

THE WEST VERSUS THE REST: THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE AND THE CRISIS OF THE “POST-WESTERN” ORDER

The Russian invasion of Ukraine intensified the defining conflict of the new age, the conflict between democratic and authoritarian capitalism. The unified Western response to the war highlighted the revitalization of the democratic club of Western states and their allies (G7 plus). Another critical implication of the War has been that a clear divide has emerged between “the West” and “the Rest” in their reactions to the War. The Russian War on Ukraine signals the beginnings of a new phase of the post-Western world, where territorial conquests could be considered the new normal, paving the way for further military confrontations in a conflict-ridden World.

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Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine marked a significant point of rupture and the beginning of a new era with dramatic consequences. The long-term consequences of the War on the international system might be as dramatic as other early 21st century crises such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks or the global financial crisis of 2008-2009. The post-Western or post-liberal order was already in the making, with the rise of China as a potential hegemonic power and the return of Russia as a global power, on the one hand, and the relative decline of the United States and the Western alliance, on the other. These processes were accelerated by the global financial crisis, which helped to shift the distribution of power away from the West to the rest, with key countries of the “global South” playing an increasingly important role in shaping the contours of the emerging post-western order.

One of the critical characteristics of the new post-liberal international order is the growing conflict between “democracies” represented predominantly by Western democracies and their few major Asian allies (Japan, South Korea, and Australia) versus “autocracies” led by Russia and China, in an increasingly unified system of global capitalism. The emerging international order looked distinctly different from the original Cold War context, where Russia and China, with their communist regimes, were effectively isolated from Western capitalism. Following the end of the Cold War, these two countries were increasingly integrated into the global capitalist system. However, their national models of capitalism differed sharply from Western styles of capitalism.

A vital issue that requires serious analysis is how the growing conflict between “democracies versus autocracies” is likely to be influenced by Russia’s War on Ukraine. Our central hypothesis is that whilst the primary fault line in the emerging international order (or disorder, considering the instability and fluidity of the emerging international system) is likely to be between the Western Alliance (G7 plus) and the Russia-China axis, in terms of economic, technological and military competition, the rest of the world or “global South” will also be a crucial element in shaping the outcome of this increasingly bipolar conflict. The article, in this context, attempts to probe into one of the striking and fascinating developments in the aftermath of the invasion. The war has created a strong impetus for Western unity. “The Rest,” in contrast, differed sharply in its reaction to the invasion, its approach to Vladimir Putin and Russia, and the whole tragedy of the War in Ukraine. Much of the global South or the non-Western world has adopted a relatively passive attitude towards the Russian invasion, in some ways similar to the Chinese reactions. How do we explain this paradox, and what are the likely consequences of this contrast involving the

West versus the Rest for the future of the post-Western international order?¹

Does the West Bear Any Responsibility?

The frequently made argument, popularized by the leading American IR scholar John Mearsheimer, that the overexpansion of NATO precipitated a natural reaction from Putin, who saw this as an imminent security threat. By enlarging NATO towards Eastern Europe and offering the promise of NATO membership to Ukraine, the West prepared the groundwork for the inevitable Russian counter-attack involving the invasion of Ukraine.

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Indeed, this seems to be an argument that has gained currency in many parts of the world. Yet, the argument is open to serious challenge. First, it in no way justifies the military invasion intruding on the sovereign space of a sovereign state. Even if Ukraine were to become an EU and NATO member, no serious analyst would contemplate the possibility of a severe security risk to Russia emanating from this. It is hard to visualize NATO considering an attack on Russia unless the original move came from the Russian side. Indeed, the later pronouncements by Putin as

¹ For debates on the crisis of liberal international order, the end of American hegemony, and the broad contours of the emerging post-Western order, see Amitav Acharya, “After Liberal Hegemony: The Advent of a Multiplex World Order,” *Ethics and International Affairs*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (2017): p. 271-285; Amitav Acharya, *The End of the American Order*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018); Richard Haass, *A World in Disarray: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis of the Old Order* (London and New York: Penguin Press, 2017); Richard Haass, *The World: A Brief Introduction* (London and New York: Penguin Press, 2020); G. John Ikenberry, “The End of Liberal International Order?,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 94, No. 1 (2018): p. 7-23; Ziya Öniş and Mustafa Kutlay, “The New Age of Hybridity and Clash of Norms: China, BRICS, and Challenges of Global Governance in a Postliberal International Order,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (2020): p. 123-142. On the crisis of liberal democracy as a key component of the emerging post-western order, see Ziya Öniş, “The Age of Anxiety: The Crisis of Liberal Democracy in a post-hegemonic Global Order,” *The International Spectator*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (2017): p. 18-35; and Mustafa Kutlay and Ziya Öniş, “Liberal Democracy on the Edge: Anxieties in a Shifting Global (Dis)order,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* (2022), Published Online on 25 May 2022. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1177/03043754221096511>

the war proceeded evidently pointed towards his real intentions, which were also pinpointed by the famous Munich Security Conference of 2007. His real intention was to reconstruct the Russian Empire and end the humiliations that Russia had experienced due to the collapse of the Soviet Union.² A combination of personal ambition (seeing himself as the disciple of Peter the Great) and revanchism was at the heart of his strategy. In Putin's mindset, Ukraine was not a truly sovereign state but an integral part of greater Russia. He had already indicated his intentions through invasions of Georgia and Crimea. His intentions to fragment and weaken the Western alliance were also aptly illustrated by election interference in the United States, support for far-right parties in Europe, and a campaign of assassinations using chemical weapons to name a few. Although the invasion of Ukraine was part of a process that started in 2007 or 2008, few people in early 2022 expected the extent of the military invasion that Putin had in mind regarding a full-scale war on Ukraine. The conventional wisdom was that Russia would continue to co-operate with China to strengthen the autocracy coalition in its neighborhood and around the world and use a variety of tactics in this process, but not extending much beyond limited military engagements.

