

The Russian-Ukrainian War's Impact on International Power Balances

تداعيات الحرب - الروسية الأوكرانية على التوازنات الدولية

Mihoubi Fakhreddine

University of Biskra

fakhreddine.mihoubi@univ-biskra.dz

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Abstract:

The Russian-Ukrainian war, which erupted in February 2022, marked a critical turning point in the structure of the contemporary international system. It accelerated the transition from a U.S.-led unipolar order—dominant since the end of the Cold War—towards an increasingly multipolar world. This shift has been characterized by the rising influence of emerging powers such as China and Russia and the consolidation of new alliances that challenge the Western liberal order, most notably the Russia-China-Iran axis.

The study begins by tracing the historical trajectory of the international system and its gradual fragmentation, then analyzes the relative decline of American hegemony in light of internal polarization and strategic failures abroad, particularly in the Middle East and Central Asia. It further explores Europe's shifting defense and energy policies in response to direct security threats stemming from the war.

Through an analysis of economic and military indicators, political discourse, and the evolution of regional alliances, the study concludes that the war has exposed structural imbalances in the global order. It has contributed to the reshaping of global power dynamics, driven growing strategic autonomy within the Western bloc, and reinforced alternative, non-Western models of strategic cooperation.

Keywords : Russia-Ukraine War; International Power Balances; Geopolitics; World Order; Global Economy.

الملخص:

شكّلت الحرب الروسية-الأوكرانية التي اندلعت في فبراير 2022 نقطة تحول مركزية في بنية النظام الدولي، حيث أدت إلى تسارع انتقال النظام من أحادية القطبية التي قادتها الولايات المتحدة منذ نهاية الحرب الباردة، إلى نمط متغير يتجه نحو التعددية القطبية. وقد جاءت هذه التحولات في ظل تصاعد نفوذ قوى دولية صاعدة كالصين وروسيا، وتبلور تحالفات جديدة تتحدى المنظومة الليبرالية الغربية، أبرزها المحور الروسي-الصيني-الإيراني.

تستعرض الدراسة السياق التاريخي للنظام الدولي وتصدعه التدريجي، ثم تُحلل أبعاد التراجع النسبي في الهيمنة الأميركية نتيجة أزمات داخلية وخارجية، وفشل استراتيجياتها العسكرية والاقتصادية، خاصة في الشرق الأوسط وآسيا الوسطى. كما تتناول التحول في مواقف الدول الأوروبية، التي شهدت تغيرات جذرية في سياساتها الدفاعية والطاقوية، مدفوعة بالتهديدات الأمنية المباشرة التي أفرزتها الحرب.

ومن خلال تحليل المؤشرات الاقتصادية والعسكرية، وخطابات الفاعلين السياسيين، وتطور التحالفات الإقليمية، تخلص الدراسة إلى أن الحرب كشفت عن اختلالات بنيوية في النظام الدولي القائم، وأسهمت في إعادة تشكيل موازين القوة العالمية، في ظل تصاعد النزعات الاستقلالية داخل المعسكر الغربي، وبروز أنماط جديدة من التعاون الاستراتيجي غير الغربي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحرب الروسية الأوكرانية؛ التوازنات الدولية؛ الجيوسياسية؛ النظام الدولي؛ الاقتصاد العالمي.

Introduction:

Since the end of the Cold War, the international system has undergone rapid transformations marked by the rise of American unipolar dominance and the relative decline of traditional powers such as Russia and China. However, this dynamic has faced increasing challenges in recent years, particularly following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The war marked a decisive moment that reshaped global power configurations, disrupted international alliances, and triggered far-reaching implications across military, economic, and geopolitical domains. This study is significant as it engages with one of the most consequential events of the 21st century, offering an in-depth examination of its implications for the future of the international order. It does not limit itself to military developments but extends to structural shifts in energy markets, the global economy, and strategic alignments. The research also contributes to theoretical debates on polarity in international relations and provides practical insight into the evolving behavior of state actors in a fractured world.

The study is guided by the following core research problem:

To what extent has the Russia-Ukraine war reshaped the international system, and can it be seen as a genuine transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world order—or merely a temporary fluctuation in global power balances?

This central issue leads to several sub-questions:

What characterized the international order before the outbreak of war?

How did the conflict accelerate the decline of U.S. hegemony and the parallel rise of alternative powers such as China and Russia?

What have been the implications of the war for European security and Western military alliances, particularly NATO?

How do these developments shape the future trajectory of the international system?

Research Hypotheses:

The war has accelerated the structural transition from unipolarity to multipolarity, with growing influence from alliances such as BRICS and the Russia–China–Iran axis.

Western sanctions against Russia have intensified global economic fragmentation, prompting major powers to explore alternative financial mechanisms outside the U.S.-led system.

