

EAST-WEST STUDIES

Journal of Social Sciences of
Tallinn University School of Governance,
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EWS Number 13 (2023/2024)

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East-West Studies

Journal of Social Sciences of Tallinn University School of Governance, Law and Society

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FOREWORD: EAST AND WEST OF WHAT AND WHERE?

What do we mean when we say East and West? Like any relative term, perspective is inherent in any understanding and common experience or shared meaning one hopes to convey. In this issue of *East West Studies*, we examine the basis of what we hope to explore in our journal, understanding what exactly are the East and West, how we decided that, and what effect that understanding has on the world we live in and analyze in our fields.

In our first article, we welcome a team from Harvard and Yale Universities – Brendan Case, Flynn Cratty, Tim Lomas, and Alexander Batson. Their piece *The Dance of East and West: A Brief History of an Unstable but Enduring Conceptual Partnership* gives historical insight into the questions above. By endeavouring to “explore variations on the East-West theme throughout six key historical eras: pre-history; the Classical Age; the rise of Christianity; the medieval world; the Enlightenment; and the Cold War”, they offer essential context for any understanding of our titular dichotomy – its origins, its evolution, and its effect on the world we find ourselves in today.

We then move to the fault lines that exist between these ideas and actors, these nations on the knife-edge of shared understanding of history and identity. From Russian-Armenian University, Yerevan, we welcome Nora Gevorgyan with *Small States in Great Powers Geopolitics: Armenia’s Role in the U.S. Policy on the South Caucasus*. The interplay of Armenia’s location, diaspora, identity, and resources within its understood relevance to East-West power centres gives clear example of how the factors we consider in this dichotomy are both static and fluid given the moment and need of the perceiver. Similarly, Tampere University Emeritus professor Jyrki Käkönen’s *Ukraine War in the Context of World System Analysis and Power Transition Theory* shows how core power dynamics can shape the lived reality of frontier states, and transition of power dynamics can create both opportunity and risk, as it ever has, with benefit weighed to powerful and risk weighed to the margins. Mariam Tarasashvili of Caucasus University, Tbilisi, then gives us practical application of the issues associated with shifting frontiers in *New Era of Uncertainties: How U.S. Foreign Aid Works in Times of War*. In this, we see the dynamics created when the demarcation line in this dichotomy is pushed into doubt.

Are East and West ideas, places, both, neither? Are these terms for collective identities with meaning and shared experience, collected sets of values and aspirations, or shifting geo-political edges on the limits of empire, subject to the whims, aspirations, and capabilities of competing cores? In this issue we thank our authors for exploring these questions. As with any compass points, to know East and West you have to first know where you stand.

Terry McDonald, Benjamin Klasche,
Mart Susi – Editors, *East West Studies*

**THE DANCE OF EAST AND WEST:
A BRIEF HISTORY OF AN UNSTABLE BUT ENDURING CONCEPTUAL PARTNERSHIP**

TIM LOMAS¹, BRENDAN CASE², FLYNN CRATTY³, ALEXANDER BATSON⁴

ABSTRACT

The distinction between East and West is among the most prominent and influential cross-cultural tropes in both academic scholarship and public discourse. However, in most cases, this attention tends to focus narrowly on certain instances or iterations of this binary. In particular, Edward Said's influential analysis of 'Orientalism' has led to a relative fixation on the dynamic between Western Europe and the 'near' and 'far' East in the 19th century. However, the East-West polarity has been a defining feature of at least the last 2,500 years of human history. It is, moreover, a complex and contested binary, whose boundaries and contours have constantly shifted. This paper therefore highlights these complexities through a 'psycho-historical' approach, namely, exploring the psychological nature and dynamics of this distinction through a *historical* lens. Thus, we explore variations on the East-West theme throughout six key historical eras: pre-history; the Classical Age; the rise of Christianity; the medieval world; the Enlightenment; and the Cold War. It is hoped that our analysis not only offers a useful introduction to the evolution of the East-West distinction but also encourages scholars to adopt a more subtle and nuanced approach to its dynamics.

Keywords: East, West, cross-cultural, history, orientalism.