Even if the "direct responsibility" argument is not convincing, there are several more subtle and indirect ways that the West might have contributed to or precipitated Russia's War on Ukraine. One obvious argument is that the Russian regime considered a reasonably well-functioning democracy right at its borders as a security threat, not a military but more in ontological terms. 70 percent of the electorate in Ukraine had elected Volodymyr Zelensky on the promise that he would push for the integration of his country into Western institutional and security structures to consolidate a fully-fledged democracy. This clearly posed an existentialist threat to authoritarian rule in Russia, which the regime could not tolerate. There were already signals that Putin would take similar actions in countries with similar indications of democratic opening. In Belarus, for example, massive protests from the ground against the long-standing authoritarian rule of Lukashenko were effectively crushed with Russian

² For a vivid account of the evolution of Putin's regime, both in terms of consolidation of power at home and turning against the West from about 2007, see Catherine Belton, *Putin's People: How the KGB Took Back Russia and then Took on the West* (Dublin: Harper Collins Publishers, 2020). Concerning the linkages between Russian domestic politics and foreign policy objectives, see Nigel Gould-Davies, "Russia's Sovereign Globalization: Rise, Fall and Future," Chatham House Paper (2016), Available at <http://policycommonsnet/artifacts/1423383/russias-sovereign-globalization/2037652/>. On the complex historical relationship between Russia and Ukraine, see Anna Reid, "Putin's War on History: The Thousand Year Struggle over Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 101, No. 3 (2022): p. 54-63. On the importance of domestic politics and diverting attention from domestic problems in understanding Putin's decision to invade Ukraine, see Daniel Treisman, "Putin Unbound: How Repression at Home Presaged Belligerence Abroad," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 101, No. 3 (2022): p. 40-53. For an early assessment of the War and Putin's motives in the direction of creating a "multi-ordered World", see Trine Flockhart and Elena A. Korosteleva, "War in Ukraine and the Multi-Order World," *Contemporary Security Policy*, Published online on 24 June 2022. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2022.209191>. On Putin's real intentions, see also BBC, "Vladimir Putin: Russia's Border Doesn't End Anywhere," *BBC News*, 24 November 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-38099842>. Accessed on 21 July 2022.

military assistance. In Kazakhstan, large-scale demonstrations against the regime, primarily driven by economic grievances, were again put down with the help of the Russian military. Finally, the Russian presence in Syria since 2014 effectively saved the notoriously authoritarian and brutal Assad regime. In all three cases, the outcome could have been quite different and positive from a democratization perspective if Russia had not actively intervened.

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In retrospect, the Western actors bear part of the responsibility for failing to estimate and react with sufficient pace and vigor to the process of aggression, which had been building up stage by stage for over fifteen years. The Western actors, the EU in particular, considered the earlier military aggressions in Georgia, Crimea, or Syria as being sufficiently distant and limited in scope not to pose a genuine security threat. Furthermore, the degree of economic and energy dependence built up with Russia (and with China) over the past few decades rendered extensive sanctions unattractive, given the perception of indirect and limited military threats. However, the invasion of Ukraine, in contrast to earlier episodes, was treated as a genuinely European War, that constituted a direct existentialist threat to the heart of Europe and the Western Alliance. From a longer-term historical perspective, the claim of irresponsibility could be extended to the early 1990s and the early years of the reform process involving Russia’s painful transition to capitalism. The West could perhaps have performed a more constructive role in integrating Russia effectively into Western economic and security structures (possibly involving partial affiliation with the EU and NATO). Yet, the 1990s and early 2000s were the peaks of the “unipolar moment.” The Western Alliance was at the peak of its self-confidence. It was naturally assumed that post-communist states like Russia and China could be safely integrated into the globalist capitalist economy in combination with the democratization of their political systems taking place on a more gradual basis.

Continuing with our theme of the West's indirect contribution, one can also draw attention to some of the significant attempts in recent years in key Western states to reform the underlying weaknesses of their domestic political economies. In the United States, Joe Biden replaced Donald Trump with an ambitious agenda for government spending to deal with problems of inequality, infrastructural development, and climate change. In Western Europe, similar patterns were evident. After several years of crises, the EU, and notably as a reaction to Covid-19, managed to put together a massive recovery fund to deal with problems of innovation and competitiveness, infrastructural development, and climate change. In Germany, the new coalition government, with Social Democrats as the dominant partner, also contemplated active energy, innovation, and environmental policies. The original Cold War had contributed to the rise of the Keynesian welfare state. The new Cold War, emanating from the challenge of China, Russia (and other major emerging powers), created the foundation of a unique style, "green Keynesianism," which seemed to offer a significant promise of revitalized Western capitalism by the end of 2021, which could also serve as a role model for many countries in the European periphery and the wider world.

Biden's "Alliance of Democracies" initiative was based on the notion that established democracies, the United States and key Western European countries, would set their own house in order as a precondition for serving as effective role models for neighboring states and the rest of the world. What Putin did by invading Ukraine was to cause a severe setback to this green Keynesian revival in the West, diverting their attention to geopolitics and security issues.

