting is a problem of reasoning, of reducing uncertainty, and of bounded and disciplined speculation” (Choucri 1974, 63), and we will try to position our argument concerning existing alternatives.

We argue that during his second term, Donald Trump will rely on a grand strategy of selective engagement rather than neo-isolationism, offshore balancing, or deep engagement. Of course, this assumes no global chaos would threaten the survival of the United States or the international order itself. In conditions of standard and expected turbulence, we contend that Trump will



choose selective engagement for three reasons: first, based on the approach he took during his first term; second, in light of the positions he has expressed during his 2024 presidential campaign; and third, through a cost-benefit analysis.

### ***Donald Trump 2.0: 45 = 47?***

Since entering the race for the Republican nomination in 2015, Donald Trump has been labelled as unpredictable (see, e.g., Bentley and Lerner 2023; Fuchs 2017). While it is undeniable that his behaviour has often been “erratic, combative, self-indulgent, and decidedly unpresidential” (Walt 2018, 132), Trump is not as unpredictable as he is frequently portrayed. Many of his ideas may be outside the traditional political mainstream and unfamiliar in the context of the modern US presidency, but the 45th US president has consistently adhered to them. As Elizabeth N. Saunders (2024) points out, “Trump’s core beliefs have been remarkably consistent”. For example, since the 1980s, he has advocated for a tougher stance towards allies, a smaller government, stronger borders, and a robust military. From 2017 to 2021, he persistently prioritised bilateralism over multilateralism and personal relationships with leaders instead of institutional approaches.

Additionally, the US’s vital national interests have not changed compared to those of the Obama administration. Trump believed that maintaining US primacy in global affairs was essential to sustain a favourable balance of power in key regions and counterbalance potential competitors. As Stephen Wertheim (2020, 20) argues, “US President Donald Trump often portrays himself as breaking with the basic pattern of recent American foreign policy. Many of his detractors also see him that way. In truth, Trump has carried forward and even intensified the post-Cold War agenda of his predecessors: spare no expense for military hegemony, and find little to spare for the earth’s climate or the well-being of anyone who is not wealthy”.

During Trump’s first term, the institutions of the liberal international order did not collapse. NATO expanded to include two Western Balkan countries, and all US Cold War or post-Cold War alliances endured. Like Obama, he prioritised peace, rejected US interventionism, and adopted a more “Pacific” than “Atlantic” approach to foreign policy. Additionally, authors like Richard Fontaine (2025) argue that there is a striking similarity between Donald Trump’s first term and Joe Biden’s term. On the other hand, multilateral institutions, the spread of democracy, and free markets were not high on Trump’s agenda. Additionally, Trump’s diplomatic style as the 45th president was unconventional. For instance, negotiations with authoritarian regimes like Kim Jong Un’s in North Korea or announcing foreign policy moves via Twitter were unimaginable before January 20, 2017.

Nevertheless, key strategic priorities from 2017 to 2021 remained unchanged compared to the Obama administration. Viewed through the lens of strategic formulation, the ends and means largely remained intact, with the most significant changes occurring in the ways—that is, the methods used to achieve these goals. Additionally, Trump is not someone who pays much attention to the strategic environment. If that were the case, he would not be taking threatening actions against allies in key regions during a time of renewed great power competition. Instead, he would be doing everything possible to contain those threats. All of this suggests that, during his first term, Trump employed a grand strategy of selective engagement.

### ***Trump: Political Campaign = Political Reality?***

It is common for politicians to make significant deviations from the promises they make during their campaigns. However, we argue that this was not the case with Donald Trump. First, during his first term, he fulfilled or made significant efforts to fulfil his key foreign policy promises. He withdrew the United States from the Paris Climate Agreement and the Iran Nuclear Deal, pursued a maximum pressure policy on Iran, insisted that NATO members increase their defence spending, negotiated a new free trade agreement with Canada and Mexico (USMCA), criticised China for “economic aggression” and unfair trade practices, and worked on strengthening the military, among other actions. In other words, he tried to apply a transactional, business-like approach to global politics, cornering main competitors and pressuring allies “to shoulder a fair share of the burden of responsibility to protect against common threats” (NSS 2017).

Second, although Trump has been active in politics since 2015, he remains an unorthodox politician and an authentic person. His impulsive and sometimes childish nature prevented him from making decisions based solely on political calculation or public opinion. In fact, he often caused headaches for Republicans with his statements or politically damaging choices. This trait will likely become even more pronounced during his new term, as, according to the 22nd Amendment to the US Constitution, his second presidency will be his last. Although he has never been overly concerned with reelection, from 2025 to 2029, we will see every aspect of Trump’s character. In other words, in his second term, “he will be his uninhibited self, free to pursue policies he has always favoured” (Saunders 2024). Therefore, all of his campaign statements about tariffs, trade wars, Israel, China, international agreements, and institutions should be taken with complete seriousness.

Finally, according to research by Elizabeth N. Saunders (2017; 2024), “the beliefs that presidents hold when they arrive in office are ‘sticky’—in other

words, presidents don't change their core views much over time". Although the findings of this research may not be universally applicable, they certainly hold for Donald Trump. His policies during his first term were not only consistent with the views he expressed during the 2015-2016 campaign but also with the political beliefs he voiced back in the 1980s. Even then, Trump argued that allies were "taking advantage" of the United States, that many countries engaged in unfair trade practices, and that he would always impose tariffs on every Mercedes and every Japanese product entering the US market (Playboy Interview 1990). Given that he applied these longstanding beliefs in the presidential office from 2017 to 2021, we see no compelling reason why he would not continue to do so from January 20, 2025, onwards.

### ***Trump = Cost-benefit Analysis?***

Among scholars and political analysts, it is widely believed that Trump seeks to apply business logic to foreign policy. The core principle of his approach to other countries is calculated *zero-sum* transactionalism, which reduces the importance of ideological or value-based alignment in international relations. In other words, if the US is giving more than it is receiving in its relationship with a particular country, or if Trump perceives this to be the case, there is no doubt that the new US president will seek to redefine the bilateral relationship in order to balance the cost-benefit analysis. The same applies to grand strategy. During his first term, whether consciously or not, Trump chose selective engagement as his grand strategy. Although he sought to distance himself from previous administrations, especially Obama's, he did not succeed in doing so because selective engagement remains, at this point, the best option in a cost-benefit analysis.

Proponents of grand strategies focused on retrenchment or restraint, such as neo-isolationism and offshore balancing, argue that these strategies offer the greatest benefits at the lowest cost (see, e.g., Bremmer 2015; Layne 1997; 2002; 2006; 2009; Walt 2006; Mearsheimer and Walt 2016). However, it seems that the cost of these strategies in the current strategic context is too high. A US withdrawal from key regions would alarm allies, who would inevitably seek alternatives, ranging from building independent strategies to aligning with US competitors like China, Russia, and Iran. Moreover, there is little doubt that competitors would exploit Washington's retreat to fill the vacuum. On the other hand, the United States already attempted to apply a deep engagement strategy during the 21st century, particularly under the George W. Bush administration, which viewed America as an irreplaceable force, where every global threat was seen as an essential threat to US security, and every US interest abroad was considered vital. Today, the strategic context for implementing such a strategy

is even less favourable than at the beginning of the century, and the costs of deep engagement would be almost incalculable.

We believe selective engagement will remain the United States' grand strategy from 2025 to 2029, among other reasons, because it offers the best cost-benefit results. By adopting this strategy, the US would remain the world's most powerful country and a regional hegemon. It would maintain a favourable balance of power in key regions—the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and the Persian Gulf. At the same time, interventionism would be limited to cases where vital US interests or principles are threatened, as was the case during Trump's first term with ISIS and the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria. Selective engagement, which includes the principle of forward posture (Art 2004), would allow Trump to respond when necessary to protect American assets or allies in key regions. In other words, it would combine the principles of transactionalism and non-interventionism with a focus on US security.

## Conclusion

The world that will greet Donald Trump is somewhat similar to the one that Joe Biden inherited on January 20, 2021. At that time, the United States had already entered an era of geopolitical competition with key challengers, China and Russia, and both administrations have sought to sharpen the US "competitive edge for the future" (see, e.g., NSS 2017; NSS 2022). The unipolar world and the liberal international order were called into question in 2017 and 2021. Although Trump's sharp rhetoric undermined the confidence of allies in the US, all bilateral and multilateral security arrangements persisted and continue to exist today. Additionally, domestic divisions did not disappear during the Biden administration, and the term "Divided States of America" remains relevant—perhaps even more so today than four or eight years ago.

On the other hand, today's world is somewhat different from what it was four years ago. Wars not seen in a long time are now raging in Ukraine and the Middle East. No matter how much Biden wishes to distance himself from the era of "endless wars" during George W. Bush's presidency, the US's indirect involvement in current conflicts is significant. Furthermore, the security threats the United States faces have increased substantially, including the risk of nuclear conflict. The Commission on the National Defence Strategy (Harman et al. 2024, v) concluded, "The threats the United States faces are the most serious and challenging the nation has encountered since 1945". Additionally, the Commission found that "in many ways, China is outpacing the United States and has largely negated the US military advantage in the Western Pacific through two decades of focused military investment" (Harman et al. 2024, v).

In other words, the rise of other powers and the post-American world that Zakaria (2008) wrote about nearly 17 years ago is now fully visible.

This paper's final lines are written in early January 2025, while Trump is still the president-elect and has not yet taken the helm of the USS America. However, signs of his future policies are already beginning to emerge. If our predictions prove accurate and Trump chooses a grand strategy of selective engagement again, China will be at the centre of Washington's focus. In the current global context, only Beijing can be a genuine challenger to the US, threatening its global primacy and disrupting the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. In other words, China can potentially negatively impact key elements of the US grand strategy. Other actors either lack the desire—like European allies—or the capability—like Russia and Iran—to effectively oppose Washington globally.

If Trump firmly adheres to the priorities of selective engagement, the next four years will see intense economic, military, diplomatic, technological, and institutional competition between Washington and Beijing. Although China was already a focus for Trump from 2017 to 2021, his attention will now be even more pronounced. The appointments of figures like Marco Rubio, Pete Hegseth, John Ratcliffe, Michael Waltz, and others (except for Waltz, all are awaiting Senate confirmation) send a clear message that the Trump administration will adopt a hawkish stance towards China. In the evolving asymmetrical multipolarity, or bi-multipolarity, where the United States and China emerge as the two dominant poles, it is evident that any instability between them will have ripple effects on the rest of the world.

Trump's second term will serve as a kind of laboratory for testing theories of international relations. The structure of the international system suggests that the world in the near future is unlikely to become a better place, and Trump's character leaves little room for optimism. From a liberal perspective, never before have two dominant centres of power been as interdependent as the United States and China are today, which might reduce the likelihood of conflict. Some constructivists argue that "a hybrid grand strategy of cooperative security and selective engagement presents a path for a peaceful rise of China without compromising America's core interests in Asia, US regional hegemony, or the United States' status as a superpower" (Jamison 2021). Regardless, it is unlikely that Trump's term will provide a final answer on the nature of Sino-American relations, but it will certainly help set the course.

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#### **DONALD TRAMP 2.0: KLJUČNI IZAZOVI, STRATEŠKE OPCIJE I „NOVA“ VELIKA STRATEGIJA SJEDINJENIH AMERIČKIH DRŽAVA**

*Apstrakt:* Pobjeda Donalda Trampa na predsjedničkim izborima u SAD 5. novembra 2024. godine, rasplamsala je akademsku debatu o budućoj Velikoj strategiji Sjedinjenih Američkih Država. Cilj ovog rada je da doprinese debati kroz analizu trenutnog globalnog konteksta i strateških opcija Vašingtona. Nastojećemo da odgovorimo na dva istraživačka pitanja: prvo, koje su strateške opcije na raspolaganju Donaldu Trampu i drugo, koju će Veliku strategiju odabrati 47. američki predsjednik. U radu tvrdimo da su, uprkos tome što je Trampov prvi mandat bio obeležen neuobičajenim pristupom, njegovi strateški prioriteti ostali prilično konzistentni prioritetima prethodnih administracija, posebno u pogledu očuvanja primata SAD i održavanja povoljne ravnoteže snaga u ključnim regionima – Indo-Pacifiku, Evropi i Persijskom zalivu. Dalje istražujemo dominantne strateške opcije koje su na raspolaganju Donaldu Trampu, a pre svega izolacionizam, uravnotežavanje s obale, selektivno angažovanje i duboko angažovanje, i iznosimo predviđanje da Tramp neće menjati veliku strategiju iz prvog mandata – selektivno angažovanje. U radu koristimo metod analize sadržaja, uporedni metod i geneološku analizu kako bismo adresirali Trampove strateške opcije u živopisnom globalnom kontekstu.

*Ključne reči:* Donald Tramp; Sjedinjene Američke Države; velika strategija, selektivno angažovanje; izolacionizam; uravnotežavanje s obale; duboko angažovanje.



## THE US POWER PROJECTION IN THE POST-SOVIET SPACE: POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Alexey A. DAVYDOV<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The article analyses the US policies in the post-Soviet space as an example of how a great power can stimulate specific political order in a region. The author states that the US strategic framework in this space does not contradict the deterrence imperatives towards the USSR. Depending on its short-term goals in relations with Russia, US foreign policy follows a seven- or eight-year cycle of stimulation of the decentralisation processes in the region. After the dissolution of the USSR, the first clear manifestation of differences between Moscow and Washington, which occurred in 1999, was followed by three waves of tensions in 2007, 2014, and 2022. In all four cases, the US raised its strategic attention towards other former Soviet republics. In each sub-region of this space, the US applies different sets of practices that would be most efficient and suitable for each country in fulfilling current American political imperatives. Throughout the last three decades, the United States demonstrated an effective usage of different sets of “carrot and stick” political approaches, mostly carried out via ideological, economic, military, diplomatic, and multilateral foreign political means, both towards these post-Soviet states and Russia. In each state of the post-Soviet space, Washington applied a unique set of political practices and tactics, often following the same goal of undermining Moscow’s power and stimulating decentralisation processes among the former Soviet republics.

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## Introduction

The modern evolution of international relations, without exaggeration, presents an exclusive opportunity for any research fellow to study the unveiling trends of social development. On the one hand, recent decades of technological progress and globalisation created unprecedented economic and people-to-people interconnectivity and mutual impact of different cultures. At the same time, these revolutionary trends did not diminish the influence of fundamental factors that determine the nature of international relations. A visual example of that is the great power competition, which determines the logic of the behaviour of other international actors. Both major and smaller countries are trying to configure the surrounding system to satisfy the imperatives of their national development. Having such instinct in its strategical thinking, any state at a specific level of its national power starts to have hegemonic ambitions.

One relationship, systemically significant for the world's development, is that between Russia and the United States. Their internal bilateral logic is determined by their historical and structural complexity and has a significant constitutional effect on interstate relations in the European and Eurasian political spaces. For the last century, Moscow and Washington's strategists were the most influential architects of the modern forms of multilateral dialogue in European civilisation, which had, in some regard, an inclusive institutional framework but mostly an exclusive and competitive one.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union had a dramatic effect on the further evolution of this architecture. The 30-year period, which followed after left-wing political forces had lost their international positions, shifted this competition to the territory of what used to be the core of the so-called World Socialist System - the territory of the former Soviet republics. This three-decade-long history of the US-Russia rivalry over the structural foundations of this new political space presents a unique example of how specific foreign policy practices may determine the infrastructure of international hierarchy.

In this regard, a matter of particular interest is the related practices of the United States. As the only superpower after the Cold War competition, Washington has accumulated national might of such scale that it reached a system-forming effect on world affairs. Therefore, the analysis of the US's experience of projecting its dominance in the post-Soviet space may provide us with an insightful view of possible international trends that are yet to come, for example, regarding both the bilateral US-China rivalry and their international projects of world order platforms (the Western rules-based liberal order and the Chinese community of common destiny) or the US-Russia competition regarding the security architecture in Europe that would be formed after the Ukrainian conflict. The evolution of the US strategy has seen drastic changes in



the last decades. The triumphalism that captured the minds of Washington's political elites after the end of the Cold War led to dramatic outcomes for the whole world's development. What started 30 years ago as a global policy of engagement and involvement in multilateral economic and political cooperation, driven by the ideas of building a better future in a new liberal international world order and achieving a strong democratic peace among all nations and peoples, has now evolved into a great power competition driven mostly by self-interest.

The existing economic limits of resources for national development and the looming perspective of the relative decline of the US's role in economic and high-tech development in the world fuelled the antagonisation of relations between the US and Russia on the one side and China on the other. The fight for structuring the most beneficial economic, political, and security ties or undermining those of your competitor has become a universal feature of international relations in almost every region of the world. In this new harsh strategic philosophy, the US sees all post-Soviet states as a ground for great power competition, first with Russia and, on a smaller scale, indirectly with China. Common historical, economic, and political backgrounds and deep social and cultural ties between former Union republics are often seen by Washington as prerequisites for the resurrection of the Cold War threats. Therefore, by strengthening, manipulating, or undermining bilateral and multilateral institutions, the United States tries to stimulate the preferable development of trends in the region. This leads to the main research question: What methods does the United States use to steer countries' behaviour in a specific direction? The wide variety of practices presents fertile ground for studying them to formulate incentive patterns in US foreign policy. This paper is based on a comparative analysis of systemic trends that determine the US strategic imperatives towards Russia and three sub-regions after the dissolution of the Soviet Union: Western Eurasia (Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova), the Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia), and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan). The logic of this case study will be focused on three questions. What conditions served as a mobilising force for coining US strategies in these sub-regions? What was the general essence of each of these strategies? What were the most essential practical measures to achieve their goals?

### **Genesis of a Strategy for the Post-Soviet Space**

The strategic framework of the United States officials and senior political analysts has never included a macro-compositional logic towards the peoples and countries that lived on the vast territory of the former Russian and Soviet



Empires. At the same time, during most of their existence, Washington never articulated verbal support for internal separatism or seriously exploited the formal status of the Soviet republics as independent states to stimulate their sovereignty or secession (Shtromas 1978; Motyl 1982; Miazga 2019). US politicians formulated a mission of liberating Ukrainians, Armenians, and peoples from the Baltic states and Central and Eastern Europe from communist captivity only on the internal national level (Republican Party 1964), which has never transferred into an official position in favour of Soviet disintegration. Until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, US strategists were mainly focused on working the odds in the major world of socialist countries, starting with exploiting Sino-Soviet differences (Radchenko 2019), covertly supporting the antigovernmental movements in the Eastern European bloc (Domber 2019, 115-136), or undermining Soviet positions in the third world countries. Thus, in dealing with the Soviet space, Washington was mostly focused on considering Moscow as the main party to talk to while undermining its positions in the broader world of socialist and socialist-leaning countries.

The fall of the USSR in December 1991 led to a significant gap, almost a vacuum, in the long-term strategic thinking of the United States towards the newly created international field. The highly structuralised strategy of containment towards the Soviet Union, which concentrated a significant part of the US military, economic, and intellectual might, did not imply a detailed approach towards a political space composed of former Union republics. The containment approach was not designed to have within itself a compositional substitution for structuring inter-state relations of new international actors (Gati 1974). The speed of internal Soviet dissolution (Kramer 2022) created a situation when the United States was unprepared to manage a completely different regional environment in the long run, which led to a great number of spontaneous and ad hoc actions. In the first half of the 1990s, the United States continued to view the post-Soviet space in a Russia-centred (or even better, Moscow-centred) logical framework, concentrated on reforming the core of the former socialist system by supporting economic and political liberalisation in Eastern Europe and Eurasia.

The first and foremost question was of a security nature. The White House supported the centralisation of all Soviet strategic weapons under one country. For that reason, the nuclear weapons arsenal of Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Belarus was re-dislocated to the Russian Federation, which inherited the Soviet membership in the Security Council of the United Nations (White House 1993, 19). Moreover, the issue of the internal transformation of Russia from a socialist into a democratic country with a market economy was also designed to serve long-term security goals. The Clinton administration stood on Yeltsin's side both in the 1993 constitutional crisis (Marcus 1993) and in the 1996 troubled

presidential elections (Shimer 2020) to eradicate the fertile ground of communist revanche. This approach eventually gave significant fruits in the process of denuclearisation in Eurasia, demilitarisation of conventional forces in Europe, and engagement of Russia in the Western-centred institutions like the NATO-Russia Council, the Council of Europe, and the Group of Seven, later renamed the Group of Eight (Bouchet 2015, 83).

Despite Washington's verbal support for Russia's democratisation and liberalisation, the country did not invest substantial efforts in real internal society transformation from a long-term perspective. For example, the amount of economic development aid provided by the United States to former republics of the Soviet Union from 1992 to 1997 made up \$12.4 bn (in 2022 constant prices), which consisted of less than 10% of all US foreign aid at this period and was 20 times lower than the assistance given for Europe's post-war reconstruction from 1947 to 1952 (ForeignAssistance.gov). A similar trend can be seen in the commodity turnover that by 1997 reached \$9.8 bn, or 0.63% of global US trade (US Census Bureau n.d.), and US direct investments in the post-Soviet countries during the same year were \$3.5 bn, or 0.41% of US investments globally (BEA n.d.). Nevertheless, until the end of the 1990s, the official logic of engagement and cooperation between Russia and the United States was the constituting line of the whole US vision. Although the scale of economic cooperation reflected low US strategic interest in increasing its presence in the Eurasian market, Russia had been the main beneficiary in the development of bilateral economic ties: in 1997, Russia received 56% of all aid delivered to the former Soviet republics, 78% of trade, and 39% of investments. Even the US provision of financial aid to Chechen separatists (Clinton 1995) and differences over Bosnia (Erlanger 1994) had no fundamental effect on the US-Russia rapprochement. Many even categorised the whole strategy dealing with the post-Soviet space as mostly a "Russia first" strategy since stimulating a Yugoslavia-like decentralisation scenario was mainly considered catastrophic (Talbot 2000, 155).

The main stumbling block in bilateral relations became the issue of NATO expansion, which had largely determined the whole subsequent logic of the US strategy in Eurasia. The factual end of the Cold War competition did not eradicate what may be the most significant consequence in the long term—a zero-sum logical framework. The dissolution of the Soviet Pole could not stop the inertia of the bipolar thinking model and automatically led to a reaction of the US political elites to support its unilateral expansion (Krauthammer 1990). Right from the start of the new era, the first US National Security Strategy directly stated NATO's mission to play a central role in filling the macro-regional organisational vacuum of the post-Cold War order in Europe (White House 1994, 21-22).

