

The Emergence of a Post-Ukrainian World Order



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Current circumstances indicate that a multipolar international world order is emerging, in which some or many countries will exercise significant power in world affairs. It is possible to see new power alliances, geopolitical influences, expanded resource control, new trade and investment avenues, and global governance. The first scenario in a post-Ukrainian world order could be led by Russia and China against the United States, NATO, and its allies. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict could increase the Hobbesian rivalry of global trade among nations. The second scenario could be a restrengthening of US and Western influence if Russia loses, but it would not create a unipolar world. The economic and geopolitical influence of China and the coming together of developing and weaker nations under the big global themes of economy, ecology, and human security will not allow unipolarity to reemerge. A multipolar world would further weaken American unilateralism and, subsequently, European dominance in world affairs. More countries would clamor for reform in international institutions like the United Nations and express their opinions. Hopefully, a multipolar world would not eliminate conflict, but it would be more conducive to fruitful negotiation and resolution.

One of the regions emerging in a multipolar world is the Global South, represented by Latin America, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. The era of fearful subservience to the West has become weak. The Global South is moving on the path of assertive self-interest, creating “limited liability partnerships” where countries are driven by “self-interest” and “lucrative economic relations” (Samir Saran, “The new world – shaped by self-interest”; <https://samirsaran.com/2023/05/>).



Photo: Public Domain

US Special Representative for Ukraine's Economic Recovery Penny Pritzker visited Kyiv, Ukraine, Jan. 12, 2024.

Many countries are still neutral in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Central Asia is not going to take sides with Russia or China, as it wants to balance two powerful neighbors by using economic opposition and cultural ties. India's security and foreign policies are increasingly directed by self-interest. It keeps its alliance with Russia and has forged a new alliance for profit with Israel. The increasing export of arms from Israel has weakened its Gandhian criticism of Israel annexing Palestinian lands. The Global South views the war in Ukraine as a typically “European problem” that it does not want to be sucked into. Russia and its allies have revolted against the “collective West” – that is, the US, Europe, and its allies like Japan. The revolt implies that the century of a peaceful world created by Pax Americana, beginning in 1945, is over (Fiona Hill, “Ukraine in the New World Disorder”, Lennart Mere Lecture 2023). If Russia loses the war, the global status quo will be retained, but if Russia wins the war, a more multilateral security world order will emerge. The Ukraine war is a desperate attempt by both Russia and the US to test the limits of conventional warfare framed by a nuclear option. If push comes to shove, Russia may threaten Japan, while the US may do so with China.

Historical Background to What's Happening Today

The world order established by the US and its allies after World War II has continued to dominate the world. The dreams of smaller nations for sovereignty and global representation were marginally realized. International law was written to control weak revisionist states such as Germany and Japan (Richard Falk, *Ukraine in the Shadow of Geopolitics: A Battle for the Future of Global Security in the Post-Cold War 21st Century World*, 2024). The right to use force was reserved for strong nations like the US, the United Kingdom, and France. The collapse of their colonial empires has made the UK and France more docile, preventing the UN from enforcing the rule of law or stopping wars. The disintegration of the USSR destroyed bipolarity and created a unipolar world dominated by the US. The collapse of the USSR in 1989 ended the Cold War bipolarity. There was a strong attempt to keep global security under Western control, but by the 1990s, an era of shared responsibility envisaged by the Treaty of Westphalia had emerged. Now the Ukraine war is shaping “global security” and reshaping the international world order. If Russia loses, a Eurasian unipolar world order will be restored. If Russia wins and annexes Ukraine, it will recreate a bipolar world order and even bring about a multipolar world once promised by the Westphalia Treaty

(Glenn Diesen, *The Ukraine War and the Eurasian World Order*, 2024). Obviously, the post-Ukraine world order is emerging under the threat of a nuclear war. The expansionist assertiveness of NATO to create liberal democracy based on peace in the whole of Europe and the Russian reaction to the Ukrainian tilt towards NATO have ignited a war in Ukraine. Now, Ukraine represents a divided Europe at war with itself.

The war is a spinoff of security issues between Russia and the West (Hiya Kusa, "Russia-Ukraine War: Harbinger of a Global Shift: A Perspective from Ukraine", *Current Affairs*, 2022). Before the war, Russia was emerging as an alternative center of power, combining hybrid warfare and diplomacy. It had forged a "values-driven relationship" both with post-Soviet republics and Europe. The West blames Russia for the war, calling it a military invasion and an unexpected adventure without highlighting the causes. Once this idea took root, Russia became the bogeyman of Europe. Once NATO started roping in Ukraine and Georgia to become member states, it became an existential threat for Russia. NATO has selectively emphasized its three equal objectives: to deter Soviet expansionism, prevent the revival of militarism in Europe, and integrate Europe politically. But the threat of Soviet expansionism far outweighed the other two. A strong NATO, excluding Russia, has only increased the risk of a collective defense based on ideological singularity. Scholars have argued that the American covert war on Russia, through its supply of high-tech ammunition, sanctions, and the threat of direct confrontation, has isolated Russia, which has sought liaison elsewhere.