Here, it might be helpful to underline that the growing preoccupation by the United States with its domestic challenges left a vacuum, which authoritarian states like China and Russia were able to capitalize on by extending their respective spheres of influence. The hasty and premature withdrawal by Joe Biden from Afghanistan was a mistake. The EU has also been in a defensive mood in recent years, and the absence of enlargement on the policy agenda did not help the cause of democrats in many neighboring states ranging from the Western Balkans to Belarus and Türkiye. The fact that the vital Western actors were increasingly preoccupied with their domestic problems also signaled to Putin that this was the right time to advance, and the possibility of a significant counter-reaction would be remote (which ultimately proved to be a miscalculation on his part).

The Russian Invasion of Ukraine as a Critical Rupture: Identifying Losers and Winners

Perhaps looking at Russia’s War on Ukraine in cost-benefit terms may be entirely inappropriate, given the scale of the human tragedy and the atrocities involved. Indeed, this was no ordinary war. It was the most significant military conflict on European soil since the end of the Second World War. Nevertheless, it might be useful to distinguish between losers and winners for analytical purposes. The war has been in progress for several months.

The losers are relatively easy to identify, whereas there are no clear-cut “winners” except the producers and merchants of armaments and military equipment. Undoubtedly, the primary victims of the war have been the citizens of Ukraine. Thousands of people, both soldiers, and civilians, have been killed. Major towns have been devastated, and millions of people had to evacuate their homes and seek refuge in neighboring countries.

Ukrainians have shown fierce and unexpected resilience against attacks. However, it is highly likely that given the asymmetries of military capabilities (despite significant support from the U.S. and Western Alliance), this heroic resistance will ultimately fail to prevent the loss of a major chunk of Ukrainian territory to Russia. The second major victims of the war have been ordinary Russian citizens. Thousands of Russian soldiers have been killed in an unnecessary war. Many citizens who came out onto the streets and protested have been repressed and imprisoned. Thousands, especially highly educated citizens critical of the regime, were forced to fly out of the country. The regime moved further in the direction of totalitarianism, with the war eliminating even limited sources of opposition from the media or civil society. The third major losers are undoubtedly the citizens of the world.

Given the degree of interdependence built up in the capitalist world economy in the post-Cold War period, the war is already causing severe economic dislocations. Energy shortages (given that Russia is the major supplier of oil and natural gas to Europe and many parts of the world) and food insecurity (given that both Russia and Ukraine are major producers and exporters of wheat) have emerged as serious problems. They will contribute to a global recession and rising inflation throughout the globe. Developing countries in Africa and disadvantaged groups in middle and high-income countries throughout the world are likely to feel the impact as income inequality worsens further due to these massive shortages and insecurities. The costs are likely to be magnified over time as more and more resources are channeled to military expenditures leaving fewer resources for social assistance and humanitarian

aid. Significant efforts to deal with existentialist climate challenges will be pushed aside as states are increasingly trapped in geopolitical competition and try to deal with direct security threats. Global governance to deal with common challenges will inevitably suffer and the G-20 will become marginalized as the world moves into competing blocs of G7 plus and BRICS plus. Even more significantly, the War in Ukraine may signal the beginning of a new age, a “new age of conquest”, where military attacks and conquest may become a new normal as part of great power rivalry, which may no longer be confined to rivalries in trade, technology or clashes over normative positions.³ The second step in this direction, perhaps not immediately but over time, would be China’s annexation of Taiwan, which would be an even more significant source of conflict between the Western Alliance and the China-Russia axis, with serious negative repercussions for the rest of the world.

The War in Ukraine is not only a European war but a truly global war in its broader repercussions. There is no doubt that one of the critical consequences of the War has involved the reunification of the Transatlantic Alliance, which had experienced a certain degree of fragmentation in recent years due to a combination of Trump, Brexit, and the EU’s search for greater autonomy in economic and strategic terms. The War in Ukraine generated a robust and unified response in the West to the perception of an existentialist threat posed by the Russian invasion. The EU, in particular, has undergone a major paradigmatic shift by recognizing the growing importance of hard power and military capabilities. This recognition was rhetorical and involved significant increases in military expenditures by key member states like Germany. The West was firm in its opposition to the War and its support for Ukraine. Sanctions of unprecedented magnitude were implemented against Russia.

There was a concerted move to punish Russian oligarchs situated in the West with close ties to Putin’s regime by seizing their assets and restricting their economic activities. Although the Western Alliance refrained from direct participation in the war, justifiably so because of the fear of a full-scale nuclear war, it provided substantial military assistance to Ukraine, which clearly contributed to Ukraine’s extraordinary resilience against an enemy five times as strong in terms of its capabilities. NATO was given a new lease on life and regained its position as a central actor of the unified Western Alliance. The enlargement of NATO is on the agenda as Sweden and Finland look to the NATO umbrella for their future security. The War also contributed to the resurgence of G-7 (in the form of G7+ to include some of the key Asian democracies) as a bloc formed by major democracies. Yet another major move involved the promise of EU membership to Ukraine coupled

³ For a good discussion of this critical issue, see Tanisha Fazal, “The Return of Conquest? Why the Future of the Global Order Hinges on Ukraine,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 101, No. 3 (2022): p. 20-27.

with significant help for massive reconstruction in the post-war context.⁴

At the same time, however, the War in Ukraine created problems and anxieties for Western democracies. Energy shortages will constitute a serious problem considering the EU is heavily dependent on oil and gas imports. It will naturally try to diversify away from Russia, which can only be a long-term process. Yet, its negative consequences in terms of severe shortages and energy prices may be quite hard to tolerate, especially in democratic societies, posing major dilemmas for democratically elected governments in the process. If the war is prolonged, it is quite possible that support in the West for Ukraine may diminish, and pressures may mount to end the war at a relatively early stage. This may, in turn, lead to the acceptance of a “peace settlement,” which may well work in Russia’s favor. There are already debates in Western and primarily American circles that there might be limits to the degree of help to be provided to Ukraine, coupled with the argument that it is ultimately their own war and the point at which they will end the war will be their own decision.⁵ The momentum of the green Keynesian resurgence will undoubtedly suffer as Western states find themselves confronted with a mixture of slow growth, squeezed budgets, high inflation, and changed priorities, with security considerations gaining ascendancy over social assistance and the environment.⁶ There are already signs that states like Germany, which have great sensitivity to environmental issues, are ready to go back to coal and nuclear energy to circumvent their energy shortages.⁷

