

UKRAINE WAR IN THE CONTEXT OF WORLD SYSTEM ANALYSIS AND POWER TRANSITION THEORY

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, the issue is the impact of the war in Ukraine on the world system in transition. Theoretically, the review is based on the world system analysis and power transition theory. The Russian war in Ukraine seems to strengthen the US position in world politics. This again provides the US the opportunity for its second hegemonic cycle in the early third millennium. However, this increases the risk of wars in the world system.

Keywords: world system, power transition, hegemony, East-West conflict, West-South conflict, rising powers.

INTRODUCTION

On a general level, two features have dominated the Western media discourse on Russia's aggressive war in Ukraine. On the one hand, that war appears as a battle between good and evil. In this narrative, big Russia, as an authoritarian and invading state, represents the evil. Under attack, small Ukraine, which in the 2010s sufficiently tried to reform itself into a Western liberal and democratic state, represents the good. On the other hand, Russia's war in Ukraine has been understood as a symptom of the changed security situation in Europe.

In this essay, the war launched by Russia and the retaliatory measures taken against Russia by the so-called international community are analysed from the perspective of the changing world system. This perspective provides one explanation for the war in Ukraine and the West's intensifying reaction to Russian aggression. This way, the war is understood in a broader context, but it does not make the Russian invasion any more acceptable. From this point of view, it is also no longer a question of the eternal struggle of good and evil in the human world. In this way, the issue is not who is the victim and who is the aggressor, but what significance Russia's war in Ukraine has for the world order.

The point of view of the article relies on two schools of international relation theory: the world system analysis founded by **Immanuel Wallerstein**, and the theory of the power transition developed by **A. F. K. Organski**. In the former, the issue is that the hegemony in the world system usually changes by war in roughly hundred-year cycles (see Käkönen, 1988). The latter, in turn, presents under what conditions the transition of leadership becomes possible (Juutinen & Käkönen, 2016). In the context of both theories, the leadership or hegemony of the system is desirable because the hegemony determines the norms of the system and the rules of the game. In return, the hegemon acts as a kind of guardian of the system and a maintainer of stability.

Both theories make it possible to suggest that the world system has been in flux since the late 1900s and early 2000s. In this essay, the presentation of the systemic change is based on my previous research. This creates a picture of what that change is like and in what direction it has been evolving. However, the question in the essay is how the Russian war in Ukraine relates

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to the change in the world system and how it affects the change itself. Although in any theoretical framework, it is difficult to foresee the future, the goal is nevertheless to try to outline what kind of effects the war in Ukraine will have on the future hegemony of the world system in the near future.

CHANGING WORLD ORDER BEFORE THE WAR IN UKRAINE

In my book, *Natural Resources and Conflicts in a Changing International System. Three Studies on Imperialism* (1988), one of the theoretical dimensions was, in addition to Lenin's theory of imperialism, the question of the hegemony of the United States, which I argued was already in decline in the early 1980s. The second dimension was two strongly interrelated contradictions: East-West on the one hand and West-South on the other. The last paragraph of the dissertation stated that the reform of the relations between West and South requires the normalisation of East-West relations. The study ends with the idea that the United States can renew its hegemony in the early 2000s, but the trans-Atlantic-centred world is potentially transforming into Pacific Ocean-centric.

In the theoretical framework used in the study, the above conclusions meant that even before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the United States, like Great Britain in the past, seemed capable of achieving another hegemonic period in the world system. A transformation of the trans-Atlantic world into a Pacific Ocean-centric one could bring to the forefront in power politics the West-South conflict rather than the East-West conflict. This again would mean replacing the Soviet Union/Russia with China and perhaps India as the US counterpart.

However, there is nothing as difficult as predicting the future. There are always surprising factors that force one to change the predictions made based on the development trends in a particular situation. Thirty years after the abovementioned study, **Marko Juutinen** and I presented our study *The Return of the Blocs. The rise of the BRICS countries, USA and Finland* (2016), in which we posited that the rise of China and India and the loose BRICS coalition formed by the emerging countries together with Russia would at least challenge the US hegemony in the early third millennium.

The book *The Return of the Blocs* focuses on a change in power relations in the world system. In it, we combined the world system analysis and the power transition theory to strengthen our theory base. Within the framework used, we drew several conclusions from changes in the world order that are relevant to assessing the possible impact of the war waged by Russia in Ukraine on the world order and its power relations. Before presenting the conclusions, it is appropriate to note that in the analysis, we raised the issue of Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine as one of the possible phenomena associated with the transformation of the world order.²

It is important to note that the change that occurs in the world order does not imply a change in the system itself. The economic basis of the entire system relies on various versions of capitalism or the market economy. This is also the view of Li (2019a), according to whom so-called emerging countries such as China and India nevertheless challenge the rules, norms, and values set by the ruling countries after the Second World War. Nor is it a question of the state-centred, so-called Westphalian system, turning into something else, even though China and India, as emerging powers, are not traditional nation-states, but rather civilisational states. In the theoretical framework we used in *The Return of the Blocs*, in the process of change underway, the issue was a change of hegemony, of the ruling state.