Washington's establishment overtly formulated the limits of Russian activities in the new realities. In his 1994 State of the Union address, President W. Clinton stated that the United States "... will seek to cooperate with Russia to solve regional problems, while insisting that if Russian troops operate in neighbouring states, they do so only when those states agree to their presence and in strict accord with international standards" (Clinton 1994). The Republican opposition in Congress articulated its views with the same logic: "...Our foreign policy towards Russia should put American interests first and consolidate our Cold War victory in Europe. We have a national interest in a security relationship with a democratic Russia. Specifically, we will encourage Russia to respect the sovereignty and independence of its neighbours; support a special security arrangement between Russia and NATO—but not Moscow's veto over NATO enlargement..." (Republican Party 1996).

The issue of NATO admission of the former Warsaw Pact members and Soviet Union republics was highly sensible for Moscow. George F. Kennan rightfully pointed out that such a move could trigger a strong militaristic reaction, therefore undermining the long-term American interest of pacifying Russia (Kennan 1997). To address these concerns, a specific compromise was formulated in the NATO-Russia Founding Act in 1997. At that moment, it presented the highest point of Russian-American dialogue over the new security architecture in Europe. The Act established a permanently working NATO-Russia Council—a mechanism for joint policy coordination, information exchange, and peaceful settling of disputes. Moreover, while it directly said that Russia had no veto over NATO's internal affairs, the Act also prescribed not to proliferate nuclear arsenals and not to establish additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces on the territory of new NATO members (US Department of State 1997).

The turning point came in March 1999. The acceptance of the former Comecon and Warsaw Pact members Hungary, Poland, and Czechia into NATO on March 12 and the almost simultaneous bombing of Belgrade two weeks later triggered substantial changes in the US strategy in the post-Soviet space. Looking at this sequence of events through the Cold War's symbolic lenses, it was the first act of decomposition of the former Moscow-centred political field in the new era, in which Washington-centred institutions deliberately turned former socialist countries against each other. It led to the gradual antagonisation of US-Russia relations and significantly increased the level of distrust later.

Traditionally, the annually updated strategic documents under the Clinton administration, while referring to the post-Soviet space, were mostly focused on Russia-centred issues. From 1993 to 1998, Belarus and Kazakhstan were only mentioned in the context of arms control, nuclear non-proliferation, and disarmament, while all other countries (besides Ukraine) were not mentioned.

Ukraine was the second state after Russia that presented vital interest for the United States, not only in security issues of strategic stability but also in its internal democratic and market transformation. Since 1997, Ukraine has been as important as Russia in developing a partnership with NATO and being integrated into the new post-Cold War European security order. Nevertheless, American cooperation with other than Russia's newly independent states (NIS) did not serve any strategic framework or goal on any comparable level. However, Moscow's major dissatisfaction with the US policies over Yugoslavia and NATO expansion significantly shifted Washington's strategic thinking. The 1999 National Security Strategy contained criticism of Russia's practices in dealing with Chechen separatists and terrorists. "The conflict in Chechnya represents a major problem in Russia's post-Communist development and relationship with the international community; the means Russia is pursuing in Chechnya are undermining its legitimate objective of upholding its territorial integrity and protecting citizens from terrorism and lawlessness". Moreover, for the first time, the NSS formulated clear imperatives and significantly broadened the agenda towards other NIS. The Clinton administration directly stated its concern regarding the withdrawal of Russian forces from Moldova and Georgia under the Conventional Armed Forces Treaty. It also stated Washington's interest in supporting Moldovan, Armenian, Georgian, Kyrgyz, Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, and Ukrainian admission to the World Trade Organisation and in developing Caspian energy resources in a partnership with Azerbaijan, Turkey, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan (White House 1999). And although it would be an exaggeration to characterise the 1999 NSS as anti-Russian, it clearly showed the first non-Russian-centred approach to building relations with post-Soviet states.

### **Transitional Phase of the Post-Soviet Strategy: Neither Friends nor Foes**

At the beginning of the XXI century, the post-Soviet space presented peripheral strategic significance for the United States. After the tragic events of September 11, 2001, Washington concentrated almost all its attention towards the global fight against international terrorism: the military operations in Afghanistan and then in Iraq and democracy promotion policies were of prime interest. Russia tried to use this major US geopolitical challenge to readjust bilateral relations. President Putin was the first foreign leader to express solidarity with his American colleague, portraying Russia's war in Chechnya as part of the same fight against terror (Kremlin 2001). Moreover, Russia brought several trust-building measures to demonstrate its readiness for security cooperation. Those measures included the withdrawal of Russian troops from

Vietnam and Cuba (Putin 2001) and facilitation to build US bases in Central Asia (Nixey 2021). Despite Moscow's objections, the G.W. Bush administration unilaterally withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty in December 2001, clearly pointing out the inequality of the partnership. On the formal level, the White House under Republicans presented its relations with Moscow as being of a strategic nature, praising the process of democratic transition, cooperation on issues of mutual interest like the fight against terrorism, and continuing arms reduction, which were led under the newly signed Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) of May 2002. However, episodes of ignoring Russia's voice would be seen as symptomatic in the further evolution of bilateral relations concerning the building of a new security architecture in Europe or on a global scale.

Slowly but steadily, the United States was developing its bilateral ties with all former Soviet republics. The White House, under Republicans, tripled US mutual trade with these states (from \$11.5bn in 2001 to \$35.9bn in 2007) (US Census Bureau n.d.), almost tripled its direct investments in them (from \$7.5bn to \$21.5bn) (BEA n.d.), and almost doubled economic assistance (from \$1.4bn to \$2.73bn) (ForeignAssistance.gov). Moreover, while still being in absolute numbers, i.e., fewer than one per cent of the US's trade and investments worldwide, the growth of economic cooperation with the region rose faster than the world's average pace. All this cooperation was developing in the framework of a previously articulated strategy of democracy enlargement and engagement, not having a substantive upgrade or sub-regional planning detailing and involvement. Russia viewed US policies in the region as practical attempts to transform the architecture of international relations in the post-Soviet space as a part of a larger strategy to impose a new order in Europe and globally. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003, another wave of NATO's expansion in the Baltic and Eastern Europe in 2004, a series of colour revolutions in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005), rhetorically and partly financially supported by the US, and mil-to-mil US cooperation with Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia, and Azerbaijan (Woods 2008) were clear examples of these. In addition, increased criticism over the state of democracy in Russia and in key US strategic documents (White House 2006, 2) has only solidified Moscow's fear of being consciously encircled by either pro-Western regimes or conflict zones (Mitchell 2012, 92-100).

The accumulated Moscow's discontent with the developing state of relations was eventually directly formulated in Vladimir Putin's speech in Munich in February 2007 (Putin 2007). Regarding its consequences, the speech became a turning point in the evolution of the US's perception of Russia, initially perceived as a difficult but non-threatening partner and later seen as a stumbling block in Washington's global ambitions (US Department of State

2007). Nevertheless, the United States was heavily involved in two military campaigns at that moment. The G.W. Bush administration initiated a reorientation of its troops from Iraq to Afghanistan (Belasco 2009). It made additional efforts to secure the results of its policies in the Greater Middle East for the longer term (Davydov 2022, 344-365). Moreover, a dramatic decline in relations with Moscow could potentially undermine the bilateral dialogue on strategic stability and leave the prospects of substituting the SORT with a new arms reduction treaty vague. Therefore, Washington decided not to invest heavily in the escalation of the war in Georgia in 2008 (Suchkov 2014) nor in supporting the pro-Western political forces of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (Markedonov et al. 2020).

Instead, the new administration of Democrats took a lighter confrontational tone in its rhetoric towards Russia while gradually reorienting towards developing bilateral ties with its neighbours. The first initial vision of B. Obama's White House on Russia remarkably contrasted with how the previous administration presented it in its final years. For example, while George Bush, in his final State of the Union in 2008, concentrated on criticising Russian and Belarussian democracies and praising revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine (Bush 2008), Barack Obama did not even mention post-Soviet states in his first address before Congress (Obama 2009). Democrats continued in the same line their Republican colleagues formulated their position towards Russia and the post-Soviet space in the National Security Strategy in their first term in the White House. While the NSS of 2000 and the NSS of 2006 were criticising Russia and supporting its neighbours, their successive NSS of 2002 and the NSS of 2010, did not mention the former Soviet republics and even drew a bright prospect for cooperation with Moscow (White House 2010, 44).

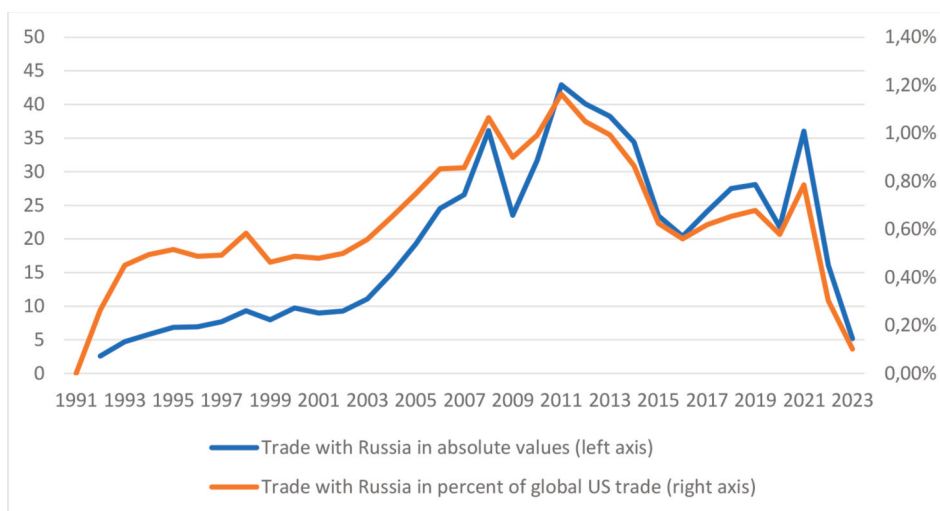
The White House, under Democrats, proposed a "reset" in Russian-American relations to harmonise them. Just like at the beginning of the Bush administration (Bush 2002), such a positive approach from Washington led to new progress over several traditionally discussed topics. Unsurprisingly, the primary interest of the Medvedev and Obama administrations was the signing of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty in 2010 (New START). Both parties made significant progress cooperating in the Afghan war: Russia made available not only its airspace but also its territory for the transfer of NATO's troops and weapons (Baker, 2009) and did not object to a dramatic increase in US troop deployment in Kyrgyzstan. Russia even became the second largest exporter of weapons to Afghanistan after the US. According to SIPRI, the quantity of supplies provided from 2009 to 2014 is estimated at 24% of total weapons imported to this country (SIPRI n.d.). Besides that, Moscow and Washington had fruitful cooperation on the Iran nuclear program (United Nations Security Council 2010) and on jointly pressuring North Korea (United Nations Security Council 2013).



Even differences over the US's role in Libya did not impede joint actions against the use of chemical weapons in Syria (Putin 2013).

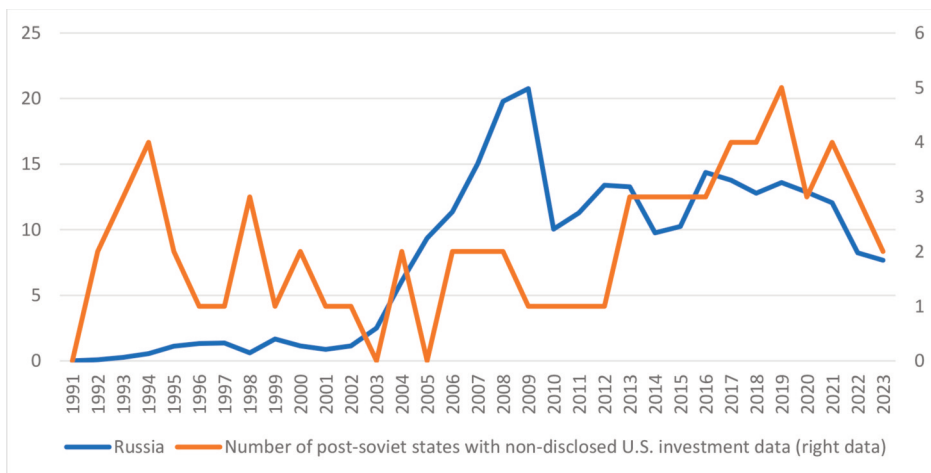
Nevertheless, all cooperation during the first four years of Obama's presidency mainly concentrated on reaching geopolitical goals of mutual interest outside the post-Soviet space. Even the long-awaited cancellation of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment led to the adoption of a new discriminatory Magnitsky Act. There was no notable advancement in altering the relationships' long-term standing or substantive quality. On the contrary, under the first Obama administration, the bilateral economic ties began stagnating and even deteriorating. After reaching its \$42bn peak in 2011, the bilateral commodity turnover went down to \$34.4bn by 2014 (US Census Bureau n.d.; Pic. 1). During the Bush presidency, US investments went from \$0.9bn in 2001 to their peak of \$20.7bn in 2009, which is a total growth of 23.5 times (BEA n.d.). When Obama came into office, the investments decreased to \$10bn due to the 2008 economic crisis but have never returned to previous numbers. Moreover, after 2009, the US started investing more in other post-Soviet states. According to the US Bureau of Economic Analysis, the number of countries with undisclosed investment data increased from two to five. It included Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan (Pic. 2). Finally, the US official development aid to Russia after 2007 gradually declined to zero, while aid flows to other former Soviet republics remained on the same level (Pic. 3).

Picture 1: The US trade in goods with Russia from 1991 to 2023, in billion US dollars



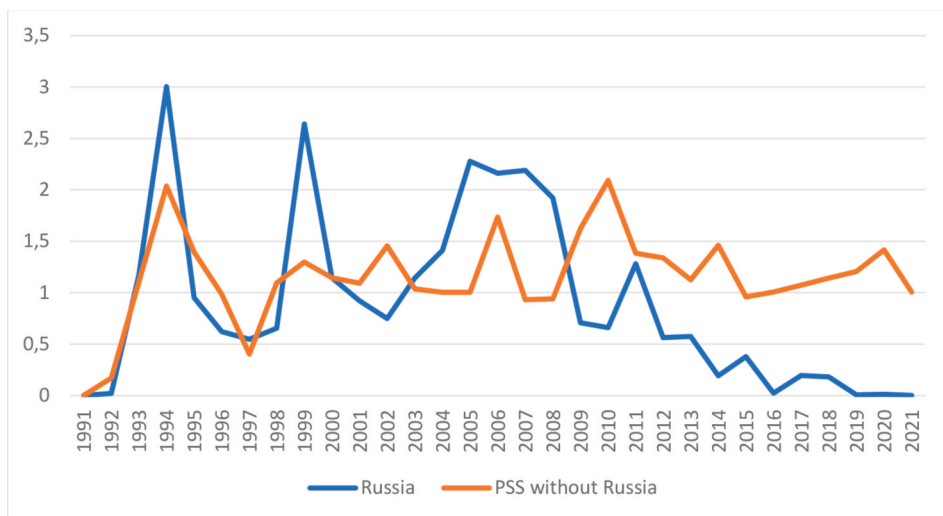
Source: US Census Bureau n.d.

Picture 2: The US direct investments in Russia and number of post-Soviet states with non-disclosed US investment data from 1991 to 2023, in billion US dollars



Source: BEA n.d.

Picture 3: The US official development aid to Russia and other post-Soviet states from 1991 to 2021, in constant 2022 billion US dollars



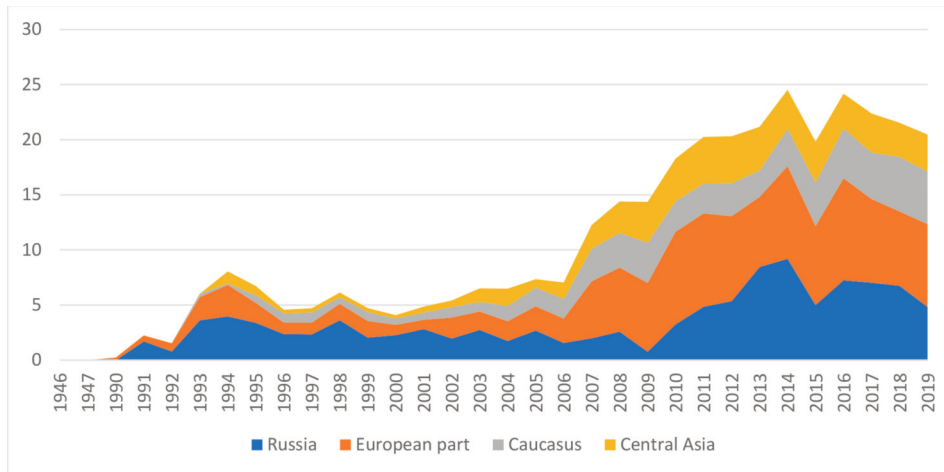
Source: ForeignAssistance.gov. 2024.

One of the most traumatising episodes happened during the parliament and presidential elections. The day after the State Duma elections of 2011,



numerous protesters went to Moscow’s squares on December 5 to protest against the alleged falsifications of votes (Nichol 2011). The US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, almost instantly categorised the elections as “not free, nor fair” (US Department of State 2011a). The Russian government considered this action as an intervention in its internal affairs because it continued the previous line of Washington’s criticism of the whole election process (US Department of State 2011b) and coincided with the rumours that Biden favoured Medvedev over Putin in running for his second term (BBC 2011). That also coincided with a larger trend of the United States significantly increasing its democracy promotion programmes in Russia and other post-Soviet states. While budgeting of these programmes raised steadily but slowly during most of the Bush administration, since 2009, the White House has drastically increased their financing (Pic. 4), eventually leading to USAID being expelled from Russia in September 2012 (Bouchet 2013). Moreover, a peculiar thing to notice: in 2011, the National Endowment for Democracy, in its annual reports, changed the region of Ukraine and Belarus from Eurasia to Central and Eastern Europe, clearly showing its strategy being more orientated towards forcing dissociation trends in these two countries from the post-Soviet space (NED n.d.).

Picture 4: The financial flows of National Endowment for Democracy Programmes in post-Soviet states from 1990 to 2019, in million US dollars

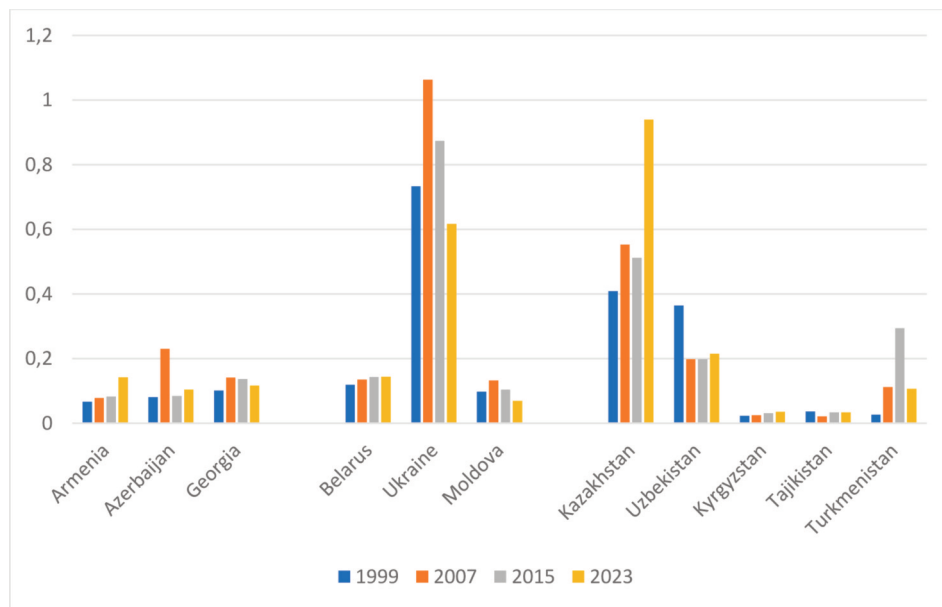


Source: ForeignAssistance.gov. 2024.

From that period until 2014, the Obama administration mainly followed an already established path in building its relations with other post-Soviet states, which, in the majority of cases, pursued a dispersed set of disconnected goals.

In Central Asia, the only country Washington was developing full-fledged bilateral relations with was Kazakhstan. It implied a whole range of issues besides securing nuclear materials and fighting international terrorism. The White House lobbied for Kazakhstan’s accession to the WTO and the repeal of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. The US also became the primary investor in Kazakhstan (Obama 2010), while Kazakhstan ended up being the first trading partner of the US in the sub-region (Pic. 5). Nevertheless, at that moment, this engagement was not driven by a directly formulated agenda.

Picture 5: The US trade overflow with post-Soviet states, in billion US dollars

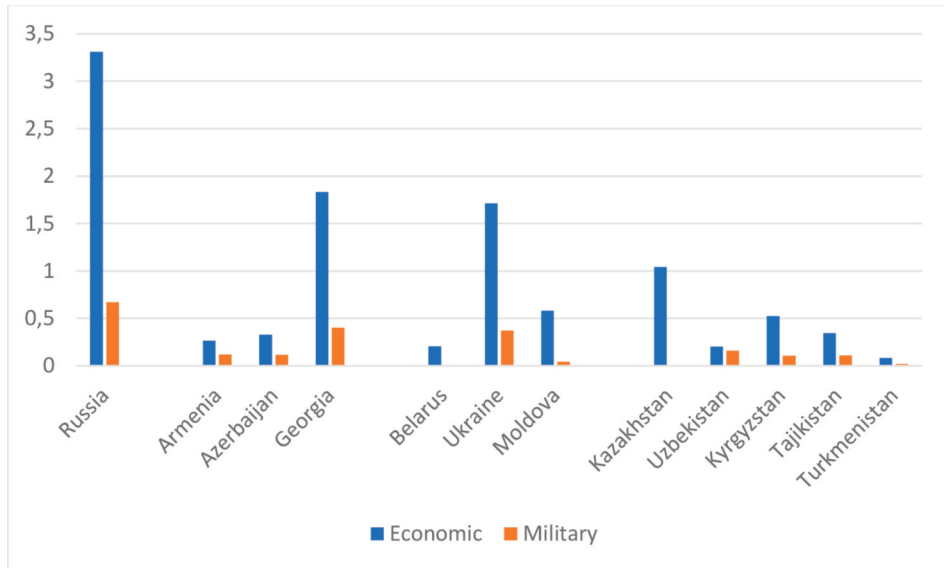


Source: US Census Bureau n.d.