Could Russia and the Putin regime (as distinct from Russian citizens) be considered major losers of the War? At first sight, there are many indications to suggest that this is indeed the case. Putin seems to have miscalculated the extent of Ukrainian resistance and the degree of Western unity displayed in defiance of Russia and in support of Ukraine. As the War proceeded, the weaknesses of Russian conventional military forces also became increasingly visible. Putin predicated his actions on the twin assumptions that Ukraine would surrender over a short period of time and the Western reaction would be relatively muted, as was the case in earlier episodes in 2008 and 2014, and these two assumptions were clearly invalidated. The war will likely be a prolonged struggle, with significant human and material losses for

⁴ See Timothy Garton Ash, “A Larger EU with Ukraine in it would Stand up to Russia Better,” *The Guardian Weekly*, Vol. 206, No. 26 (2022): p. 45-46.

⁵ See Dan Lamothe and Karoun Demirjian, “As Ukraine War Bogs Down, US Assessments Face Scrutiny,” *The Washington Post*, 2 July 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/07/02/ukraine-russia-us-assessments/>. Accessed on 21 July 2022.

⁶ See Anatol Lieven, “The War Ukraine will only Deepen the Climate Crisis,” *New Statesman* (2022), available at <https://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2022/05/the-war-in-ukraine-will-only-deepen-the-climate-crisis>

⁷ See Kate Connoly, “Germany to Reactivate coal Plans as Russia Curbs Gas Flows,” *The Guardian*, 8 July 2022. <https://www.guardian.com/world/2022/jul/08/germany-reactivate-coal-power-plants-russia-curbs-gas-flow>. Accessed on 21 July 2022.

the Russians. Russia also faced massive sanctions, which clearly have and will continue to weaken the Russian economy. Russia has been effectively isolated from Western economies and financial markets, which constituted a big economic blow. To resume the war effort in the future would require a much larger conscription effort to mobilize armed forces, which have already started to create tensions and resistance. At a deeper level, significant setbacks could be identified concerning the international standing of Russia as a state and Putin as a leader with global reach and popularity worldwide. Many nationalist-populist leaders around the world, ranging from Bolsonaro to Orban, who looked towards Putin as a role model, could no longer openly identify themselves with Putin and endorse his actions.⁸ Arguably, the Russian strategy for re-establishing its global status could have been much better implemented without resorting to a full-scale war with Ukraine with its costly consequences for Russia itself.

Yet, The Russian economy has proved to be more resilient than originally anticipated. The resilience of the Russian economy was boosted by high energy prices, as many Western economies could not sever their ties with Russia in the short run, given the degree of their energy dependence. Putin's regime also proved to be far more resilient than expected in major Western capitals. The typical reaction in the West was that the depth of the unified Western response and the sanctions implemented, coupled with major sanctions on the Russian oligarchs would undermine the foundations of Russian authoritarianism. Through a process of intra-elite conflict, Putin's regime would collapse and pave the way for the opening up of the Russian political system. What happened instead was quite contrary to this benign scenario.⁹ Putin managed to extend his grip on the Russian state. The regime became even more totalitarian, using the opportunity to eliminate any remaining forms of dissent in the process.

The oligarchs have clearly experienced a major blow to their wealth and comfort zones in the West. However, this does not mean their huge fortunes have evaporated. Although it is hard to estimate the damage inflicted on the oligarchs themselves, it is fair to assume that large segments of their wealth remained intact through diversion to other locations. In any case, their fortunes are closely tied to the Russian state, which suggests their fortunes are likely to grow over time. By and large, there are no indications that Russian oligarchs have turned their back against Putin. Even more striking is the extent of popular support for Putin and the War in Ukraine,

⁸ On the rise of right-wing populism as a global phenomenon, see Ziya Öniş and Mustafa Kutlay, "The New Age of Hybridity and Clash of Norms: China, BRICS, and Challenges of Global Governance in a Postliberal International Order," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (2020): p. 123-142.

⁹ For a good analysis of the resilient nature of the Russian regime and the degree of consolidation of Putin's grip on power, which rendered regime change highly unlikely, see Tony Wood, "Matrix of War," *New Left Review*, No. 133-134, (2022). Available at <https://newleftreview.org/issues/ii133/articles/tony-wood-matrix-of-war>

which is publicized as a “special military operation.” Part of this is due to the highly centralized nature of media, which now has a monopoly on shaping public opinion and projecting the dominant narrative of the Russian state, which many people accept without criticism. At the same time, the solid nationalist and anti-Western sentiments held by large segments of the Russian public mean that Putin continues to enjoy significant political support, which the repressive policies of the Russian state cannot simply explain.

Perhaps China is close to being classified as a “winner” of the War on Ukraine. Although there are important reservations about handling the Covid-19 crisis, the Chinese economy was able to emerge from that crisis in a decisive fashion. The war in Ukraine strengthened the alliance between China and Russia and increased the asymmetry between the two superpowers in China’s direction. China continues to be heavily integrated into the global economy. The fortunes of Western economies tend to be heavily tied to the performance of the Chinese economy, despite recent trends in the direction of partial de-globalization and rising protectionist tendencies. This process had been fueled by a reaction to rising competition from China as well as the insecurities experienced during the Covid-19 crisis.