However, the change of hegemony, that is, the loss of the leading position of the United States, is not a process that will take place in just a few years, but over a period of at least 20-30 years. Of the individual states in the 2010s, only China began to have the prerequisites to challenge the United States. In fact, at a meeting of the Chinese Communist Party in 2017, the party's general secretary and Chinese president, **Xi Jinping**, set China the goal of being a leading state in 2049, marking the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Revolution. In a way, the issue here is the dismantling of the colonial system and the restoration of China's mythical lost greatness. India, too, has a great power dream associated with its own mythical past (Käkönen, 2022).

² In this subsection, unless otherwise referred, the presentation of the transitions in the world system in the 2010s are based on the analysis and conclusions presented in our book *The Return of the Blocs*.

In the early 2010s, neither China nor India alone was capable of challenging US leadership. Even less capable of this was Russia, although its nuclear arsenal is still close to the level of the United States. Due to its weak economy, Russia has sunk to the level of a regional power. Russia has not been prepared to accept this. However, as a unified bloc, the BRICS, founded in 2009 with India, China, and Russia as key members, in addition to Brazil and South Africa, would even be able to overturn US supremacy in the world system according to the power transition theory.

As a cooperative organisation, the members of the BRICS are united by dissatisfaction with the prevailing system: its normative base and the domination of the USA in the system. This does not yet make the community a strong alliance and is perhaps not even enough to hold the alliance together. So far, the alliance has been characterised by the fact that it has not supported any member state's individual aspirations for power. Although the alliance was formed on the initiative of Russia, Russia has not received support from it for its own goals of challenging the United States in the traditional East-West race for hegemony. At the same time, it must be said that the coalition has also not supported China's aspirations for supremacy, which are linked to the West-South power struggle.

The return of China and India to world politics and their membership in the BRICS alliance has shifted the focus of world politics and US interest from the transatlantic dimension to Asia and the Pacific. At the same time, the West-South conflict has acquired a civilisational dimension, in addition to which it emphasises the decolonisation of the international system (Käkönen, 2020). China and India are not only states seeking superpower status and leadership, but they also want to bring their own traditional values and norms into the rules of the world system or at least have their values and norms respected as equal to the Western tradition.

It is obvious that the leadership of the United States and its hegemony have been challenged by emerging states. However, it is not just a question of challenging leadership, but of challenging the entire post-Second World War liberal international order or the still-colonial system (Käkönen, 2020; Käkönen, 2022). On the other hand, according to the logic of world system analysis, it is equally obvious that the United States seeks to maintain its supremacy and, like Great Britain, to renew its hegemonic cycle. Admittedly, it cannot do this on its own, which is why it sought to strengthen its own position and the continuity of the system through various free trade agreements, such as the TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) and the TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership). These processes, however, were stalled due to President Donald Trump's 'making America great again' policy. This deprived the United States, at least momentarily, of being able to function as a driving force in world trade policy.³

President Donald Trump's 'United States First' policy cut short, at least temporarily, the strengthening of the Western alliance in relation to the BRICS challenge. In fact, for a while, it even looked like a unified West was cracking, but President Joe Biden's policies have sought to fix the problems Trump has caused. Along with strengthening the Western alliance, the US goal is to seek to break up the BRICS, or at least to feed its internal contradictions. India has played a key role in this policy.

In Asia, the United States needs India to balance the increasing Chinese influence. Admittedly, India has its own utopia of superpower status and therefore does not want to be a partner in the US anti-China policy. On the one hand, however, to prevent China from becoming the leading Asian power, India needs the support of the United States. For India, US support is also important because it has an open border problem with China (Käkönen, 2022). On the other hand, in the BRICS, India, together with China, opposes the global domination of the United States and seeks a multilateral and pluralistic international system. However, in this political dualism of India may lie the weakness of the BRICS as a unified bloc.

It has been argued above that the world system itself is unlikely to change, nor does it appear that the leadership of the system is shifting to Asia, although the focus of world politics is doing so. Despite this, the leadership of the United States and its role as a custodian of the stability of the system is no longer indisputable. The change in the position of the United States is reflected, among other things, in the fact that as recently as 2006, the United States was the largest trading partner for 127

³ For all its vagueness, I use the term West capitalised to refer to a community, which is not necessarily a single entity. By the term, I refer primarily to the transatlantic axis, who assumes the roots of its civilisation are in the Ancient Greece. This transatlantic community is strongly built around NATO, even Japan is economically and politically included into this group, although culturally Japan is alien to the Western civilisation.

countries, while China was the largest trading partner for only 70 countries. Just five years later, in 2011, the situation had been turned on its head. China was the largest trading partner for 124 countries and the United States for only 76 countries (Li, 2019b).

