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## **SOME ASPECTS OF THE POLITICAL WEST'S STRUGGLES: CHALLENGES TO POWER AND SUPREMACY**

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the transformation of global power structures in the context of the perceived decline of American hegemony and the liberal international order. It critically assesses the internal and external pressures reshaping the U.S.-led global framework, including ideological fragmentation within liberal democracies, the strategic rise of non-Western actors such as China and Russia, and the growing challenges to the legitimacy of multilateral institutions. The concept of the “Political West” is used to describe the alliance of liberal democracies committed to open markets, democratic governance, and rule-based international norms. By analyzing key theoretical perspectives and geopolitical developments, the study aims to evaluate whether the current world order is undergoing a temporary adjustment or a more enduring systemic transition toward multipolarity.

**Keywords:** liberal international order, American hegemony, Political West, global powershift, multipolarity

### **INTRODUCTION**

Today, theorists of modern political thought are arguing about two theses: whether there is an alternative to Western supremacy (and

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whether there is a need at all for a hegemonic force) and second, whether the Political West itself is aware of its erosion and is ready to give up the primacy to another center of power? This raises the question of whether the current so-called *interregnum*<sup>1</sup> will ultimately favor Western civilization, that is, whether the West, with internal reforms and internal structural transformation, will survive the ravages of time and continue its “hegemony” or the whole world order will find a new non-Western paradigm. Alternatively, could a symbiotic world order emerge, shaped by the coexistence of multiple centers of power? This paper uses the term “Political West” not as a strictly geographical construct but as a value-based alliance of states – primarily North America and Western Europe – that share commitments to liberal democratic norms, market-based economies, and multilateral cooperation. While the term can be contested, it serves here as a practical shorthand for those actors historically aligned with U.S.-led internationalism since 1945. Equally central to this analysis is the concept of the “liberal international order.” This term refers to the post-World War II global system built around open markets, democratic governance, institutional multilateralism, and rule-based international norms – principles institutionalized in organizations like the United Nations, NATO, the WTO, and the IMF (Ikenberry 2011). Although related to “liberal democracy,” “liberal economy,” and “liberal internationalism,” the liberal international order encompasses a broader system of global governance and reflects the normative and institutional architecture of U.S. hegemony. This paper distinguishes these concepts while focusing on the liberal international order as the central framework through which American power and its global legitimacy are evaluated.

According to Ismail Serageldin (Serageldin 2016), the current world order goes through five contradictions. The first contradiction in the current world order is due to the fact that the whole set of concepts and ideas that are dominant today are entirely Western creations. Most of the rest of the world accepted them but did not participate in their

<sup>1</sup> According to Ivanov (2023, 107): “There are numerous definitions of the term *interregnum* and, at the same time, numerous interpretations that have been the product of various historical contexts. Depending on the needs, the term itself and its application offered explanations of current, temporary, and irregular events caused by a variety of symptoms, trends, historical ordeals, personalities, and so on. In general, the *interregnum* is a time interval indicating the interruption of a certain continuity. This time interval between two periods (what was and what is coming) is most often used in defining the temporal space from the end of the reign of one sovereign ruler until the coming to power of another, that is, its successor.”

creation and implementation. The second contradiction concerns Muslim extremism, with forces disrupting stability and order in countries across the globe (Serageldin 2016, 40). As Serageldin (2016, 40) argues, today, they are a threat to Europe and America, as well as the whole world, and aim to overturn the current world order and establish a religious state based on a barbaric, fanatical ideology. The challenge here is ideological and reminisces the rise of totalitarian ideologies, such as communism, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. A third contradiction is the very nature of the state. A foreign policy based on soft power cannot be effective and deliver results in times of crisis, and EU members lack commitment to a unified strategy (Serageldin 2016, 40).

The fourth contradiction is the one between politics and the economy, while the fifth contradiction is the apparent obsolescence of the UN design and the absence of another alternative design of a forum where major powers discuss significant issues and bring solutions, not only declarative decisions and consents (Serageldin 2016, 40). Similarly, Niall Ferguson talks about the Four key components (which he calls black boxes that need to be opened) of our civilization: democracy, capitalism, rule of law, and civil society, and the same ones that are the pivot of the Western institutions are degenerate (Ferguson 2013, 19). He implies that they are often taken for granted, with the assumption that they function properly without questioning their inner functionality. However, on closer reflection, Ferguson argues that these institutions are experiencing decay or corruption, leading to a decline in Western dominance (Ferguson 2013, 19).

This paper will explore the ongoing crisis of the Western-led world order by analyzing key contradictions within its ideological, economic, and military frameworks. It will examine whether these challenges signify an inevitable decline, a potential transformation, or the emergence of a multipolar world. Drawing on the perspectives of theorists such as Ikenberry, Ferguson, and Huntington, the paper will examine whether the West can adapt to new global realities or whether alternative power structures will reshape the international system.