The war has exposed limitations in U.S. power projection, encouraging strategic autonomy among its traditional allies, especially in Europe.

Previous Studies

A number of scholarly works have examined the implications of the Russian-Ukrainian war on global power dynamics. At the forefront is the study by **Alexander Gabuev** (2023), titled “*The Sino-Russian Entente and the New World Order*”, published by the **Carnegie Endowment for International Peace**, which analyzes the deepening strategic alignment between Russia and China following the war. Gabuev argues that this partnership—though not formalized as a military alliance—serves as a pillar of an emerging multipolar order, with both powers seeking to undermine Western dominance through coordinated economic and diplomatic actions.

In a related context, **Frederic Wehrey** (2022), in his report “*The Impact of Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine in the MENA Region*” (Carnegie Endowment), explores the indirect repercussions of the war across the Middle East. His findings highlight the rise of regional powers such as Iran and Turkey, the strategic neutrality adopted by Gulf states, and the gradual erosion of U.S. influence in favor of new geopolitical alternatives.

From an Arab academic perspective, **Dr. Haidi Yehia Ghoneim** (2024) in her article “*The Repercussions of the Russian-Ukrainian War on International and Regional Power Balances in the MENA Region*”, published in the *Journal of Political & Economic Studies* (Suez University), concludes that the war has weakened the foundations of unipolarity and accelerated the formation of unconventional alliances. She emphasizes the growing autonomy of regional actors in areas of energy and security as signs of deeper structural changes in the international system.

Methodology and Tools:

The research employs a historical-analytical method to trace the evolution of global power structures from the Cold War to the post-2022 era, and a descriptive-quantitative method to assess data such as military expenditure and trade flows. It also adopts a case study approach, focusing on emerging alliances like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the trilateral Russia–China–Iran partnership. The analysis is supported by discourse analysis (e.g., political speeches on multipolarity) and relevant economic indicators (e.g., supply chain disruptions, sanctions impacts).

Structure of the Study:

The study is organized into three main parts:

Introduction:

- **Historical Context:** An overview of the international system prior to the war and key signs of its systemic crisis.
- **Shifts in Global Power:** The decline of U.S. influence and the concurrent rise of China and Russia as central actors.
- **Implications of the War:** The conflict’s impact on European security, energy crises, and the long-term trajectory of the global order.

Conclusion:

The Russian-Ukrainian War has upended the standards of European and global security and balance that had prevailed since at least the end of the Cold War. The effects of Russia’s war on Ukraine quickly manifested in the military expenditures of European states, with Western nations significantly increasing their defence budgets after years of decline since 1991.¹ By 2023, **NATO** members had collectively increased defence spending by over 8% annually, with Eastern European states like Poland allocating 4% of GDP to defence-exceeding the alliance’s 2% target.² Beyond its impact on traditional European security and power dynamics, one of the war’s most critical non-traditional security implications concerns global and European energy security.³ The war triggered⁴ a scramble for alternative energy sources, accelerating Europe’s renewable energy transition, with wind and solar capacity growing by 15% in 2022–2023.⁵

This chapter examines the repercussions of the Russian-Ukrainian War on international balances, particularly among major powers.

Section One: Pre-War International Order and The Evolving Architecture of the Global System.

The post-Cold War international system was shaped by U.S. unipolarity, but by 2022, this order faced mounting challenges. This section examines the structural foundations of the pre-war system and the forces driving its transformation toward multipolarity.

1.1 The Character of the Contemporary International System.

The post-1945 order rested on institutional, economic, and normative pillars that came under strain in the 21st century. Russia's strategic partnerships exemplify efforts to reconfigure this system.

Russia sought to establish strategic partnerships with pivotal powers (China, Iran, and India) and create political, economic, and security alliances, which became key drivers of its success in advancing a multipolar world order and challenging U.S. unipolarity⁶. Notably, Russia formed a strategic axis—the Russia-China-Iran triangle—with these nations serving as its primary allies in opposing⁷ the U.S.-led unipolar system.⁸ The 2021 China-Russia "No Limits" partnership and Iran's inclusion in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2023 formalized this alignment, creating a counterweight to Western institutions like the G7.⁹ As noted by Katarzyna Zysk, Russia's reliance on China deepened post-2022, with bilateral trade reaching \$240 billion in 2023, though this fostered asymmetrical dependence.¹⁰

This section analyses the pre-war structure of the international system and its prevailing power balances.