NATO is a declining force, more dependent on US financial support, which is declining. Some scholars believe that the Ukrainian conflict has put the future of NATO in jeopardy and ended US efforts to create a win-win connection with Russia (Rajan Menon and Eugene B. Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order*, 2015: Boston Review Books). As American foreign policy concentrates on containing Russia, diplomatic moves to contain terrorism and "nuclear proliferation" have weakened. Russia views NATO as segregationist and a threat to its security. But it has no intention to break the European Union. Should Russia distance itself from Europe or work to transform it? Within the EU there are different perceptions of the way NATO should act. This has further weakened the security umbrella. East European nations bordering Russia see the necessity of NATO, while West European nations question some of its actions. The US has urged European nations to increase their defense spending to 2% of their GDP. Europe looks at America differently. It shows the immaturity of American leadership and electorate.

The Effect of Sanctions

The US believes that economic sanctions against Russia will bring it to its knees, but there are no clear results. The sanctions have disrupted supply chains, bank transactions, and redistributed "energy markets", especially oil and gasoline, from Russia to the US, Qatar, Turkey, Israel, Egypt, and Algeria (Kusa 2022). It has increased oil

prices that have benefited Russia. Though the US, UK and Canada imposed strict embargoes on Russian oil imports, this did not happen evenly in Europe. The US cap on Russian crude at \$60 has not prevented it from being sold at \$70 and above (Alan Rappeport, "The West's plan to cap Russian oil revenues is sputtering", *New York Times International Edition*, May 22, 2024). The Russians have deftly circumvented the pressure of sanctions by changing their trading pattern, foreign policy, and military strategy. Since the cap is ineffective, the US plans to stop the "shadow fleet of oil tankers". But such a move would increase oil prices during the US election period (Jim Tankersley and Alan Rappeport, "U.S. weighs new penalty to curb oil from Russia", *New York Times International Edition*, July 9, 2024).

The US pressurized oil-producing Gulf nations to stabilize oil prices, but the pressure did not work. The US then threatened to sue OPEC countries and their national companies for manipulating oil markets around the world by hiking oil prices. The hike in oil prices became a critical issue for Ukraine, as it depends mostly on Russia and Belarus for oil imports. The blockade of Ukrainian Black Sea ports and the bombing of Ukrainian fuel depots by the Russian military further worsened the situation. The US could not get world governments to support its claim against Russia except for its allies. It has been exerting pressure on other nations, like China, to stop the supply of war-grade exports. The US is expanding sanctions on the sale of semiconductor chips and other goods to Russia, targeting third-party sellers in China and elsewhere for use in missiles (Josh Wingrove, "US to widen sanctions to curb chip sales to Russia's war machine", *The Japan Times*, June 13, 2024).

People are arguing that the West is pushing Russia more towards China, and China is becoming wary of the US. Russia is a big producer of oil and natural gas, and China wants it. This will increase economic cooperation between Russia and China. The construction of a gas pipeline called the Power of Siberia from Russia to China has further cemented energy cooperation. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), led by China, and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), led by Russia, have established a network of associations in Eurasia. A post-Ukraine world order will develop greater cooperation between Russia and China. In both economic and strategic areas, the two nations will impart greater synergy to each other.

The US is a great military superpower, but it is facing the biggest deficit in the world. The strength of the dollar is declining. The US has frozen Russian assets and is using them to finance the Ukraine war. But other countries that were de-dollarizing have made contingency plans. They have sold off US-dollar assets kept in Treasury bonds. They are diversifying or delinking their economy from the dollar. The Saudis have broken a 50-year agreement to link their oil to the dollar. The world is evolving in a manner where its dependence on the US dollar is reduced. China does not want to take risks with the US dollar, and the Saudis are diversifying. Russia recognizes this economic and has made contingency plans. It is hoping that soon it will win the war and annex Ukraine; then it can thumb its nose at the West. No matter how the war ends, the US relationship with China has to change. The US is spending billions

Photo: Official White House Photo by Erin Scott



President Joe Biden greets administration staff members in the Rose Garden of the White House, Wednesday, July 24, 2024, after making a statement to the American people about his decision to withdraw from the 2024 presidential race.

fighting Russia and missing its target, which is China. It is pushing Russia closer to China, forgetting that the real contender for global supremacy is China. But somehow, the US cannot take on China squarely.