This does not mean that the Chinese leadership approved of the War. Sympathies have been expressed by the Chinese elites as well as sections of the public for the tragic plight of the Ukrainian people. What the Chinese leadership would probably have preferred would be to compete and weaken the Western alliance through economic and technological competition as well as providing support for like-minded regimes, without necessarily resorting to an active war effort. The weakening of the global economy and the growing segmentation of global governance will also hurt China’s efforts to establish itself as the new “responsible” hegemonic power, even though they continue to support Russia on international platforms.

A Divided World: The West Versus the Rest

One of the most striking developments, as the War unfolded, involved the sharp differences in the reactions of the Western or G-7 plus world and the rest of the world, or the global South. The Western Alliance appeared to be firm in its unequivocal opposition to Russia and its support for Ukraine. The verdict was clear. It was non-provoked aggression by Putin on a sovereign state, which had no justification whatsoever. It was a clear violation of international law, which had to be countered by all means at their disposal, military or otherwise. It was also seen as part of a broader struggle between autocratic versus democratic regimes, which had already started but seemed to reach a climax with the Russian invasion posing an

existentialist threat to the democratic world. Perhaps the only outlier in the Western camp was Victor Orbán's Hungary, which continued to support Russia behind the scenes and did not share the concerns of his Western allies, even as a full member of the EU. Hungary's position in this context is much closer to the position of the global South. Interestingly, the two major post-communist EU members, Hungary and Poland, had followed a parallel trajectory of democratic backsliding in recent years. Yet their responses to the War were quite different. Poland was vigorously in the camp of Western countries and pushed firmly in support of Ukraine. Indeed, Poland became the home of several millions of Ukrainian refugees, which seemed to make a sharp contrast with its previous closed-door approach to Syrian refugees.

The rest of the world, however, displayed a radically different reaction. Leaders worldwide and the public at large expressed their disapproval of war *per se* and expressed their sympathies for the Ukrainian people. Nonetheless, the argument that was generally accepted in the rest of the world was that the West itself had major responsibility for precipitating the War through the unnecessary expansionism of NATO to the east and by promising to accept a country like Ukraine, right on the borders of a rival great power Russia, as a full member. Hence, it was ironic that Mearsheimer's argument, based on an earlier essay, attributing the responsibility of the War to the West and NATO appeared to have enjoyed wide currency in the Rest.¹⁰ It is also quite striking that Lula, the popular left presidential figure in the 2000s and the presidential candidate with a strong possibility of victory in the upcoming Brazilian elections, attributed only part of the blame to Putin and claimed that Zelensky (and implicitly the West) was also responsible for the Russian invasion.¹¹

What are the major reasons underlying the widely differing reactions from the Rest? The initial hypothesis is that the Rest seems to have regarded the War as a European War rather than their own war, in the same way perhaps that the Europeans did not consider the Syrian Civil War as their own war. One needs to remember that the Syrian War, still ongoing, was as dramatic as the War in Ukraine in terms of its tragic humanitarian consequences. However, the Western response was largely muted and driven by self-interest. The Syrian crisis started to be a center of reaction only after 2016 when a refugee crisis started to cause serious problems and populist backlashes leading to divisions between member states and fragmentation of the EU. The asymmetrical treatment of refugees coming from different destinations is also attracting attention in the Rest. The EU member states have been much more welcoming to Ukrainian citizens (perhaps because of their closer white-Christian

¹⁰ See John, J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault? The Liberal Delusions that Provoked Putin," *Foreign Affairs*, No. 94 (2014): p. 77.

¹¹ Guardian Staff and Agencies, "Brazil's ex-President Lula Claims Zelensky Equally to Blame for War," (4 May 2022). Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/may/04/brazil-lula-zelenskij-blame-war>

identity), whilst they have been much less receptive (perhaps with the notable exception of Germany) to the influx of Syrian and Mediterranean refugees (because they did not fit into their perception of European identity).

The second hypothesis is that the growth of anti-Western sentiments in much of the world is associated with the emerging post-western order. The roots of anti-Westernism have multiple causes. Many countries of the global South are reacting to colonial legacies as well as to the disastrous military campaigns ranging from Vietnam to Afghanistan and Iraq, which have severely undermined American popularity in much of the world. In that context, it is perhaps rather sad that a well-intentioned attempt by President Biden to forge an Alliance of Democracy initiative against autocratic regimes seems to have generated very little enthusiasm in much of the global South. Given the intensity of anti-American or anti-Western sentiments, the natural tendency in the global South is to view the Russian invasion as a natural outcome of great power competition, and not different from the earlier examples of American military interventionism in the Cold War and the immediate post-Cold War era.

A third related hypothesis is that democracy has been seriously declining in much of the Rest. Even some of the established democracies like Brazil and India have been experiencing major democratic backsliding under authoritarian populist leaders like Bolsonaro and Modi. Many of those regimes are closer in value terms to the authoritarian camp and derive part of their popularity from the promotion of strong anti-Western sentiments.¹² For many countries of the global South, which involve different shades of illiberalism and authoritarianism, the natural strategy seems to maintain a neutral stance on the conflict.