The US strategy in the Caucasus and the European part of the post-Soviet space had a more articulated angle. While Washington’s reactions towards the events or trends in Belarus (2010 presidential elections), Armenia (the issue of the 1915 genocide and normalisation of relations with Turkey), and Azerbaijan (projects of gas delivery to Europe) did not lead to serious long-term consequences for the overall strategy, US support of Ukraine, Georgia, and, less intensively, Moldova’s integration into the Euro-Atlantic community has been consistent and straightforward, with Tbilisi and Kiev as the largest recipients of economic and military foreign assistance (Pic. 6). The view of US policies in the

region as purposefully aiming to impose a security order unilaterally without Moscow's consent was only strengthened by that tendency (German 2017).

Picture 6: The US economic and military aid to all post-Soviet states from 2009 to 2014, in constant 2022 billion US dollars



Source: ForeignAssistance.gov. 2024.

### Active Decomposition Strategy of the Post-Soviet Space

By 2014, the bilateral relations between Barack Obama and recently reelected president Vladimir Putin had been seriously poisoned by mutual distrust. The US actions during the 2011 election campaign were mainly considered an attempt to intervene in Russia's domestic affairs.

In addition, Russia gave asylum to the American whistleblower Edward Snowden in 2013, which only raised tensions between Russia and the US (Troianovski 2020). The intensifying American cooperation with nearby states, especially in the security sphere, and the military operations in the Arab region were increasingly perceived through the lenses of traumatic events in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Moreover, the policies, not only of Russia but of other former Soviet republics to build multilateral cooperation within the Eurasian Economic Union or the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, were seen in Washington as Moscow's attempts to revive the Soviet Union, which the United States openly vowed to prevent (Financial Times 2012).

In 2013, another political crisis in Ukraine started in a completely different environment. The Maidan protest in favour of the Euro-association, the violation of the agreement on the settlement of the Ukraine crisis (Guardian 2014), the coup, and the eventual Crimea's incorporation into the Russian Federation gave birth to two fundamentally different narratives from the part of Russia (Baranovsky 2015) and the United States (McFaul 2020). The crisis had a constituting effect on the whole US strategy in the post-Soviet region.

The renewed US approach has formulated an upgraded long-term framework towards Russia in a more restrictive manner. It consisted of imposing sanctions on Moscow for its actions, viewing Russian gas exports as a political tool and potential threat to European energy security, and paying attention to Russia's involvement in the neighbouring countries. Although the 2015 NSS did not exclude prospects for bilateral cooperation in areas of common interest, the main narrative has fundamentally shifted (White House 2015, 2, 5, 10, 25).

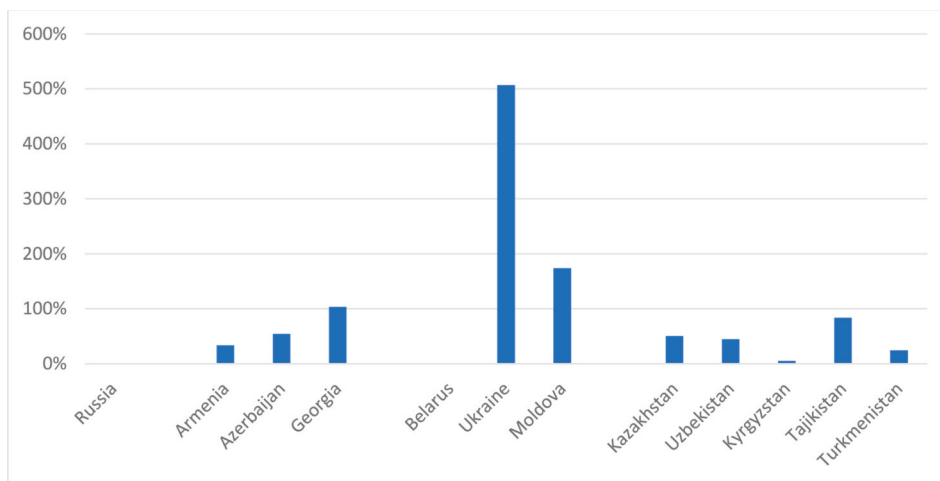
Since the start of the Ukrainian crisis, US-Russia bilateral economic relations steadily continued the stagnation trend. After ending the US trade preferences in May 2014 (Radio Free Europe 2014), trade in goods from 2014 to 2021 increased only by 4.7% from \$34.4bn to \$36bn, which significantly decreased in comparison to the previous periods of growth—2000-2007 by 173% and 2007-2014 by 29.4% (US Census Bureau n.d.). From 2014 to 2021, the investments rose by 23.4%. However, after a serious decrease of 35% from 2007 to 2014, they have never again reached the 2009 maximum of \$20.7bn (BEA n.d.). This trend was, first of all, set by Obama's policies to impose sanctions on Russia over Crimea. However, all consequent administrations accepted this approach as the main form of countering Moscow (Timofeev 2018). Moreover, the United States under the Trump administration continued this hostile trend by fixating on the adversarial status of Russia as a revisionist power (White House 2017) and by withdrawing from arms control treaties (Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, Open Skies Treaty) (Bowen and Cory 2021, 48), which only intensified the Kremlin's concerns.

The fundamental shift of Washington's attitude towards Russia clearly brought a qualitative change in US foreign practices in all sub-regions of the post-Soviet space. Policies towards Ukraine became more consistent and significantly shifted its vector. On the diplomatic track, the United States started unilaterally supporting Kiev's position on the fulfilment of the Minsk agreements, not pressuring it so much to fulfil its part of the obligations (Markedonov, Silaev, and Neklyudov 2020). In the expert community, the events in Ukraine started to be interpreted as an anticorruption Revolution of Dignity against a Russia-orientated president (Rice 2017, 116-201). In addition, the training programmes for a new generation of Ukrainian political leaders began (Stanford). Ukraine became the primary trading partner of the United States in

the post-Soviet space (not taking Russia), doubling its trade in goods from \$2.2bn in 2014 to \$4.4bn in 2021. At the same time, Washington significantly militarised these relations. Ukraine became the main recipient of US arms, receiving 39% of all arms sold to countries in the region (SIPRI n.d.). The US military assistance to Kiev increased almost 5 times: from 2009 to 2014, the total amount was \$0.37bn, and from 2015 to 2020, the overall sum of military aid reached \$1.89bn (Pic 7.), while economic help almost did not rise (ForeignAssistance.gov).

This trend had multiplied extensively by the start of the direct and open military confrontation between Russia and Ukraine in 2022. The United States seriously increased military and economic aid to Ukraine. According to the USAID statistics, the total amount of official development assistance multiplied 24 times: from \$0.5bn in 2021 to \$12.4bn in 2022 and then \$15.9bn in 2023 (ForeignAssistance.gov). Moreover, Washington has drastically increased the supply of military weapons with a total value of \$55 billion (US Department of State 2024), which, in comparison to 2021, increased 135 times in both 2022 and 2023 (SIPRI n.d.).

Picture 7: The change in the amount of US military aid given to Ukraine and other former Soviet republics from 2009 to 2014 and 2015 to 2021, in %



Source: ForeignAssistance.gov. 2024.

In 2015, the United States initiated a multilateral forum, C5+1, in Central Asia to intensify the development of all sorts of bilateral ties and discuss regional issues. Although it was not formally framed on an anti-Russian basis, the strategic planning documents directly formulated the necessity to support

regional countries' sovereignty in front of Chinese and Russian security risks (US Department of State 2019, 10). Under this imperative, the US adopted a strategy to promote public administration reform in Central Asia, market liberalisation, and strengthening economic ties with South Asia (US Department of State 2020), which in 2021 led to the creation of the US-Afghanistan-Uzbekistan-Pakistan group (US Department of State, 2021). While not being the biggest trading partner with the region, the United States became a leading investor in Central Asia, reaching almost \$44.8 bn, primarily concentrated in Kazakhstan (US Department of State n.d.).

Through direct and indirect means, the United States played on divisions between Russia and its smaller allies: Belarus and Armenia. Traditionally, Washington paid little attention to the events in Belarus, having its bilateral ties on a low level and routinely criticising the regime for human rights violations and election fraud. However, the Trump administration attempted to find common ground with Belarus. For the first time since the 1990s, amid Moscow-Minsk tensions over the oil supplies and the Kremlin's attempts to build closer interstate relations in the so-called Union State (Financial Times 2020a), the US Secretary of State, M. Pompeo, made a trip to Minsk in February 2020 to offer an oil supply substitute to import from Russia (Financial Times 2020b). Nevertheless, after the political crisis in August 2020, due to the massive protests after the presidential elections and subsequent internal political turmoil in Belarus, and especially after the start of the direct Russian-Ukrainian confrontation, the United States returned to their previous policies towards Belarus and intensified the sanctions against its authorities (Welt 2021) and the idea of creating a new form of the so-called Union State with Russia (Congress 2020).

Finally, the United States indirectly stimulated the divisions between Russia and Armenia by presenting itself to Erevan as an alternative provider of security and economic development. During the escalation of the Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020, the United States decided to limit its participation by simply expressing its concern on the level of the State Department and its representatives in the OSCE (Guardian 2020). Despite having a large Armenian diaspora inside the United States, Washington decided not to intervene directly. It preferred to outsource the active role in this conflict to Turkey, which actively supported Azerbaijan. Intentionally or not, this combination allowed the United States to save the potential to develop its bilateral ties with Armenia for the future and, at the same time, create a stress-test situation for Russia, which is obliged to come to help its ally under Article 7 of the Collective Security Treaty (also referred to as the 1992 Tashkent Treaty).

This US approach eventually proved its effectiveness after the start of the third and final Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2023. The termination of the existence of the unrecognised Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and the Armenian

unpreparedness to defend it seriously increased the distrust of the Armenian leadership towards the Kremlin (Davydov 2023). That eventually led to a serious increase in Erevan's political, diplomatic, and even military contacts with the United States in order to develop and strengthen bilateral relations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia 2024).

## Conclusion

The evolution of the United States policies and strategy towards the post-Soviet space over the last 30 years has seen significant transformation. The complex analysis of the United States strategy and its realisation through its foreign practices led to several conclusions. The first one answers the main research question of this paper. In order to achieve its long-term goals, the United States has used all its economic, military, and diplomatic arsenal, carefully calculating the disbursement of resources. In the case of the post-Soviet space, the US strategy towards this region was a direct continuation of the Cold War goals of defeating the Soviet Union in the bilateral systemic confrontation that implied competition in all social spheres. The absence of the Marshall Plan in the 1990s, NATO's partnership with Ukraine and Georgia in the 2000s, C5+1 cooperation in the 2010s, a change of type of relations with Russia after the 2007 Munich speech (decrease and stagnation of trade and investments, decrease of development assistance, and rise of democracy promotion programmes and criticism), and then with Ukraine after 2014 (increase of trade, military assistance, arms supply, and people-to-people relations)—all these actions served the same strategic approach: to impede the resurrection of the Soviet threat via creating a new European security order under NATO and stimulating decentralisation processes in the post-Soviet space.

Second, we noticed a specific seven- or eight-year “flux and reflux” cycle in this US approach. Each time Moscow and Washington had serious disagreements (1999, 2007, 2014, 2022), the United States increased the significance of another former Soviet republic in their foreign policy strategic documents. However, when it was necessary to achieve significant results in bilateral relations (primarily in the sphere of strategic arms reduction), the White House, under both Republican and Democratic administrations, tried to calm its critical rhetoric towards the Kremlin.

The third conclusion is about the way the US distributes its resources. In each case, Washington used different foreign policy mechanisms and resources to stimulate or impede some international trends in the post-Soviet space. First, a whole range of multilateral forums have been used to frame the relations and steer them in a specific direction: the Russia-NATO Council, NATO partnership with Ukraine and Georgia, and C5+1 with Central Asia. The case of the 2020



Nagorno-Karabakh war demonstrated how the US did not fulfil its full potential involvement within the Minsk Group of the OSCE to undermine a competing multilateral framework of the CSTO. Second, the US actively used its economic and financial dominance as a “sticks and carrots” instrument to manipulate the behaviour of its counterparts in the region. The offer to Belarus made by Mike Pompeo to substitute Russian oil, the tremendous rise of investments in Kazakhstan, economic and military aid to Ukraine, the potential of strengthening relations with Armenia, and the gradual increase of sanctions on Russia were creating a mechanism to stimulate economically decentralisation trends between the former Soviet republics. Third, the same approach can be seen in ideological accents made by the US officials and expert community actively praising the 2014 Ukrainian revolution after the 2007 Munich speech and after Kiev codified its Western orientation towards inclusion into NATO and the EU in its constitution. Thus, the complexity of these US multilateral, economic, military, and ideological practices does not fit a unified framework or standard. Instead, in each case, Washington used a different set of tools that would most effectively serve its long-term interest of undermining any centralisation processes in the region.

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## PROJEKCIJA MOĆI SAD U POSTSOVJETSKOM PROSTORU: POLITIKE I PRAKSE

*Apstrakt:* Članak analizira politiku SAD-a u postsovjetskom prostoru kao primer kako velika sila može stimulisati specifičan politički poredak u nekom regionu. Autor navodi da strateški okvir SAD-a u ovom prostoru nije u suprotnosti sa imperativima odvratanja prema SSSR-u. U zavisnosti od svojih kratkoročnih ciljeva u odnosima sa Rusijom, spoljna politika SAD-a prati sedmogodišnji ili osmogodišnji ciklus stimulacije decentralizacionih procesa u regionu. Nakon raspada SSSR-a, prvo jasno ispoljavanje razlika između Moskve i Vašingtona, koje se dogodilo 1999. godine, bilo je praćeno sa tri talasa tenzija – 2007, 2014. i 2022. godine. U sva četiri slučaja, SAD su povećale svoju stratešku pažnju prema drugim bivšim sovjetskim republikama. U svakom potregionu ovog prostora, SAD primenjuju različite setove praksi koje su najefikasnije i najprikladnije za svaku zemlju u ispunjavanju aktuelnih američkih političkih imperativa. Tokom poslednje tri decenije, Sjedinjene Države su demonstrirale efikasnu upotrebu različitih „štapova i šargarepa“ u političkom pristupu, uglavnom putem ideoloških, ekonomskih, vojnih, diplomatskih i multilateralnih sredstava spoljne politike, kako prema ovim postsovjetskim državama, tako i prema Rusiji. U svakoj državi postsovjetskog prostora Vašington je primenjivao jedinstven set političkih praksi i taktika, često sa istim ciljem – podripanja moći Moskve i stimulanja decentralizacionih procesa među bivšim sovjetskim republikama.

*Ključne reči:* Rusija; Evroazija; Centralna Azija; Kavkaz; Sjedinjene Države; Ukrajina; liberalni svetski poredak; promocija demokratije.



## AN INDEFINITE WAR OF ATTRITION: THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S STRATEGY FOR THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR

Vladimir TRAPARA<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the outgoing US Biden administration's strategy for the Russo-Ukrainian War and the prospects of its revision under the incoming Donald Trump administration. Building on Stephen Kotkin's characterisation of this strategy as an "indefinite war of attrition", the author addresses questions about the origins and the meaning of this strategy, alternatives to it proposed by its critics, and its alignment with the broader US grand strategy, offering answers as to whether Biden's decision to allow Ukraine to use long-range weapons against Russia signifies a strategic shift and what options Trump has to end the war. Analysing Biden's approach to Ukraine throughout his presidency within the framework of the US grand strategy of liberal hegemony and its corresponding policy towards Russia, the paper concludes that the strategy of an indefinite war of attrition—which offers neither Ukrainian victory nor a compromise peace—is consistent with the liberal-hegemonic primary objective to weaken Russia and remove it from the ranks of great powers and remains unchanged with Biden's latest decisions. For the Trump administration to contribute to resolving the conflict, an approach combining "interventionist" and "isolationist" perspectives on the current strategy is essential.

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## Introduction

On November 17, 2024, outgoing President of the United States, Joseph Biden, reportedly authorised the Ukrainian military to use US long-range weapons, in particular Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS), against targets deep within the internationally recognised territory of the Russian Federation. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky neither confirmed nor denied these reports, stating, “The missiles will speak for themselves” (*Reuters* 2024). And indeed, they spoke: two days later, the Ukrainians used ATACMS to strike a Russian arsenal in the Bryansk region, potentially opening a new chapter in the Russo-Ukrainian War that has been raging since February 24, 2022. Biden’s controversial decision came amidst the Russian military offensive along nearly the entire frontline, including portions of Russia’s own Kursk region that Ukraine had recently occupied during a cross-border incursion, where Moscow deployed several thousand North Korean troops as support. Furthermore, this decision came less than two weeks after Donald Trump’s stunning victory in the US presidential elections over Biden’s Vice President, Kamala Harris.

During his campaign, Trump repeatedly vowed to end the war if elected, and following the elections, several of his closest associates publicly condemned Biden’s move (Roth 2024). Before the elections, the Biden administration had been hesitant to authorise the use of these missiles, already supplied to Ukraine, for strikes deep into Russia. With this authorisation in place, a question arises about how it aligns with the outgoing administration’s broader strategy towards the Russo-Ukrainian War. The purpose of this paper is to discuss this and other issues, such as what kind of strategy this is and since when it has been used, what goals it seeks to accomplish and how it fits into the larger US grand strategy, what alternatives to this approach have been put forth by both the “left” and the “right,” and, lastly, what strategic options the incoming Trump administration has for keeping its promise to bring peace to Ukraine.

First, I agree with historian Stephen Kotkin (2024) that Biden’s strategy for the Russo-Ukrainian conflict is most aptly described as an “indefinite war of attrition”. I also argue that this approach has been in place at least since Russia’s withdrawal from the Kiev battlefield in the spring of 2022. The core of this strategy involves robust and growing, yet deliberately limited, US and Western military support to Ukraine. This aid is sufficient to sustain Ukraine’s resistance and prevent Russian victory. However, it falls short of enabling Ukraine to win decisively, whether by expelling Russian forces from its internationally recognised territory or even rolling back Russian gains to the February 2022 line of contact. Kotkin himself represents the “interventionist” critics of this strategy, who contend that the US should do more to ensure a swift Ukrainian victory

over Russia, arguing that this is the only way to end Ukrainian suffering and compel Russia to abandon its imperial ambitions in Ukraine.

On the opposite end of the spectrum are the “isolationist” critics, who argue that the US has already done too much to fuel the conflict. They believe the war should not rank high among US priorities and advocate for pressuring Ukraine to accept a compromise peace with Russia. The third section of this paper focuses on the debate between these interventionist and isolationist perspectives. In the fourth section, I argue that this debate notwithstanding, Biden’s strategy for Ukraine aligns seamlessly with the long-standing US grand strategy of liberal hegemony and its corresponding policies towards Russia. The concluding section summarises the findings and explores the strategic options available to a new Trump administration, should it genuinely seek to secure a durable peace in Ukraine. However, before delving into these discussions, it is essential to examine what Biden has actually done in this war. That includes analysing his approach to the pre-war crisis, shifts in expectations and strategy during the early stages of the war, and whether his “lame-duck” decision to escalate with long-range weapons signifies a new strategic shift.

### **What Has Biden Done About Ukraine?**

It would not be an exaggeration to say that US foreign policy, throughout Biden’s presidency, was mainly defined by addressing a renewed Ukrainian crisis. In March 2021, less than two months after his inauguration, Russia began a massive military build-up near Ukraine’s border, citing a recently completed military exercise to justify it. This followed an escalation in fighting between the Ukrainian army and the forces of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics. Confronted with uncertainty over whether Russia was preparing to invade Ukraine, Biden chose to give US-Russian relations, recently additionally strained by issues such as another round of alleged Russian interference in US elections, cyberattacks, and the treatment of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, one more chance. He invited President Putin to a bilateral summit, an offer Putin accepted while simultaneously announcing a partial withdrawal of troops from the Ukrainian border. The two leaders’ summit held in Geneva in June 2021 resulted in an agreement for both nations to continue cooperation in areas of mutual interest, most notably strategic stability. In a gesture unprecedented in recent US diplomacy, Biden referred to Russia as a “great power”, recognising the importance of the status of the Russian leadership and offering a glimmer of hope for a “reset light” in relations between Washington and Moscow (Trapara 2021).

For a brief period, it seemed that the threat of a reignited conflict in Ukraine had been averted, as the Russian military build-up seemed less about Ukraine

specifically and more about pressuring the West for concessions (Lee 2021). However, in October and November, Russian troops did not withdraw following the conclusion of the “Zapad” military exercise, starting another massive build-up instead. US intelligence soon uncovered Kremlin plans for a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, forcing the Biden administration to reassess its approach.

Once intelligence reports about the impending invasion arrived, a two-pronged response was adopted. The administration took immediate steps to deter Putin while simultaneously preparing for the possibility that deterrence would fail. The deterrence consisted of two key components. First, intelligence was shared with US allies, Ukraine, and the international public to send a clear message to Russia that its plans had been uncovered, thereby placing moral pressure on Putin (Plokhly 2023, 144). Second, the US issued warnings of unprecedented sanctions from a unified West if Russia proceeded with the invasion. However, one measure was explicitly ruled out: deploying US troops to Ukraine, which would risk direct involvement in a war with Russia. This approach aligned with the guidance of General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who outlined the key objectives in the event of war: “don’t have a kinetic conflict between the US military and NATO with Russia; contain war inside the geographical boundaries of Ukraine; strengthen and maintain NATO unity; empower Ukraine and give them the means to fight” (Bick 2024, 144-145; Plokhly 2023, 143-144).

At the time, however, no one anticipated the scale and duration of the conflict that would eventually unfold. The same intelligence that predicted an invasion also suggested the war would last only a few weeks, with Kiev quickly falling, followed by regime change and Russian occupation of most of Ukraine (Plokhly 2023, 144; Bick 2024, 150; Mahnken and Baker 2024, 191-192). Against this backdrop, one must ask: what exactly did the Biden administration mean by “empowerment” of Ukraine, and what “means to fight” did it envision providing?