The US has lost its gung-ho exceptionalism in managing world affairs. There is a question within the US about whether American liberalism will “continue forever” (Stuart Gottlieb, “Ukraine and the End of the ‘New World Order’”, *Journal of International Affairs*, 75, No. 2. War in Ukraine: The World Reports Spring/Summer 2023). The US Congress believes that it will. It has approved \$61 billion in aid to Ukraine. Meanwhile, the threat of a change of guard is in the offing in the November election, but whether Kamala Harris or Donald Trump wins, the US will be “just another power” managing its self-interest. It will not be the crusader protecting a rules-based world order (Andreas Kluth, “American exceptionalism is dead no matter who wins”, *The Japan Times*, June 25, 2024).

Russian Perspective

Contrary to Western opinion, Russia was not interested in undoing the global order but in “correcting” it. The US hoped to garner strong support from like-minded nations to create an “anti-Russian coalition” beyond its allies. But a lackluster response disappointed Washington and revealed the changing nature of international relations. After the Cold War, nations hankered for greater diversity than just a US monopoly. Russian intellectuals see the war against Ukraine as “a groundbreaking event in post-Soviet history” and a way of correcting a Western-dominated system (Fyodor A. Lukyanov, “Ukraine, Russia, and the New World Order”, *Russia in Global Affairs* 14:10, 2022). Lukyanov argues that it was natural for Russia to lay claim to Ukraine based on historical and ethnic lines since the ninth century. The shared history of Russians and Ukrainians makes the claim stronger that Russians and Ukrainians are “one people, a single whole” (Vladimir Putin, “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”, Kremlin website, July 2021 https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/On_the_Historical_Unity_of_Russians_and_Ukrainians). NATO

did not see Russia as a European ally and rejected its claim to include it in its security alliance. Russia was perturbed by increased military cooperation between NATO and the US after 2014. NATO’s covert attempt to distance Ukrainian borders from Russia threatened Russian sovereignty. A “quasi-ethnic separation” weakened the idea of a “traditional Russia” (<https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/expressions/ukraine-russia-and-new-world-order>).

Russia is becoming more self-reliant and forging trade partnerships with China and India. Few countries accept the bogey of human rights violations in Ukraine by Russians, as argued. A beleaguered Russia is bolstering ties with North Korea both to further antagonize the West for its military help in Ukraine and to replenish its supply of ammunition. It has signed a Treaty of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership to enhance bilateral relations with North Korea. North Korea has been supplying artillery shells to Russia. Now the US has alleged that Russia will get ballistic missiles from North Korea, which will be tested in combat. This deal will benefit Russia to replenish its dwindling supply of weapons and North Korea to bolster its spy technology program (Jesse Johnson, “Putin set for N. Korea visit to boost ties”, *The Japan Times*, June 18, 2024). Also, the “strategic partnership treaty” will allow both nations to defend each other if attacked. Russian news agency *Tass* explained that the treaty was necessary as global and regional geopolitics have evolved and there are “qualitative changes” in “bilateral relations”. Some Western enthusiasts have argued that the US and NATO were waiting for Russia to attack Ukraine. They cite Biden’s statement that “this man (Putin) cannot remain in power.” Anthony Blinken, trying to take out the blunt honesty of Biden’s statement, explained that the US does not want regime change in Russia or elsewhere. So what was it doing in Vietnam, Iran, Guatemala, Chile, Nicaragua, Panama, Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan? The UK, too, wanted a revolt in Russia to replace Putin. From the beginning, the West wanted to wage a war of attrition in Russia through sanctions to change the regime. The global media is providing different perspectives and weakening the effectiveness of the Western media. The West finds Russian claims of a shared past and ethnic similarity preposterous. It focuses on Ukrainian military resistance, human solidarity, and the fight against war crimes to garner international support.

The US sanctions have pushed Russia to forge stronger alliances with the Global South and other non-European countries. The threat of Western support for Ukraine has given rise to deeper patriotic feelings within Russia. The American cap on Russian crude oil exports has been circumvented through the use of shadow ships, faking European insurance, and selling crude above the cap. G7 strictures on China not to supply chips that have a dual purpose lack teeth given the weakened economic clout of the G7 over the decades. A trade war with China would hurt not only China but also the US and Europe. China is ahead of the US in green technology and placing heavy duties on its exports to the US would not be helpful in the long run.