To guide this inquiry, the paper proposes the following hypothesis: the current liberal international order, though not in terminal decline, is undergoing a multidimensional transformation driven by ideological fragmentation, economic decentralization, and the erosion of Western-led geopolitical authority. This hypothesis will be explored through three interrelated dimensions: (1) the ideological and institutional crisis of the

liberal order, (2) the geopolitical and economic rise of non-Western actors, and (3) the strategic contradictions and identity crisis of U.S. foreign policy. Each section will examine these dynamics through the lenses of key theorists and case studies, ultimately assessing whether the West can retain leadership in a shifting multipolar world.

## **CRISIS OF THE (WESTERN) INTERNATIONAL (NEO)LIBERALISM**

Recent scholarship has increasingly emphasized the vulnerability of the liberal international order in the face of rising geopolitical tensions and ideological fragmentation. Zimmermann describes the decline of the liberal international order as rapid and striking, noting that “from apparently inexorable and triumphant ascent to defensive and fractured gloom, [it] has been quite swift” (Zimmermann 2024, 1304). This swift erosion reflects not only external challenges posed by revisionist powers like Russia and China but also internal inconsistencies within the order itself. Trubowitz and Burgoon (Trubowitz and Burgoon 2024) similarly argue that the foundational support for liberal internationalism – rooted in post-Cold War triumphalism has significantly weakened. They highlight the erosion of democratic norms, growing protectionism, and the increasing disillusionment among Western electorates as key factors undermining the cohesion and legitimacy of the liberal order (Trubowitz and Burgoon 2024). Together, these accounts underscore a transition from a previously stable, rule-based global order to one marked by contestation, fragmentation, and ideological realignment.

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a critical stress test for the liberal international order, exposing deep structural weaknesses in global governance and multilateral cooperation. As Whichelo (Whichelo 2020) observes, the crisis did not create these vulnerabilities but accelerated pre-existing trends of fragmentation and distrust among liberal democracies. The absence of coordinated international responses, combined with rising nationalism and protectionism, underscored the declining capacity of Western-led institutions to manage transnational crises (Whichelo 2020). This erosion of global solidarity has contributed to a more contested international landscape, further complicating the West’s efforts to maintain its leadership and normative influence.

According to some theorists, such as John Ikenberry (Ikenberry 2011), the world’s most powerful nation began to undermine the order

it established initially. He argues that the transfer of power and wealth from the North and West to the East and the South is underway, with the United States and Europe opening up space for non-Western countries on the rise (Ikenberry 2011). Ikenberry wonders what kind of global political order will emerge once the wheels of power shift and their consequences unfold – “Some anxious observers argue that the world will not only look less American – it will look less liberal [...] The notions of liberal internationalism – openness and rule-based relationships protected by institutions such as the United Nations and norms such as multilateralism – could give way to more contested and fragmented systems of blocks, spheres of influence, mercantile networks and religious rivalries” (Ikenberry 2011, 56). Over the past seven decades, the United States has played a central role in sustaining the liberal international order, leveraging its global leadership strategic alliances, economic power, and dominance in the currency system. Perhaps exactly what is happening today, Ikenberry concludes, is a “crisis of transition” that could lead to a post-Western and post-American world order, which can, in fact, be regarded as a deep crisis of the very liberal internationalism itself, whose erosion can lead to protectionism, nationalism, spheres of influence and regional projects of the Great Powers (Ikenberry 2011, 56). Therefore, according to some, the determining factor for the existence and survival of liberal internationalism is the Western and American hegemony, whose dominance is undermined. He argues that the future of this system hinges on two key factors: whether the United States and other liberal democracies can reclaim their progressive political direction and whether the US and its longstanding allies can expand and strengthen a broader coalition of states committed to cooperation within a reformed global order (Ikenberry 2011, 56). Achieving this, however, requires ensuring the survival of liberal democracy itself.

While much scholarly attention has focused on external geopolitical challenges to the liberal international order, an equally important dimension of the crisis lies within Western democracies themselves. Santarelli argues that the malaise affecting liberal democratic societies is not solely the result of populist backlash or institutional fatigue but stems from deeper and more systemic issues (Santarelli 2025, 157). In particular, he highlights how entrenched commitments to traditional economic models such as austerity, market liberalism, and technocratic governance, have alienated large segments of the population (Santarelli 2025, 158). These frameworks, often presented as neutral or “evidence-based,” have

in fact failed to address growing inequality and social fragmentation, thereby weakening the legitimacy of democratic governance. Santarelli's analysis suggests that the crisis of Western democracy is as much about a crisis of imagination and adaptability as it is about political dysfunction, calling for a reevaluation of the ideological assumptions underpinning policymaking in liberal societies (Santarelli 2025).