The most plausible answer was the option of backing armed resistance in occupied Ukrainian territories. This strategy was developed by an interagency “Tiger team”, created on the initiative of the National Security Advisor to assess potential scenarios and offer recommendations (Bick 2024, 146). The support envisioned primarily involved weapons already familiar to Ukraine, such as Javelin anti-tank missiles and Stinger anti-aircraft systems—tools well-suited for guerrilla warfare. This approach closely mirrored the US strategy of aiding anti-Soviet insurgents in Afghanistan during the 80s (Plokhly 2023, 144-145). This plan deeply frustrated Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and his advisors. Throughout the crisis, culminating in the 2022 Munich Security Conference just days before the war, Zelensky repeatedly criticised the US for issuing warnings of an invasion without providing Ukraine with the means to defend itself effectively (Plokhly 2023, 146-148).

The Biden administration would soon have an opportunity to test its chosen approach. After rejecting Moscow's ultimatums on "security guarantees" in December and failing to restrain Putin through its own and its allies' diplomatic efforts, it received confirmation on February 24, 2022, that its intelligence regarding Russia's three-pronged, full-scale invasion of Ukraine was accurate. Yet within days, the second part of the intelligence assessment—that Russia would quickly and easily win the conventional war—proved entirely wrong. The resilience of the Ukrainian people and military exceeded both Putin's and Biden's expectations, prompting Washington to reassess its strategy again.

The shift in US strategy did not occur immediately. Frustrated by Western reluctance to provide more direct support, including the refusal of a request for a no-fly zone over Ukraine, the Ukrainian government expressed its readiness to negotiate with Russia from the first day of the invasion. The Russians also showed openness to diplomacy once it became clear that their blitzkrieg to capture Kiev and force regime change had failed. Several rounds of negotiations were held in Belarus and Istanbul, with both parties making substantial concessions and agreeing on a communiqué based on Kiev's pledge to neutrality in exchange for firm multilateral security guarantees while leaving territorial issues aside. However, the negotiations collapsed by late April. Official diplomacy then fell silent for the next two and a half years.

There are several overlapping explanations for the failure of these talks. The first is that neither side was genuinely committed to ending the war and instead used the negotiations to buy time for military regrouping while seeking to shift blame for the failure onto the other party. The second is that Ukraine faced a moral dilemma in continuing negotiations after reports of the alleged massacre of civilians by Russian forces in Bucha (near Kiev) came to light. The third is that Russia's withdrawal from the Kiev front bolstered Ukrainian confidence, increasing its belief that victory was achievable. Finally, Western reluctance to provide firm security guarantees to Ukraine, coupled with encouraging Ukrainians to continue fighting, may have played a role. Russian officials would later repeatedly claim that Ukraine was influenced to quit diplomacy by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who publicly stated that he did not believe in negotiations with Russia before visiting Kiev a few weeks before the collapse of the talks (Charap and Radchenko 2024).

The failure of diplomacy and Russia's abandonment of its plan to capture Kiev ushered in a new phase of the conflict: a prolonged war of attrition in Ukraine's east and south with Russia's apparent objective shifted to seizing as much territory as possible. It was during this phase that Washington ultimately decided to provide Ukraine with more substantial military and financial support, enabling it to confront Russian forces in conventional warfare. The first results of this reversed strategy became evident within months. While Russia initially

made gains in the Donbas region, primarily thanks to its superior artillery firepower, Kiev gradually regained momentum. Using advanced US weaponry, including the HIMARS artillery systems delivered in the summer of 2022, Ukraine managed to halt Russian advances and even launch successful counteroffensives in the Kherson and Kharkov regions.

The shift in US strategy becomes evident when comparing Biden's speeches and actions during the initial and later stages of the war. On the first day of the invasion, he stated, "Although we provided over 650 million dollars in defensive assistance to Ukraine just this year... our forces are not and will not be engaged in the conflict with Russia in Ukraine", adding that "history has shown time and again how swift gains in territory eventually give way to grinding occupations, acts of mass civil disobedience, and strategic dead-ends", and cautioning that "the next few weeks and months will be hard on the people of Ukraine" (The White House 2022a). These remarks make it clear that Biden initially anticipated providing military assistance for guerrilla warfare on territory swiftly occupied by Russia.

Just two weeks later, Biden's tone significantly changed: "We will make sure Ukraine has weapons to defend against an invading Russian force... But we already know Putin's war against Ukraine will never be a victory" (The White House 2022c). In the second week of March, Biden approved \$1 billion in security assistance to Ukraine, more than he had allocated since the start of his term. While this aid consisted primarily of Javelins and Stingers, a new package requested from Congress in late April included a much broader range of weapons (The White House 2022d; The White House 2022f). The signing of the "Ukraine Democracy Defense Lend-Lease Act of 2022" on May 9 to "support the government of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people in their fight to defend their country and their democracy against Putin's brutal war" marked the final step in transitioning to a strategy focused on supporting Ukraine in a conventional war of attrition against the invading Russia, rather than planning for occupation and subsequent resistance (The White House 2022g).

But how long was this war of attrition meant to last? Did Biden's assertion that Putin's war would never be a victory imply that Ukraine would be supported sufficiently to achieve its own victory and expel the invading forces as quickly as possible? Biden and his associates often repeated that support for Ukraine would continue for "as long as it takes". However, this raised the question: as long as it takes to achieve what? Ukrainian battlefield successes in the second half of 2022 prompted Putin to double down by annexing four Ukrainian regions, pursuing a partial mobilisation, and launching an aerial campaign against Ukrainian civilian infrastructure. Yet none of these moves enabled significant Russian advances on the frontline, nor did they crush the fighting morale of Ukraine's leadership, army, or people. In 2023, the observers awaited a major Ukrainian counteroffensive in the east and south of the country,

aimed at expelling the invaders and concluding the war with a decisive Ukrainian victory. Western (including US) military support was crucial for this effort, yet it ultimately proved insufficient to break through Russia's multilayered defences, and the counteroffensive ended in disaster. The US contributed to this by a visible pattern: despite spending tens of billions of dollars, Washington consistently delivered qualitatively new weapons, such as F-16 fighter aircraft, Abrams battle tanks, or ATACMS ballistic missiles, i.e., too little and too late to make a decisive impact (Schake 2024, 164-165; Feaver and Inboden 2024, 291).

The 2024 election year further complicated US military aid, reducing it to a start-stop process dependent on partisan bargaining in Congress and the pressures of the presidential campaign. Biden authorised Ukraine's use of ATACMS in Russian territory only after the elections and significant new Russian territorial gains. That brings us to the first research question: does Biden's decision represent a shift to a new strategy? The evidence suggests otherwise. Once again, the assistance arrived too late and in insufficient quantities to shift the war decisively in Ukraine's favour. The first use of ATACMS prompted Russia's retaliatory strikes by its similar means without any meaningful reversals on the battlefield. If supplied to Ukraine in larger quantities alongside similar European weapons, ATACMS might slow Russia's offensive temporarily and delay negotiations, thereby prolonging the war of attrition. This indicates that the Biden administration's strategy remains fundamentally unchanged. However, this strategy will persist only until January 2025, when President-elect Donald Trump takes office. With his inauguration, a new approach to the Ukraine conflict may emerge, potentially influenced by critics of Biden's strategy. The next section examines their perspectives.

### **The Critics: The Interventionists vs. Isolationists' Debate**

Once it became evident that the Biden administration's strategy for the Ukraine conflict was leading to an indefinite prolongation of the war of attrition, it drew criticism from many quarters. Critics pointed to the immense suffering it inflicted on Ukraine and the substantial costs it imposed on the US. However, these critics are divided on how Washington could expedite the war's conclusion compared to the current approach. Should the US increase and expedite its military support to enable Ukraine to achieve a decisive victory on the battlefield? Or should it take an opposite approach: curtail its support to Kiev and pressure it to seek a negotiated peace with Russia? I categorise proponents of these conflicting views as *interventionists* and *isolationists*.<sup>2</sup> That said, Biden,

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<sup>2</sup> Feaver and Inboden (2024, 297) use a similar categorisation, with *internationalists* instead of *interventionists*.



himself, can still be considered an interventionist, albeit a “constrained” one, because his “overriding goal in Ukraine is not to see Russian forces ejected from the occupied territories but to minimise the risk of a Russian attack on the United States or a NATO ally” while weakening Russia by “bloodletting” (Harris, Marinova, and Gricius 2023, 4).

Stephen Kotkin, the scholar who described Biden’s strategy as an indefinite war of attrition, is among its most vocal interventionist critics. He argues that continuing the current strategy, “even if Western support at sufficient scale were to continue without interruption”, causes “too much new damage daily” to Ukraine while failing to secure “a durable armistice on favourable terms” for it, given that everything that “appears to be on offer from Putin” is “Ukrainian recognition of Russian annexations as well as permanent infringement on Ukrainian sovereignty in its freedom to choose international alignments” (Kotkin 2024, 25). What the US is essentially doing is “renting” Ukraine’s land army to degrade Russian military capacities (much like it “rented” the Red Army and Chinese forces to weaken Germany and Japan during World War II), thus “instructing Ukraine to suffer land-war-scale casualties against Russia, a land power par excellence with a regime that does not value human life”, which Kotkin (2024, 32-33) does not see as a “persuasive strategy”.

Instead, he advocates for securing “an armistice and an end to the fighting as soon as possible” alongside “an obtainable security guarantee and European Union accession” — “in other words, a Ukraine, safe and secure, which has joined the West” (Kotkin 2024, 24). To achieve this, Kotkin (2024, 26-30) proposes opening a “political front” against Putin through innovative tactics rather than relying on the largely ineffective pro-Western liberal opposition. He suggests supporting nationalist and conservative defectors from Putin within Russia’s military and security ranks, “who have concluded, correctly, that the war is badly damaging Russia”, and might be willing to agree to an “armistice without annexations or sovereign infringement on Ukraine, for Russia’s sake”. This strategy does not necessarily have to mean a regime change but rather a credible threat to pressure Putin into signing an armistice favourable to Ukraine, Kotkin (2024, 30-31) concludes.

Unlike Kotkin, most other interventionist critics mainly advocate for significantly more robust military support to Ukraine as a key to achieving a decisive victory. Coffey and Rough (2024, 2) attribute the failure of Ukraine’s 2023 counteroffensive to “congressional delays and White House indecisiveness”. Instead, they propose a “strategy of courage”, which would involve supporting Kiev not for “as long as it takes” but “until Ukraine wins”, in particular by providing it with long-range weapons, enabling it to pursue “a Crimea-first strategy” aimed at reclaiming the peninsula, and inviting Ukraine to join NATO (Coffey and Rough 2024, 2-9). Jensen and Tingle (2024, 5) similarly criticise the current approach,

which “calls for slowly increasing Ukraine’s resources and capabilities while bleeding Russia” and “may be enough to prevent a decisive Ukrainian loss, but is insufficient for victory”. However, their solution offers little beyond the recommendation to supply Ukraine with long-range weapons to target Russian strategic assets (Jensen and Tingle 2024, 10-11).

Michael McFaul (2023) also emphasises the importance of long-range weapons as part of a broader solution to replace the current strategy of “incrementalism”, advocating in addition for more sanctions against Russia and increased economic assistance to Ukraine, expressing hope for a decisive Ukrainian victory as early as 2023. Anne Applebaum (2024) sets forth a particularly ambitious goal: an unambiguous victory, achieved through timely deliveries of advanced weaponry to Ukraine and hybrid warfare against Russia on multiple fronts. According to this scholar, only a military defeat “can persuade the Russians themselves to question the sense and purpose of a colonial ideology that has repeatedly impoverished and ruined their own economy and society, as well as those of their neighbours, for decades”, while “another frozen conflict” or a “face-saving compromise” “will not end the pattern of Russian aggression or bring permanent peace” (Applebaum 2024, 93).

Finally, Kori Schake (2024, 157) also contends that the Biden administration’s strategy “was principally concerned about limiting American risk, not maximising Ukraine’s ability to restore its people’s security and country’s territorial integrity”, and was devised to “provide extensive but limited support to Ukraine for as long as it takes”. Although this author does not explicitly call for sending US troops to Ukraine, she suggests expediting the war’s conclusion, among other measures. Such a scenario can be “read between the lines” from her insistence that the US should be less risk-averse and concerned about escalation compared to Russia, “that would lose its war of aggression even more quickly should it draw Washington and its allies into direct participation” (Schake 2024, 167).

A typical isolationist argument is presented by a group of British and American scholars and diplomats in their open letter to Western leaders, published in the *Financial Times* in July 2024.<sup>3</sup> They contend that, in light of Russia’s recent military gains in Donbas and the low probability of its expulsion from occupied territories, a negotiated settlement of the war in Ukraine has become urgent. “Seizing peace before it’s too late”, they argue, would allow Ukraine to retain its independence with minimal territorial concessions while enabling the West to avoid the risk of a nuclear conflict with Russia: “The longer the war continues, the more territory

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<sup>3</sup> The signatories of this letter are Lord Skidelsky, Sir Anthony Brenton, Thomas Fazi, Anatol Lieven, Jack Matlock, Ian Proud, Richard Sakwa, and Christopher Granville.



Ukraine is likely to lose, and the more the pressure for escalation up to a nuclear level is likely to grow” (Skidelsky et al. 2024).

Another common isolationist perspective assigns primary responsibility for the war to the US and the West, asserting that their policies threatened Russia’s security and provoked it into conflict with Ukraine. John Mearsheimer is perhaps the most prominent proponent of this view. He goes to great lengths to absolve Putin of blame for the war, instead placing responsibility on Biden, whom he accuses of being “unwilling to eliminate that threat through diplomacy” and of recommitting “to bringing Ukraine into NATO in 2021” (Mearsheimer 2022, 12). According to Mearsheimer (2022, 13), Biden “reacted to the outbreak of the war by doubling down against Russia”, committing himself “to decisively defeating Russia in Ukraine and employing comprehensive sanctions to greatly weaken Russian power”. This author argues that the neutralisation is the only solution for the Ukrainian leaders “to spare their country further harm”, though he doubts that ultra-nationalists in Ukraine and the Biden administration would accept such a compromise (Mearsheimer 2022, 23-24). He is also deeply concerned about the risk of the US and NATO being dragged into direct conflict with Russia, warning that nuclear escalation remains a real possibility (Mearsheimer 2022, 24-26).

Charap and Priebe (2023) echo these concerns, arguing that avoiding a prolonged war in Ukraine should be a top US priority, given the high risks of escalation into a NATO-Russia conflict or use of nuclear weapons, maintaining that a political settlement leading to a durable peace serves American interests better than a temporary armistice. To achieve this, they propose a series of US policy options, from clarifying the future aid to Ukraine through US and allied commitment to Ukraine’s security and neutrality to establishing conditions for relief of sanctions against Russia, criticising Biden for failing to make any moves to push the warring parties towards negotiations (Charap and Priebe 2023, 20-25). Similarly, Yazini April (2023, 4) criticises Biden’s “hawkish approach” to Russia, advocating for a “dove approach of dialogue and peace” (2023, 4). For such an approach to work, “US and Western acceptance of their role in fanning the fire and Russia’s hemispheric influence is essential” (April 2023, 3-4).

The common argument shared by both interventionists and isolationists—that the Biden administration’s approach prolongs Ukraine’s suffering and imposes costs on the US while not guaranteeing that Russia will not win the war—is a valid critique, regardless of the soundness of divergent alternatives they propose. However, from the perspective of broader US policy towards Russia, which is rooted in the grand strategy of liberal hegemony adhered to by the Biden administration (and supported at least by most of the interventionist critics), this strategy is understandable. This warrants a more detailed analysis, which I develop in the next section.

## Liberal-Hegemonic Roots of Biden's Ukraine Strategy

The Biden administration has never officially declared an indefinite war of attrition as its strategy towards the Russo-Ukrainian War. The conclusion about the existence of such a strategy is drawn from the scale, quality, and timing of US military support to Ukraine, which has effectively resulted in such a war, as well as from the critiques of various observers regarding Washington's approach. This section upgrades that argument, demonstrating that if Biden indeed chose this strategy, it aligns with his ideological background and the circumstances prevailing in the war at the time the decision was made.

Unlike his predecessor (and successor) Donald Trump, whose grand strategy was incoherent (if he even had one), Biden adheres to the long-standing grand strategy of liberal hegemony, which has dominated US foreign policy during the post-Cold War era. Barry Posen (1984, 13; 2014, 1) defines grand strategy as "a political-military, means-ends chain, a state's theory of how it can best 'cause' security for itself", or, more succinctly, "a nation state's theory about how to produce security for itself". The grand strategy of liberal hegemony builds on Woodrow Wilson's earlier idea of making "a world safe for democracy", which suggests that liberal-democratic domestic orders in the US and other Western countries cannot be secure unless a supportive world order is established—one in which democracies can survive and thrive, like "eggs in eggs' carton" (Ikenberry 2020, xi). Over time, the US foreign policy establishment came to believe that the only global order that could guarantee this objective was the one of American hegemony, and the unipolar international distribution of power at the end of the Cold War bolstered Washington's conviction that such an order was feasible.

Achieving true global hegemony, however, would eventually require the elimination of other independent great powers by reducing their status to lesser powers that would align their foreign policies with Washington and recognise the US as a world leader. This would effectively transform the international system from an anarchic to a hierarchic one. Given that Russia is one of the two remaining great powers (the other being China) in the post-Cold War era, continuous US efforts to encircle and weaken it while refusing to treat it as an equal partner or acknowledge its sphere of influence are understandable within the framework of this strategy. So far, the US has not been successful in reaching its final goal, and the strategy of liberal hegemony has faced significant criticism for being overly ambitious and ideologically driven, with Posen (2014) and his realist colleagues (Layne 2006; Mearsheimer 2018; Walt 2018) arguing against its feasibility and desirability. Nevertheless, it has endured a series of setbacks and the Trumpian challenge, continuing into Biden's presidency.

Biden's intent to steer US foreign policy back towards liberal hegemony was already evident in his *Foreign Affairs* article, published before he was nominated as a presidential candidate. In the article, Biden (2020) strongly criticised Trump for abandoning US allies and partners, launching "ill-advised trade wars", abdicating American leadership, and turning away from democratic values. Instead, Biden (2020) pledged to "renew US democracy and alliances, protect the United States' economic future, and, once more, have America lead again". He further states that if the US does not lead, either someone else will—"but not in the way that advances our interests and values, or no one will and chaos will ensue". Less than two months into office, Biden signed *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* to replace Trump's *National Security Strategy* until a new one could be issued. The core idea emphasised in this document is that "our world is at an inflection point in history", "in the midst of a fundamental debate" about its future direction, centred on the question of whether "democracy can still deliver for our people and for people around the world, or "autocracy is the best way forward" in the times of "accelerating global challenges" (The White House 2021).

These statements clearly indicate Biden's commitment to liberal hegemony. Yet, the profound challenges for US foreign policy and democracy he emphasised have introduced a note of tactical pragmatism, making a rhetorical acknowledgement of Russia as a great power and an attempt at a "reset light" possible (Trapara 2021, 124-125). Nevertheless, diplomacy requires reciprocity—Russia's decision to invade Ukraine necessitated further adjustments but also presented a new opportunity to revive an embattled grand strategy of liberal hegemony.

Biden's speeches at the onset of the Russian invasion reveal a clear connection between the US response to the war and its overarching grand strategy. On the first day of the invasion, he declared, "America stands up to bullies. We stand up for freedom. This is who we are". He also outlined the anticipated consequences of the war for both Russia and the West: "The United States and our allies and partners will emerge from this stronger, more united, more determined, and more purposeful... And Putin's aggression against Ukraine will end up costing Russia dearly—economically and strategically. We will make sure of that. Putin will be a pariah on the international stage" (The White House 2022a).

In his State of the Union address in March 2024, Biden emphasised his own efforts to maintain and strengthen Western unity in the face of Putin's aggression, which he framed as an attack not just on Ukraine but on the entire democratic world: "Like many of you, I spent countless hours unifying our European allies", he said. According to Biden, the result is that "in the battle between democracy and autocracies, democracies are rising to the moment,

and the world is clearly choosing the side of peace and security". He predicted that "when the history of this era is written, Putin's war on Ukraine will have left Russia weaker and the rest of the world stronger", asserting that Americans are "the only nation on Earth that has always turned every crisis we've faced into an opportunity" (The White House 2022b).

Speaking at the Royal Castle in Warsaw, Poland, at the end of March, Biden explicitly invoked the term "free world", describing the war in Ukraine as "a battle between democracy and autocracy, between liberty and repression, between a rules-based order and one governed by brute force". While denying that NATO enlargement is "an imperial project aimed at destabilising Russia", he reiterated expectations of severe economic repercussions for Russia due to sanctions and, for the first time, hinted at regime change, stating, "Vladimir Putin's aggression has cut you, the Russian people, off from the rest of the world, and it's taking Russia back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century... For God's sake, this man cannot remain in power" (The White House 2022e).

The statements above provide reliable indicators of Biden's liberal-hegemonic worldview as it pertains to the Russo-Ukrainian War. First, his narrative frames the conflict as part of a larger democracy-autocracy divide, with the US upholding democracy as a core purpose of its engagement in international politics, including its involvement in Ukraine. Second, Biden emphasises a multilateral approach, portraying the US as the indispensable leader of a coalition of democracies and other nations that adhere to a "rules-based order". His rhetoric is steeped in the spirit of American exceptionalism (Ostrowski 2022). Third, Biden stresses the necessity of weakening Russia and altering its behaviour to ensure the security of the "free world".

This framework is echoed in Biden's 2022 *National Security Strategy*, which was delayed and revised to address the implications of the war in Ukraine. The document leaves no doubt about the administration's grand strategy: "Around the world, the need for American leadership is as great as it has ever been. We are in the midst of a strategic competition to shape the future of the international order... We will not leave our future vulnerable to the whims of those who do not share our vision for a world that is free, open, prosperous, and secure" (The White House 2022h).

One of the leading proponents of liberal hegemony, Robert Kagan (2022), articulated the stakes for the US in Ukraine with striking clarity. He wrote that "the defence of Ukraine is (indeed) a defence of the liberal hegemony", arguing that "the natural trajectory of history in the absence of American leadership has been perfectly apparent: it has not been toward a liberal peace, a stable balance of power, or the development of international laws and institutions", but "great-power conflict and dictatorship have been the norm throughout

human history, the liberal peace a brief aberration. Only American power can keep the natural forces of history at bay”.