Peace talks without the inclusion of Russia and China would not work. Both the G7 and the Swiss Peace Summit had limited success. The G7 leaders rebuked China over its “industrial overcapacity, non-

market policies, and economic support for Russia". The G7 reproached China for conducting "harmful" trade practices and exporting "dual-use" technology to Russia; it sanctioned a \$50 billion loan to Ukraine to rebuild its crumbling infrastructure. The European Commission has levied tariffs up to 38% on Chinese electric vehicles but explained that they are not decoupling but "de-risking" China's economic development. The \$50 billion loans will be paid back with interest generated from the \$300 billion immobilized Russian funds held in Europe. The two-day peace conference in Onbungen, Switzerland, organized by President Volodymyr Zelensky without inviting Russia, ended in a fiasco (Zolan Kanno-Youngs, Anton Troianovski, and Andrew E. Kramer, "Russia is not invited to talks to end the war", *New York Times International Edition*, June 17, 2024).

A Post-Ukrainian World Order

The world is witnessing a shift from global hegemony to interdependent relations in the economy and security. An aggressive foreign policy by any nation could bring about a security crisis. An inclusive international regime would reflect a multipolar world more accurately than one based on Western unilateralism. Sooner or later, there would be better governance that could give weaker nations the opportunity to participate in global decision-making processes. A multilateral world order must bring about changes if it wants to become inclusive. In recent years, there has been pressure on the UN, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank to be reconstituted to reflect the new power dynamics of emerging players like India, Iran, Israel, Turkey, and Japan. The number of permanent members of the security council could be expanded to include new emerging players. The veto power of five permanent members, namely the US, UK, China, France, and Russia, could be expanded to include the 10 non-permanent members. Also, new inclusive platforms within these organizations should be created so that nations that have been silent until now can express their opinions. Through a multilateral consensus, international organizations could draft new regulations to enforce human rights standards and accountability. If more members are included, international organizations will have more resources to support democratic values by enabling countries to hold fair elections, allow free speech, and uphold the rule of law. The new world order is beginning to emphasize fair trade practices by reducing economic restrictions on developing countries, increasing development, and giving incentives to nations that implement sustainable development goals (SDGs). Nations need to agree to implement international law and rules-based order. There would be increased pressure on nations to follow the international order. If disputes persist, they could be resolved by recourse to treaties and conventions. A multipolar world would see more nations adhering to the Non-Proliferation Treaty without recourse to the arguments of non-aligned or developing nations that they would give up nuclear weapons only when everyone does.

Power that was once in the hands of the US is getting distributed amongst stronger nations and organizations. The rise of multiple centers of power will play significant roles in regional governance.

The African Union, ASEAN, and EU will be strengthened through contributions and membership. Regional trade agreements would be brought under global trade systems, giving rise to higher economic growth. The G20 is increasingly addressing global economic issues represented by developed and emerging nations. The BRICS are also challenging the dominance of the West. NGOs and private-public partnerships are weak, but they would grow to challenge global issues and shape public policies.

In a multipolar world, both the Global South and Japan will become highly responsible for ensuring global peace and security. They will play a bigger role in peacekeeping, South-South dialogue, nuclear disarmament, and non-alignment. Japan's pacifist constitution and security alliance with the US have given it a unique opportunity to be an arbiter of peace in the Asia-Pacific region. Though the geopolitics of the Far East have become more confrontational, Japan will play an important role in maintaining peace through its economic clout and strategic alliances. It has developed the experience to negotiate with belligerent nations through diplomacy and financial assistance. Japan's pacifist constitution has been under strain due to the muscular rise of China, but Japan has done well to adjust to the demands of a new geopolitical reality without confrontation. In the coming decades, the US-Japan Strategic Alliance will become stronger, but Japan will not limit its foreign policy to the US alone. It will balance its interests by playing a dominant role in regional and international groups like ASEAN, APEC, the G7, the G20, and the Quad. Japan has found partnerships with South Korea, Germany, Australia, and India to promote regional peace and international security. In a multipolar world, Japan will garner support through its ODA programs to create a win-win situation in the Indian Ocean. In recent years, it has promoted rules-based maritime trade and regional security in the Indian-Pacific Ocean and East Asia. In a multipolar world, Japan will become a stronger force in promoting global peace, the rule of law, sustainable development, and human rights.

The new global order will see more cultural and educational exchanges. These exchanges will create a network of friendship and understanding amongst young minds, as they did after World War II, when such exchanges started. Governments across the world must be encouraged to increase grants and scholarships to share knowledge and create human networks. It is hard to say if an enlightened leadership will balance national interests and global imperatives through diplomatic negotiations, keeping in mind the interests of its stakeholders. The world order created by the US and its allies after World War II has weakened, giving way to alternative international relations and the distribution of resources. **JS**

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