The post-World War II **international order** represents a comprehensive system of governance comprising rules, institutions, and power structures that regulate relations between states and international actors. This order rests on four foundational pillars: (A) multilateral institutions like the United Nations and WTO that provide frameworks for global cooperation; (B) U.S. hegemony that has underpinned the liberal democratic framework; (C) specialized agencies addressing transnational challenges; and (D) an extensive network of binding treaties and agreements. At its core, this system enshrines key principles of sovereignty, diplomacy, international law, and collective security, while facilitating governance across political, economic, cultural and humanitarian domains. Emerging from the 1945 settlement, it established mechanisms for rules-based conflict resolution, market-oriented economic policies, and human rights protections. However, recent geopolitical developments - particularly the 2022 Ukraine crisis - have exposed systemic stresses, revealing tensions between the established order and emerging power dynamics that continue to reshape the contours of global governance.¹¹

This system rests on foundational principles including economic interdependence, the prohibition of interstate aggression, collective security mechanisms, and the promotion of liberal democratic norms. Scholars often describe the post-1945 order as a "rules-based multilateral system" defined by "free-market economics, globalized trade, and Western-dominated governance structures".¹²

The Cold War era (1947–1991) bifurcated this system into competing blocs: a U.S.-led capitalist-democratic order and a Soviet-aligned socialist-communist sphere. This ideological rivalry manifested in proxy conflicts, economic warfare, and cultural competition.¹³

Emerging Dynamics (Post-2022 Update):

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has served as a catalyst for the accelerated transition toward a **multipolar** world order - defined as an international system where power is diffused among several major states (the U.S., China, Russia, and the EU) and regional blocs, creating a more complex and contested global governance environment. This conflict has exposed three fundamental challenges to the existing order: First, it has severely undermined the normative foundations of the UN Charter through Russia's blatant violation of territorial sovereignty. Second, it has revealed the fragmentation of multilateral institutions, as seen in the Security Council's paralysis and the simultaneous strengthening of alternative groupings like BRICS. Third, it has accelerated economic decoupling trends, particularly in energy markets and financial systems.

These developments reflect a deeper structural shift where competing visions of world order - liberal democratic versus authoritarian capitalist models - increasingly collide across geopolitical, economic and institutional domains. While this multipolar transition creates opportunities for greater balance in international affairs, it also raises significant risks of instability due to the absence of effective crisis-management mechanisms between competing power centers. The emerging order will likely be characterized by fluid alliances, weaponized interdependence, and intensified great-power competition over the coming decade.

- **Economic Fragmentation:** Sanctions and counter-sanctions are disrupting global supply chains, fueling de-dollarization efforts.¹⁴

- **Institutional Paralysis:** The UN Security Council's deadlock highlights declining Western dominance in multilateral bodies.¹⁵

1.2 Fractures in the 21st-Century World Order

The early 2020s reveal a world in flux. The unipolar moment-already weakened by the 2008 financial crisis-has further eroded due to U.S. domestic polarization and the rise of revisionist powers.¹⁶

Europe struggles with internal cohesion, while Russia and China exploit regional instability to expand influence. Conflicts in the Indo-Pacific, Sahel, and Eastern Europe underscore the decline of U.S. unilateralism and the chaotic transition toward multipolarity.¹⁷

The world today confronts a fundamental reality regarding the international system: influential global powers - notably China, Russia, and India - have gained significant sway in the balance of power¹⁸, diminishing the dominance of traditional hegemonic actors like the United States. The current international order is now defined by clear determinants of power that differ markedly from both the Cold War era and the immediate post-Cold War period.

Power dynamics continue to evolve, with some nations ascending (China and Russia) while others decline (the United States), heralding the birth of a new, potentially multipolar international system. The first decade of the 21st century witnessed intense debate within American and Western political and academic circles about the future of U.S. power and its role in the post-Cold War order that began taking shape with the Soviet Union's collapse in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This debate centres on challenges to the foundations of American power on one hand, and fundamental shifts in the international balance of power on the other.

While perspectives vary on the exact contours of this emerging international order, there is consensus that China represents the most formidable potential challenger to U.S. global leadership. As projected in the U.S. National Intelligence Council's "Global Trends 2025" report, China is expected to become the world's largest economy and a leading military power,¹⁹ while pursuing greater influence in international politics over the next two decades than any other nation.

Furthermore, we witness Russia's resurgence and the emergence of other capable international actors - such as Brazil and India - that can compete with the erstwhile unipolar power. Regional powers too are aligning in ways that create new global balances, actively shaping the contours of the emerging world order.

Section Two: The Shifting Dynamics of Global Power

The 21st century has witnessed a redistribution of global power, marked by U.S. relative decline and the ascent of revisionist states. This section analyzes the catalysts and implications of this transition.