According to Michael J. Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington, and Fumio Watanuki, "the vulnerability of the democratic government in the United States is not primarily caused by threats from the outside, although they are real, and neither from the internal subversion with the left and the right, although the two possibilities exist, but primarily from the internal dynamics of democracy itself in the highly educated, active and participatory society" (Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki 1975, 115).

Robert Kagan argues that many believe the decline of American dominance does not necessarily signal the end of the liberal international order. There is an expectation, if not an assumption, that key aspects of this order, such as democracy, prosperity, and peace among major powers, can endure beyond the waning influence of the United States. In contrast, Ikenberry maintains that the fundamental principles of a liberal international order will persist and continue to develop (Kagan 2012).

For generations, thinkers have recognized a recurring pattern in which political systems often contribute to their own downfall. Long before Arnold Toynbee's assertion that not one empire dies from murder but from suicide (Toynbee 1987), John Adams had already warned democracies are inherently short-lived (Adams 1851). Adams wrote: "[...] democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide" (Adams 1851). According to Michael Crozier, Samuel P. Huntington and Joji Watanuki "this suicide is, above all, the result of overindulgence than of anything else" (Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki 1975, 115). It is precisely such overindulgence in the form of decadent stagnation that is an inevitable element for empires, democratic states, and superpowers. The same is what Adams wrote two centuries ago: "Power always thinks it has a great Soul and vast Views beyond the comprehension of the Weak. This is the deep root of the combination of savagery and self-justification that infuses the imperial mentality – and to a certain extent, any structure of authority and domination" (John Adams cited in: Chomsky 2007, 287).

However, are these warnings that scholars believe will emerge from the twilight of liberal internationalism in the early decades of the

21<sup>st</sup> century no longer present and inflaming from within the West? Paul Berman hypothetically asks what the meaning is of the claim that the 20<sup>th</sup> century did not end in 1989 and that in the modern age, there were still present and survived those impulses that caused harm because, as vile tyrants, they always cause a certain problem. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, various new movements emerged, presenting radical and apocalyptic visions embraced by the masses, leading to widespread violence against enemies and allies. These movements arose from a deep frustration with the shortcomings and perceived naivety of liberal civilization. Despite their destructive nature, they were deeply influenced by some of the most profound literary and philosophical achievements, tapping into fundamental aspects of human nature that gave them significant power (Berman 2005). It seems as if we are witnessing an absurd situation in which even though we have a good reason to be scared, it is not a good idea to be scared. "Oh, how much I would like," Berman says, "to show that the world can be explained rationally – that Chomsky is right – and to show that all evil comes from bad oil companies and their allies from the media or some other plague that can be identified" (Berman 2005, 240).

According to many realists such as John Mearsheimer (Mearsheimer 2001), Stephen Walt (Walt 1987), and Kenneth Waltz (Waltz 1979), the West not only loses the primacy of a tangible front-runner, but we can also feel its weakening in ideological domination because of the growth of other world powers. China's economic growth as the leading Asian giant has almost doubled compared to Western democracies. On the other hand, mild authoritarian regimes mark significant economic growth compared to other pro-Western democracies. Democracy undoubtedly offers greater openness to societies but not always greater economic effectiveness than other political orders (Schmitter and Karl 1991). From an analytical standpoint, it appears that the democratic prosperity of Western industrial states such as Great Britain, Germany, France, and Italy is increasingly under pressure, as weakened leadership and political fragmentation limit the capacity of these governments to deliver effective solutions. It is a long-held belief that a state's strength is measured by the number of decisions it can make. However, the more decisions a modern state must handle, the more powerless it becomes. Decisions bring not only authority but also exposure to risks. A key vulnerability of European states lies in their tendency to yield to blackmail tactics (Crozier, Huntington, and Watanuki 1975).

Namely, US foreign policy seeks definitive outcomes in international relations, aiming to resolve issues and neutralize threats. Their approach favors unilateral actions rather than working through international institutions like the United Nations (Kagan 2004). Cooperation with other nations is limited, as they remain skeptical of international law and often choose to act independently when necessary or beneficial (Kagan 2004). In other words, when a US foreign policy has set a clear goal in front of itself, it is driven exclusively by the premise that “the goal justifies the means.” *While Machiavelli is often associated with the idea that “the end justifies the means,” his writings suggest this is only justifiable when the survival of the state is at stake – not for pursuing selfish or unjust causes* (Machiavelli, 2019).