Instead of uni- and bipolarity, development trends were moving towards a more pluralistic and multipolar system. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the traditional Western-centric institutions for international governance have been joined by institutions formed by emerging countries that compete for legitimacy, such as the BRICS and the New Development Bank (NDB). If nothing else, then emerging countries have been able to make changes in the hierarchy of the international system (Li, 2019a; Juutinen & Käkönen, 2021).

Now, when assessing the impact of the war in Ukraine on the future of the world system, based on what has been said, attention must be focused at least on the spillover effects of the war on the key individual potential challengers of US hegemony: Russia, China, and India. In addition, we need to see what impact the war in Ukraine will have on the BRICS and on its unity. It is also essential to assess the impact of the war on the position of the United States and on the unity of the so-called Western alliance as a whole.

UKRAINIAN WAR AND STRUGGLE FOR HEGEMONY

What does the war in Ukraine have to do with the struggle for hegemony in the capitalist world system? After all, Russia invaded Ukraine to prevent NATO from expanding to its own borders in the south and to restore the Russian Empire. This is how President **Vladimir Putin** has indicated the reasons for the attack. However, the West has wanted to ideologise the war in Ukraine and see it as an attack on democracy and Western values (see, e.g., Joshi, 2022 and Puri, 2022). This has made it possible to justify the West's massive support for Ukraine's struggle for its existence and, at the same time, for the defence of Western values. Thus, in the political rhetoric of the West, there is an ideological desire to present the war as something broader than just Russia's illegal violation of Ukraine's borders and sovereignty.

The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union did not end the East-West confrontation and the power struggle between the United States and the USSR/Russia. It continued with the expansion of NATO, and the EU to the east, into the sphere of interest of the former Soviet Union. The expansion of both institutions meant the expansion of Westernisation, liberal democracy, and the market economy, that is, the homogenisation of the world in accordance with Western values. With the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union, NATO lost its importance as a defensive alliance when its counterforce disappeared. The continuation and expansion of its life cannot be understood otherwise than that it still had an enemy: Russia.

For the states that were liberated from Soviet domination and regained their independence, joining NATO was based precisely on the Russian threat. In this context, it does not matter what was promised to Mikhail Gorbachev in the negotiations that ended the Cold War regarding the possible expansion of NATO. The fact is that with the expansion of NATO towards the borders of Russia, the West showed that it had won at least one set in the struggle between East and West and that Russia should submit to the prevailing realities. At the same time, Russia was excluded from the various reorganisations of Europe and the solutions to the wars of the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. Thus, it was shown that, despite nuclear weapons, Russia is no longer a superpower whose perceptions play a role in the management of the world order.

In the 1980s, Afghanistan became the Vietnam of the Soviet Union, which was one of the factors in the collapse of the USSR. In the power struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union, the United States, in a way, built out of Afghanistan a trap for the Soviet Union (see, e.g., Maalouf, 2021). Now, the same pattern is repeated for Russia in Ukraine. It is possible to say that it is not only about Russia's unilateral aggression and Putin's desire to restore the Russian Empire. Within the theoretical framework used, it is possible to say that this war has been prepared for a long time both by the United States and by the entire so-called West and Russia.

Preparations for the war are accompanied by the already-mentioned expansion of NATO to the east. The West has been fully aware of Russia's attitude towards this. Russia has not left its own retaliatory measures to guesswork, and Ukraine has fallen victim to the East-West power struggle that continued after the Cold War. In this endeavour, neither side has sought to promote peace – quite the contrary. Instead of seeking peace, the UN has also been used to defend Western values to isolate Russia, which is not conducive to supporting the UN's position as a legitimate governing institution of the international system (see Joshi, 2022; Puri, 2022).

Russia's entry into an aggressive war was also facilitated by the emergence of the West-South conflict at the centre of world politics after the end of the Cold War. The development was spurred on by the rise of China and India. As the focus shifts from the transatlantic axis to Asia and the Pacific, China is replacing Russia as the US counterpart. The United States has elevated China as the greatest threat both to its own security and to the continuity of the entire liberal international order it leads (Hawksley, 2020; Rosecrance & Miller, 2014). From Russia's point of view, this transition was underlined by the agreement on military cooperation between Australia, Great Britain, and the United States (AUKUS) signed in September 2021.