1.1 The Erosion of U.S. Hegemony in the 21st Century.

The erosion of American dominance in the 21st century stems from a confluence of internal vulnerabilities and external pressures, with six interrelated factors driving this systemic decline. Empirical evidence reveals a relative diminishment of U.S. primacy, manifested through:

A. Strategic Overextension and Military Setbacks:

The U.S. has faced significant challenges in sustaining its military interventions, particularly in the Middle East and South Asia.²⁰ The costly and inconclusive wars in Afghanistan (2001-2021) and Iraq (2003-2011), along with limited success in countering nuclear proliferation (e.g., Iran, North Korea), have exposed the limits of unilateral military power.²¹

Recent studies highlight how the U.S. defence budget's focus on legacy systems (e.g., aircraft carriers) may be ill-suited for emerging threats like cyber warfare and drone swarms²². The growing militarization of space and AI-driven warfare further complicates traditional power projections.²³

B. Political Polarization and Institutional Dysfunction:

Domestic gridlock in the U.S. (e.g., debt ceiling crises, partisan foreign policy shifts) has weakened its ability to project consistent global leadership²⁴ (8). The lack of bipartisan consensus on issues like NATO expansion or climate change undermines long-term strategic planning.²⁵

A 2023 Council on Foreign Relations report notes that 62% of allied nations express declining confidence in U.S. commitments due to policy volatility (8).²⁶

C. The Rise of Alternative Alliances:

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Russia's energy diplomacy have eroded U.S. economic influence in regions like Africa and Central Asia²⁷ (5). Meanwhile, BRICS+ expansion (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Iran joining in 2024) signals a shift toward non-Western governance models (10).²⁸

D. The Evolving Power Dynamics in the Middle East: U.S. Retrenchment and the Ascendancy of Regional Powers (2020-2024)²⁹

The failure of U.S.-backed initiatives like the "Greater Middle East" project and the stalled "Deal of the Century", combined with the erosion of traditional American alliances, has created strategic openings for rival powers. Recent developments underscore this transformation:

- 1-Iran's Expanding Military Capabilities: Beyond Israel's borders, Iran has developed precision-strike drone networks capable of targeting regional U.S. bases.
- 2-Russia's Strategic Foothold: Moscow has not only maintained its presence in Tartus but has expanded naval cooperation with Egypt and Algeria
- 3-China's Economic Inroads: Through BRI investments, China has secured port access in Oman and the UAE, challenging U.S. maritime dominance³⁰

The United States has faced growing domestic discontent due to rising unemployment and political polarization, fueling anti-federalist movements and internal instability (1, p. 3). These challenges have weakened its ability to project consistent global leadership.

E. The Trump Administration's Unpredictability (2017-2021):

- Sudden policy shifts alienated traditional allies.³¹
- The failure to effectively manage the COVID-19 pandemic damaged U.S. credibility, particularly among advanced nations.

- "America First" by:

1. Reducing U.S. involvement in multilateral negotiations and agreements, including withdrawal from some of them.
2. The decline of the United States' role as an active global power, accompanied by a crisis of trust with partners and allies.
3. Undermining the international system that it is ostensibly leading.
4. Failing to promote democracy and human rights principles, while supporting authoritarian regimes.
5. Leaving leadership vacuums in global governance, particularly in conflict resolution, allowing other states and powers to emerge.³²

The conflict has accelerated shifts in the international system:

- U.S. Strategic Distraction: While supporting Ukraine, Washington has struggled to balance commitments in Asia (China) and the Middle East (Iran).
- Russia's Resilience: Despite sanctions, Moscow has deepened ties with China, India, and Global South nations, challenging Western isolation efforts.

- Rise of Alternative Blocs: BRICS expansion and non-Western neutrality (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Türkiye) signal declining U.S. hegemony.³³

F. Structural Weaknesses in the U.S. Economic System

The United States exhibits concerning macroeconomic indicators that threaten its global leadership:

- Trade Imbalance Crisis:

- Monthly goods deficit peaked³⁴ at \$323.6 billion in April 2023
- Q1 FY2023 fiscal deficit reached \$1.52 trillion (10% annual increase)³⁵

- Institutional Warnings:

- IMF Chief Economist warned of "procyclical fiscal policies during inflationary periods"
- Debt-to-GDP ratio projected at 130% by 2030.³⁶

Geopolitical Consequences of Economic Strain

Economic weaknesses translate into strategic vulnerabilities:

- Military Constraints:

- Nuclear modernization delays due to budget cuts.
- 15% reduction in Pacific fleet deployments³⁷.

- Alliance Reliability Crisis:

- 68% of Europeans doubt U.S. security commitments.
- Gulf states increased Chinese arms purchases by 35%.