But how does Biden’s strategy of an indefinite war of attrition fit into all this? In fact, it fits quite neatly. The grand strategy of liberal hegemony suggests that the primary US objective in Ukraine should be weakening Russia, with the ultimate goal of eliminating it from the ranks of great powers—a shift that, in time, should be accepted by Russia’s ruling elite. This is envisioned as essential for safeguarding democracy and maintaining a “rules-based order” (Trapara and Jović Lazić 2024). We have already seen that the Biden administration’s initial plan was an Afghan-style support to an armed resistance by Ukrainians following an anticipated Russian success in occupying their territory. When the Russian army failed to achieve this expected outcome, it was natural that Washington was reluctant to pursue either a swift diplomatic solution or to supply Ukraine with military means of sufficient scale and quality promptly to achieve a quick battlefield victory. Either option would have left Russia’s core capabilities intact and undermined the rationale for imposing harsh economic sanctions on Russia, enforcing its diplomatic isolation, and strengthening Western unity. Instead, a protracted conventional war promised to drain Russia’s capabilities in a similar way guerrilla warfare would, only without allowing the initial occupation of Ukraine.

This approach became part of a broader strategy of “containment 2.0” aimed at Russia, with an anticipated outcome similar to the one its first, Cold War edition, had—the collapse of Moscow’s sphere of influence and, ultimately, regime change (Trapara 2022). That said, I do not argue that Biden’s policy towards Ukraine is an entirely immoral or cold-hearted approach to fighting against Russia “to the last Ukrainian”. While it may appear that way on the surface, two mitigating factors should be considered. First, Ukrainians are not fighting Russia because Americans have instructed them to but because they are defending their own nation; thus, a war of attrition is, to some extent, their choice. Second, and more importantly, the war of attrition is also Putin’s choice, which paradoxically provides the US with a strong justification for its strategy (Veebel and Ploom 2023, 72).<sup>4</sup> Let us not forget that it was Putin, not Biden, who initiated this war. On the contrary, Biden’s preferred strategy before the invasion was to deter Putin and prevent the conflict altogether.

Nevertheless, the strategy of an indefinite war of attrition has its limits. One is rooted in common sense: a large-scale conventional war cannot continue indefinitely. Sooner or later, the fighting capabilities of one or both parties will

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<sup>4</sup> As Mihajlo Kopanja (2023) said, neither the US nor Russia (and Ukraine) initially planned for the war of attrition, but they all opted for it once the conflict inadvertently escalated.

become depleted. Russian capabilities, however, show no signs of nearing exhaustion, not to mention the slow and inefficient impact of economic sanctions, cracks in diplomatic isolation, and failure of attempts to politically destabilise Russia. It is then unsurprising that voices calling for an alternative approach have grown louder, especially following the 2024 presidential election victory of Donald Trump—a leader who has never been enthusiastic about liberal hegemony. Consequently, the narrative around achieving peace in Ukraine has gained prominence. But what can Trump exactly do to bring peace? That is the remaining question that has to be addressed in the concluding section.

### **Conclusion: How Can Trump End the War?**

Stepping down in January 2025, the Biden administration leaves behind an unresolved military conflict between Russia and Ukraine just a month before its third anniversary. As this paper has demonstrated, the administration significantly contributed to this outcome by employing a strategy of an indefinite war of attrition rather than equipping Ukraine with the means to secure a decisive battlefield victory or pursuing a compromise peace, as suggested by interventionist and isolationist critics of this strategy, respectively. A “lame-duck” November 2024 decision to allow Ukraine to use US long-range weapons against targets within Russian territory did not signify a fundamental shift in this approach. The primary objective of this strategy was to weaken Russia as much as possible through a protracted conventional war, serving a broader, long-term goal of removing Russia from the ranks of great powers—a goal neatly aligned with the grand strategy of liberal hegemony. However, the war of attrition has thus far failed to achieve its intended outcomes. Russia has neither suffered the desired military and economic exhaustion nor experienced political destabilisation. On the contrary, Russian forces maintain the initiative along the entire frontline, while Ukrainian resilience and Western resolve are approaching their limits. In this context, a new US president with a different vision step in, at moments promising to end this war within no more than 24 hours. Even more intriguingly, both warring parties seem to heed his call, engaging in discussions about a negotiated peace for the first time in two and a half years.

At first glance, Trump appears to align with the isolationist camp among Biden’s Ukraine approach critics. During his September televised presidential debate against his election rival Kamala Harris, he outlined his main arguments for ending the war. Claiming that the war would never have begun if he had been president, he stressed the need to halt the killing in Ukraine (exaggerating by mentioning “millions” of lives lost) and to prevent potential escalation into World War III against a nuclear-armed country (Hoffman 2024). He has been reiterating these points throughout his campaign and the post-election period. Yet, let us



go back to the remark that diplomacy requires reciprocity. While the US is not a direct participant in the conflict, it can wield significant influence over Ukraine as its primary supporter. But what about Russia? What if Putin interprets Trump's efforts to bring Ukraine to the negotiating table as a sign of weakness—an appeasement that would “invite” him to engage in further aggression?

The reasoning Trump used in the aforementioned debate to argue that the war would never have started under his leadership cited the weakness Biden allegedly showed Putin with “the worst withdrawal” from Afghanistan (Hoffman 2024). One of the key foreign policy principles from Trump's first term, encapsulated in his 2017 *National Security Strategy*, was “peace through strength” (The White House 2017). This is the same phrase Zelensky used in his congratulatory message to Trump following his election victory: “I appreciate President Trump's commitment to the ‘peace through strength’ approach in global affairs. This is exactly the principle that can practically bring just peace in Ukraine closer” (Fornusek 2024). That is also where interventionist arguments converge with isolationist perspectives, offering a potentially unique path forward.

For a compromise peace initiative to succeed, it is not sufficient to merely adopt isolationist arguments and acknowledge the necessity for Ukraine to abandon its plans for a battlefield victory. To be honest, such a victory was evidently never a viable option under Biden's strategy of an indefinite war of attrition. It is also essential to deter Putin from further aggression and from seeking his own victory. This requires careful signalling to Russia that certain measures proposed by interventionists could be employed if it refuses to freeze its invasion at the line of contact acceptable to Ukraine, proceeds to claim more territory, or demands unacceptable terms that would undermine Ukraine's independence.

Despite Trump and his associates' criticism of Biden's ATACMS decision, they could still leverage its potential withdrawal as a bargaining chip in negotiations with Russia while simultaneously threatening to provide additional quantities of these and similar weapons if the talks fail. To demonstrate a genuine resolve to achieve peace through strength, Trump might even flirt with an option Biden never considered, and which even the most interventionist critics of his strategy were reluctant to endorse—a threat to deploy US and allied troops to areas of Ukraine behind the frontline that would serve as a deterrent to further Russian advances. The idea of peacekeeping troops in Ukraine has already been floated by Zelensky and some European leaders (Basmat 2024). While it is hardly imaginable that Putin would accept NATO forces along the line of contact as part of a negotiated solution, the possibility of their arrival without his approval could still be used to pressure Russia into making concessions on other matters. At the same time, isolationist arguments offer useful “carrots” for Russia that could be paired with interventionist “sticks”, such as the partial lifting of economic sanctions



and easing diplomatic isolation. In conclusion, there is no simple way out of a three-year-long war of attrition that has deeply embittered both Russo-Ukrainian and Russia-West relations. Recognising that such a war should not have been allowed to occur in the first place and that a revision of US strategy towards it is essential for achieving peace is a constructive starting point.

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#### **RAT IZNURIVANJA NA NEODREĐENO: STRATEGIJA BAJDENOVE ADMINISTRACIJE PREMA RUSKO-UKRAJINSKOM RATU**

*Apstrakt:* U ovom članku istražuje se strategija odlazeće administracije SAD Džozefa Bajdena prema Rusko-ukrajinskom ratu, kao i izgledi za njenu izmenu pod novom administracijom Donalda Trampa. Nadovezujući se na karakterizaciju ove strategije koju nudi Stiven Kotkin, kao „rata iznurivanja na neodređeno“, autor razmatra poreklo i značenje ove strategije, alternative koje nude njeni kritičari, kao i njeno uklapanje u širu američku veliku strategiju, te nudi odgovore na pitanja je li Bajden odlukom da Ukrajini dozvoli upotrebu naoružanja dugog dometa protiv Rusije izmenio strategiju, kao i koje opcije Tramp ima da zaustavi rat. Nakon analize Bajdenovog pristupa Ukrajini u toku njegovog mandata u kontekstu američke velike strategije liberalne hegemonije i njoj odgovarajuće politike prema Rusiji, u članku se zaključuje da je strategija rata iznurivanja na neodređeno – koja ne nudi ni ukrajinsku pobjedu, ni kompromisni mir – u skladu sa prvenstvenim liberalno-hegemonističkim ciljem slabljenja Rusije i njenog uklapanja iz redova velikih sila, te da ostaje nepromenjena nakon najnovijih Bajdenovih odluka. Da bi Trampova administracija doprinela razrešenju sukoba, neophodan joj je pristup koji bi kombinovao „intervencionističke“ i „izolacionističke“ poglede na aktuelnu strategiju.

*Ključne reči:* Džozef Bajden; Rusko-ukrajinski rat; rat iznurivanja; velika strategija SAD; liberalna hegemonija; intervencionizam; izolacionizam; Donald Tramp.



## INTERNATIONALLY WELL-INTENTIONED BUT INSTITUTIONALLY FAILED: HUMAN SECURITY NETWORK

Bülent Sarper AĞIR<sup>1</sup>, Orçun MUTLU<sup>2</sup>, Barış GÜRSOY<sup>3</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The end of the Cold War provided a favourable environment for normative thoughts in the security realm and thus led to the broadening and deepening of security conception. Thereby, some states in global politics have been relatively stripped of traditional security conceptions and can focus on “human security”, which is part of a wide range of security agendas. In this respect, a coalition of states, based on common ground and expectations on human security issues, launched the Human Security Network initiative with the effect of the normative milieu and achievements of the 1990s. However, it faced a myriad of challenges in the 21st century when traditional security conception was re-emphasised, especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and subsequent turning point developments such as the 2008 global financial crisis, the Brexit process of the European Union, the failure of the Arab Spring, refugee flows, insufficient global solidarity during the COVID-19 pandemic, and rising authoritarianism in global politics. The purpose of this study is to examine the extent to which the Human Security Network has met its objectives since its founding in light of the difficulties that have contributed to the decline of the global liberal order and its principles, as well as any organisational shortcomings.

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## Introduction

“We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery, we need humanity; more than cleverness, we need kindness and gentleness. Without these qualities, life will be violent and will be lost”, says Charlie Chaplin in his brilliant work “The Great Dictator”. The dominance of the state-centric perspective has resulted in a general tendency to discuss states, power, and wars in International Relations (IR). Thus, scholars and practitioners have mostly missed the importance of the “human” in IR. However, with the end of the Cold War, the “if the state is secured, the individual and the society will be secured” assumption of the traditional security conception has been widely questioned due to global, pervasive, and multidimensional security threats. Accordingly, there have emerged many different theoretical and conceptual perspectives for considering a broadened security agenda and deepening security in terms of various referent objects.<sup>4</sup> The security concept has been reconceptualised beyond state-centric and power-based security thinking.

Security discourses have been influenced by the globalisation process, erosion of state authority, and the existence of new security threats in the post-Cold War period. Global socio-economic inequalities and humanitarian disasters like human rights violations have led to the development of the human security concept (Ağır 2022). As a turning point in the development of the human security concept, the 1994 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 1994a, 22) defined the concept by suggesting that “everything changed... and we require a new manner of thinking... we need a transition from nuclear security to human security”. Thus, there has gradually emerged a security thinking beyond the state-centric security agenda.

The concept of “human security” is conceptualised as a product of the normative and liberal world order of the 1990s, which was also known as “the humanitarian decade” of global politics. According to normative theory, there is a need to improve common principles that underpin global common good and responsibility. In addition to intellectual interest in human security, a few states, such as Canada and Japan, made some efforts on human security during the 1990s. Such efforts at the state level reveal that the deepening and widening debates in security studies have a positive impact on foreign and security policy formulations. Since the article focuses on global changes and challenges to the Human Security Network (HSN), state-level variables, such as the government changes in the HSN member countries,

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<sup>4</sup> For more details about the debate of the widening and deepening of the security concept, see: Buzan 1991, Bilgin 2003, Bilgin 2010, Booth 1991, and Krause and Williams 1996.

are excluded from the study. On the other hand, some international organisations, such as the European Union (EU) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, give considerable attention to human security. This change in international politics is an important turning point in the transition of human security from the idea level to practical applications. Thus, the Human Security Network (HSN) as the main subject of the article emerged in 1999 among like-minded states focusing on the promotion of human security.

The HSN is an example of a policy framework for coordination and action on the part of countries united by a commitment to applying a human security perspective to global problems (Julio and Brauch 2009, 991). In this article, we will first analyse the activities carried out by the HSN and its achievements for global security since its establishment in 1999. However, the HSN faced a myriad of challenges in the 21st century when the traditional conception of security increased its importance, especially since the start of the 21st century. Therefore, we also aim to examine how the HSN was influenced by the recent global developments and, subsequently, the rise of traditional security understanding in international politics. Although the HSN has somewhat receded out of the public spotlight, its spirit, goals, and people-centred and prevention-orientated approach to global challenges and issues are crucial for the peace and safety of all.

The main contribution of this article to scholarly debates in the Security Studies subfield is to analyse the influence of the erosion of the liberal international order on normative security thinking concerning human security and its symbolic institutionalisation, the HSN. Another reason is that in the recent literature on the human security concept, it is not easy to find any comprehensive and deep study on the HSN, besides some exceptions. The analysis of the article is mostly based on the review and analysis of the relevant literature on the human security concept and official documents of the HSN. Thus, it aims to generate a policy analysis about the HSN and its decline.

### **The Concept of Human Security**

Human security aims to consider individuals in a collective manner as the referent objects of security. The 1994 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) emphasised human security by pointing to the need for a change from a state-centric security conception to a human-centric security conception. Firstly, the report considers human security a universal concern for all individuals (UNDP 1994a). Secondly, for the report, the components of security are interdependent, and any development such as a pandemic, terrorism,

refugee flow, or environmental pollution in any part of the world could have an implication on the rest. Thirdly, human security could be provided with the prevention of any humanitarian crisis rather than intervention in it (UNDP 1994a). Fourthly, it is argued that the referent object of security is people, not states (UNDP 1994a, 22-23). These elements differentiate human security from traditional security conceptions.

Security conditions of the post-Cold War era directly influenced the development of the human security concept. The disappearance of the global nuclear war led to the consideration of the growing importance of non-military security issues. At the same time, the democratisation process has increased its significance as a result of the expansion of democracy in world politics. Connectedly, the basic rights and freedoms of individuals and their socio-economic conditions have been largely regarded by many actors in world politics. In this respect, human security has been an important perspective for comprehending many challenges, risks, and threats to human beings, such as violations of human rights, gender issues, environmental degradation, and socio-economic problems. Moreover, the emergence of the human security concept has been a part of the growing importance and influence of liberal values and concepts in international relations (Ağır 2022). Indeed, the main mission of states in terms of providing their people's security has been subject to assessments by the United Nations (UN), the EU, and non-governmental international organisations (NGOs) such as Amnesty International. One explicit piece of evidence of the growing importance of the human security conception is related to its adaptation by some states, such as Canada, Norway, and Japan; some international organisations, such as the UN and the EU; and some informal initiatives of states, such as the HSN (Ağır 2022).

Human security means creating political, social, environmental, economic, military, and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood, and dignity (CHS 2003, 4). The concept of human security is defined according to two different conceptions: *freedom from fear* and *freedom from want*. The freedom from fear aspect of human security emphasises the protection of people from physical violence such as war, riots, terrorism, and ethnic conflicts. The freedom from want aspect of the concept gives attention to structural violence, such as socio-economic problems, poverty, and lack of educational and healthcare services (UNDP 1994a, 24). Despite these two different human security conceptions, there is a complementary relationship between them because they consider the threats to human security in a multidimensional and comprehensive manner.

Threats to human security target the physical integrity of an individual and his/her ability to make choices freely. In the UNDP's (1994b, 230-234)

Human Development Report, personal security, community security, economic security, food security, environmental security, political security, and health security are described as local threats to human security. In addition to these local threats, the 1994 Report gives attention to global or transnational issues, such as global economic inequalities, international migration, environmental issues, and international terrorism that threaten the security and welfare of human beings. It is clear that the concept of human security comprises actors and agendas beyond those of traditional international politics.

In economic security, threats are defined in the following way: employment opportunities, poverty, homelessness, job security, etc. In food security, threats are defined as poor access to food and drinkable water, etc. In health security, threats are defined as infectious diseases, air pollution, poor access to healthcare services, etc. In environmental security, threats are defined as degradation of the ecosystem, water scarcity, deforestation, air pollution, etc. In personal security, threats are defined in the context of physical violence, such as torture, war, crime, rape, suicide, and drug use. In community security, threats are defined as discrimination, assimilation, weakening, and/or disappearing of traditional languages and cultures, etc. In political security, threats are defined as political repression of the states and governments, systematic human rights violations, militarisation of society, etc. These components of human security display themselves in the emergence of both regional and global norms and institutions, from human development and humanitarian law to human rights and democracy.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Who Provides Human Security and How?***

The human security conception does not explicitly determine a specific responsible actor for providing human security. An individual himself/herself is not in any position to provide human security. That is why human security can be provided by larger units such as society, state, and global and/or regional international institutions. The state, in particular, should assume the primary role in providing human security since it constitutes the most important macro-structure in terms of responsibility for security. However, human security can be deeply at risk in the case of fragile states (Thakur 2006, 257). What if a state is unwilling and/or incapable of providing security to its citizens? This situation points to a significant dilemma. Although the

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<sup>5</sup> For further information, please see: Alkire 2003, Brauch 2005, Chandler 2008, Gasper 2005, Hough 2004, Kaldor 2007, McDonald 2002, Paris 2001, Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007, and Zwi 2004.

democratic state remains the only desirable actor for human security, a number of states remain undemocratic in the international scene. Indeed, the concept of “responsibility to protect”, enhanced by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), questions the norm of non-intervention and state sovereignty concerning the protection of human rights and freedoms. In addition to the state’s role in solving human security problems, the concept of human security also requires cooperation with civil society.

With human security, not only is the scope of security broadened and deepened, but also the providers of security constitute a network of multiple actors (Amouyel 2006, 16-17). Thus, human security has increasingly become a part of the security agendas of various international commissions, international organisations, and states. For instance, through the European Security Strategy of 2003, the EU has launched an initiative to integrate the human security concept with the Union’s foreign and security policy. Moreover, some states, such as Canada, Norway, and Japan, have become the leading countries for the promotion of the human security conception for world security. Canada and Norway define their human security conceptions in respect of the absence of direct violence, such as war, terrorism, and violent rebellions, to the well-being and right to live of individuals. However, according to Japanese foreign policy, “human security covers all the menaces that threaten human survival, daily life, and dignity, such as environmental degradation, violations of human rights, organised crime, refugees, poverty, anti-personnel landmines, and infectious diseases such as AIDS” (DFAIT 1999b; MFAJ 1999, UN 2006). Moreover, Japan established the UN Human Security Fund in 1999 to operationalise the human security concept. The Human Security Trust Fund for Human Security supports projects directly related to peace-building activities, poverty, food security, and human trafficking (UN 2009, 56-57). It is clear that Japan has embraced a more comprehensive human security perspective in respect of freedom from want.

In addition to these states, some international organisations emphasise the importance of the human security conception. For instance, in 2003, the Organisation of American States (OAS) issued the Declaration on Security in the Americas, in which the importance of human security is emphasised (UN, 2010). The EU made several references to human security in its European Security Strategy 2003 by stating that new security threats are mostly non-military and cannot be dealt with by military instruments (EC 2003, 3-5). The Human Security Doctrine for Europe, prepared by the Human Security Working Group in 2004, suggested the integration of the human security concept with the EU’s security policy (HSWG 2004). On the other hand, the

refusal of the EU Constitution by France and Denmark prevented the official integration of human security into the Union (Ağır 2015).

However, there are still institutional problems in strengthening the human security conception. For instance, although inter-organisational cooperation is a necessity in the formulation of human security policy and implementation, many actors of global politics, such as the EU, the OAS, the UN, and the HSN, that pay attention to human security policy do not interact sufficiently (Prezelj 2008, 13). The institutionalisation of norms of human security should be at the heart of the UN activities and global economic and financial institutions. However, their policies and activities can be effective if states stand behind them (Bajpai 2000, 31). In this respect, it should be underlined that the effective application of human security suffers from adequate support from the powerful states (Mahmud et al. 2008, 67). On the other hand, the growing interdependence of global politics makes cooperation among states, international organisations, and civil society inevitable for dealing with human security threats.

### **Erosion of Liberal International Order and Its Impact on Security Thinking**

The end of the Cold War brought about an era of great expectations. Thus, a positive atmosphere for multilateralism, cooperation, dialogue, international law, and diplomacy in global political issues emerged. In parallel with the growing importance of human rights, freedoms, and democracy, a liberal understanding of international relations began to focus on the survival and well-being of individuals. Accordingly, the responsibilities and duties of states have been subject to re-evaluation by scholars and practitioners. Moreover, during the first decade of the post-Cold War era, regionalism and integration processes became popular practices for states within globalisation. All in all, the concept of human security found suitable conditions to express its necessity for global security. It is obvious that most of the current security threats have a multidimensional and transboundary character. That is why environmental degradation, migration issues, global socio-economic disparities, and pandemics cannot be solved by individual states' efforts.

Although multilateralism and international law seemed to be the defining features of global politics during the 1990s concerning the protection of human rights, NATO realised the "Allied Force" operation without having any authorisation from the UN by any Security Council resolution. However, a turning point happened on September 11, 2001, through terrorist attacks on the targets in the United States of America (USA). Eventually, a new and quite

different form of politics would begin to shape international relations. The 9/11 attacks and the following events in the 2000s, such as the “war on terror”, the “Arab Spring”, the rise of authoritarianism and populism, the “Syrian civil war”, mass migration, the 2008 global financial crisis, BREXIT, and their reflections on global politics, had an undermining impact on the liberal understanding of International Relations (IR) and subsequently the human security conception.

As a part of the US’s strongest reaction to the attacks, Washington declared the “war on global terror”, and in the 2002 National Security Strategy Document of the US, “our best defence is a good offence” is declared as its main method (NSS 2002). This will be called the Bush Doctrine and the “preemptive strike”. Thus, multilateralism, international law, and liberal values were strongly ignored by the US administration. For instance, the absence of any UNSC resolution and the lack of support from some of its European allies did not lead to any hesitation in the US occupation of Iraq. On the other hand, such a unilateral action has become a precedent for the Russian Federation and some other states’ aggressive and status-quo-challenging behaviours in realising their national security interests by regarding the traditional security conception.