Russia's disparagement in Europe, on the one hand, and the shift of the focus of world politics to Asia, on the other, showed Russia that, like Western Europe or the EU, it has been sidelined in power politics. As a former – and now clearly declining – superpower, it has found it difficult to accept becoming an almost silent partner in world politics. Thus, in a world of changed geopolitical biases, Russia, on the pretext of various pretexts, sought to highlight the fact that it is still a superpower that must be listened to and considered in the construction of the world system of the third millennium.

In the context of world system analysis and power transition theories, Russia acted exactly as a declining superpower is supposed to behave. Namely, according to both the theory of the power transition and history, it is often the superpower that loses its position in relative terms that starts the war (Käkönen, 1986; Juutinen and Käkönen, 2016). To maintain the position, it is better to begin a war preferably when there is still a theoretical chance of also winning the war. Admittedly, the declining superpower that has started the war over the course of history has generally not emerged victorious from the war. Ukraine's resistance and the West's massive support for Ukraine might prove this once again.

With the invasion of Crimea in 2014 and the war it waged in Ukraine, Russia demonstrates that it is not subject to the rules and norms of the so-called rules-based international order. This makes the power struggle between the United States and Russia into a struggle between the whole so-called West and Russia. However, it is worth remembering here that those rules rejected by Russia strongly serve the interests of the ruling state⁴ and generally justify the actions of the West (see van der Pijl, 2014). That is why both Russia and the so-called emerging countries such as China and India have called for a reform of those rules and norms as well as the institutions of governance of the international system.

Whatever happens in the war in Ukraine, it is possible to say, based on the argumentation above and the theoretical framework used in this essay, that there is a war going on in Ukraine for the leadership of the world system between the United States, together with its allies, and Russia. Thus, as Lakshmi Puri (2022) and Pinak Chakravarty (2022b) have argued, the war can be understood as a proxy war against Russia by the United States and the entire West. By prolonging the war, it is possible to weaken Russia's military power in relation to the United States and its allies without directly participating in the battles themselves.

The above also implies that by invading Ukraine, Russia has succeeded, through a policy of force, in returning the East-West contradiction to the centre of world politics at the expense of the West-South conflict. At the same time, Europe has once again, at least momentarily, become the main stage of world politics. How long the United States can and intends to leave Asia to China is another matter (Lidarev, 2022). To this, a kind of response was given by the visit of the Speaker of the US House of Representatives **Nancy Pelosi** to Taiwan and the strong Chinese reaction it caused in early August 2022.

⁴ In this context, it is appropriate to highlight that as a hegemon of the world system, the United States has also often taken the view that the rules of the game in the system are intended for others, but they do not apply to it itself when the issue is about its interests. One example of this is the United States together with the so-called willing States attacking Iraq in 2003 by referring to fake evidence.

Since the war in Ukraine is not just about the insane dreams of Russia or the Russian leader, President Putin, but about the hegemony of the world order, it is now appropriate to assess the spillover effects of the war on the key challengers of the hegemony and on the unity of the potential challenger bloc, the BRICS. Only then will it be possible to assess what impact the war in Ukraine will have on the future of the world order, at least in the short term.

CHALLENGER STATES TO HEGEMONY AND THE WAR IN UKRAINE

For India, since its independence, the West-South conflict has been a more significant factor than the East-West conflict, in relation to which it remained unaffiliated throughout the Cold War. In the West-South conflict, India has never been nonaligned. On the contrary, it has always sought to seek allies. Despite the tensions between China and India, which from time to time have manifested themselves in the form of armed clashes, such as, at worst, in the 1962 border war, India, along with China, has opposed the West-centric colonial system and US supremacy. In decolonising the system and opposing US supremacy, India has also been working closely with the Soviet Union/Russia (Käkönen, 2022).

It is good to be aware that, for India, cooperation with the Soviet Union has never meant that it has located itself as part of the Eastern Bloc on the front lines of the Cold War. In dismantling the colonial system, India needed and still needs, Russia, in addition to the United States, to balance China's influence in Asia. A key dimension of India's world politics is the dismantling of the colonial system and the achievement of a leading position in the world system. These are the two reasons why India is one of the founding members of the BRICS and why it has also joined the so-called Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which was set up on the initiative of China and Russia. On the other hand, India has also joined the Quad, formed by Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, which is clearly directed against China in the region of the Indian and Pacific Oceans (Käkönen, 2022).

With the war in Ukraine, India's concern is the shift in the focus of US world politics from Asia to Europe. India's concern is how, on the one hand, the war and, on the other, the focus of US attention on Europe will affect the relationship between India and China since US support for India may be weakened while China is strengthening its position in Asia. India's grief is compounded by the fact that, as is typical of the BRICS countries, India has not condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Nor within the framework of the Quad, has India, like other members, condemned Russia or joined sanctions against Russia (Sodhi, 2022).