INTRODUCTION

A wealth of research has indicated that human societies throughout history appear to have been invariably characterised by (at least) three interlinked tendencies: (1) the creation of in-groups (e.g., one's tribe) and out-groups (e.g., other tribes) (De Dreu et al., 2016); (2) the formation of positive beliefs and attitudes regarding one's in-group (e.g., loyalty, familiarity, and high regard) versus negative beliefs and attitudes regarding out-groups (e.g., antipathy, suspicion, and low regard) (Shaw & Wong, 1987); and (3) an understanding of in-group versus out-group dynamics through the lens of spatial orientation (e.g., North vs South) (Grigoryev, 2022). This paper charts the evolving history of a particularly influential form of spatial comparison: the distinction between West versus East (WvE). This binary has found myriad forms of expression throughout the centuries, with fuzzy and disputed boundaries that are ever shifting in response to historical events. Moreover, it has maintained its rhetorical force to this day, serving as a powerful conceptual lens of analysis and comparison in numerous fields of endeavour, from politics to the academy. Indeed, appeals to WvE differences are frequently invoked today even within disciplines such as psychology, in which cross-cultural nuances are often overlooked in favour of a more universalising perspective.

Indeed, one crucial element in contemporary global political economy is the deep integration of China into the US-led international liberal order. From this perspective, the rhetoric of political rivalry emphasised in US National Security Strategy – as much as the small-scale trade wars caused by the US can be seen as an indication of assimilation problems on the part of

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the Hegemon instead of what has been feared, the onset of Age of Empires, Global Game of Thrones, or the return of the state of nature (Barbieri, 2020; Hopewell, 2021; Juutinen & Käkönen, 2016). However, the continuity of sui generis liberal world order would involve tremendous regional changes. This is related to the American foreign policy agenda discussion towards the “deep engagement” strategy to balance or counter the Rising Powers’ initiative.

However, many contemporary invocations of WvE are often flawed or at least partial and limited in some way. This is frequently because they focus on only one particular iteration of WvE dynamics (hence being partial/limited), such as Western Europe compared to the ‘Far East’ of East Asia in the 19th century, and take this as representative of WvE dynamics more generally. In that respect, Said’s (1979) identification and articulation of ‘Orientalism’ has been hugely influential. This was his label for the process by which 19th-century Western thinkers came to understand themselves and their society by contrasting it with the ‘Other’ of the Orient. There were different strains of this thought process. More benevolent, albeit still contentious, were forms of ‘Romantic Orientalism’, in which the East was viewed through a utopian lens as superior in various ways, such as wiser, less materialistic, and more spiritual (Taylor, 2004). Then, far more troubling were the discourses used to justify and rationalise imperialism and colonialism, for instance presenting the East as inefficient and thus apparently ‘in need’ of intervention. Despite Said’s real and important insights though, such is his influence that his particular iteration of WvE dynamics has tended to overshadow all others, often becoming the main or even only historical WvE distinction acknowledged or cited by most scholars. This of course is not a criticism of Said per se, nor of those who have drawn on his work; indeed, it is rather a sign of how original, compelling, and impactful his ideas have been. However, this dominance of the subsequent literature has had some negative consequences, including that his particular iteration has since often been reified and essentialised in subsequent discourse in the form of stable generalisations and stereotypes. Thus, for instance, the West has often been interpreted as self-consciously individualistic, which is then juxtaposed with a view of the East as more communal and – if seen in a negative light – conspicuously *lacking* in individuality (Martinez Mateo et al., 2013). This point of comparison has then arguably provided the foundation for what is perhaps the most common WvE distinction in modern scholarship – certainly in fields such as psychology (Lomas et al., 2022) – namely the idea that the West tends towards individualism and the East towards collectivism, as influentially articulated by Hofstede (1980) and Markus and Kitayama (1991).

However, as this paper will show, the WvE distinction has seen many incarnations over the centuries, together with complex, shifting arrays of thought and behaviour patterns. Indeed, East and West are relative terms (e.g., who/what is West for one group of people may be East for another), which contributes to the shifting meanings. Indeed, as Emerson (1984) illustrates using the case of ‘Southeast Asia’, such words have a powerful function in that they ‘simultaneously describe and invent reality’ (p. 1); while some names acknowledge what exists (e.g., ‘rose’) and others create what would otherwise not exist (e.g., ‘unicorn’), the terms East and West effectively play *both* roles. As such, we hope that our analysis will not only offer a useful introduction to the evolution of the WvE binary but also encourage scholars to adopt a more nuanced and subtle approach to the distinction. Thus, we have sought to provide what one might call a ‘psycho-historical’ account of this binary, that is, an account that lies at the intersection of psychology and history. We are interested in the psychological nature and the dynamics of this distinction, specifically interrogated through a *historical* lens. This approach heeds calls from Muthukrishna et al. (2020) to envisage psychology as a ‘historical science’, namely to consider how the phenomena it focuses on have changed in meaningful ways over the centuries. Here, we use this temporal perspective to shed light on East-West dynamics specifically, but it bears emphasising that this approach can help illuminate myriad and indeed perhaps all aspects of human psychology and culture more broadly. To that point, their foundational paper provides a wealth of ‘illustrative examples that link contemporary psychological variation—including cooperation, trust, personality, and gender differences—to historical processes focused on religion, kinship, formal institutions (democracy), economic patterns, and ecological factors’ (p.721).