According to Robert Kagan, the American foreign policy, like the very system of the liberal international economy, survives its identity crisis (Kagan 2012). Kagan portrays the USA’s foreign policy in the following way: “They are reluctant, then aggressive, asleep at the switch, then quick on the trigger, indifferent, then obsessed, then indifferent again. They act out of a sense of responsibility and then resent and fear the burden of responsibility they have taken on themselves. Their effect on the world, not surprisingly, is often the opposite of what they intend. Americans say they want stability in the international system but are often the greatest disrupters of stability. They extol the virtues of international laws and institutions but then violate and ignore them with barely a second thought. They are a revolutionary power but think they are a status quo power. They want to be left alone but cannot seem to leave anyone else alone. They are continually surprising the world with their behavior, but not nearly as much as they are continually surprising themselves” (Kagan 2012, 240).

## WHERE DOES POWER LIE?

Stratfor founder George Freedman is critical of American foreign policy. The British have the “Colonial Office,” the Romans had a “Proconsul,” and the United States has a chaotic array of institutions that deal with foreign policy. There are sixteen intelligence services with overlapping responsibilities. The State Department, the Defence Department, the National Security Council, and the National Intelligence Director all turned towards resolving the same issues, coordinated only to the extent that the President coordinates them all (Friedman 2012).

Friedman advises that the US apparatus of international relations needs to rationalize faster in the next decade before it gets out of control and is too late (Friedman 2011). It can be concluded that American foreign policy is in a state of contradiction and hypocrisy because, as Friedman concludes, they want to blame everyone for their problems except themselves. “At the very root of the problem is that there is no consensus in the United States about whether it has an empire and what to do with it” (Friedman 2012, 242). Arguing for the mere fact that the United States inadvertently grew into an empire, Friedman points to the conclusion that the empire poses a profound threat to the republic. If that moral basis is lost, the empire would have no point. In his forecast for the next 100 years on how the 21<sup>st</sup> century will look, Friedman thinks that the events shaping this century will rotate around the United States (Friedman 2011). Because we are currently in an America-centric era, if we would like to understand the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we must understand America and its culture, which is both young and barbaric and will be the one that will define how the world will live and think (Friedman 2009).

Friedman may be right. It is undisputed that America is and will be the supreme world leader, and it is very little apparent that another power could replace it. However, what precisely do the concepts of power and force mean? According to realists, the most fundamental divisions of power are military, economic, and cultural. For now, America is superior in one, is leading in another, and is under threat in the third. The one in which it leads is the cultural.

(a) The United States of America and the West, in general, are cultural leaders and a superpower, essentially a lifestyle force. However, that culture, as Pitirim A. Sorokin explains, rests on laurels (Sorokin 1957). Europe and the United States still dictate many cultural and social flows, but the question is how original and innovative they are today. On the other hand, the educational process that is later reflected in social life seems to go through a process of “incestuousness” (Thompson 2017).

There is no conflict of ideas, and the criticism of liberal ideas and their values by the right is perceived as a threat to democracy, freedom, and human rights. A system that wishes to be inclusive suffers precisely from an overdose of inclusive tendencies with no tolerance for what is outside of it. This should not mean the denial of the rights of cultural minorities to exercise their civil rights and freedoms. Exactly the opposite. This was evident in the rise of the woke movement and cancel culture, both gaining significant traction. However, these dynamics may shift in response to

the policies and influence of the recent Trump administration. However, what worries is the pretentiousness that leads to the tendency that only liberal ideas are universal and valid in this global order, and everything opposite is retrograde and wrong. The pretentiousness of liberal leaders towards creating a world and order that necessarily has to be prone to neo-liberal logic is an occasion for an even greater disintegration of the societies themselves, primarily within their democracies. However, is the universalization of Westernization a legitimate act?

Civilizations such as Orthodox, Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, Confucian, or Japanese have distinct cultural and historical traditions that shape their perspectives, which may differ from those of Western civilization. The world is a conglomerate of differences, particularities, and specifics of different communities and identities, which, instead of trying to create an international order of coexistence, are often guided by the desire for unification of values. Values for which the West independently agreed to be universal. The order of international relations, implemented through the main subject embodied through national states, was essentially a product of the Westphalian Peace Treaty. A treaty in which European states, as leaders of the Western world, agreed on something that should apply to the rest of the world.<sup>2</sup> However, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the ideas of the Western world, such as liberalism, brought with it the ideas of freedom, democracy, free market, human rights, constitutionalism, and individuality aimed at creating a “universal civilization.”

The idea of creating a “universal civilization” that represents an attempt at creating a Western civilization is simply impossible with the very existence of other civilizations and their fundamental differences with the West. Universal civilization is possible only as a symbiosis of values from all civilizations and their proportionate placement in the equilibrium of the international community. It should not be forgotten that there are values that have their historical continuity and that people constantly desire to live in communities that are subject to natural law and the realization of fundamental human interests and rights. These values

<sup>2</sup> In his book *World Order*, Henry Kissinger notes that these concepts were later extended beyond Europe, influencing global perspectives on international relations. He also reflects on how viewing the world solely through a Western lens can lead to challenges when engaging with regions with different historical experiences and cultural contexts. This expansion of the Westphalian model to the rest of the world sometimes resulted in tensions, as non-Western societies were introduced to a system that did not always align with their traditional structures (Kissinger 2014).

are deeply related to the morality and ethnicity of every society and the original distinction between what is good and evil and right and wrong. Similar to the cosmopolitan consciousness of universal affiliation, where the individual is a citizen of the world. The starting point for realizing this idea is the moral dimension or the cosmopolitan moral ideal.