While the US is focusing on Europe, it needs more India in Asia. Therefore, the United States has not sought to pressure India into sanctions against Russia (Sodhi, 2022). The United States has even ignored India's increased imports of cheap Russian oil. India, for its part, is critical of sanctions against Russia. It fears that the isolation of Russia will lead to closer cooperation between Russia and China in Asia, which in turn shifts China's focus from a West-South conflict, or decolonisation of the international system, to the East-West conflict. At the same time, Russia's role in Asia would be weakened, and India would no longer be able to rely on Russia as one of the factors balancing China's influence (Kapoor, 2022).

If India cannot rely on a weakening Russia, it will be forced to move closer to the United States, which is not the best option for the country from the point of view of decolonisation of the international system. One of India's objectives has been a multipolar system in which Russia would play a significant role. Russia's weakening position and possibly closer cooperation with China will reduce India's strategic space in Asia. As a result, India may have to rethink its entire world politics (Kapoor, 2022; Brosig, 2019).

China's objective, which has already been mentioned above, to secure superpower status by 2049 cannot be ignored, either. To achieve that goal, China opposes US domination of the international system and seeks to build an anti-American front. At the same time, China is questioning the entire US-led liberal international order and its norms. The social model adopted by China is incompatible with that system. Therefore, the rise of China can lead to alternative values and norms of the system, although China is not a threat to the capitalist mode of production, that is, to the basic structures of the world economy (Li, 2019b).

As a representative of non-Western civilisation and an emerging state, China considers the prevailing international system unfair. To achieve its own dream, China is creating alternative and parallel multilateral institutions of global governance, such as the BRICS, the NDP (New Development Bank) or the AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank). In doing so, it challenges the so-called Bretton Woods order created after World War II (see Li, 2019b). The construction of a future China-centric system also includes the so-called New Silk Road project, or BRI, which aims to connect the Chinese economy through Central Asia to Africa and Western Europe.

For China, Russia's anti-Americanism, natural resources, and military might have made it an important partner in both the traditional East-West and West-South conflict. Although China has not condemned Russia's war invading Ukraine, it has not (at least for the time being) openly supported Russia. The crucial question for China's own ambitions now is what China can win or lose with Russia in the war in Ukraine. Both Russia and Ukraine play a key role in China's BRI project, both geopolitically and geoeconomically. Whether the war in Ukraine ends in victory or defeat for Russia, both potentially threaten the operation of the transport corridors included in the Belt and Road project after the war (see Brosig, 2019).

The fate of Russia in the war in Ukraine is also a matter of fate for China. Can China allow Russia to lose that war, which concerns the relationship between Russia and the United States? The potential victory for Ukraine is also a victory for the United States and the entire so-called West. Thus, if Russia weakens, this result could also be a defeat for China and lead to its marginalisation in world politics (see Singh, 2022). Admittedly, China's position in the global economy is so significant that isolating it would mean isolating the West from the global economy. On the other hand, openly standing up in supporting Russia would quite obviously lead to sanctions against China, even if the sanctions would also hit the West itself even harder than the sanctions against Russia have done.

The Russian war in Ukraine has put China in an awkward position. It is difficult for it to find any good position from the bad options. It is not just a question of supporting Russia, because isolating Russia is not a good option for China either, while at the same time, there is a risk of China isolating itself from the world economy. One option is to transform the BRICS into an open economic organisation in which Russia is involved and whose driving force would be the Chinese economy. Is China ready to build an alternative trading system in which, in addition to the BRICS, Turkey and Iran, for instance, would be involved (Singh, 2022)? However, such an arrangement would also support the multipolarity that India craves.⁵

In going to war in Ukraine, Russia has become entrenched in two significant fantasies of its own about history and its position in the world system. The first relates to the arguments put forward by Russia to justify its attempt to return Ukraine to Mother Russia. The question here is the restoration of the Russian Empire and its greatness. More relevant to the power struggle in the world system, however, is the fact that, as a declining superpower, Russia has still attached itself to the US, Europe, and NATO-centric power struggle and worldview (Skak, 2019).

Looking at world politics after the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is possible to say that Russia has long been waging proxy wars against the United States in various parts of the world, supporting political forces or armed movements that have fought against regimes that rely on the support of the United States. Similarly, Russia has resisted international attempts to overthrow sitting governments under the umbrella of humanitarian intervention. In Russia's strategy, the most significant of these policies continues in Syria, where Russia has been involved in supporting **the Basar al-Assad** regime by arms. It is precisely in the Syrian civil war that Russia is most clearly waging war on the United States and maintaining influence in Middle East politics (Skak, 2019; Brosig, 2019).