1.2 China's Expanding Influence in the Global Order: Recent Developments and Strategic Shifts.

In recent years, China's role in the international system has grown exponentially, marked by its economic ascendancy, military modernization, and assertive diplomacy. While Beijing has historically framed its rise as "peaceful," its actions in the Indo-Pacific, technological dominance, and infrastructure diplomacy (e.g., the Belt and Road Initiative) suggest a more ambitious geopolitical agenda.³⁸

Economic and Technological Leadership

China's rapid economic growth-bolstered by its manufacturing prowess, digital economy, and investments in renewable energy-has positioned it as a challenger to U.S. hegemony. By 2023, China accounted for 18% of global GDP³⁹, while its advancements in 5G, AI, and quantum computing underscore its bid for technological supremacy⁴⁰. Notably, its "dual circulation" strategy aims to reduce dependency on foreign markets, signalling a shift toward self-reliance amid U.S.-China decoupling.⁴¹

Military Modernization and Regional Assertiveness

Despite claims of a "defensive" military policy, China's aggressive posturing in the South China Sea, Taiwan Strait, and border disputes with India highlight its willingness to flex hard power. The PLA's expansion of nuclear capabilities and carrier-based operations reflect ambitions beyond regional dominance. Additionally, the 2023 security pact with Solomon Islands and naval base developments in Africa reveal a strategy to project power globally.⁴²

Diplomatic Manoeuvring and Institutional Influence

China has leveraged multilateral institutions (e.g., UN, WHO, BRICS) to reshape norms favoring authoritarian governance. Its Global Security Initiative (2022) and mediation roles in the Middle East (e.g., Iran-Saudi détente) demonstrate a departure from non-interventionism⁴³. However, tensions with the West over human rights (e.g., Xinjiang, Hong Kong) and trade practices (e.g., semiconductor bans) risk isolating Beijing.⁴⁴

China's dual goals of sustaining economic growth and securing geopolitical influence may force harder choices. While it avoids direct conflict, its "wolf warrior" diplomacy and alliances with Russia and the Global South suggest a recalibration of its "peaceful rise" doctrine.⁴⁵ The U.S.-led containment efforts (e.g., AUKUS, CHIP-4) will test China's capacity to maintain stability while countering Western pressure.⁴⁶

1.3 Russia's Resurgence After the Soviet Collapse: Strategic Shifts and Global Ambitions

The transformations in the global order following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, coupled with Russia's internal instability, significantly eroded its international standing and imposed severe economic and political challenges. During Boris Yeltsin's presidency, Russia was compelled to relinquish its superpower status, adopting a passive foreign policy amid global shifts.⁴⁷

The political and economic turmoil post-1991 further weakened Russia, forcing Yeltsin's administration to address multifaceted crises-political decay, economic collapse, and social unrest-while pursuing a fragile foreign policy.⁴⁸

This trajectory shifted when Vladimir Putin assumed power, launching a campaign to restore Russia's Soviet-era global influence. Putin's leadership sought international recognition of Russia as a great power, emphasizing its right to reclaim a dominant role and shoulder global responsibilities.⁴⁹

However, Putin's ambitions faced domestic hurdles, including political, economic, and security reforms. His administration marked a new era in Russian foreign policy, prioritizing strategic interests and leveraging pragmatic, dynamic approaches to regain international prominence.⁵⁰

By reasserting influence over former Soviet territories and revitalizing Russia's military and economic capabilities, Putin succeeded in repositioning the country as a challenger to U.S. hegemony.⁵¹

Russia's persistent efforts to restore its influence in the Middle East and Eastern Europe became evident in the mid-2000s, following the repayment of its foreign debts and the revitalization of its military capabilities. However, these efforts only gained significant momentum after Moscow framed the Arab Spring uprisings as "Western-backed collar revolutions" aimed at overthrowing existing regimes and replacing them with pro-Western governments-a strategy mirroring Russia's own interventions in regions like Ukraine and Georgia.⁵²

There is no doubt that Russia's role has gone beyond regional assertiveness, reflecting a broader ambition to reclaim its global stature. This was evident in its military intervention in Syria and its diplomatic manoeuvring during the crisis, marking a new phase in its strategic resurgence.⁵³ Moscow's repeated interventions, driven by both old and new strategic imperatives, signaled its return as a key player on the international stage, challenging the unipolar dominance of the United States that had prevailed since the Soviet Union's collapse.⁵⁴

By actively engaging in regional conflicts, Russia sought to construct a multipolar world order, countering U.S. hegemony. This ambition was further underscored by NATO's eastward expansion, which Moscow perceived as an attempt to encircle and marginalize it politically and strategically.⁵⁵

Section Three: The Evolving Global Order – Russian-Ukrainian War and the Reshaping of Power Dynamics

The Ukraine conflict became a catalyst for accelerating pre-existing trends. This section evaluates its impact on alliances, security architectures, and great-power alignments.