The unilateral actions of states such as the US and Russia have been completely contradictory to the basic assumptions of liberal theory in IR. In addition to neglecting the role of international institutions, some important documents of international law, such as the Statute of Rome, the Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty, the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the Kyoto Protocol, have been trivialised by many states for their narrow national interest definitions. However, all these international efforts are important for global peace and security and compatible with the human security conception.

While old concepts and methods of international politics have been revisited, particularly after the 9/11 events, the state security paradigm was reintroduced by privileging military security and geopolitical competition in global politics. The discourses and practices of states during more than two decades have caused the weakening of liberal thinking. Accordingly, the notion of multilateralism has been gradually replaced by unilateralism, given the rising importance of the state at the heart of security issues again.

The following events are the symbolic developments of the erosion of the liberal order and liberal security thinking: disappointing results of the Arab Spring in bringing democracy, human rights, and equality to peoples of the Middle East and North Africa; the socio-economic repercussions of the 2008 global financial crisis; the backsliding of the integration efforts of the EU regarding Brexit; the slowing down of the accession process of candidate countries; and reactions to migrant and refugee peoples and their socio-



political effect in terms of rising intolerance to “other”. Moreover, there is a lack of liberal leadership in the promotion of liberal values and ideals. In contrast, there are populist, authoritarian, and nationalist political leaders who follow illiberal, nationalistic, and mostly egoist perspectives about security issues that directly target individuals. For instance, according to Ikenberry, Donald Trump was the first president who has been actively hostile to liberal internationalism since the 1930s (2018, 7). Particularly since the pandemic, it is argued that the entrenchment of authoritarianism and exacerbation of nationalism undermine the popularity and authority of international institutions that buttress the principle of multilateralism (Huang 2021, 20). John Mearsheimer argues that “it was clear that the liberal international order was in deep trouble. The tectonic plates that underpin it are shifting, and little can be done to repair and rescue it” (2019, 7). This is not an exacerbated approach given the decreasing influence of multilateralism, liberal principles, and normative values in global politics. It also has an implication for security thinking in the framework of boosting the traditional security conception.

### **The Birth of the Human Security Network**

Traditionally, states form coalitions for political, economic, military, and/or strategic interests. However, the HSN represents an attempt to encourage the global community on a broad range of human security initiatives. The cooperative activities between Canada and Norway regarding human rights issues played an important role in the HSN establishment process with the participation of other like-minded states in the coalition.

In December 1997, the Ottawa Convention on Anti-Personnel Landmines was signed by 131 states. Canada’s Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy and his Norwegian counterpart Knut Vollebæk met for the first time in Ottawa, Canada. Norway has been among the first countries to join the “Ottawa Treaty”, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production, and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and their Destruction. Norway, Canada, and other like-minded states agreed to collaborate in providing resources for demining and aid to victims (Axworthy et al. 2014, 144). Thus, the foundations of the Human Security Network were introduced during the negotiations of the Ottawa Convention. And also, the entry into force of the Ottawa Convention in 1999 was an important achievement. The idea that Ottawa’s success could be replicated in other human security issues led to the emergence of the idea of forming an informal agenda-setting group. It can be claimed that this success inspired the formation process of the HSN.

After the two meetings between Axworthy and Vollebæk, the Lysøen Declaration (Canada-Norway Partnership for Action) was signed on May 11, 1998, in Bergen. Human security is conceptualised to provide the protection of human rights, lives, and security from threats of physical violence in the Lysøen Declaration (DFAIT 1999a, 2). Indeed, both Canada's and Norway's human security conceptions emphasised the freedom from the fear aspect of the concept by prioritising the protection of civilians in armed conflicts, preventing humanitarian catastrophes like genocidal actions in Srebrenica and Rwanda (Axworthy 1997, 183-196; Axworthy 2001, 6). On the other hand, the HSN defines human security with respect to both freedom from fear and freedom from want (UN 2010). However, most of the efforts and activities of the HSN are mainly focused on the issues of physical violence and their implications for global peace and security. The campaign for banning landmines, efforts to prevent the expansion of small arms and light weapons, and the signing of the Rome Statute for the establishment of the International Criminal Court are the main examples of a narrow conception of human security (Krause 2007, 4).

With regard to emerging human security issues, Norway and Canada, via the Lysøen Declaration, agreed to establish a framework for consultation and concerted action in the areas of enhancing human security, promoting human rights, strengthening humanitarian law, preventing conflict, and fostering democracy and good governance, as well as cooperation in the Arctic (Axworthy et al. 2014, 144). In order to achieve these objectives, they agreed to hold ministerial meetings at least once a year to review progress and set priorities. There was also an emphasis on the involvement of civil society, relevant international bodies, and other states (Small 2001, 232).

Accordingly, in the early summer of 1998, Axworthy visited the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) Summit, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Ministerial Conference to promote the human security agenda for global politics. The foreign ministers of Switzerland, Austria, Ireland, and Thailand expressed enthusiasm for joining a new human security group. In consultation with Norway, it was decided to approach the Netherlands, Slovenia, Jordan, South Africa, and Chile. The latter four countries, in particular, were invited in order to provide a cross-regional balance. Vollebaek offered to invite all the ministers to Bergen in May 1999 for a meeting to build on "the spirit of Lysoen" (Small 2001, 233). As a result of discussions in the Bergen meeting, the "Human Security Network" emerged to include the participation of like-minded states and non-governmental international organisations in respect of human security.

The HSN was comprised of thirteen countries: Austria, Canada, Chile, Greece, Ireland, Jordan, Mali, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, South Africa (observer status), Switzerland, and Thailand. At the constituent meeting of the HSN in Bergen in May 1999, representatives of these thirteen countries were joined by the representatives of several international organisations and non-governmental organisations, including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Save the Children, the International Committee of the Red Cross, Amnesty International, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, Coalition to Combat Land Mines, and Coalition to Combat Small Arms (Axworthy et al. 2014, 145). During the HSN's meeting on September 26, 2013, it was stated that "all members have shown unity in their commitment to human security... It is this diversity that gives the Network its strength" (PMCUN 2013). Thus, the HSN promotes the integration of the human security approach into policies and programmes at the regional, national, and international levels.

In addition to pioneer states in human security, such as Canada, Norway, and Japan, some other states, such as Jordan, Ecuador, Lithuania, and Thailand, have sought to make human security a part of their national security policies. In this respect, for instance, in 2008, Ecuador made human security a part of its constitution in order to find a more human-centric solution to the problems of the country. Thailand became the first state to establish a human security ministry in the world. Human security was also recognised as the primary value of Lithuania's national security in the 2012 National Security Strategy, which was more comprehensive and included the economy, energy security, human rights, public health, and the prevention of transnational organised crime (UN 2013).

The HSN has created a structure that is explicitly informal and flexible, thereby providing an effective approach for promoting international action on concrete problems. The HSN's effectiveness is the result of three key advantages: First, it has developed a capacity for international agenda-setting. The member countries have succeeded in placing several human security issues on the international agenda. Such issues include landmine destruction and aid to landmine victims, small arms trafficking, the rights of children in armed conflict, international humanitarian law, and the impact of climate change on vulnerable groups (Julio and Brauch 2009, 1000-1001). Second, it has emphasised the multidimensional nature of the concept of human security. Third, it has become a platform through which countries can lobby collectively for issues of common concern. Human security provides the framework through which like-minded countries can work together to address global problems. Moreover, it allows countries that have little power on the international stage to leverage their collective influence and experiences to become relevant players in international policymaking (Julio

and Brauch 2009, 994). For instance, the promotion of the establishment of the HSN by Canada and Norway is also related to their search for status in international politics (Suhrke 1999, 267).

The HSN used a variety of informal mechanisms, including annual ministerial meetings, to universalise the human security idea. The first meeting at the level of Ministers of Foreign Affairs was held in Bergen, Norway, in 1999. In this meeting, the issues of anti-personnel landmines, children in armed conflict, human rights, international humanitarian law, the International Criminal Court, peacekeeping, organised crime, and development and security were addressed by the participants. At the second meeting of the HSN in Lucerne, Switzerland, in 2000, the issues of small arms, armed non-state actors, education in human rights, children in armed conflict, conflict prevention, the International Criminal Court, anti-personnel landmines, and protecting civilians in armed conflict were extensively addressed and discussed by the members of the coalition (Julio and Brauch 2009, 994). At the third meeting of the HSN in Petra, Jordan, in 2001, the issues of development and human security, peacekeeping, children in armed conflict, human security index, HIV/AIDS, gender and human security, and, lastly, small arms constituted the main items of the agenda addressed by the participant countries (HRW 2001; Julio and Brauch 2009, 992; UN 2001). In Santiago, Chile, in 2002, at the fourth meeting of the HSN, participant countries discussed the human security index, education in human rights, public security, and human security (Julio and Brauch 2009, 992; OAS 2003). In Graz, Austria, in 2003, at the fifth meeting of the HSN, participant countries addressed the issues of children in armed conflict and education in human rights (Julio and Brauch 2009, 992, MOFA, 2006). In Bamako, Mali, in 2004, at the sixth meeting of the Network, participant countries discussed the issues of children in armed conflict, small arms trafficking, gender and peacekeeping, and education in human rights (Julio and Brauch 2009, 992; MOFA 2004). In Ottawa, Canada, in 2005, at the seventh meeting of the HSN, the issues of the United Nations reform and the UN Secretary-General Report “In Larger Freedom” were extensively addressed by the participant countries. In Bangkok, Thailand, in 2006, at the eighth meeting of the HSN, the issues of people-centred development, HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, global environmental change, and natural hazards (Julio and Brauch 2009, 992; MOFA 2005) were discussed. Also, during the meeting in Bangkok, Japan initiated a policy titled “Toward Forming Friends of Human Security” (Julio and Brauch 2009, 992). In Ljubljana, Slovenia, in 2007, at the ninth meeting of the HSN, the issues of landmines, protection of women and children, fight against HIV/AIDS, human trafficking, fight against poverty, and climate change impact on vulnerable groups were discussed by the participants (Julio and Brauch 2009, 994). These meetings of the HSN were continued with the

meetings in Athens, Greece, in 2008, and Dublin, Ireland, in 2009, and thus an important agenda for human security was created with the participation and contributions of the coalition countries. Although during these meetings, some issues of human security became a topic of discussion on the agenda, some coalition countries, such as Chile and Mali, have incorporated human security into their foreign policies, but to a lesser degree.

### ***Agenda and Achievements of the HSN***

The HSN has sought to bring global attention to new and emerging issues about the security conditions of human beings. By applying a human security perspective to global problems, the HSN aims to energise political processes aimed at preventing or solving conflicts and promoting peace and development. The agenda of the HSN focuses on all four pillars of the human security concept: “freedom from want”, “freedom from fear”, “freedom to live in dignity”, and “freedom from hazard impacts” (Julio and Brauch 2009, 992-998). For instance, in 2005, the HSN defined a working plan (2005-2008) that includes some areas of collaboration, such as effective multilateral institutions, promotion of human rights, protection of civilians, preventing the spread of small arms and landmines, and emphasis on the relationships between women, peace and security, HIV/AIDS, and poverty (Julio and Brauch 2009, 994-996).

The HSN played a key role in the achievement process of some important international conventions, such as the Anti-Personnel Landmines Agreement in 1997 (Ottawa Convention), the signing of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, the Action Plan against Small Arms, the Additional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child, the Additional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture, and the Treaty of Rome in 1998, which established the International Criminal Court (Julio and Brauch 2009, 996). Moreover, the HSN played a role during the acceptance of some thematic resolutions of the UN Security Council on Children and Armed Conflict and on Women, Peace and Security, and the unanimous adoption in 2005 by the UN member states of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) (Axworthy et al. 2014, 145-146). The HSN has been active in the promotion of a rule-based system of global cooperation and the protection of people. These achievements have revealed that common ground in the context of human security could lead to practical results for global peace and security.

The work agenda of the HSN has been organised around a series of intergovernmental meetings held in each of the member countries. In these meetings, the participants discuss future areas where the HSN should become involved. Each of the member countries has used these meetings to direct the attention of the global community to a range of national and regional issues. For instance, while Canada, Switzerland, and Austria give attention to human

rights education, Mali emphasises the importance of the issue of child soldiers and the protection of civilians in humanitarian crises in Africa. In the same way, while Thailand gives importance to the spread of AIDS in Southeast Asia, Greece seeks to regard the relationship between human security and the climate change impact on vulnerable groups (Julio and Brauch 2009, 996-997).

In his speech during the ninth ministerial meeting of the HSN on May 18, 2007, in Ljubljana, Yukio Takasu (2009), Ambassador of Japan in charge of human security, stated that the relevance of human security was extensively acknowledged as a result of the affirmed consensus during the Outcome of the World Summit in September 2005. As an implication, the Friends of Human Security (FHS) met for the first time in October 2006 in New York. The second meeting was organised in April 2007 under the co-chairmanship of Japan and Mexico and the participation of 33 countries, including the US and Russia. The FHS is another informal forum of representatives who desire to cooperate to make the human security approach better reflected in the UN activities and to carry out joint activities (Takasu 2009). For instance, on September 23, 2009, in New York, during the annual ministerial meeting of the HSN hosted by the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN, the relationship between peace and justice was strongly emphasised, especially in post-conflict societies (O'Brien 2009). On August 19, 2013, in New York, the representative of Chile in the UN made a speech on behalf of the HSN about the protection of civilians in armed conflicts (PMCCUN 2013). Thus, the HSN has sought to increase the awareness of the UN member states, the UN bodies, and global civil society about the potential of human security conception for global peace and security.

## **Conclusion**

The human security concept has constituted a challenge to traditional security thinking since the early 1990s. The human security concept is a product of structural and normative conditions of global politics and a timely offered concept, both in terms of its focused referent object and a broadened security agenda. The implementation of human security necessitates a qualitative change in the formation of foreign and security policies of the actors (Ağır 2022). The effects of human security problems have been felt differently by various states and regions. States must share a common understanding with multilateralism to struggle with these problems. Global security problems ask for global solutions. The formation of the HSN, acceptance of human security by international organisations, such as the UN, the EU, and the OAS, and promotion of the concept by some countries, such as Japan, Canada, and Norway, could be considered the success of human



security. However, human security as a normative concept has lost much of its persuasive power among policymakers. Thus, the performance of liberal states will be a determining factor for the future of the HSN.

The HSN could not help the formation of a comprehensive and effective human security regime in global politics because of several developments of the new millennium. This is mainly because of the changing perspectives of states about their security priorities and their methods to address them. Especially the 9/11 events, the Arab Spring, regional conflicts, civil wars, mass migration, economic and financial crises, pandemics, the rise of authoritarianism, unilateral actions taken by states, and mistrust of international organisations are important factors that have caused considerable erosion in the liberal international order. This erosion naturally results in great handicaps for the HSN.

As a normative stand, the HSN could mobilise the global community for the human security conception as an international agenda-setting actor. Thus, many issues of human security could be brought to the attention of some states, international institutions, civil society organisations, academia, media, and global society. It also managed to be an international platform for several states from different regions of the world in the context of the human security conception by emphasising the multidimensional nature of human security.

The HSN failed to hold meetings at the level of heads of state. While Canada did not participate in the meetings after 2011, the meetings of the HSN ended in 2018. Moreover, in Canada, as the pioneer state of the HSN, the term human security was not a subject on the website of its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and its human security website was also closed. In Norway, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs similarly no longer lists human security as a subject heading on its website. While Canada and Norway, as two driving forces of the HSN, stopped their support for the promotion of human security in global politics due to the lack of effective institutionalisation of the HSN, its activities could not go beyond conducting an international agenda-setting unit and supporting a normative perspective about global security. Therefore, currently, it seems difficult to deepen collaboration among the member states and expand partnerships with other like-minded states on issues of common interest. Moreover, concerning the insufficient institutionalisation of the HSN, it does not have an effective website and social media presence through which its activities, mission, and vision could easily be followed.

Some HSN members demonstrated incoherent attitudes about recent human security issues in global politics. For instance, while the HSN has not addressed the COVID-19 pandemic, migration and refugee issues, the Gaza massacre, and the humanitarian implications of the Ukraine-Russian War,



Canada, Switzerland, and Norway, as the members of the HSN, are among the top actors in the manufacturing and trading of weapons and ammunition in the global market (Tian et al. 2024) despite the HSN's anti-armament initiatives. Additionally, some member countries of the HSN, such as Canada, were involved in the US's global war on terrorism campaign after the 9/11 terrorist attacks despite all its unlawful aspects.

One further problem is the predominant subjectivity of human security threat perception. Similar human security situations can be perceived quite differently around the world. The constructivist approach in social sciences substantiated the idea of contemporary reality as a social construction. Naturally, the perception of human security situations will always be subjective and conflicting. However, this is not a reason that should prevent the scientific community from contributing to minimising these differences. We need an objectivisation of human security in crisis and non-crisis situations. A periodically prepared human security index would be helpful in this regard (Prezelj 2008, 19-20).

The empowered HSN could contribute to providing detailed data collection from individual states. Thus, there will be more effective positions for evaluating and improving risk assessments about human security. The old model of separating state security from human security cannot sufficiently respond to the current generation of challenges around the globe. In global security, we should face long-term structural challenges and sudden crisis-like situations. Indeed, from the inception of the concept of human security to the present day, the nature of the threats human beings face around the world has changed dramatically (JICA Ogata Research Institute 2024). While new threats, such as dangerous planetary changes, cybersecurity, technological developments, social media, and pandemics to human security, have diversified (UNDP 2022), there is a growing need to promote solidarity for achieving human development and security. Certainly, both the human security concept and the HSN still represent a vision that is a dream for many and should be a reality for all.

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#### **MEĐUNARODNO DOBRONAMERNA, ALI INSTITUCIONALNO NEUSPEŠNA: MREŽA LJUDSKE BEZBEDNOSTI**

*Apstrakt:* Kraj Hladnog rata obezbedio je povoljno okruženje za normativne ideje u oblasti bezbednosti, što je dovelo do proširenja i produbljenja koncepta bezbednosti. Time su neke države u globalnoj politici relativno oslobođene tradicionalnih shvatanja bezbednosti i mogu se fokusirati na „ljudsku bezbednost“, koja je deo šireg spektra bezbednosnih agendi. U tom kontekstu, koalicija država, zasnovana na zajedničkim stavovima i očekivanjima u vezi sa pitanjima ljudske bezbednosti, pokrenula je inicijativu Mreže ljudske bezbednosti, oslanjajući se na normativni ambijent i postignuća iz devedesetih godina. Međutim, ova inicijativa suočila se s brojnim izazovima u 21. veku, kada je tradicionalno shvatanje bezbednosti ponovo dobilo na značaju, posebno nakon terorističkih napada 11. septembra i ključnih preokreta poput globalne finansijske krize 2008. godine, procesa Bregzita u Evropskoj uniji, neuspeha Arapskog proleća, priliva izbeglica, nedovoljne globalne solidarnosti tokom pandemije COVID-19 i porasta autoritarizma u globalnoj politici. Cilj ove studije je da ispita u kojoj meri je Mreža ljudske bezbednosti ostvarila svoje ciljeve od osnivanja, uzimajući u obzir teškoće koje su doprinele slabljenju globalnog liberalnog poretka i njegovih principa, kao i eventualne organizacione nedostatke.

*Ključne reči:* bezbednost; ljudska bezbednost; normativni liberalni svet; Mreža ljudske bezbednosti.





## NAVIGATING THE GLOBAL ALGORITHM ECONOMY: IMPLICATIONS FOR BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA'S GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE

Sanel HUSKIĆ<sup>1</sup>, Muamer HIRKIĆ<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This study explores the implications of the global algorithm economy on Bosnia and Herzegovina's (BiH) geopolitical landscape, focusing on the strategic competition between the United States (US) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) in artificial intelligence (AI) development. As AI technologies rapidly evolve, they reshape economic value and global power dynamics. The US and the PRC, as leaders in AI innovation, are at the forefront of this transformation, influencing international relations and positioning smaller nations like BiH in complex geopolitical scenarios. This research investigates the ripple effects of the global AI rivalry on BiH's data sovereignty, political discourse, and public policy through a mixed-methods approach, including an analysis of the AI machine learning value chain and semi-structured interviews with key informants. The findings highlight significant challenges for BiH in leveraging AI for national growth but underscore opportunities for improvement through strategic investments and coherent data management strategies. The study concludes with recommendations for BiH to proactively address these challenges, emphasising the importance of understanding regional dynamics and aligning with global AI standards.

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## Introduction

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies has become a defining characteristic of the 21st century, profoundly influencing global economic and geopolitical dynamics. As nations strive to assert dominance in the AI domain, the competition between major global powers, particularly the US and the PRC, has intensified, influencing a wide array of sectors from technology to economic policy. This race is not only reshaping economic landscapes but also redefining geopolitical alliances and strategies. Against this backdrop, smaller nations such as BiH are finding themselves at a critical juncture where they must navigate the complex interplay between global AI powerhouses to safeguard their interests and enhance their geopolitical standing.

The concept of the “algorithm economy” refers to an economic paradigm where algorithms, particularly those driven by AI and machine learning, play a pivotal role in driving economic value and growth (Trabelsi 2023; Gonzales 2023; Qin et al. 2023). In this new economic model, data is the key. Hence, the ability to collect, process, and analyse vast amounts of data has become a key determinant of national power and influence. Countries that lead in AI development are not only poised to reap significant economic benefits but also to exert considerable geopolitical influence (Bonsu and Song 2020; Pavel et al. 2023). The US and PRC are at the forefront of this transformation, each leveraging their unique strengths to advance their AI capabilities and secure a competitive edge.

With its robust innovation ecosystem, substantial financial resources, and a long history of technological leadership, the US continues to be a dominant force in AI research and development. American tech giants such as Google, Microsoft, and IBM are pioneers in AI innovation, continuously pushing the boundaries of what is possible. Furthermore, the US’s strategic investments in AI through government initiatives and defence projects underscore its commitment to maintaining technological supremacy (Buchanan 2020). On the other hand, China has rapidly emerged as a formidable contender in the global AI race. With extensive government support and a vast population that generates enormous amounts of data, China has made remarkable strides in AI development (Gueham 2017). The Chinese government’s strategic vision, as articulated in its “New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan,” aims to position China as the world leader in AI by 2030 (Gueham 2017). Chinese tech giants like Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent are at the forefront of this effort, developing cutting-edge AI technologies and applications.