Last but not least, is the fourth hypothesis; namely, there are strong economic benefits to be derived from adopting balanced, neutral positions concerning both blocks. Many of the regimes in the Rest approach the Russian invasion pragmatically and try to generate economic benefits from a purely interest-driven, transactional perspective. None of these countries had any inclination to impose sanctions on Russia. As Western sanctions are implemented on Russia, there is a clear realization that Russia will shift its trade and investment to non-Western countries, which will clearly benefit the economies of such countries at the expense of the Western Alliance. In the current international context, India may be singled out as the outstanding example of this balancing strategy as the country tries to benefit from its close interactions with the U.S., on the one hand, and its equally

¹² For a perceptive analysis of Russia and China serve as gravity centers for authoritarian rule in other parts of the World, see Marianne Kneuer and Thomas Dommelhuber, “Gravity Centres of Authoritarian Rule: A Conceptual Approach,” *Democratization*, Vol. 23, No. 5 (2016): p. 775-796.

strong economic and diplomatic relationship with China and Russia, on the other, using this balancing strategy as a means of countering the rising hegemonic power of China at the same time.

China and Russia: The Growing Asymmetry in a Robust Partnership

Admittedly, the Russian invasion of Ukraine created a mini-crisis in the Russia-China partnership, as Chinese leadership did not directly endorse the decision to invade Ukraine. It is important to remember that Putin had visited China before the start of the Winter Olympics in February 2022 and there was a joint declaration by Putin and Xi Jinping concerning the common Russian and Chinese visions regarding the future of the world order. Whilst China did not actively support Russia; it did not condemn it either (which effectively meant implicit support). The Ukraine crisis showed the robust nature of the partnership. It is also interesting that there was no condemnation of Russia in the recent BRICS Summit (where the major BRICS led by China appeared to display a unified front). In contrast, there were strong reactions to Russia in the ensuing G-20 meeting. What is critical in the present context is the position of China in the broader global conflict surrounding the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In the original context, the kind of sanctions implemented by the West could probably have ruined the Russian economy. In the present global setting, where China and major emerging powers are key players, sanctions are likely to be less effective. They can be diverted by changing the direction of trade, investment and energy linkages. If China had opposed the war, Russia would be isolated. China's implicit endorsement of Russian actions also sends dangerous signals of new military conflicts, in line with the new era where conquests by great powers become a normal state of affairs once again as in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The possibility of annexation of Taiwan may follow in the footsteps of the Russian invasion of Ukraine; but, given the longer-term strategic vision of Chinese leadership, this may not happen in the immediate future.¹³ What is also striking is that the War in Ukraine not only bolstered the strategic partnership between Russia and China but has also rendered the relationship even more asymmetric than before. With a weakened economy in the face of sanctions, the pendulum will swing further in China's direction. Russia is likely to become even more dependent on China than before, which is clearly not in line with Putin's vision of a returning great power.

An essential question in this context is whether the Western alliance can shift the balance in favor of the "Alliance of Democracies" in this rapidly changing and hostile global context. The West has formidable resources. However, it faces significant

¹³ See the comment of the CIA Chief in Guardian, "Ukraine War Forcing China to Rethink 'How and When' It May Taiwan, CIA Chief Says," *The Guardian*, 21 July 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jul/21/ukraine-war-forcing-china-to-rethink-how-and-when-it-may-inavade-taiwan-cia-chief-says>

trade-offs as it tries to deal with internal structural problems and generate more funds for military expenditures. It will need to generate massive funds for foreign aid to pull countries closer to its orbit, to match the scale of economic benefits offered by China’s Belt and Road Initiative. There are talks of a new Marshall Plan (G7 Infrastructure Plan) involving the financing of major infrastructural projects. It will be interesting to see the extent to which this plan will be implemented. The West also needs to fulfill its promises and increase its assistance for environmental protectionism and climate change-related policies to the developing world. One also needs to remember that the West did not have a strong record of assisting poorer countries by sharing the benefits of its vaccines during the recent Covid- 19 crisis. In concrete terms, however, the most direct route to enlarge the democratic coalition involves the path for EU enlargement in Europe’s immediate neighborhood. The decision to offer EU membership to Ukraine and Moldova constitutes an important step in this direction. The new wave of enlargement could have an even more substantial impact if the program becomes even more ambitious and includes Western Balkan countries, Georgia and Türkiye in the agenda. The pace of enlargement is also important. The rhetoric of enlargement will not suffice if it is associated with prolonged negotiations and the absence of credible incentives.

Türkiye Between the West Versus the Rest

Türkiye constitutes an interesting case in the broader discussion of the West versus the Rest divide vis-a-vis the War in Ukraine. Türkiye has traditionally been a member of the Western Alliance as a member of NATO, an associate member, and more recently a candidate country of the EU. Türkiye’s membership of the Customs Union with the EU signaled a deep form of integration yet falling short of full membership. There have always been tensions in Türkiye’s relationship with the Western Alliance. Yet in the later phase of the Justice and Development Party, during the 2010s, Turkish foreign policy started to shift significantly away from the Western Alliance as a new partnership with key non-Western powers, like Russia and China started to be increasingly more important.¹⁴

With President Erdogan playing an increasingly dominant role in foreign policy, Türkiye started to situate itself as a key member of the global South. Foreign policy was driven by the logic of “strategic autonomy,” which aimed to balance its relations

¹⁴ For assessments of Türkiye’s changing foreign policy over the course of the past decade, Mustafa Kutlay and Ziya Öniş, “Turkish Foreign Policy in a Post-Western Order: Strategic Autonomy versus New Forms of Dependence,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 97, No. 4 (2021): p. 1085-1104; Mustafa Kutlay and Ziya Öniş, “Understanding Oscillations in Turkish Foreign Policy: Pathways to Unusual Middle Power Activism,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 12 (2021): p. 3051-3069. For a balanced assessment of Türkiye’s domestic politics and foreign policy orientation and the decline in its relations with the West, see Dimitar Bechev, *Turkey under Erdoğan* (New Haven Conn: Yale University Press, 2022).

with the West with its new Eastern orientation. Strong relationships were forged with Russia during the period, facilitated by the personal affinity of two key leaders, Erdogan and Putin. Although there were crises and tensions in the Turkish-Russian relationship (e.g., Türkiye and Russia have been on different sides in the Syrian conflict, with Russia supporting the Assad regime and Türkiye taking a strongly anti-Assad position), the relationship could still be effectively managed.¹⁵ What is paradoxical from a comparative perspective is that Türkiye's intention has been not to leave its institutional links to the Western Alliance, notably its membership of NATO and the CU with the EU. Nevertheless, in normative terms, Türkiye has increasingly diverged from the EU. As a NATO member, Türkiye also displayed a unique outlier position by buying S-400 missiles from Russia, creating significant tensions and resentments within the Western Alliance.