In terms of East-West considerations in particular, the historical terrain here is so vast that we cannot hope to be exhaustive. Rather, our goal will be limited to briefly surveying just six epochs – and moreover often focusing on an especially pivotal year – to show the shifting nature of WvE through the centuries. These are: (1) the ‘pre-history’ before the WvE comparison emerged; (2) the classical era; (3) the rise of Christianity; (4) the medieval world; (5) the European Enlightenment; and

(6) the Cold War. In each case, we highlight the internally complex and ever-shifting contours of the WvE binary and show how the legacies of each period's WvE relations continue to shape the present. As a final point, it might perhaps be deduced from this choice of epochs that we authors are ourselves Western and have an intrinsically Western 'take' on the topic, with an implicit privileging of Western empirics as evidence. Indeed, even more idiosyncratically, the selection of these eras and our interpretation of them represent our own personal interests and areas of expertise (although all the instances chosen are undeniably important and may well be selected by other scholars in similar papers). This we acknowledge as a limitation, though we would also argue that there is no neutral 'view from nowhere' (Nagel, 1986); any account inevitably bears the cultural and biographical imprint of its authors' particular background. Thus, it would be most welcome if our paper were to be augmented in the future by similar analyses of these WvE dynamics from other perspectives, including of course from scholars in the East as well as from relevant cultures that are less easily categorised. Indeed, we hope our paper can inspire and encourage such efforts and that collectively these works can approach a relatively full and comprehensive account of this topic.

PRE-HISTORY

The WvE dichotomy may have emerged in an enduring and substantial sense in relation to the wars between the ancient Greeks and the Persians around the 5th century BCE, as we explore in our second main section. However, notions of West and East were developed well before that time, with roots in 'pre-history' (i.e., the vast epoch before written records were kept or are now lost) (Lomas & Case, 2023). Of course, this lack of records makes tracing these roots difficult, but not impossible. There are two main sources of suggestive evidence pointing to the use of West and East in pre-history: linguistic and cartographic. Here, we shall briefly explore each in turn. First, though, we should observe that although the concepts of WvE existed in pre-history, these appear to mainly function as spatial directions, together with the associated symbolism. There, the kind of group-based spatial *identification* that began to emerge in the Classical era, whereby people conceptualised themselves or others as *being* Western or Eastern, seems not to have been present. Rather, all peoples appeared to gravitate towards a centre-periphery distinction, whereby their own in-group was at the centre of their conceptualisation of the world, with out-groups, to the extent that people were aware of such, relegated to the periphery (Delnero, 2017).

Our earliest traces of notions of WvE are found in language, with the etymologies of these concepts, whose genesis may stretch back far into the unrecorded mists of pre-history, revealing clues about their emergent conceptualisations. In short, across many languages, they are associated with the passage of the sun, with words for East and West linked to sunrise and sunset, respectively. These words themselves stem from the Proto-Indo-European roots *aus* and *wes*, which refer to an upward versus a downward movement and hence also to the rising or setting sun and likewise to dawn and dusk (Vasunia, 2012; Gąsiorowski, 2012). Similar patterns are found cross-culturally. With the East, the Proto-Indo-European root *aus* is also reflected in languages such as Akkadian (*asu*), Dutch (*oost*), Frisian (*ast*), German (*Ost*), Greek (*ēōs*), Latin (*aurora*), Old Norse (*austr*), Old Saxon (*ost*), and Sanskrit (*usah*). Similarly, beyond that specific root, numerous languages use words connoting or derived from sunrise – or more generically 'rising' – to denote the East, including Arabic (*shurūq*), Chinese (*dōng* – involving a pictograph of the sun rising behind a tree), French (*levant*), Greek (*anatolē*), Hebrew (*mizrahi*), Latin (*oriens*), Russian (*vostok*), and Persian (*xavar*). Such terms are also the roots for other labels for the East, such as the 'Orient' (from the Latin *oriens*) and 'Asia' (from the Akkadian *asu*). With the West, the Proto-Indo-European root *wes* is likewise reflected in languages such as French (*ouest*), Greek (*hesperos*), Old Frisian, Middle Dutch, Dutch, and Old High German (*west*), Old Norse (*vestr*), and Latin (*vesper*). Again, beyond that specific root, numerous languages use words connoting or derived from sunset – or more generically 'falling' or 'resting' – to denote the West, including Arabic (*gharb*), Chinese (*xī*, with a pictograph that Sagart (2004) suggests may connote a bird settling into a nest), Hebrew (*ma'arab*), Russian (*západ*), and Latin (*occidens*). As with the East, these words are also the roots of other terms linked to the West. For instance, Europe may derive from the Semitic *ereb* (root of the Arabic *gharb* and Hebrew *ma'arab* above), arising in relation to the Phoenicians' colonisation of territories in the Mediterranean to their West from the 10th century BCE (Vasunia, 2012).