In Ukraine, too, Russia can be said to be waging war on the United States. The Ukrainians are the scapegoats of Russia's efforts to maintain its superpower position in the world system. From Russia's point of view, it may be possible to argue that in Ukraine the United States is waging war with Russia to the last Ukrainian (cf. Puri, 2022). For Russia, in turn, it will not be easy to give up to its goals without a complete military defeat. To maintain the global superpower status dreamed of by Russia, it is necessary for it to have undeniable supremacy in the geographical space controlled by the former Soviet Union (Brosig, 2019).

⁵ In the Johannesburg Summit August 2023, BRICS made a move in this direction by inviting six new members (Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) and in 2024 only Argentina declined the invitation and other five became new members.

Using military force, Russia is seeking, in a way, to restore its self-confidence after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the humiliation caused by NATO's eastward expansion (cf. Maalouf, 2021). As a nuclear power, Russia finds it difficult to accept its decline into a second- or third-class power that is unquestionably no longer even a regional superpower. This may also be a problem for the entire world system, which has no historical experience of nuclear power declining in the power hierarchy (Kapoor, 2022). According to historical examples and the theory of the transition of power, Russia, like any declining superpower, has been ready to start a war to restore its superpower status (Skak, 2019). That is what Russia has now done, although history also tells us that there is a risk of the permanent loss of superpower status for at least the next fifty, or even a hundred years.

BRICS AND THE UKRAINIAN WAR

Here, it is appropriate to first return to what the BRICS is and what kind of objectives it represents. Regarding the possible change of hegemony in the world system, it is still justified to focus mainly on the three key members of the BRICS: India, China, and Russia. As outlined above, for Russia, the BRICS is a tool for promoting vested interest in the East-West conflict. Therefore, Russia's goal has been to use the BRICS as part of its own crusade against US supremacy. India is also involved in the BRICS for the same purpose, but its goal is to dismantle the colonial system and achieve its own superpower status. China, for its part, as a member of the BRICS, participates in challenging the leading position of the United States on both the East-West and West-South axes and seeks support for its own leadership dreams from both Russia and the developing countries, the so-called Global South.

Thus, in opposing US supremacy, the key members of the BRICS undertake contradictory efforts to change the world system and achieve a multipolar system (Juutinen & Käkönen, 2016; Juutinen & Käkönen, 2021). This undermines the ability of the BRICS to function as a unified bloc against the domination under which, in practice, one dominant state has dictated the values and standards of the system, and the same state, as the police, has enforced them (Brosig, 2019). Dominance has also meant that it has been possible for the United States, which holds the status of hegemony, to use means to preserve the system that are not permissible for those seeking hegemony, such as interventions or the overthrow of legally elected governments (Chakravarty, 2022a).

The key members of the BRICS are obviously using the alliance to achieve their own goals. Since the objectives are contradictory, apart from one of the key ones, the bloc faces difficulty in imposing its own values and standards on the international community – and even more difficulty in enforcing them. Another issue is whether the BRICS, as a community, even set alternative values and standards for others. Although the BRICS member countries have challenged the values of the post-Second World War liberal international community on various occasions, so far, the BRICS has not produced any new values or standards attached to their own traditions. Instead, at its summits, the BRICS regularly invokes the values and norms of the Western-centric international system, such as the inviolability of states' sovereignty and borders, and the interference in the internal affairs of other states. In a way, the BRICS documents shine with neo-Westphalianism as Brosig suggests (2019).

BRICS's chances of becoming a value leader instead of the United States are undermined by its own attitude to the neo-Westphalian values it calls for at summits. As in the case of the United States, it seems that the values are not binding on the BRICS themselves or on its member states. From the outset, the documents of the BRICS summits have stressed respect for the sovereignty of states and the inviolability of borders, as well as opposing interventions, even under the auspices of the R2P (*responsibility to protect*) concept. Building on these principles, the BRICS and its member states have opposed Western policies in Libya and Syria, among others (Brosig, 2019).

In the same documents, positions on conflicts such as Ukraine, Kashmir, Tibet, the South China Sea, South Ossetia, or the India-China border conflicts are conspicuous by their absence. It seems obvious that one of the key conditions for keeping the BRICS community together is that problems classified as internal to members or security risks considered to be national

are not addressed. This framework also includes Russia's actions towards Ukraine. Not a single mention of violations of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty can be found in the documents of the summits, even though Russia has been occupying eastern Ukraine for a long time and annexing Crimea (Brosig, 2019).