The competition between the US and the PRC in AI is not merely a technological rivalry but also a strategic contest with far-reaching implications for global politics. This rivalry influences international trade policies, security

alliances, and diplomatic relations, thereby shaping the geopolitical landscape. For countries like BiH, situated at the intersection of these global forces, navigation through this complex terrain is essential for ensuring national security and economic prosperity. A country with a strategic location in Southeast Europe, BiH has a unique geopolitical position. Historically, it has been a crossroads of different cultures, ideologies, and political influences. In the current context of AI-driven geopolitics, BiH must carefully balance its relationships with global powers while developing its own AI capabilities. The nation's engagement with both the US and the PRC presents opportunities and challenges that require informed strategies. Hence, this research aims to delve into the dynamics of the global algorithm economy and its impact on BiH's geopolitical position. By examining how the US-PRC competition in developing robust AI technologies influences the geopolitical landscape of BiH, this study seeks to uncover potential outcomes and strategies for navigating this complex terrain. Specifically, the research will explore how AI development by these global powers affects BiH's data sovereignty, political discourse, and public policy.

## **Conceptual and Theoretical Background**

The AI machine learning value chain is crucial in the race for AI leadership, particularly between China and the United States. This value chain consists of five key stages: data collection, data storage, data preparation, algorithm training, and application development (Stanton et al. 2019; Bughin et al. 2017). Understanding this chain is vital for countries seeking a competitive advantage in the AI era. The geographic distribution of these stages significantly influences a country's position in the global economic landscape and impacts broader geopolitical dynamics.

### ***Data Collection in the AI Machine Learning Value Chain***

Data collection is the foundation of machine learning, providing the raw material necessary for developing AI applications. Vast amounts of data are generated daily through various devices and activities, including internet searches, social media posts, phone calls, and online transactions. This raw data is essential because it is used to train machine learning algorithms, making them more accurate and effective (Kelly 2022). China is often highlighted for its significant advantage in data collection (Kelly 2022). The country has a massive and highly digitised population, which generates an enormous amount of data. Additionally, China's regulatory environment is relatively lenient regarding data protection, allowing for extensive data collection across numerous sectors, such as technology, e-commerce, and social media. The Chinese government views

data as a crucial resource and has established data trading exchanges to leverage this asset strategically (Kelly 2022). In contrast, the United States excels in technological innovation and has some of the world's leading technology companies, such as Google, Facebook, and Amazon. These companies play a significant role in collecting data globally. The US benefits from a diverse range of data sources, including tech companies, financial institutions, and research organisations, contributing to a rich and varied dataset. This diversity is a significant advantage in the data collection stage of the AI value chain (Kelly 2022; Koetse 2024).

### ***Data Storage and Data Preparation in the AI Machine Learning Value Chain***

Once data is collected, it must be securely stored and managed. Initially, companies used physical data centres, large facilities filled with servers to store data. However, there is a noticeable shift towards cloud storage. Instead of maintaining their servers, many businesses now rely on cloud service providers, which operate extensive networks of servers and virtual machines accessible over the Internet. One of the most advanced forms of data storage today is found in hyperscale data centres (HDCs). These facilities span multiple locations and house thousands of servers, handling millions of virtual machines (Ozsevim 2023). Furthermore, the expansion of data centres raises important environmental concerns (Vincent 2024; Anderson, Sweeney, and Canonica 2023). For example, the expansion of data centres, particularly hyperscale facilities, has raised critical environmental concerns due to their substantial energy demands and water usage. Globally, data centres consumed approximately 460 terawatt-hours (TWh) of electricity in 2022, representing 1.8% of the world's total electricity consumption, with projections indicating this could surpass 1,000 TWh by 2026 (Ozsevim 2023). In regions such as Ireland, data centres accounted for 18% of national electricity use in 2022, with estimates suggesting they could consume 28% by 2031 (Anderson, Sweeney, and Canonica 2023). Additionally, hyperscale facilities, such as those operated by Google, require an average of 550,000 gallons (2.1 million litres) of water daily for cooling, amounting to over 200 million gallons annually (Vincent 2024). This high resource demand is particularly concerning in water-stressed areas, where such facilities intensify local scarcity. Furthermore, many data centres rely on electricity derived from fossil fuels, contributing to elevated carbon emissions and hindering global efforts to combat climate change (Vincent 2024).

Raw data often come with inherent disorder, containing outliers and errors that require attention. Data preparation, or data pre-processing, involves cleaning and structuring this data. This process is typically carried out by highly

skilled data engineers and scientists, who use various techniques to correct errors, handle outliers, and organise data into tables or other formats suitable for analysis (Kotsiantis, Kanellopoulos, and Pintelas 2006). In addition to these specialists, less-skilled workers, known as data labellers, may be employed to categorise manually subsets of data according to specific algorithmic requirements. For instance, in training facial recognition algorithms, data labellers might classify images of faces into categories like “male” or “female” to help the algorithm learn distinguishing features and make predictions on new data (Stanton et al. 2019). The effectiveness of data preparation significantly depends on the skills of the personnel involved. Data scientists play a crucial role, tasked with collecting, cleaning, and analysing large datasets from various sources, including databases, social media, and sensors. They employ statistical and machine learning techniques to analyse data and develop models that predict future trends and outcomes. Effective communication of these results to stakeholders is also a key responsibility (Segaran and Hammerbacher 2009). The demand for data scientists is projected to grow significantly. The US Bureau of Labour Statistics forecasts the creation of approximately 11.5 million data science jobs by 2026, with a 35% growth in employment from 2022 to 2032 (US Bureau of Labor Statistics 2022). This growth highlights the increasing need for skilled data professionals. Highly skilled workers in data preparation often come from STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) backgrounds. Therefore, the number of STEM graduates is a useful proxy for estimating the availability of data scientists. In 2016, China and India were the leading producers of STEM graduates, with 4.7 million and 2.6 million. The US followed with 0.5 million graduates (Stanton et al. 2019). The Biden administration’s recent Executive Order underscores the importance of STEM education in fostering a skilled workforce for AI and other advanced technologies (Patel and Ahmad 2023).

China’s “Thousand Talents” programme aims to attract skilled professionals and enhance its technological capabilities by recruiting both Chinese and non-Chinese experts (Zwetsloot 2019). This initiative reflects China’s strategy to bridge gaps in technology and innovation. However, concerns remain regarding the quality and transparency of Chinese research, particularly in areas such as intellectual property and data security (Zwetsloot 2019). In contrast, the United States benefits from a well-established research ecosystem and top-tier institutions, making it an attractive destination for international talent. More than half of Chinese undergraduates studying AI have migrated to the US, with a high percentage choosing to remain and work there after graduation (Appenzeller, Bornstein, and Casado 2023). This talent mobility highlights the competitive nature of AI development and the potential challenges posed by restrictive immigration policies and increased competition from other nations.

### ***Algorithm Training in the AI Machine Learning Value Chain***

The role of human talent is critical in algorithm training (Stanton et al. 2019). Data scientists are the experts responsible for developing, refining, and comparing various models. Their work involves selecting appropriate algorithms and fine-tuning their configurations to optimise performance. Given the complexity and variety of algorithms, data scientists must possess a high level of expertise to navigate the numerous options available and evaluate their effectiveness through rigorous testing and validation processes (Stanton et al. 2019). The significance of skilled labour in this context cannot be overstated, as these professionals are crucial for enhancing predictive accuracy and adapting models to meet evolving data and requirements. Another essential component of algorithm training is computing power (Stanton et al. 2019). The efficiency and speed with which algorithms are trained rely heavily on advanced computer hardware. Sophisticated models, particularly those that handle large datasets, require substantial computational resources. This demand is met by bespoke semiconductors, such as Graphics Processing Units (GPUs) and Field-Programmable Gate Arrays (FPGAs), which are specifically designed to handle the massive parallel processing tasks needed for machine learning (Buchanan 2020). The exponential increase in computing power has been a major driver of AI progress, allowing systems to process larger volumes of data in shorter time frames. While recent research suggests that large language models (LLMs) could be trained with more modest resources, high-performance computing remains a significant bottleneck (Stanton et al. 2019). When comparing the AI capabilities of China and the United States, several key differences emerge, particularly in the realm of algorithm training. China leads in the number of individual machine learning patents and holds a significant share of patents related to deep learning, a rapidly growing subfield of AI (Stanton et al. 2019). However, in the global patent landscape, China lags behind the United States (Stanton et al. 2019). American entities have filed nearly a quarter of a million patent applications abroad, more than double the number from China (Stanton et al. 2019). Furthermore, US patents are more frequently cited, indicating higher technical relevance and quality (Stanton et al. 2019). The semiconductor industry also highlights a critical difference between the two countries. Historically, the United States has been a global leader in semiconductor technology. However, most semiconductor manufacturing now occurs outside the US, particularly in Taiwan, South Korea, and China. Meanwhile, China has made significant progress in acquiring machine learning patents and advancing its semiconductor capabilities (Stanton et al. 2019). The Chinese government has also launched initiatives like the “Thousand Talents” programme to bolster domestic expertise and reduce reliance on foreign technology (Zwetsloot 2019).

### ***Application Development in the AI Machine Learning Value Chain***

Software development has become increasingly crucial with the rise of technology. According to Evans Data Corporation, there were 26.4 million software developers worldwide in 2022. This number is expected to grow to 28.7 million by 2024 (Evans Data Corporation 2023). Developer Nation Report (2021) further illustrates this growth, noting that there were 24.3 million software developers globally in 2021, a 20% increase from 2020. Projections suggest this figure will reach 45 million by 2030 (Developer Nation 2021). The distribution and characteristics of software developers vary widely. The Asia-Pacific region, particularly India and China, has the largest population of software developers, with significant growth expected in the coming years (Stanton et al., 2019). In contrast, Europe is experiencing slower growth due to economic challenges and the ongoing impacts of the war in Ukraine. North America and Latin America are also showing steady growth rates. The growth and distribution of software developers are critical for understanding how effectively countries can develop and deploy machine learning applications.

### ***Data Sovereignty***

Moreover, in this race, the concept of data sovereignty is becoming increasingly important.<sup>3</sup> Countries are asserting more control over the data produced within their borders, recognising its national security and economic value. The European Union, for instance, has implemented policies to ensure “digital sovereignty,” aiming to govern the extensive data collection within its member states (European Commission 2024a; European Commission 2024b; European Parliament 2020). Similarly, countries like India and Saudi Arabia are taking steps to manage and leverage their data resources more effectively (Chander and Sun 2023). The transformative nature of AI extends beyond its technological advancements, significantly impacting global economic and geopolitical landscapes. Governments worldwide are navigating the dual challenge of fostering AI innovation while addressing its associated risks. Unlike earlier systems, which relied on pre-programmed rules and human expertise, modern AI leverages significant advancements in computing power, sophisticated algorithms, and an unprecedented volume of data. This evolution has positioned AI as a major driver of economic value, contributing

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<sup>3</sup> Data sovereignty is an increasingly important issue, shaping how countries, companies, and individuals manage and protect digital information. At its core, it involves a nation’s right to control data within its borders, free from external influence. Understanding this concept is crucial for navigating the complexities of global data governance in the digital age.



approximately \$2 trillion to the global economy and potentially reaching \$16 trillion by 2030 (Rao and Verweij 2017; Bughin et al. 2018). The substantial economic impact of AI has led to heightened geopolitical competition, prompting governments to escalate investments in AI research, development, talent, and infrastructure.

In China, the government has implemented stringent measures to control data flows, such as mandating that foreign companies store data from Chinese customers within its borders. This policy aims to safeguard national security while also limiting the use of Chinese data by external entities (The Economist 2017; Lee 2017). In contrast, the US has employed a range of measures to protect its technological edge. For instance, the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS) blocked Chinese investment in a major US semiconductor producer, reflecting both national security concerns and strategic interests in maintaining dominance in semiconductor production (The Economist 2017; Lee 2017). This action, while officially framed as a national security measure, also serves to preserve the competitive advantage of US semiconductor technology. The concept of data sovereignty posits that data generated, processed, and stored within a country's borders is subject to its national laws (Kirvan 2023). This principle encompasses both data residency, where data is stored but not processed, and data localisation, where data must be stored and processed within the same jurisdiction. Governments are increasingly adopting policies to assert control over data flows, reflecting broader geopolitical aspirations to safeguard national security, protect citizen privacy, and enhance economic competitiveness. Data sovereignty has become particularly prominent in Europe, where concerns over American and Chinese control over data have driven regulatory initiatives. European policymakers, for instance, are increasingly focused on strengthening their regulatory frameworks to ensure local control over data and protect against extraterritorial legal influences (Pannier 2022). The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Digital Markets Act, and Digital Services Act aim to strengthen data protection and ensure local data management (Pannier 2022). Initiatives such as Numspot, a joint venture to create a trusted, locally based cloud server, exemplify Europe's efforts to bolster data sovereignty (Kirvan 2023). Despite these advancements, challenges remain, such as the extraterritorial effects of US legislation like the CLOUD Act, which allows American authorities to access data stored abroad (van der Berg 2022). This legal conflict complicates efforts to ensure data protection within European jurisdictions. China's approach to data sovereignty is articulated through its Data Security Law, which mandates that foreign companies store data from Chinese customers within China (Gueham 2017). This law also restricts the use of Chinese data for services outside the country, reflecting China's strategic interest

in controlling data flows and protecting national security (Gueham 2017; Chander and Sun 2023).

## Methodology

### *Purpose and Objectives*

This study aims to explore the complex dynamics of the global algorithm economy and its influence on BiH's geopolitical position. Specifically, the research focuses on how the competition between the PRC and the United States in developing advanced artificial intelligence (AI) technologies impacts BiH's geopolitical landscape. The study investigates the engagement of BiH with these global powers and other nations to uncover potential outcomes and strategies for navigating this intricate terrain.

Therefore, the main research questions of this paper are: *Does the US and PRC's pursuit of the development of robust AI shape BiH's geopolitical standing? What are the prospects of BiH's contribution to the race?*

### *Conceptual-Methodological Framework and Data Collection Methods*

This research adopts a geopolitical imagination approach to examine the relationship between AI development and geopolitical dynamics. Grounded in the existing knowledge and empirical evidence, the study aims to provide insights into tangible outcomes rather than speculative scenarios. A mixed-methods approach was employed, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative techniques. During the secondary research phase, desk analysis and literature review were conducted using available reports, studies, and relevant documents. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven key informants from pertinent institutions and fields related to the study's subject.

The research was conducted in June 2024 by the authors of this paper. The idea was to gather expert opinions on geopolitics, artificial intelligence, and the economy. A total of seven interviews were conducted, with four taking place in person and three online. The questionnaire included 14 questions designed to explore the intersection of geopolitical dynamics, investment decisions, and data governance in BiH. It specifically sought insights into BiH's geopolitical standing, the influence of political stability on investment decisions, and the role of data sovereignty, residency, and localisation in attracting international investments. Furthermore, it examined how governance improvements in BiH could create a favourable environment for foreign investments, particularly in

the IT and data storage sectors. Respondents were experts in the fields of geopolitics, artificial intelligence, and economics.

The key areas of analysis for this study include the current state of BiH's nodes related to the AI machine learning value chain, existing policies, and third-party legal obligations. Additionally, the research will explore the links and potential correlations between BiH's political discourse and data sovereignty. Based on these analyses, the study will provide recommendations for potential areas of intervention to reverse negative trends.

## Results

BiH is situated in a complex geopolitical scenario, corroborated by varied descriptions by respondents. Also, BiH has to deal with the marginalisation and limited bargaining ground in this AI-fuelled economy. Respondent 1 believes that BiH "does not hold a significant geopolitical role and serves as a bargaining ground for major powers, particularly between the East and West". They emphasise BiH's marginalisation in technological terms, highlighting an economy "reliant on cheap labour".<sup>4</sup> Conversely, Respondent 2 underscores "regional differences in the perception of geopolitical relations". They point out that "while some countries in the region gravitate towards the EU and Euro-Atlantic integrations, Serbia's ambivalence complicates the regional dynamics further".<sup>5</sup>

In addition to regional dynamics and Euro-Atlantic integrations, the US is deemed to have the most significant influence by all respondents. For example, respondent 3 notes the influence of the US, "which is transmitted through Germany and the EU, making the actual influence of the US dominant".<sup>6</sup> Respondent 4 adds that "BiH's economic relations include cooperation with the US, China, and the EU", while Respondent 5 views BiH as "part of a broader regional satellite image with strong influences from the US and neoliberal policies positioning BiH as a *colony 2.0*".<sup>7</sup> These differing views illustrate the complexity of BiH's geopolitical position, influenced by various global powers and regional dynamics. This suggests that BiH's geopolitical manoeuvring is heavily influenced by the broader regional context, requiring a better understanding of the varied regional alignments and aspirations.

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with the male respondent, data expert, Sarajevo, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with the female respondent, data expert, Sarajevo, 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with the male respondent from a state institution, Sarajevo, 2024.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with the female respondent from a state institution, Sarajevo, 2024, and interview with the female respondent, data expert, Sarajevo, 2024.

Investments in the country (including the AI value chain) come from various destinations, but they are not strategically pursued or managed. Regarding investment in BiH, Respondent 1 criticises the focus on “raw materials and the lack of strategic investments that would benefit BiH citizens”. They believe that “BiH lacks an investment strategy, and that the financial system is not adapted to global flows, deterring private investors”.<sup>8</sup> Respondent 2 views “investments as a tool for strengthening influence”, emphasising the importance of the origin of money and transparency. They highlight that “the EU and US have been the largest investors, but China’s arrival has complicated the situation by adding a new dimension to regional geopolitical relations”.<sup>9</sup> Respondent 3 confirms that “the EU is the largest investor, while China targets large state projects such as highways, rather than small businesses”.<sup>10</sup> Respondent 5 criticises neoliberalism and the abolition of protectionist measures, considering that “foreigners use BiH as a source of cheap labour without real benefits for the local economy”.<sup>11</sup> While these responses provide insights, they are limited in scope, as they represent a small sample from a single city. To further substantiate the claim that BiH lacks a clear investment strategy, additional research is required. However, these responses indicate that a clear investment strategy would benefit BiH citizens rather than relying on external investments that satisfy the appetites of foreign markets. Additionally, the importance of transparency and the origin of money is crucial for the long-term sustainability of investments in BiH.

There is a connection between political instability and investment, but respondents’ answers to this question vary. Respondent 1 does not consider political instability a key factor for investments in BiH, citing “administrative and financial problems as greater obstacles”.<sup>12</sup> They see political instability more as a media projection. Respondent 2 agrees that “political instability is not crucial but emphasises the lack of the rule of law as a bigger problem”. They believe that many companies facing more turbulent areas might see BiH as a more “stable option”.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, Respondent 3 points out that “political issues can be problematic for investors, but China, focusing on infrastructure projects, does not pay much attention to political rhetoric”.<sup>14</sup> Respondent 5 adds that “the small number of IT companies in BiH is not due to political instability

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with the male respondent, data expert, Sarajevo, 2024.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with the female respondent, data expert, Sarajevo, 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with the male respondent from a state institution, Sarajevo, 2024.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with the female respondent, data expert, Sarajevo, 2024.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with the male respondent, data expert, Sarajevo, 2024.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with the female respondent, data expert, Sarajevo, 2024.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with the male respondent from a state institution, Sarajevo, 2024.

but rather a lack of workforce and infrastructure development”.<sup>15</sup> These responses suggest that while political instability can play a role, bigger issues for investors lie in administrative, legal, and infrastructural shortcomings.

Respondents note, regarding data management and localisation, that there is no coherent system at any level of government or any institution in BiH. Respondent 1 views data as a “strategic matter but emphasises that BiH lacks adequate infrastructure and strategy for data management”. They believe “there is a need to establish national digital infrastructure to effectively manage data sovereignty”.<sup>16</sup> Respondent 2 highlights that “regulations like GDPR go against the idea of the internet as a free space”. They see data localisation as “a geopolitical issue” and emphasise the risks of non-transparency, especially in the context of cooperation with Chinese companies.<sup>17</sup> Respondent 3 believes that “the issue of data sovereignty has been neglected in BiH and that globalisation has brought many challenges that BiH is not prepared to solve”.<sup>18</sup> Respondent 5 criticises “the monopolisation of data by large corporations and underscores the need for localisation of certain types of data, such as health and cadastral data, while also highlighting the problem of non-transparency and political manipulation of data”.<sup>19</sup> These responses indicate the need for a clear data management strategy and the establishment of adequate infrastructure that would enable efficient and transparent management of data sovereignty in BiH.

## Discussion

Respondents’ views on investment in BiH reveal a consensus on the need for a strategic approach that benefits the local economy and ensures long-term sustainability. In their opinion, there is an obvious lack of strategic investments related to the AI machine learning value chain. Moreover, respondents criticise the current focus on raw materials and the absence of strategic investments that could uplift the local economy. They argue that the financial system in BiH is not aligned with global financial flows, which deters private investors. This highlights the need for a robust financial infrastructure, which will attract and support strategic investments and foster economic growth and development. Regarding the influence and transparency of investments, there is an emphasis

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with the female respondent, data expert, Sarajevo, 2024.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with male respondent, data expert, Sarajevo, 2024.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with female respondent, data expert, Sarajevo, 2024.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with male respondent from the state institution, Sarajevo, 2024.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with female respondent, data expert, Sarajevo, 2024.

that investments are often used as tools for geopolitical influence. They stress the importance of the origin of investment funds and the need for transparency. The respondent notes that while the EU and the US have historically been the largest investors in BiH, China's recent entry adds a new dimension to the geopolitical landscape. This perspective underscores the need for a transparent investment framework that can manage and balance the interests of diverse investors while safeguarding national sovereignty.

An important observation is that the EU is still the largest investor in the country. Respondents confirm that the EU remains the largest investor in BiH, with China focusing on large-scale infrastructure projects. This indicates a division of investment domains, where the EU's investments are more diverse and widespread, while China targets specific high-impact sectors. Understanding this division can help BiH develop targeted investment policies that leverage the strengths of each investor while mitigating potential risks. An interesting observation is a critique of neoliberalism and the current state of protectionist measures. Some respondents have criticised the neoliberal approach and the removal of protectionist measures, arguing that it has led to the exploitation of BiH's labour market. They advocate for a more protectionist stance that ensures foreign investments contribute to the local economy's sustainable development. This perspective calls for a reassessment of BiH's economic policies to ensure that foreign investments deliver tangible benefits to the local population.