The underlying reasons for the dramatic shift in Turkish foreign policy over the past decade would take us beyond the scope of the paper. There were several factors at work. Humiliations of the membership process contributed to a serious nationalist backlash. There were also disappointments with Western partners for paying insufficient attention to Türkiye's security concerns with respect to the Kurdish conflict, which had been magnified by the onset of the Syrian Civil War. The arguably dramatic shift of Türkiye's politics in a more struggling direction, and a highly centralized and personalistic presidential system also meant that Türkiye came into conflict with the key Western powers over critical issues, including the implementation of several democratic norms and values.¹⁶ The failed coup attempt of July 2016 aggravated the anti-Western sentiments, which already existed and accelerated the path to a fully-fledged presidential system.¹⁷ The leadership has effectively used strong anti-Western sentiments, which were not confined to religious conservatives, but were equally shared by large segments of Turkish society. Indeed, a highly nationalistic and assertive foreign policy based on strong anti-Western sentiments brought substantial populist dividends in terms of domestic political support. In spite of the pro-active use of anti-Western rhetoric, the administration, nevertheless, was careful in maintaining its commitment to Western Alliance in transactional terms. The fact that Türkiye is dependent economically on the West and has been in the process of deepening economic crisis over the past few years is

¹⁵ For a detailed assessment of growing ties between Türkiye and Russia over the course of the past decade, see Ajdin Didic and Hasan Kösebalaban, "Turkey's Rapprochement with Russia: Assertive Bandwagoning," *The International Spectator*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (2019): p. 123-138.

¹⁶ On the dramatic shifts on Türkiye's domestic front involving the transition to a highly centralized and personalistic presidential regime, see Berk Esen and Şebnem Gümüüşü, "Rising Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 9 (2016): p. 1581-1606; Yunus Sözen, "Competition in a Populist Authoritarian Regime: The June 2018 Dual Elections in Turkey," *South European Society and Politics*, Vol. 24, No.3 (2019): p. 287-315.

¹⁷ On the strong anti-Western sentiments promoted by the government in Türkiye, which, in some ways is rather like what Putin has been doing in Russia, see Alper Kaliber and Esra Kaliber, "From De-Europeanization to anti-Western Populism: Turkish Foreign Policy in Flux," *The International Spectator*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (2019): p. 1-16.

a key driving force in this process.

Given the context we outlined, The Russian invasion of Ukraine left Erdogan and the AKP elites in an awkward situation. Whilst they opposed the war, in principle and sympathized with the tragedy suffered by Ukraine, they had no intention of cutting down on strong relations established with Putin’s Russia over the years. In many respects, Türkiye’s position on the War was in line with the Rest. The broad perspective shared by large segments of the Turkish public, on the right and left of the political spectrum, was that it was not Putin but NATO and Western Alliance that provoked the War at first. At the state level, Türkiye endorsed the UN Resolution against Ukraine, but abstained from voting on Russia’s suspension from the Council of Europe. There was certainly no intention of implementing Western-style sanctions, which would have been suicidal in any case given the degree of economic dependence, particularly in the realm of energy. Türkiye’s position diverged from many countries of the Global South who decided to keep themselves distant from the conflict. Türkiye tried to position itself as a key mediating power, capitalizing on the strong relations it had managed both with Russia and Ukraine over the years. Through this mediation process, Türkiye was able to strengthen its position, where it was already in a strong place in terms of the size of its army and the strength of its military capabilities. In fact, Turkish drones sold to Ukraine were used in the early part of the conflict and proved to be quite effective. This helped to restore a certain degree of goodwill for Türkiye among the NATO partners. Türkiye organized meetings to bring the representatives of Russia and Ukraine for negotiations. Whilst these negotiations did not fundamentally alter the course of the war, they were nevertheless important for other reasons. On balance, this active mediation effort appeared to work well and was effectively used as a means of expanding political support for Erdogan and the AKP and helped to deviate attention from an ongoing domestic crisis, whilst at the same time, reinforcing and extending its role in the context of NATO. These efforts helped to expand the visibility and enhance the importance of Türkiye as a critical actor in the international arena. The Grain Deal, which was signed on 22 July in Istanbul, was one of the profound examples of how Türkiye has been utilizing the connections it has with both Ukraine and Russia. In the face of a severe food crisis, especially for the developing countries, facilitating grain exports from Ukraine and Russia was a crucial success of Turkish foreign policy. The establishment of the grain corridor through Turkish and UN initiatives helped to bolster the standing of Erdogan both internationally and in the domestic context.¹⁸ At the same time, Türkiye’s opposition to enlargement and the inclusion

¹⁸ The statement of Mykhailo Podolyak in Twitter who is one of the advisors of the President Zelenskyy can be used as an example to demonstrate the Turkish role in this deal explicitly where he said “Ukraine does not sign any documents with Russia. We sign an agreement with Türkiye and the UN and undertake obligations to them. Russia signs a mirror agreement with Türkiye and the UN” (Mykhailo Podolyak, 2022), hence Türkiye is the crucial element that made this deal possible. According to the Grain Deal itself, Türkiye is regarded as one of the parties along with Ukraine, Russia and the UN that is responsible for establishing monitoring centers for shipments and ensure their safety (Ragıp Soylu, 2022) which elevates Türkiye’s position not just a mediator between parties but one of the guarantors as well.

of Sweden and Finland (although a consensus was reached, and the Turkish veto was subsequently withdrawn) also indicated that Türkiye was not on the same page with the Western alliance and was an outlier in terms of its basic orientation and values in the NATO context.