The above suggests that the members of the BRICS have, at least until now, considered it important for themselves to maintain the vague unity of the alliance. The interesting question is how Russia's violent war against Ukraine, and thus also the blatant violation of the values proclaimed by the BRICS, will affect that unity (cf. Brosig, 2019). It will be possible to judge this on the basis of the 14th BRICS Summit. The meeting was held virtually on 23 June 2022, four months after Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022.

The summit was hosted by China. China's strict coronavirus policy can be considered a good justification for the meeting being held virtually. However, this may not be an adequate explanation. It is possible that Russia's war in Ukraine will be one of the reasons for conducting the meeting remotely. There are two supporting elements for this assumption. The first is that for a long time, the date of the meeting was open. In fact, the date was not officially announced until less than two weeks before the event, which indicates uncertainty about the organisation of the meeting. Another explanation is that it would have been embarrassing for at least some of the leaders of the member states to appear in the traditional summit photo with Russian President Putin. In the virtual meeting, handshakes and smiles were avoided – and coronavirus provided a good excuse for this⁶.

If the above assumption is correct, then it is possible to say that the Russian war in Ukraine is causing a rift in the ranks of the BRICS. However, this is not reflected in the summit outcome document (BRICS Summit, 2022). The document echoes the Community's traditional phrases about its commitment to Neo-Westphalian values and respect for international law and UN objectives. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a flagrant violation of the Community's overall commitments set out in the document. Yet there is almost complete silence about the war in Ukraine, except for the hope of bilateral negotiations between Russia and Ukraine to resolve the war. In a way, this is an attempt to marginalise the West in resolving the conflict.

As is typical of the BRICS, the impression of unity was maintained by taking a neutral view of Russia's war in Ukraine. On the other hand, it is possible to argue that the summit indirectly even came out in support of Russia. In the traditional way, the document calls for an open system of international trade and opposes any artificial barriers to international trade. When the West imposes economic sanctions on Russia because of the war in Ukraine, this can be understood on a situation-by-situation basis, with the BRICS as a community condemning the sanctions against Russia. This interpretation is justified by the fact that, of the BRICS countries, India and China are strategically heavily dependent on trade with Russia, particularly for energy.

The document clearly shows that it is still important for the BRICS community to show unity, both against the West-centric system led by the United States and in the further strengthening and even expansion of the BRICS. The strengthening of unity is reflected in the document in highlighting new cooperation projects that have already begun and in opening new areas of cooperation. The objective of Community enlargement, on the other hand, is given concrete expression in welcoming Bangladesh, Egypt, Uruguay, and the United Arab Emirates as new members of the NDP⁷ (BRICS Summit, 2022).

For the time being at least, Russia's war in Ukraine has not dissolved the BRICS as a potential challenger to US hegemony, although it has obviously caused a rift in the Community. At the same time, however, the Community's prestige is diminished among developing countries because it overlooks the fact that Russia is constantly violating the Community's own declared principles. Thus, it is obvious that there is no serious challenger to US hegemony because of the war in Ukraine, at least not in the short term, and perhaps not even in the medium term.

⁶ In the 2023 Summit in South Africa the International Criminal Court warrant against Putin provided again the option to have the meeting in absence of Putin. It is now interesting to see what will be the gathering in the 2024 Summit in Russia and what shall that tell about the coherence of the extended BRICS.

⁷ In this context, it is good to recognise that Jair **Bolsonaro**, who has been positive to the USA and NATO, as the President of Brazil, did not substantially change the policy and position of the country in the BRICS Community. This is understandable because of Brazil's dependence on Chinese investments in Brazilian infrastructure and industry (see Li, 2019b).

THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND THE LEADERSHIP OF THE WORLD SYSTEM

Within the framework of world system analysis and the theory of power transition, the goal of the war in Ukraine waged by Russia was not the restoration of the Russian Empire, but it is directly linked to the struggle for world leadership and the position of a superpower in the world system. By war, Russia, as a declining superpower, wanted to show that it cannot be ignored when building the world order of the third millennium or the sixth power cycle of the world system. The irony for Russia is that the war in Ukraine for world leadership seems to produce exactly the opposite result regardless of how that war in Ukraine ends. However, the estimates below are only relevant if the war in Ukraine does not escalate into a nuclear war.

The war in Ukraine has so far strengthened the so-called transatlantic axis and solidarity (Mishra, 2022). Fear of Russia has led to the expansion of NATO by two new members (Finland and Sweden). In any case, the West has condensed around the United States. The position of the United States is also strengthened by sanctions against Russia. As a result, the EU has already become dependent on US energy, oil, and gas, the production of which is increasingly based on the use of environmentally destructive oil sands and oil and gas shale. As a spillover effect of the war, orders from the US arms industry have also increased. As early as 1986, I demonstrated the vital role that the arms industry plays in the US national economy and in its hegemonic position (Käkönen, 1986).