Many question the West, its' neo-liberalism and interventionism, and its' belonging to the sphere of good and right, which time will show. Fern, as described by Haber (Haber 2002), dissociating himself from the liberal tradition, will conclude that no universal community consists of rational creatures. Every individual belongs to multiple communities, each with its own dynamics. These communities are not fixed or unchanging entities but rather diverse and fluid (Haber 2002). Starting from this aspect and understanding, Fern argues that "any applicable political theory must be capable to accept the view that the subject is never singular or autonomous, but that he or she always exists as a member of a community;" the subject is "subject-in-community, which is the basis for his theory of emancipation" (Haber 2002, 8).

The formulation of "universal civilization" has its roots in V. S. Naipaul (Naipaul 1991), who considers Western civilization the most suitable for people's lives. He is delighted with the "beauty of the idea of the pursuit of happiness" (Naipaul 1991). This idea is at the core of civilization's attractiveness to those on the periphery.<sup>3</sup> Tony Blair's 2001 statement that these values are not merely Western but universal marked a significant shift in rhetoric (Blair 2001). Rather than being seen as characteristics of Western culture, they were now framed as the only acceptable values. This perspective reflects a form of cultural dominance,

<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, it is illusory to think that the superiority and universality of Western civilization lies in the fact that it is only capable of pursuing and spreading happiness. The pursuit of happiness, freedom, and life are the three well-known pillars of the American Declaration of Independence that represent the inalienable rights of every US citizen. However, the idea of searching for happiness is not an original American creation, which should only be considered a benefit to Western civilization and the United States. Before the emergence of Western domination, many civilizations and empires were aware of this concept. The source is assumed to lie in the Epicurus Philosophy, in whose understanding of the world lies the hedonistic ethics as the basis for man's wisdom. Unlike the Stoics, who see the path to that wisdom through their obligations, the Epicureans see it through the enjoyment. Epicurus sees the man as an individual, who, in contrast to the teachings of Plato and Aristotle, is not primarily a "political subject" or *ζῶον πολιτικόν* and a citizen of the polis but only an individual who is searching for happiness, who as a private person should not live publicly, but exemplarily.

suggesting an ongoing ideological struggle where one culture seeks to replace others until it is universally adopted. The following day, *The Times of London* reinforced this idea, asserting that these fundamental values should be applied equally to all (Pirs 2014).

Regarding the universal civilization, Huntington concludes that “this idea can refer to some things that are deep but irrelevant, to things that are essential but not deep, as well as to things that are irrelevant and superficial” (Huntington 1996, 57). At the same time, universal civilization “can refer to the assumptions, values, and teachings that many currently adhere to in Western civilization and some in other civilizations,” which he refers to as “The Davos Culture” (Huntington 1996, 56; 56-59). Namely, as he emphasizes, to all participants in the forum in Davos and, in fact, the same thing common to people of Western civilization: political democracy, individualism, and belief in market economies. The participants at the forum “control virtually all international institutions, then many of the world’s governments as well as most of the world’s economic and military capacities ... but globally, how many share that culture?” (Huntington 1996, 57).

According to Huntington (1996, 57) “outside the West, probably less than 50 million people or 1% of the world’s population, and perhaps only a tenth of 1% of the world’s population. This culture is far from universal culture... this common intellectual culture exists, as Hedley Bull emphasizes, only at the level of elites: its roots are shallow in many societies... it is questionable whether, even at the diplomatic level, it embraces in itself what was once called a common moral culture or a set of common values, unlike a common intellectual culture”.

(b) According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS 2023, 45), the United States is still the dominant actor and leader in global military affairs. Although the United States faces no direct military threat to its primacy, the rise of China’s economic power has introduced a new form of strategic competition. While some argue that China’s ambition remains primarily economic, other scholars highlight its’ growing naval presence and assertiveness in regions such as the South China Sea as evidence of broader geopolitical ambition (Kaplan 2010). These developments suggest that any shift in China’s strategic priorities could eventually challenge the military dominance of the United States. The United States, as a dominant global power, emerged as the central force in the war on terror following the 9/11 attacks, an outcome that, as Friedman describes, was “unintentional” (Friedman 2012, 241).