We should emphasise though that as these concepts were developing, East and West were not fixed in any relatively stable location (unlike in later epochs) but were relative to the people creating them. Indeed, people generally viewed themselves as a central reference point, as we discuss below. So, for instance, although North Africa (e.g., Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia) might be deemed Eastern from a modern Western perspective, the Arabic term for this region is *Maghreb* – meaning ‘sunset’ – since this is how this region would be situated relative to an Arabian Peninsula perspective. Indeed, the etymology of ‘Arab’ itself, although often interpreted as being first used to convey meanings such as wanderer or nomadic, has been traced to the aforementioned Semitic *ereb*, potentially implying that people identified as Arabic were to the *West* of these Semitic speakers.

In any case, as cultures developed concepts of WvE, they began to attach symbolism and meaning to them. As befitting the direction of the dawn and the rising sun, the East is often associated with qualities such as birth, rebirth, renewal, life, and youth. These are reflected in the way that cardinal directions were often personified as deities – as per the animistic and polytheistic mindset of this era – with the East symbolised by goddesses of dawn such as *Ēostre* (Germanic), *Ēos* (Greek), *Aurora* (Roman), and *Usas* (Vedic). Such symbolism continued into the realm of history. In the Old Testament, for instance, the East is associated with the creation of life (Genesis 2:8 states that God ‘planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed’) (Meier, 1998). Likewise, in Christianity, the East – and similarly sunrise and dawn – was associated with Christ himself (the ‘light of the world’) and with his Resurrection and Second Coming. For that reason, early Christians would often pray facing East; as Origen wrote in *On Prayer* (AD 231): ‘It should be immediately clear that the direction of the rising sun obviously indicates that we ought to pray inclining in that direction, an act which symbolises the soul looking towards where the true light rises’ (Lang, 2009, p. 93).

Conversely, as similarly befits the direction of the dusk and the setting sun, the West was usually associated with ageing, death, and the afterlife, though these were not necessarily negatively coded, especially if the afterlife was construed in beneficent ways. For example, in various schools of Buddhism (e.g., ‘Pure Land’), the West is associated with enlightenment (Lye, 2002). Such imagery is found cross-culturally and is frequently reflected in funeral and burial practices, evidence of which survives today, such as symbolism on Western walls of tombs and bodies arranged in a Westerly direction – ranging from Ancient Egypt (Omran, 2016) to Bronze Age burial sites in Central Asia (Sollohub, 1962). Such imagery persists to this day; in the Great War, for instance, the phrase ‘Go West’ was often used poetically as an image of soldiers dying (Seal, 2013).

In pre-history, we find a general association of East and West with sunrise and sunset, respectively, together with the associated symbolism (e.g., birth and death). Perhaps for this reason, East and West seem a more important dichotomy in this era than North and South, with most early maps prioritising East as their focal point by positioning it at the top, as discussed below. By contrast, before the discovery of polarity and the invention of the magnet (in China around the 2nd century BCE), North and South were often conceptualised merely in relation to East and West. The word North for example is thought to derive from the Proto-Indo-European unit *ner*, which can mean either ‘left’ (possibly reflecting the way the North is to the left as one faces the sun) or ‘below’ (possibly reflecting the way the sun is at its ‘lowest’ point when in the north).