The growing dependence of Europe on the United States means that one European dream is being postponed far into the future, or even buried. For several decades, documents on the EU's common foreign and security policy have stated the goal of an independent world policy, independent of the United States, which could make the EU a major global player (Käkönen, 2011). This would require both federal development and the creation of its own independent military force. As all EU member states will soon be members of NATO, the EU will be dependent on the United States for power politics. NATO, on the other hand, does not do anything that is not in the interests of the United States, and, on the other hand, the United States can, if necessary, act without NATO, as it has done so far in various coalitions of those who are willing to join.

As the US position strengthens, one interesting question is whether AUKUS – a coalition of Australia, Great Britain, and the United States – will develop into the NATO of the Pacific or Asian region due to the fear of Russia and China. If the development goes in this direction, it is likely that the importance of the Quad will weaken. Such a development, and the condensation of the West in general, around the United States, puts China in a difficult position. When attempts are made to exclude Russia from world trade and the West becomes more unified, China is forced to consider whether it will openly support Russia. If China makes this choice, power politics will develop towards bipolarity. At the same time, multilateralism is weakening, as the other members of the BRICS are unlikely to join China in openly supporting Russia.

The Russian war in Ukraine not only strengthens US hegemony but also has spillover effects on the internal development of societies in the so-called West. The West's sanctions against Russia target not only Russia, but also the West and, in fact, the world system as a whole. As a result of the war and sanctions, energy and food prices will rise, states will have to save on services provided to citizens, and the tax rate will nevertheless rise. Citizens are also forced to save on their consumption as inflation eats away citizens' purchasing power.

The war in the Middle East caused an analogous situation in 1973 because of the so-called oil crisis. Even then, sacrifices were expected, if not demanded, from the citizens. The pressures on the people at that time erupted in the form of a conservative rebellion, which in 1979 brought to power Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain and, two years later, Ronald Reagan in the United States (see Maalouf, 2021). Now, with the war in Ukraine, sanctions against Russia and Russia's retaliatory measures are causing energy crises, food shortages, material shortages in industrial production, and rising prices all over the world. The result may be social unrest, which shall be used by populist movements and ultra-conservatives.

Indeed, the political reaction to the war in Ukraine may be the rise to power of ultra-conservatives in some EU countries. In a heavily polarised United States, the current conservative revolution could bring Donald Trump to the presidency of the United States in the 2024 presidential election, while the United States is strengthening its hegemonic position in the world

system. With a possible conservative revolution, democracy is being exploited to curtail freedoms and rights and to exclude differences (cf. Maalouf, 2021).

The renewal of the strong hegemony of the United States and the conservative revolution, taken together, would mean that the world system would have an aggressively US-led West in power that promotes its own values and is hostile to other cultures and civilisations and their values. This, in turn, is a threat to the decolonisation of the international system and to the aspirations of India and China for a pluralistic and multilateral international system.

CONCLUSION

In the theoretical framework used, the war of aggression against Ukraine initiated by Russia appears as an attempt to at least restore lost superpower status and to be a credible challenger to the hegemony of the world system. Within this interpretative framework, Russia has waged war in Ukraine against the United States. Things are turning out differently regarding Russia's objectives for the war. By launching a war of aggression, Russia has created a situation that has strengthened the position of the United States as the leader of the West and the entire prevailing world system. As a result of the war, it does not seem likely that power in the world system is shifting to any individual or collective challenger.

Within the framework of the analysis of the world system and of power transition, the war waged by Russia in Ukraine turns out to be a factor that changes the development of power relations in the world order. Instead of losing its hegemonic status, the United States is renewing it. However, this does not seem to change the fact that the focus of world politics has shifted to Asia. At the same time, it is likely that power politics will condense on the US-China axis. In this way, however, bipolarity would return with a new dimension.

Theoretically, what is interesting about the new setting is that two different versions of capitalism are contrasted in the capitalist world economy. Under this system, China has already built its own semi-periphery and periphery, which its economy needs (see Li, 2019b). Thus, in the world system, in accordance with the Leninist theory of imperialism, a struggle for the re-division of the world rather than decolonisation is developing or has already begun (cf. Käkönen, 1988).

In both the re-division of the world according to the theory of imperialism and the possible change of hegemony in the analysis of the world system, wars are an integral aspect. If there is not at least a global player in the system that enjoys the legitimacy of all the major players, where a peaceful solution to the ongoing change could be found to the satisfaction of the various parties into a new order, there is a risk that the war in Ukraine will not be the last. In other words, it is possible that the risks of wars will increase, while humanity should be able to prevent human-made climate change and biodiversity loss.

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