Russia's determined pursuit to reclaim its status as a global power has become increasingly evident through a triad of military assertiveness, energy diplomacy, and strategic negotiations. Recent developments (2023-2024) demonstrate Moscow's growing reliance on its nuclear posture and energy exports as tools of geopolitical leverage, particularly amid Western sanctions.⁵⁶

President Putin's rejection of the post-Cold War settlement – exemplified by his controversial statement that "accepting Eastern Europe's independence was a historical mistake" – underscores Russia's revisionist ambitions to restore its Soviet-era sphere of influence.⁵⁷

1.1 NATO's revival: Strengthened U.S.-Europe alignment under Biden vs. decline under Trump.

NATO's resurgence post-2022 reflects both renewed purpose and unresolved tensions. Three dynamics reveal its adaptive challenges:

A. NATO's Realignment and the Strengthening of European Security

The Russian-Ukrainian war has had severe repercussions worldwide, exacerbating food shortages, disrupting energy supply chains, and triggering significant economic fallout. The consequences for Europe have been particularly profound, fueling a growing sense of insecurity among nations involved in the crisis or supporting either side. Europe has once again become a focal point of international geopolitical conflict, marking an end to the era of prosperity and stability that prevailed for nearly 74 years following two devastating world wars that claimed millions of lives across the continent.

The economic crises gripping Europe have coincided with a sharp increase in defense spending. Western nations, which had maintained historically low military expenditures since 1991, have significantly ramped up their budgets:

- Germany announced a doubling of its defence budget to €100 billion, up from €47 billion.
- Poland purchased 250 Abrams tanks from the U.S. for \$6 billion.
- Belgium allocated \$14 billion for military spending.
- The UK invested £16.5 billion in its defence industry.
- France increased its military budget by €1.7 billion for the current year.
- Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Latvia, and the Netherlands raised defence spending to between 2.5% and 6% of GDP.⁵⁸

Beyond conventional security and power dynamics, one of the war's most critical non-traditional security impacts has been on **European energy security**, particularly due to the escalating crisis in natural gas supplies from Russia. Natural gas is a vital global energy source, second only to oil in many countries. The global gas sector has undergone fundamental changes in recent years, directly affecting worldwide energy security.⁵⁹

Regarding the nature of the relationship between Europe and America within the NATO framework, it manifested according to President Trump's decision as follows:

1. Reduction of Military Support for Ukraine

President Trump repeatedly asserted he could end the war through negotiations likely requiring Ukrainian territorial concessions - approach European leaders vehemently oppose.

2. **Escalation of Trade Protectionism** April 02nd 2025 Tariffs ranging between 10% and 35% were imposed on various countries worldwide.

3. Intensified Pressure on NATO

Trump would likely condition continued U.S. commitment on European members meeting 2% GDP defence spending targets, potentially threatening partial withdrawal. Institutional Impact:

- Only 11/31 NATO members currently meet the 2% benchmark (NATO, 2023)
- Could destabilize Article 5 credibility while empowering anti-Atlanticist factions
- May force EU to activate Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) mechanisms

B. NATO's Revival and Strategic Shifts.

Before the war, NATO faced existential doubts, with leaders like Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron questioning its relevance.⁶⁰ However, the Russian invasion has:

- Reinvigorated NATO unity, leading to:

- Sweden and Finland's accession (2023-2024), ending decades of neutrality.⁶¹
- Enhanced Eastern Flank deployments, with 40,000 troops now stationed in Poland and the Baltics.⁶²

- Strengthened Ukraine support:

- Over €120 billion in military aid from NATO members (2022-2024).⁶³
- Long-term security pacts signed with the U.S., UK, and Germany in 2024.

While the Russia-Ukraine war has reinforced transatlantic unity, this cohesion remains fragile. Several European states continue to lag on defense spending targets, delay Sweden's NATO accession, advocate for strategic autonomy from the United States, or resist coordinated efforts to mitigate risks posed by China. The most significant manifestation of Western divisions emerged when former U.S. President Donald Trump publicly questioned NATO's relevance and cast doubt on American security guarantees to allies during his presidential campaign.⁶⁴

C. The Future of NATO in the Shadow of the Russia-Ukraine War

The Western bloc initially stood united in supporting Ukraine and resisting compromise with Russia, driven by the belief that any concessions would embolden Moscow to repeat its aggression elsewhere, thereby threatening European security.

The U.S.-led strategy sought not just to repel Russia but to impose such heavy costs that it would deter future aggression.⁶⁵

However, as the war enters its second year, cracks in NATO solidarity have begun to emerge. Key member states like Hungary and Turkey have undermined collective efforts by:

- Providing Russia with diplomatic and economic support
- Circumventing Western sanctions
- Obstructing NATO's expansion and military coordination

These divisions highlight the alliance's vulnerability to internal discord, raising critical questions about its long-term cohesion and strategic effectiveness.⁶⁶

Europe's security architecture currently prioritizes the defence of core EU and NATO members, leaving non-allied states to fend for themselves—with the partial exception of Finland and Sweden, which are on the path to accession. While this does not formally end NATO's enlargement policy, **de facto** limitations will emerge under Russia's perceived siege mentality, leaving the EU and NATO with diminished capacity for ambitious external policies.⁶⁷