This role reinforced the perception that its presence is essential, as many view it as the only power capable of confronting such a formidable threat. However, if we continue to live in a permanent and prolonged war against the Islamic world, and if the threats that are not only dangerous to liberal democracy but also to humanity, in general, are genuine, the United States as the main counterpart of that dangerous world have already lost “because there is no way to pacify more than a billion Muslims” (Friedman 2012, 241). However, this assumption is mainly due to imagination.

The United States is often perceived by international relations scholars, especially realists like Mearsheimer, as a superpower that prioritizes the attainment of its strategic goals – even when doing so may override ethical considerations (Mearsheimer 2001). It can be argued that the United States pursues its interests in ways that align with a misreading of Machiavellian principles. This perception suggests that, in pursuit of strategic interests, particularly abroad, the United States may employ coercive or interventionist tactics without regard for moral limits. But does this always translate to the genuine defense of its national borders and citizens? Realism – the recognition of national egoism – more easily leads to everybody’s understanding of the interests and ideas of others rather than the idealism or the cult of abstract principles. Reinhold Niebuhr, if not Hans Morgenthau, would add that realism should not be cynical and that “the remedy for the arrogant idealism, which imagines that it knows about the future of people more than the mortals are given to know, is not selfishness. It is a concern for themselves and others” (Aron 2001, 585). Henry Kissinger was a proponent of conservative realism, advocating for pragmatic diplomacy that prioritized national interests, even if it meant engaging with various regimes (Kissinger 1994). Historically, the United States has formed strategic alliances and taken covert actions to counter governments that were not aligned with its interests. According to Douzinas (2007, 144), at times, this included support for certain authoritarian regimes, which facilitated actions against adversaries. Additionally, US foreign policy has sometimes involved decisions that pushed the boundaries of international law, contributing to local conflicts and major wars, such as those in Korea and Vietnam, which resulted in significant casualties (Douzinas 2007). Chomsky and Robinson (Chomsky and Robinson 2024) argue that U.S. foreign policy, under the guise of idealism, has often destabilized regions rather than promoting global order. They challenge the narrative of American

exceptionalism, linking it to a pattern of interventions that exacerbate conflict (Chomsky and Robinson 2024).

That need for domination has resulted in numerous hotspots far from the American continent and several open questions whose consequences are still felt. Especially after Vietnam, the world has changed – as always, not because of the gifts of benevolent leaders but because of the deeply committed popular struggle, which, according to Noam Chomsky (Chomsky 2007), developed too late but was ultimately successful. According to him, the world is in a terrible state today, but it is much better than yesterday in terms of unwillingness to tolerate aggression and many other ways we are inclined to take for granted. The lessons of that transformation should always be taken into consideration. According to Chomsky (Chomsky 2007), “it is not surprising that as the population becomes more civilized, the systems of power become more extreme in their efforts to control the ‘great beast’ as Alexander Hamilton called the people “The great beast” (Chomsky 2007, 151).

Today, countries such as Syria and Iraq continue to face profound internal fragmentation and weakened central governance. The question arises whether the countries of the Middle East will disintegrate as Yugoslavia did. The methods of Western influence, military interventions, and sanctions that have already been tried will not be important in this case. They have never even been helpful. New concepts are sought, but Western brain trusts cannot offer more than sad reports of the downfall of the liberal world order or restraining the role of the United States as a global policeman. This world order was liberal only for those who conceived and supported it (Liders 2016).

Today, wars are not fought as before. There are no front lines, there are no trenches, there are no battlefields. There is a new reality dictated by new technologies and advanced weapons, in which Clausewitz would not have been very helpful. Artificial intelligence, drones, nuclear weapons, long-range missiles, and other sophisticated methods have entirely changed the image of the war. Hence, it is logical to conclude that the one who controls the technology and is superior to it will be the most significant military force on the planet. Elon Musk, Henry Kissinger, and Eric Schmidt agree that AI could fundamentally reshape global politics and military power, suggesting that nations controlling AI would have a significant advantage and that whoever dominates will shape the future of global power (Kissinger, Schmidt, and Huttenlocher 2021, 52).

However, according to George Friedman (Friedman 2012), the most important factor for the power of the United States is the oceans, and their domination and control allow it to intervene where it is needed and give it control over international exchange. Friedman concludes that the one who controls the global exchange controls the oceans. "The balance of power strategy is a form of maritime war, preventing triggers that create forces that can threaten the American control of the seas" (Friedman 2012, 240). In other words, the colonial power that ruled through the control of the seas centuries ago is depicted today in the image of the United States. Nevertheless, the colonization the US wants to implement today does not need the oceans. According to many, the new colonialism of the United States today is financial.