How long can Türkiye maintain this fine balancing act, which rests on awkward foundations? Türkiye has been trying to combine a contradictory position. This involves a commitment to NATO where the principal “other” is Russia (and in broader global terms, Russia and China). At the same time, it involves an attempt to play the role of an autonomous, mediating actor, which involves maintaining strong relations with Russia behind the scenes whilst refraining from active support for Putin and the Russian War. There is no doubt that from Putin’s perspective, Türkiye’s “neutral” position is interpreted as a sign that Türkiye is in the Russian camp. Türkiye may gain significantly from this “neutral” position, as Russia increasingly looks for new avenues for diverting Western sanctions. There are already indications that there is a strong inclination on the part of the Russian state to expand economic relations with Türkiye. Growing Russian presence in Türkiye may, in turn, precipitate further tensions with the Western Alliance, which may push for the implementation of sanctions, which Türkiye will naturally resist.

The brief excursion into the Turkish experience in the context of Russia’s War in Ukraine is striking and important for the following reason. It shows how a country like Türkiye, which was firmly embedded in the Western camp in previous decades, has moved in the direction of the Rest in recent years in the emerging Post-Western order. Moreover, Türkiye’s position during the conflict shows that it will be difficult to reverse this Eastern orientation, even though Türkiye may remain part of key Western institutions and maintain its relations with the West in pragmatic, transactional terms. An exit strategy would not be a rational option for both sides. NATO is likely to tolerate deviant behavior since the cost of losing Türkiye would be too high. For Türkiye, weakening its economic and security ties to the West would be an extremely costly option. Bringing Türkiye back to the Western camp would probably require some dramatic changes, which would involve a combination of domestic political change in Türkiye leading to the reversal of changing dynamics in domestic politics and a credible signal of EU membership. In that sense, the role of the EU could be critical in terms of including Türkiye in the next wave of enlargement, starting with the membership of Ukraine. In the absence of such dramatic changes, the combination of the already existing challenges due to the changing domestic dynamics, with a neutral foreign policy abroad will continue and is likely to bring Türkiye closer to the Russia-China axis in the process.

Conclusions: Towards a Synthesis

The Russian invasion of Ukraine intensified the defining conflict of the new age, the conflict between democratic and authoritarian forms of capitalism. From a global, systemic perspective the war had some important repercussions. The unified Western response to the crisis highlighted the revitalization of the democratic club of Western states and their principal allies. G7 (plus) and NATO re-emerged as significant actors and the group of democratic states displayed a common resolve to protect and promote democratic values worldwide. The active support for Ukraine was a clear reflection of this broader objective. At the same time, the War also showed the limits of the West’s ability to revive the post-war liberal international order. The West will continue to be a dominant force in the post-Western world, but its normative position is likely to apply to a certain subset of the system. Another important repercussion of the War, which is still an ongoing process, has been to bolster the already strong partnership between Russia and China, with the balance in the relationship shifting significantly in China’s favor. Another critical implication of the War has been that a clear divide emerged between the West and the Rest regarding their reactions to the War. Whilst Putin may have lost some of his previous popularity, the predominant reaction in the Rest differed dramatically from the natural reaction in the West, which held Putin responsible for unprovoked aggression. The dominant perspective in the Rest was that the West was responsible, and the excessive enlargement of NATO towards the East caused a security threat and a major reaction from a rival global power in an age of intense geopolitical competition.

The contours of the emerging world order point towards a three-tier structure (a) a bipolar world involving competition between the democratic capitalist (G7 plus) and (b) the authoritarian capitalist bloc (the Russia-China axis), (c) a large part of the world, the rest of the global South falling in between these two competing blocs and trying to manage relations with both sides in their quest to achieve strategic autonomy. The future of the democratic project will very much depend on the domestic politics of countries located in this third, in-between category. The task of Western powers to extend the liberal project to the Rest will be difficult given that many of the regimes in the Rest are illiberal-semi-authoritarian or even fully consolidated authoritarian states. Furthermore, strong feelings of nationalism and anti-Western sentiments in such countries suggest that they will try to keep their distance from the Western bloc and maintain strong relations with the Russia-China axis. At the same time, unlike Russia and China where totalitarian regimes are firmly established and unlikely to fade away in the foreseeable future, the regimes in the global South are more fluid. They may evolve in a more democratic direction over time.

Finally, the Russian war on Ukraine aptly illustrates the importance of democracy for human security. It is authoritarian states that face legitimacy problems and typically resort to military aggression. We contend that the democratic peace theory continues to be highly relevant. Many of the grievances against the West may be valid. At the same time, a world dominated by different shades of authoritarianism, with states acting solely in terms of their narrow self-interest is unlikely to bring peace and stability and generate the will to deal with significant global challenges of our age, notably in the realms of inequality and environmental protection. Ending on a frightening note, the War in Ukraine may signal the beginning of a new phase of the post-western world, where territorial conquests could once again be considered the new normal, paving the way for further military confrontations in a conflict-ridden world, with enormous human costs on a global scale.