By contrast, the EU's current defence policy, unlike NATO's, remains far from capable of guaranteeing its members' security. Reassuring Eastern EU states militarily will thus become imperative. Yet sanctions and rhetorical appeals to a "rules-based international order" will prove insufficient to deter Russia or curb its expansionist ambitions. For decades to come, the U.S. will remain Europe's linchpin, as NATO relies overwhelmingly on American support.⁶⁸

A potential Trump return to the White House could cripple NATO⁶⁹ without formal withdrawal. Merely questioning the alliance's utility, reducing military exercises, withdrawing troops from Europe, or halting arms shipments to Ukraine would suffice. Moreover, members like Hungary and Turkey, already second-tier actors, have demonstrated their ability to obstruct critical decisions (e.g., delaying Swedish-Finnish accession). While NATO's future remains precarious, its greatest threat lies not in Leader Vladimir Putin vs. Western Autocrat Donald Trump

This is the stark historical lesson in the second anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.⁷⁰

Russia will exert every possible effort to weaken the commitment to NATO and the transatlantic relationship. It may activate methods it has used before, such as influencing public opinion and elections in European countries, thereby seeking to destabilize the political landscape in Europe. Russian sovereignty over Ukraine will lead to instability and insecurity throughout the Eurasian region, from Estonia to Poland and from Romania to Turkey. The Russian presence in Ukraine will be a constant source of concern for all of Ukraine's neighbors, and its continuation will pose a real threat to their security.⁷¹

1.2 Increasing Russian-Chinese Cooperation

A. Motives for Increasing Russian-Chinese Cooperation

Russia's need for a strong strategic ally to balance its relations with the West amid the economic crisis resulting from American and European sanctions due to the Russian-Ukrainian war. Several factors contribute to this need, such as geographical proximity, China's transformation from an investment country to a consumer country, and the similarity of governance systems.⁷²

The Russian-Chinese Strategic Alignment and Its Implications for the Liberal World Order

B. Chinese Leadership's Pro-Russia Stance: Strategic Calculations

The majority of Chinese policymakers perceive that a Russian defeat in its confrontation with the West would make China the next target, potentially paving the way for its containment. China's rapid economic, technological, and military growth poses a more significant challenge to U.S. hegemony than Russia does.⁷³

A 2024 report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) notes that 78% of Chinese elites view Russia as a critical buffer against Western pressure, reinforcing Beijing's alignment with Moscow.⁷⁴

2. The Emerging Authoritarian Axis: A Challenge to U.S. Primacy

Russia and China are advancing a multipolar world order, converging to counter U.S. sanctions and Western dominance. Their partnership—combining Russia's military prowess with China's economic might—aims to dismantle the liberal international system, which clashes with their authoritarian governance models. This alliance revives the U.S.'s "greatest geopolitical nightmare": a cohesive Eurasian authoritarian bloc⁷⁵

3. Post-2022 War Dynamics: Institutionalizing the Partnership

The Ukraine war accelerated Sino-Russian collaboration, evidenced by:

- China's abstention from UN votes condemning Russia.
- Joint leadership in **BRICS** and the **Shanghai** Cooperation Organization (SCO).
- Coordinated efforts to build alternative financial and security architectures.

Conclusion:

The Russian-Ukrainian war has emerged as a pivotal turning point in the contemporary international system, accelerating pre-existing geopolitical and economic shifts. This study demonstrates that the conflict was not merely a regional dispute but a catalyst for reshaping global power dynamics, affecting military and security alliances (e.g., NATO), the structure of the global economy (particularly energy markets), and the rise of alternative blocs (e.g., the Russia–China–Iran axis and BRICS expansion).

Key findings of the research include:

Accelerated Shift from Unipolarity to Multipolarity: With the relative decline of U.S. hegemony and the rise of revisionist powers like China and Russia, a new international order is emerging, where non-Western alliances play an increasingly influential role in global governance.

Erosion of Western Sanctions' Efficacy: Sanctions against Russia failed to achieve their strategic objectives, instead deepening Moscow's cooperation with Beijing and Tehran and hastening efforts to de-dollarize the global economy.

Redefining European Security: The war triggered increased defense spending in Europe but also exposed fissures within NATO, particularly with growing calls for European strategic autonomy.

Emergence of New Alliances: The Russia–China partnership has intensified as a counterbalance to Western pressure, potentially forming a long-term authoritarian coalition to challenge the liberal international order.

In conclusion, the Russian-Ukrainian war was not simply a regional conflict but an "accelerator" of structural transformations in the international system, pushing the world toward a more multipolar—yet volatile and competitive—order. As these dynamics persist, states will need to reassess their security and economic strategies in an increasingly uncertain global landscape.