(c) Therefore, we come to the third parameter of power – the economy. Often, non-Western countries are susceptible to criticism that if they do not adjust and adapt to the self-declared universal values, they will threaten the free world or at least regress and be marginalized by modern social trends. Kaplan points out that developing nations do not always have the choice but to adapt to a game guided by the rules of the West. However, according to him, the material and ideological domination of the West, which is put into question, gives space for other nations to accept Western rules of play only if their domestic values and socio-economic orders converge with those of the West. If the West wants to preserve its position, the progress of modernization in developing countries must lead to a more uniform global community shaped by Western models. However, the problem, according to Kaplan, is that liberal democracy, industrial capitalism, and secular nationalism, as defining pivots in the West, do not experience their replicas in the developing regions that are being modernized. He argues that rising countries like China, Turkey, India, and Brazil, due to their traditions, domestic orders, and ideological orientations, have their own cultural and socio-economic features different from those of the West. The difference is also evident in their perceptions of the basics of political legitimacy, the nature of the concept of sovereignty, the rules of international exchange, and the relations between the state and the society. Kaplan concludes that as their material strength gains momentum, they will seek to re-examine the international order in the sense that they will seek an order that will give preference to their interests and ideological preferences. The very development of these emerging countries would be an alternative to the

Western way, not a long-term bypassing of the path to global hegemony (Friedman 2012).

As of January 2025, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects global economic growth to be 3.3% in 2025 and 2026, with an upward revision for the United States offsetting downward adjustments elsewhere. (International Monetary Fund [IMF] 2025a). For China, the IMF has slightly increased its 2025 growth forecast to 4.6%, attributing this adjustment to the anticipated effects of recent stimulus measures (IMF 2025b). Regarding India, the IMF's January 2025 update maintains the country's growth projection at 6.5% for the 2025–2026 and 2026–2027 fiscal years, reinforcing its position as the fastest-growing major economy (IMF 2025c). Standard Chartered anticipates a slight deceleration in global economic growth, projecting a decrease from 3.2% in 2024 to 3.1% in 2025 (Standard Chartered 2024). This outlook considers factors such as looser financial conditions and expansionary fiscal policies, which may be partly offset by protectionist trade measures and sustained high interest rates in regions like the United States. These projections indicate that while the United States and China are expected to experience moderate growth, India is poised for more robust economic expansion in the coming years.<sup>4</sup> The above parameters point to an existing tendency that slowly draws attention to new, fast-growing power centers. In the new multipolar world, we are yet to see if they must again function in a hegemonic order or a conglomerate of several forces.

In his capital work *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, Paul Kennedy raises the question of whether the rise and fall of the great powers in the anarchist world order always lead to war, although for many authors, the “war” and “the system of great powers” go hand in hand (Kennedy 1989). However, according to Kennedy (Kennedy 1989), there is a pattern in which the transformation in the balance of power is

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<sup>4</sup> Namely, according to estimates conducted in 2010, Standard Chartered projects China's GDP growth to reach 24.6 trillion dollars by 2020 (Standard Chartered 2010). Projections do not favor the United States, which is expected to grow its GDP to 23.3 trillion dollars. Comparatively, China's GDP in 2010, which was 5.7 trillion dollars, is significantly lower than that of the United States, which amounts to 14.6 trillion dollars. If we take the growth trend from 2010 to 2020, both countries are progressing, but things favor China. That is, in 10 years, China will reach the United States and surpass it. The third place in the first three economic powers is also expected to change. The Standard Chartered predicted that India would take the place held by Japan, with a GDP of 9.6 trillion dollars by 2020 (Standard Chartered 2010).

realized in much more accelerated dynamics than before. Namely, first, the transformation is subject to a gradual process that implies a change in total world production and military expenditures on a global level and their distribution and shift between the “pentarchy.”<sup>5</sup> History knows of many turning points when leadership and initiative have crossed from one group, from one part of the world to another: the period of the rise of the modern state and the shift of the center of power from the Mediterranean to Western Europe, and the period of the French Revolution, are noticeable examples of this. Such periods are always times of fierce turmoil and struggle for power. Old authorities weaken, old orientations disappear, and a new order emerges from a fierce clash of ambitions and exasperation (Carr 1967). We are going through an *interregnum* in which the states should revise their position.

How does the foreign policy of the United States and the West, in general, relate to this transformation, and how could they lead the struggle for their survival? According to Machiavelli, there are two ways of struggle: one with the help of the laws and the other with the help of force. The first is worthy of the people, and the other is for the beasts. However, since this first one is often insufficient, it is necessary to turn to the other. Therefore, the ruler must understand how to pull out from him both the beast and the man (Machiavelli 2015). However, in international relations and Western hegemony, the question is often, how much humanity is left to achieve the goals? Even in the first lines of his “Social Contract,” Rousseau bravely and directly points out that many consider themselves to be masters of other people, yet they are bigger slaves than them as long as people are forced to subjugate and as long as they subjugate, they do well; but as soon as they can liberate themselves from the yoke, and they do, it is even better; because by regaining freedom through the same right they were denied it – they either have the right to continue it or there is no justification for their deprivation of it (Rousseau 2002).