However, despite the importance of WvE, significantly, people did not appear to regard themselves as being *in* the East or West. Rather, people tended to see themselves as being at the *centre* of the world. They may well have been aware of other peoples, even if only dimly, but these others were usually seen as being on the periphery or fringes of the world. Thus, even if people had developed a sense of WvE in terms of direction and symbolism, as far as humankind was concerned, the dominant conception seems to be more one of centre versus periphery. The evidence for this mode of understanding is again linguistic, but also cartographic.

In terms of linguistic evidence, this conception of centre-periphery is reflected in the names cultures give to themselves versus other peoples. Perhaps the clearest example is China, whose self-name – transliterated as *Zhōngguó* (中國) – literally means ‘middle country’. One of the earliest articulations of the Chinese sense of their location in the world is found in the *Yu Gong*, one of the Five Classics of ancient Chinese literature, describing the legendary Yu the Great and the provinces of his time, which most scholars believe was written in the 5th century BCE. In this, as elucidated by Wang (1999), the term

'four ends' (*sizhi*) was used to signify the utmost ends of the world (i.e., East, West, North, and South) at which one could only encounter vast oceans or deserts. Then, as Wang (1999) further articulates, in later centuries, as awareness of other places and peoples developed, the Chinese developed a conception of three zones – expanding outwards from China at the centre – depending on cultural affinities to and spatial distances from China. First was a 'Sinic Zone' (Korea, Vietnam, and sometimes Japan). Second, an 'Inner Asian Zone', featuring non-Han ethnic groups of nomadic tribes. Third, an 'Outer Zone' including regions in Southeast and South Asia, and Europe in later ages. The differences among the zones were reflected in nomenclature: most places in the Sinic Zone were allocated names – such as *Chaoxian* (Korea) or *Riben* (Japan) – which, if they did initially have derogatory meanings, eventually were lost; by contrast, states in the Inner Asian and Outer Zones were simply referred to by terms equivalent to 'barbarian' (e.g., *yi*, *fan*, and *man*).

Comparable forms of linguistic ethnocentrism can be found in many cultures and languages. Even if people did not include the idea of the 'centre' in their name, it is common for cultures to refer to themselves by terms that simply mean 'people'. This is seen, for example, in the original names of many Native North American peoples, such as 'Inuit'. Some other groups also qualify this label with an adjective that implies that, although other people are recognised, they are not thought especially highly of, such as 'Hopi', which etymologically is thought to mean 'peaceful people' or 'civilized people' (Graves, 2016), suggesting by contrast an awareness of other groups who are *not* peaceful or civilised. To that point, as per the names given by the Chinese to people in the Inner Asian and Outer Zones, it is common to find cultures referring to other peoples by names that are relatively derogatory or at least not bestowing upon them the same dignity and worth as one's own people.

Further support for this idea that pre-historic cultures tended to have a centre-periphery view comes from cartography. Put simply, most early maps put the people the map was created by/for at the centre, with other peoples and places situated towards the edge. Cartography extends far into pre-history, with some of the earliest surviving examples including a representation of a region near Pavlov in the Czech Republic carved on a mammoth tusk, dated to 25,000 BCE, and an Aboriginal Australian cyclon potentially depicting the Darling River, circa 20,000 BCE (Wolodtschenko & Forner, 2007). The art particularly excelled in Ancient Babylonia, involving accurate surveying techniques, such as a map of a river valley on a clay tablet dated to the 25th century BCE (Clark, 2016). Most famous is the Babylonian Imago Mundi, dated to the 6th century BCE (Delnero, 2017). It is the earliest known world map, though it is more symbolic than literal (e.g., it deliberately omits peoples such as the Persians and Egyptians, who were well known to the Babylonians). It centres on Babylon on the Euphrates, surrounded by a circular landmass including Assyria, Urartu (Armenia), and several cities, which in turn are surrounded by a 'bitter river' (*Oceanus*), with eight outlying regions (*nagu*) arranged around it in the shape of triangles, thereby forming a star.

Many other early maps – extending into history itself – maintain this centre-periphery orientation. For example, Anaximander (c. 610–546 BCE) is credited with creating one of the first literal world maps. Although no longer extant, surviving descriptions depict it as circular with the known lands of the world grouped around the Mediterranean Sea at the centre (Couprie et al., 2003). The sea was bisected by a line through Delphi – the world's 'gnomon' (i.e., central axis) – with the northern half called Europe and the southern half Asia. The habitable world – *oikoumenê* in Greek – consisted of small strips of land to the north (Spain, Italy, Greece, and Asia Minor) and south (Egypt and Libya) of the sea, plus lands to the east (Palestine, Assyria, Persia, and Arabia). Lands to the north were cold territories, inhabited by mythical people, and to the south, hot countries of 'burnt' people.