¹ Al Jazeera, "Russia's War on Ukraine: European Countries Double Military Spending," YouTube video, accessed [date], <https://youtu.be/OTchs08XFb>.

² "The Impact of the Russian-Ukrainian War on Energy Security," *Siyassa Journal*, accessed [date], <https://www.siyassa.org/New>

³**Energy Security** :The ability of a state or region to secure stable, affordable, and sustainable energy supplies while minimizing the risk of external disruptions, especially during geopolitical crises.

⁴ John Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 45–50.

⁵ Stephen Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018), 112–115.

⁶ **Unipolarity**: A global system dominated by a single superpower that holds disproportionate influence in military, economic, and political realms—commonly associated with U.S. global dominance after the Cold War.

⁷ NATO, *Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2023)*, July 2023, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_216635.htm.

⁸ International Energy Agency (IEA), *Renewable Energy Market Update 2023*, June 2023, <https://www.iea.org/reports/renewable-energy-market-update-2023>.

⁹ Alexander Gabuev, "The Sino-Russian Entente and the New World Order," Carnegie Endowment, April 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/04/12/sino-russian-entente-and-new-world-order-pub-89554>.

¹⁰ Katarzyna Zysk, "Russia's Pivot to Asia: The Geopolitics of Desperation," Chatham House, March 2024, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/03/russias-pivot-asia-geopolitics-desperation>.

¹¹ Muhammad Al-Gharbi, *The Future of the International System in Light of Emerging Alliances* (Baghdad: Dialogue House, 2023), 2.

¹² J.M. Canefor, *Understanding the Current International System* (New York: Rania Foundation, 2017), 13.

¹³ Ibraheem Muhammad, *The New World Order: Russia's Strategy for Regional Expansion* (Western Asia Studies Center, 2022), 3.

¹⁴ Geoeconomic Fragmentation and the Future of Multilateralism (Washington, DC: IMF, 2023).

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¹⁷ Kagan, R. (2024). The Jungle Grows Back: Power and the Return of Realpolitik. Knopf.

¹⁸ **Balance of Power**: A principle in international relations wherein states maintain equilibrium by ensuring that no single power becomes dominant. It often involves forming alliances or increasing military capacities to deter aggression.

¹⁹ Mearsheimer, J. J. (2010). "Why the Rise of China Will Not Be Peaceful." *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 10(1), 45-52.

²⁰ Deibel, T. (2009). *Foreign Affairs Strategy: The Logic of American Governance*. Beirut: Arab Book House. (pp. 201-215).

²¹ Khader, M. B. (2014). "The Present and Future of the International System." *Journal of Political and International Affairs*, 24, pp. 15-31.

²² Brooks & Wohlforth (2023). *Beyond Unipolarity*. Princeton University Press. (pp. 87-122).

²³ Kania (2024). *AI and the Future of Warfare*. Brookings. (pp. 41-53).

²⁴ CFR (2023). *Allies and Adversaries*. (pp. 30-42)

²⁵ Brooks & Wohlforth (2023). *Beyond Unipolarity*. Princeton University Press. (pp. 87-122)

²⁶ CFR (2023). *Allies and Adversaries*. (pp. 30-42)

²⁷ Zaid, Q. et al. (2021). *The Future of the International Order Amid Declining American Hegemony*. Berlin: Arab Democratic Center. (pp. 89-102).

²⁸ BRICS Report (2024). *Expansion and the New Development Bank*. (pp. 5-25).

²⁹ A 2023 RAND study shows U.S. favorability in the Arab world has dropped to 32%, while China's approval rose to 48%.

The Calculated Retreat: America's Military Drawdown and Its Consequences

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan (2021) marked a turning point, with ripple effects across the region:

- Iraq Transition: The remaining 2,500 U.S. troops now face regular attacks from Iran-backed milit
Syria Quandary: Despite maintaining 900 troops in northeast Syria, the U.S. struggles to counter Russian and Turkish influence.

- Gulf Reassessments: Saudi Arabia and the UAE have diversified security partnerships, purchasing Chinese drones and Russian air defences.

The 2023 U.S. National Defence Strategy acknowledges the need to "prioritize China while managing Middle East commitments". Russian MOD White Paper (2022). **Mediterranean Security Strategy**.

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³⁴ RT Arabic (June 2023). Trade Deficit Report. p.1.

³⁵ Sputnik Arabic (October 2023). Fiscal Analysis. p.3.

³⁶ IMF World Economic Outlook (October 2023). p.12.

³⁷ US Naval Institute Report (2024). p.7

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³⁹ World Bank. *Global Economic Prospects: East Asia and the Pacific*. June 2023, p. 12.

⁴⁰ Lee, John. *The Digital Silk Road: China's Technological Expansion*. Harvard UP, 2021, pp. 89–93.

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