## CONCLUSION

Uncertainty will define the times ahead, and control over global developments will no longer rest solely with traditional centers of power. The era dominated by the United States and its allies established

<sup>5</sup> Paul Kennedy believed that in the short term, no country would be able to join the five superpowers: the USA, USSR, China, Japan, and the EEC (Kennedy 1989).

after 1945 and reaffirmed in 1989 is gradually fading. New centres of power are emerging, both old and new, shaping a multipolar world with unpredictable dynamics. This shift is driven by evolving alliances among states, nations, civil society organizations, non-governmental entities, transnational criminal and terrorist networks, supranational actors, global corporations like Amazon and Google, and intelligence agencies competing for power and influence. According to Lüders (Liders 2016), today's allies can quickly become tomorrow's adversaries or even enemies. With the rise of China, not merely as an emerging power but as an established force, the existing world order is increasingly unsustainable (Liders 2016, 183). Lüders provocatively suggests that it might not be possible even if Beijing wished to uphold the old order (Liders 2016, 184). He argues that navigating this lack of transparency will require diplomatic skill, intellectual rigor, and pragmatic decision-making (Liders 2016, 184).

Francis Fukuyama's grand narrative from 1989, according to Müller, was shaped to some extent by the influence of American political philosopher Allan Bloom, under whom Fukuyama studied. Bloom, in turn, was influenced by the Russian émigré and French Hegelian thinker Alexandre Kojève (Müller 2011). Müller suggests that Fukuyama's views are intertwined with the same cultural pessimism that inspired Bloom. He raises a critical question: Could it be that in liberal democracy, Nietzsche's "last men" prevail – obedient, self-satisfied, and unremarkable suburbanites, far removed from the full potential of what human beings can truly be? Fukuyama acknowledged this scenario's bleakness, stating, "The end of history will be a very sad time... In post-history, there will be no art nor philosophy; there will only be an eternal preservation of the museum of human history" (Müller 2011, 239). The idea that collective political entities and their actions could counterbalance such a development has been discredited in both the East and the West. Müller argues that political philosophy in the future will bear the burden of demonstrating that no single value – whether autonomy, stability, or another ideal – will be sufficient to ensure the future of European democracies. Müller concludes his debate on democracy's uncertainties: "Totalitarianism seeks once and for all to secure certainty, whereas democracy, on the other hand, institutionalizes uncertainty" (Müller 2011, 242).

The future remains uncertain, but the West can still maintain its dominance if it transforms itself and returns to the core principles of democracy. This means revitalizing democratic institutions, fostering civic engagement, and reaffirming the values of freedom, equality, and

the rule of law. If the West fails to adapt, it risks being overtaken by an unpredictable and unstable world order shaped by forces that may not share the same commitment to democracy and human rights. The choice is between renewal or decline, between a future where the West reasserts its leadership or one where uncertain alternatives take hold. In other words, it is not whether change will occur but whether the Political West will shape or be shaped by it.

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## НЕКИ АСПЕКТИ НАСТОЈАЊА ПОЛИТИЧКОГ ЗАПАДА: ИЗАЗОВИ МОЋИ И СУПРЕМАТИЈЕ

### Резиме

Овај рад истражује текућу трансформацију глобалне расподеле моћи, фокусирајући се на борбу „политичког Запада” да одржи своју супрематију. Испитује да ли се либерални поредак под вођством Запада налази у привременој кризи или у неповратном паду, вођен идеолошким контрадикцијама, економским променама и геополитичком нестабилношћу. Студија се ослања на теоријске перспективе Икенберија, Хантингтона, Фергусона и Кагана како би анализирала ерозију западне доминације и појаву алтернативних центара моћи, нарочито у Азији. Методолошки, рад користи компаративни и аналитички приступ, процењујући војне, економске и културне динамике како би оценио одрживост западне хегемоније. Налази показују да, иако Запад и даље има значајан утицај, његова идеолошка кохезија слаби, економско вођство је угрожено успоном нових сила, а војна доминација ограничена је променљивим стратегијама ратовања. Резултати указују на то да будући светски поредак неће бити обележен потпуним падом Запада, већ променом ка мултиполарности, у којој ће коегзистирати више центара моћи. Рад закључује да ће способност Запада да се прилагоди и реформише одредити да ли ће остати доминантна сила или ће препустити место новим алтернативама. Без стратешког реструктуирања, идеолошке обнове и прилагођавања политичких приступа, либерални поредак би могао бити фрагментиран, што би довело до неизвеснијег и конфликтнијег међународног система.

**Кључне речи:** западна хегемонија, глобална промена моћи, либерални међународни поредак, мултиполарност

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