Regarding political instability and investment, the responses highlight varying views on the impact of political instability on investments in BiH, with a general agreement on the more pressing issues of administrative and infrastructural challenges. This view suggests that addressing bureaucratic inefficiencies and improving financial systems could be more effective in attracting investments than merely focusing on political stability. In addition, all respondents agree that political instability is not the main issue, pointing instead to the lack of rule of law. They argue that this poses a greater challenge to investors, who may be willing to overlook political instability if there is a predictable and fair legal framework. This underscores the importance of legal reforms and the establishment of a reliable judicial system to attract and retain investments. Furthermore, political issues may concern some investors, but China's focus on infrastructure projects makes it less sensitive to political rhetoric. This highlights the varying tolerance levels of different investors towards political instability, suggesting that BiH could tailor its investment strategies to attract those less deterred by political concerns.

Respondents also identify workforce and infrastructure development as important factors. It is observed that the scarcity of IT companies in BiH is more attributable to the lack of workforce and infrastructure development than

political instability. This indicates that improving education and training programmes, as well as developing technological infrastructure, could enhance the attractiveness of BiH as an investment destination. Regarding data, data management, and data localisation, the responses emphasise the strategic importance of data management and the need for BiH to develop robust policies and infrastructure to manage data sovereignty effectively. They emphasise the need for National Digital Infrastructure. They view data as a strategic asset and stress the need for BiH to establish a national digital infrastructure. They argue that without a coherent strategy, BiH cannot effectively manage its data sovereignty. This calls for the development of a comprehensive digital policy that includes infrastructure development, regulatory frameworks, and data management protocols. Respondents also reflected on the geopolitical implications of data localisation, noting that regulations like GDPR challenge the concept of a free and open internet. They emphasise the risks associated with non-transparent data practices, especially in collaborations with Chinese companies. This perspective underscores the need for BiH to develop clear and transparent data policies that align with international standards while protecting national interests.

Also, there is an obvious neglect of data sovereignty by officials and decision-makers. Some point out that BiH has neglected the issue of data sovereignty, facing challenges brought by globalisation. This indicates a need for BiH to prioritise data sovereignty in its national policy agenda, addressing the gaps and vulnerabilities in its current data management practices. One respondent also criticised the monopolisation of data by large corporations and the political manipulation of data. They advocate for the localisation of sensitive data, such as health and cadastral data, and stress the importance of transparency. This calls for regulatory measures to prevent data monopolies and ensure that data management practices are transparent and accountable.

Lastly, it is important to note that this research also encountered some challenges, particularly given the novelty of the topic in the minds of decision-makers. There remains a significant need for increased awareness and understanding of the importance of AI and data sovereignty among key stakeholders. Future research could greatly benefit from incorporating a broader range of perspectives, including those of policymakers, industry leaders, and civil society actors, who are crucial to advancing the conversation. Expanding the scope of inquiry to include these voices would provide a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing BiH in this evolving landscape.



## Conclusion

In the rapidly evolving landscape of the global algorithm economy, BiH stands at an important crossroads. The intensifying competition between global superpowers, particularly the United States and China, in the realm of artificial intelligence has far-reaching implications for smaller nations. This study highlights the urgent need for the country to strategically position itself within this shifting geopolitical landscape by focusing on several key areas. First, BiH must prioritise the development of a comprehensive AI framework that not only aligns with global standards but also fosters local innovation. This framework should be supported by significant investments in digital infrastructure, ensuring the country has the necessary foundation to participate in and benefit from the global AI economy. Establishing robust data management policies and infrastructure will be essential in safeguarding national interests and building trust with both domestic and international stakeholders. Moreover, encouraging a skilled workforce through targeted education and training labour is crucial for BiH to develop its capacity in AI and related fields. By cultivating expertise in AI, the country can increase its competitiveness and attract strategic investments that drive economic growth. Second, the study emphasises the importance of transparent and ethical data practices. BiH must adopt policies that prevent data monopolies and promote the localisation of sensitive data, ensuring data management is conducted transparently and with accountability. This will mitigate the risks associated with data exploitation and political manipulation, which are particularly relevant in the current geopolitical climate. Finally, the path forward for BiH involves active participation in international collaborations and aligning with global AI standards. By engaging with international AI consortia and forming strategic partnerships with leading AI nations, BiH can access cutting-edge technologies and knowledge, thereby enhancing its geopolitical relevance. While challenges such as political instability and the lack of a coherent investment strategy remain, BiH has the potential to secure a stronger position in the global AI economy. By adopting a proactive and strategic approach, the country can bolster its geopolitical standing and lay the foundation for sustainable economic development in the era of artificial intelligence.

## Recommendations

The expanded findings reflect the complex nature of BiH's geopolitical position and the various factors influencing investment and data management in the country. Addressing these challenges requires a strategic approach that balances external influences with national interests, ensuring sustainable

economic development and robust data sovereignty. By developing clear policies and infrastructure, BiH can better navigate the dynamics of the global AI economy and enhance its geopolitical standing.

- 1. Developing a strategic AI framework is crucial for BiH.** It should focus on creating a national AI strategy that meets international standards and encourages local innovation. This framework needs to establish specific goals for each phase of the AI and machine learning process, including data collection, storage, preparation, algorithm training, and application development. To oversee AI initiatives, the government should create dedicated bodies that promote collaboration among academia, industry, and government agencies. By setting clear priorities and fostering an environment supportive of AI innovation, BiH can attract strategic investments and play a more significant role in the global AI landscape.
- 2. To support the AI value chain, BiH needs to significantly improve its digital infrastructure.** That involves constructing high-speed internet networks, data centres, and cloud computing capabilities. The government should also encourage the establishment of research and development centres focused on AI and machine learning. By investing in cutting-edge infrastructure, BiH can establish a strong foundation for AI development and attract both domestic and international tech companies to set up operations within the country.
- 3. To fully leverage AI's potential, it is crucial to invest in education and workforce development.** BiH should focus on creating training programmes that cultivate expertise in AI and machine learning. This includes updating school and university curricula to incorporate AI-related subjects and offering incentives for students to pursue careers in these fields. Additionally, the government should promote continuous professional development for existing workers through specialised training programmes and partnerships with leading tech companies. By nurturing a highly skilled workforce, BiH can enhance its competitiveness and innovation capacity in the AI sector.
- 4. The government should prioritise creating a comprehensive data sovereignty policy.** This involves developing a national digital infrastructure capable of securely storing and managing data. BiH should adopt strong data protection regulations that align with international standards, such as the GDPR, while also addressing local needs. By ensuring transparent and secure data practices, the government can protect national interests and build trust with both domestic and international stakeholders.
- 5. Ensure transparent and ethical data practices.** It is crucial to maintain data sovereignty through transparent and ethical data management. The

government should enforce policies to prevent data monopolies and encourage the storage of sensitive data, like health and cadastral information, within the country. This involves creating clear guidelines for data sharing and usage and ensuring that all data-related activities are conducted with transparency and accountability. By promoting ethical data practices, BiH can reduce the risks associated with data exploitation and political manipulation.

- 6. To enhance its geopolitical standing and take advantage of the benefits of the AI revolution, BiH should actively engage in international collaborations and align its policies with global standards.** The government should participate in international AI consortia, research networks, and standard-setting bodies to keep up with technological advancements and best practices. Furthermore, forming strategic partnerships with leading AI nations can provide BiH with access to cutting-edge technologies and opportunities for knowledge transfer. By being proactive and collaborative in the global AI arena, BiH can strengthen its geopolitical relevance and economic prospects.

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## **KRETANJE KROZ GLOBALNU EKONOMIJU ALGORITAMA: IMPLIKACIJE ZA GEOPOLITIČKI PEJZAŽ BOSNE I HERCEGOVINE**

*Apstrakt:* Ova studija istražuje implikacije globalne algoritamske ekonomije na geopolitički pejzaž Bosne i Hercegovine (BiH), s fokusom na strateško nadmetanje između Sjedinjenih Američkih Država (SAD) i Narodne Republike Kine (NRK) u razvoju veštačke inteligencije (AI). Kako se tehnologije AI-a brzo razvijaju, one ne samo da preoblikuju ekonomsku vrednost, već i globalnu dinamiku odnosa moći. SAD i NRK, kao lideri u inovacijama AI-a, predvode ovu transformaciju, utičući na međunarodne odnose i postavljajući manje nacije poput Bosne i Hercegovine u složene geopolitičke scenarije. Ovo istraživanje ispituje odjeke globalnog rivalstva u AI-u na suverenitet podataka, politički diskurs i javne politike BiH kroz pristup koji kombinuje više metoda, uključujući analizu lanca vrednosti mašinskog učenja u AI-u i polustrukturirane intervjue s ključnim informantima. Nalazi ističu značajne izazove za BiH u korištenju AI-a za nacionalni razvoj, ali naglašavaju i prilike za napredak kroz strateške investicije i koherentne strategije upravljanja podacima. Studija zaključuje s preporukama za BiH da proaktivno odgovori na ove izazove, naglašavajući važnost razumijevanja regionalne dinamike i usklađivanja s globalnim AI standardima.

*Ključne reči:* ekonomija algoritama; veštačka inteligencija (AI); geopolitika; Bosna i Hercegovina; rivalstvo SAD-Kina.





### CHINA AND EURASIA RELATIONS IN MULTIPOLAR WORLD ORDER 2.0

Mher Sahakyan, ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Chinese and Eurasian International Relations*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2024, pp. 528.

Chinese and Eurasian relations have undergone profound changes in recent years. Some influences come from systemic factors, particularly geopolitical shifts like the Russia-Ukraine war or intensifying tensions between the United States and China. One of the linchpins of such transformation is China's rise and expansion in Eurasia due to its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which created pathways across Eurasia, bolstering connectivity and economic cooperation. Though China's expansion has had many positive effects, there is a growing concern and criticism regarding environmental impacts and financial sustainability (Benyon and Fukuyama 2023; Hughes 2019; Tarrósy 2020). Furthermore, many questions arise regarding China's political and security influence in Eurasian countries amid the changing world order. Therefore, the *Routledge Handbook of Chinese and Eurasian International Relations*, edited by Mher Sahakyan, has been published just in time to provide critical insights into the complexities of these transformations and their implications, offering a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of China's presence and relations across Eurasia in the context of the emerging multipolar world order. The Handbook is the result of a collaborative effort by 37 scholars from China, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Poland, the United States, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, France, Germany, Croatia, Hungary, Greece, Czechia, Sri Lanka, and Sweden. It is worth mentioning that this volume builds on themes explored in *China and Eurasian Powers in a Multipolar World Order 2.0: Security, Diplomacy, Economy and Cybersecurity*, also edited by Mher Sahakyan and previously published by Routledge (see Sahakyan 2023). This latest Handbook expands on topics such as China's strategies regarding Central Asia, Russia, and Europe. It also introduces new themes such as high-tech development, digitalisation, and environmental governance, enriching its scope and relevance and filling the existing gaps in the literature.

This Handbook consists of ten parts and thirty chapters, covering various regions like Central Asia, the Middle East, Europe, the Asia-Pacific, and the Arctic, as well as different themes such as digitalisation, environmental politics, China's relations with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). In the introductory remarks to this Routledge Handbook, Mher Sahakyan and Anahit Parzyan set the context for understanding subsequent chapters connected by the Multipolar World Order 2.0 Concept and the Realism approach (in most chapters). Furthermore, these authors explain the importance of exploring China's growing economic and political relations, particularly with Eurasian countries. China is a "young superpower" whose presence in "the centre of the world" (Eurasia) is of utmost importance, as this is the continent where the battle for world hegemony takes place in the multipolar world order 2.0 (Sahakyan and Parzyan 2024, 1). With that in mind, the BRI is China's vital asset and tool for securing the leading role.

The first part explores the issue of the collision of great powers' interests in Eurasia in a multipolar era. This section delves into power plays in Eurasia, highlighting the diverse impacts of the Russo-Ukrainian war. The first chapter, authored by the editor, focuses on issues China has been facing due to the Russo-Ukrainian war, especially losses in the areas of transportation and trade. In that light, the author analyses China's stance on the war and its actions towards the political settlement. Greg Simons is the author of the second chapter, dealing with the competition between the United States (US) and China in Eurasia and the Western containment of China, which primarily relies on AUKUS and the Quad. The author uses a constructivist paradigm and qualitative research approach. He stresses the changing nature of the international system, which is moving from a US-centric to a multipolar (emerging non-Western-centric) system (Simons 2024, 40). Simons also reflects upon the Russo-Ukrainian war in the context of China-US tensions.

The second part focuses on Central Asia and China's position in the region. It examines its politics, as well as the convergence and divergence of China's interests with other powers in the region, particularly Russia and India. The overall conclusion of the section is that time is on China's side. The third chapter delves into the relationship between Russia and China in this region, particularly regarding natural gas. It also explores the energy policies of China and several countries in the region. The author concludes that China could get in a more advantageous position over Russia despite the two countries having decided to give priority to cooperation. The fourth chapter analyses India's renowned engagement and growing role in Central Asia (especially after 2015) and its competition with China. The fifth chapter focuses on the BRI and how China gradually expands its footprint in the region, including the security realm. The author uses Kazakhstan as a case study. His main argument is that this country

is of vital interest for China's march to the West (via the BRI). Relying on the Multipolar World Order 2.0 concept, he argues that the best option for Kazakhstan would be a multi-vector foreign policy, thus avoiding dependence on China only (Izimov 2024, 99). In the sixth chapter, the author exhaustively explores the relationship between Kyrgyzstan and China, highlighting Kyrgyzstan's debt to China as an obstacle. The author also reflects on green energy and high-tech as fields in which their cooperation could be increased.

The third part examines various aspects of China's increased presence in the Middle East and expanding politico-economic relations with the countries in this region. Selçuk Çolakoğlu, the author of the seventh chapter, examines the relationship between China and Türkiye. The author claims that Türkiye is balancing the Western allies with the "China card" (Çolakoğlu 2024, 133). Despite Chinese investments and Turkish participation in the BRI, the author concludes that, eventually, Türkiye will not align with China but with the West due to its NATO status and mutual dependence in economic, security, and political domains. The eighth chapter has Iran as the focus of the analysis, particularly its "Look to the East Policy" and the reasons behind it. The author explores the mutual benefits of Iran's cooperation with Russia and China. He presents three scenarios for the future and concludes that a neutral position is the best option for Iran in a multipolar era. The ninth chapter, authored by Máté Szalai, focuses on China's growing footprint in the Middle East through its cooperation with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The author examines the topic through power asymmetry and hierarchy in international relations, particularly between great powers and small states.

The fourth part provides a deeper analysis of China's relations with different European countries in the context of the emerging multipolar world order. The main argument of this section is that European countries will eventually have to choose between the East and the West. This section starts with exploring China's relations with Germany in the tenth chapter. The authors explain opposing attitudes towards China in the German government and conclude that Berlin's hedging with Beijing for economic interests might not be an option in the multipolar world as "the space to do so has considerably shrunk" (Ohle, Cook, and Han 2024, 178). The eleventh chapter deals with different aspects of Sino-Italian relations and Italy's engagement in the BRI. Chapter twelve, authored by Šárka Waisová, focuses on the Czech Republic and fluctuations in relations with China. Based on media content analysis, the author argues that there is a negative attitude towards China in the public, partly due to the lack of expected Chinese investments under the 16+1 framework. The crucial factor is the Russo-Ukrainian war and China's rapprochement with Russia. Additionally, the West-East divide in the multipolar era will push Chechia, a NATO member state, more towards its Western allies. Chapter thirteen, authored by Nenad

Stekić, delves into Sino-Serbian relations, particularly since the pandemic, and their comprehensive strategic partnership. The analysis is focused on economic, political, and military-technical cooperation between Serbia and China and the factors behind fostering such collaboration. The author particularly highlights the role of China's cultural and soft power diplomacy in Serbia. He further explains Serbia's multi-vector foreign policy, based on "four pillars of the world order" (European Union, Russia, China, and the United States) (Stekić 2024, 216). Despite its position as a European Union (EU) candidate country and strong pressures to side with the West, Serbia has not imposed sanctions on Russia. Likewise, Serbia keeps nurturing an "ironclad" friendship with China. The author concludes that strategic hedging will keep shaping Serbia's strategic calculus in the emerging multipolar era (Stekić 2024, 225). The subject of the fourteenth chapter focuses on Poland and its changing foreign policy towards China in a multipolar world order 2.0. The author concludes that Poland's siding with its Western allies impacts its relationship with China, thus preventing their deeper ties. Chapter fifteen deals with China's relations with Greece, especially their cooperation under the BRI, focusing on the vital importance of the Piraeus port. The author considers the China-US competition in Greece and its impact on Greece's efforts to cooperate with both sides.

The fifth part of the Handbook is focused on the Asia-Pacific region and patterns of conflict and cooperation when it comes to China and other great powers in this area. This section considers the China-US competition in different domains, such as maritime routes, natural resources, or geopolitical influence. This part opens with chapter sixteen, which deals with the position of Hong Kong towards China and the United States, particularly in the context of the negative effects of decoupling. Chapter seventeen analyses new security architecture in the region and argues the need for prioritising peace over conflict in the relations between China and the United States. The authors explore China-Pakistan and US-India cooperation, as well as the role of the Quad in containing China. The South China Sea dispute is the focus of chapters eighteen and nineteen, which approach the subject from different perspectives. Relying on critical discourse analysis, Éric Pomès and Matthieu Grandpierron explore the narratives and official Chinese discourse regarding its position and claims in the South China Sea. Yulong Dai focuses on Sino-Malaysian relations in the context of conditions for settlement of the South China Sea dispute. Tony Tai-Ting Liu, the author of the twentieth chapter, explores the competition between China and Japan through the prism of the battle between tellurocracy and thalassocracy. China's rise prompts Japan's strategic response to balance it through the Quad and other regional partnerships. The following chapter discusses the growing cooperation between Sri Lanka and China, particularly focusing on its significance for the Maritime Silk Road. The author highlights

the geopolitical struggle for Sri Lanka and the counterbalancing strategies of the United States and India. The last chapter explains the increasing role of Mongolia in China's BRI, which enhances China's position in the region.

The sixth section contains only one chapter, which delves into the partnership between Russia and China in the Arctic region. Jan Železný provides a detailed analysis of the interests, strategies, and weaknesses of both countries in this resource-abundant region. The author further argues that the control of the Northern Sea Route and the related competition with the West push Moscow and Beijing closer together. However, some obstacles hinder the development of such cooperation: Moscow is a "gatekeeper", while Beijing "advocates for internationalisation and the right of non-Arctic states" (Železný 2024, 374).

China's relations with the EAEU and NATO are explored in the seventh part of the Handbook. Gohar Barseghyan argues that current geopolitical conditions create various opportunities for greater alignment between the BRI and the EAEU and that China should seize such a moment. On the other hand, Armine Arzumanyan, the author of chapter twenty-five, analyses the official Chinese discourse regarding NATO, the United States, and the EU, concluding that NATO is represented as an American instrument of military dominance while the EU is seen as a mere junior partner.

Parts eight and nine of this Handbook are thematically organised. The eighth section deals with digitalisation and cyberspace, particularly from a geopolitical perspective, exploring different aspects of China's Digital Silk Road (DSR). Chapter twenty-six, authored by Magdalena Łągiewska, explores China's superpower ambitions in cyberspace, focusing on legal aspects of its DSR. The following chapter builds on the previous one, giving priority to the DSR in the countries of the EAEU in the context of technology decoupling between the United States and China. The ninth section of the Handbook delves into environmental issues and geopolitics in Eurasia. Kevin Lo, the author of chapter twenty-eight, highlights the need to improve environmental protection measures in BRI-related projects, stressing the importance of incorporating green technology. The following chapter, authored by Giorgio Caridi, offers a comparative empirical analysis of e-governments' impact on effectively dealing with environmental issues in China and Italy. The author argues that social tensions are caused, *inter alia*, by environmental issues and that e-governments can decrease social dissatisfaction.

The tenth part of the Handbook offers concluding remarks by the editor, Mher Sahakyan. The US lost its position of dominant power, though it still has an important role thanks to military bases and alliances such as the Quad, AUKUS, and NATO. In that context, the author discusses different challenges for

Eurasian international relations in a multipolar era, particularly addressing weapons production, finance, and high-technology issues.

The *Routledge Handbook of Chinese and Eurasian International Relations* significantly contributes to studying China's expanding role in Eurasia amid the evolving multipolar world order. The breadth and depth of its analysis, reflected in an extensive geographical scope of the research and thematic diversity, provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics shaping Eurasia. Furthermore, the chapters offer rich insights into China's relations with many Eurasian countries from a historical perspective, which makes it useful for diplomats as well. What enriches the perspectives and enhances the book's value is the authors' use of sources in multiple languages. Drawing on insights from an impressive array of scholars from around the globe, the Handbook also skilfully integrates geopolitical frameworks with emerging themes such as digitalisation and environmental governance. Its balanced approach to analysing opportunities and challenges posed by China's rise and its Belt and Road Initiative makes it a valuable resource for researchers, students of international relations, and policymakers. Despite the breadth of its coverage, the book leaves room for future exploration of China's strategies in other regions and the interplay between economic ambitions and geopolitical rivalries. The volume is recommended to anyone seeking to explore the multifaceted and rapidly changing landscape of Chinese-Eurasian relations.

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Nataša PAJIĆ



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Dal Lago, Alessandro, and Salvatore Palidda, eds. 2010. *Conflict, Security and the Reshaping of Society: The Civilization of War*. Oxon & New York: Routledge.

Hayek, Friedrich A. 2011. *The Constitution of Liberty: The Definitive Edition*. Edited by Ronald Hamowy. Vol. 17 of *The Collected Works of F. A. Hayek*, edited by Bruce Caldwell. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988–.

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[PTBT] Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Under Water. 1963. Signed by US, UK, and USSR, August 5. <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20480/volume-480-I-6964-English.pdf>.

[TFEU] Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. 2012. *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 326, October 26. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12012E/TXT&from=EN>.

[UN Charter] Charter of the United Nations, October 24, 1945. <https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/introductory-note/index.html>.

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[UNSC] UN Security Council. Resolution 2222, Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, S/RES/2222. May 27, 2015. <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/2015.shtml>.

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