Interestingly, in many early maps, the cardinal directions were not located in the same spatial orientation as current maps. As Gordon (1971) articulates, the genesis of specifying four directions is thought to have emerged by people identifying a fixed point on the horizon and then deriving the other three directions from that. This fixed point was then given particular significance, which in cartographic terms usually meant placing it at the top of the map as if it were the direction people were facing. Crucially, given the symbolic significance of the East – signifying birth, life, renewal, etc., as argued above – it was common to situate *this* at the top and West at the bottom. Thus, people often construed themselves as facing East; in Hebrew, for example, the term for East literally means 'the front' and the West 'the back'.

There are exceptions; ancient China placed more significance on the north-south axis, even before but especially after their discovery of polarity and invention of the compass, thought to be during the Han dynasty (206 BCE to 220 CE) (Guan & Bai, 2021). Again though, intriguingly, this too differed from contemporary orientations, being *South* bearing. But whichever way the directions were located, a centre-periphery mode of understanding was the norm in pre-history and indeed also moving into the epoch we call history. However, with this move into history, we also see the stirrings of the *spatialisation* of people. Instead of the dominant centre-periphery mindset, as cultures became increasingly aware of the significance and location of other peoples, there gradually emerged a view of oneself as existing in a particular *direction* relative to them. The first significant example of this is in the Classical age.

CLASSICAL AGE

Most scholars agree that perhaps the first main case of WvE spatialisation – and certainly the most well-preserved, significant, and influential – arose in the Classical age. Specifically, it occurred in the context of the wars between the Persians and the Greeks. The most famous and consequential account of this conflict – and hence of this emerging WvE binary – comes from Herodotus, the Greek historian and ethnographer, in his great work *Histories*. While the rivalry was long in the making, it came to its conclusion in 480-79 BCE with the famous Greek victories over the Persian king Xerxes at Salamis and Plataea. Herodotus posits real differences between the Greeks and the Persians, but his analysis also subtly complicates these distinctions, demonstrating how they are largely the product of convention and history rather than innate ethnic character or environmental determinism. In doing so, Herodotus portrays East and West in perpetual, dynamic tension, constantly informing and transforming each other through their interactions.

In purely geographical terms, the WvE divide forms an important structure for the narrative. In the beginning of the work, Herodotus recounts the story of Homer's *Iliad* and the war between the European Greeks and the Asian Trojans, explaining that this was the beginning of the perpetual rivalry between East and West (I.4). For the Persians, this invasion of Troy was a violation of natural geographic boundaries, 'because the Persians claim Asia and the barbarian races dwelling in it as their own, with Europe and the Greek states being, in their opinion, quite separate' (I.4).

Yet Herodotus also blurs these rigid geographic borders. Speaking of Europe, Asia, and Libya, he wonders why 'three distinct women's names should have been given to what is really a single land-mass' (IV.45), raising the possibility that such continental divisions might be merely conventional, rather than natural (Thomas, 2000). Additionally, the stark polarities of North and South reinforce the porosity of the WvE boundary. The Egyptians and Scythians live at the extreme edges of the world, the former in the torrid South and the latter in the frigid North, and their opposite climates produce totally opposite peoples (Hartog, 1988, pp. 15-19; Redfield, 1985, pp. 106-109). Whereas the northern and southern neighbours are completely determined by their extreme environments, the WvE axis is a location of exchange, adaptation, and transformation. Herodotus emphasises this fact by locating the start of the war in Lydia, on the frontier between Greece and Persia. Although Lydia was technically in Asia Minor, the Lydian king Croesus was extremely interested in Greek culture, and his empire served as a meeting point between the Persians and the Greeks (I.6-94). Political conflicts over Lydia and the neighbouring Ionia eventually ignited the war, and by beginning on the geographical and cultural margins, Herodotus blurred the boundaries between East and West (Pelling, 1997, p. 56).

Herodotus also complicates the WvE dichotomy through his constant shifting of perspectives. Although much of the book is told from the viewpoint of the Greeks, the very first and last episodes of the massive work are narrated through Persian eyes (I.1ff.; IX.122; see Flower, 2006, p. 274). He gives no hint that the actions or perspectives of the Persians are to be disparaged (Isaac, 2004, p. 262). In the famous proem, he states that he wrote the work so that '[G]reat and marvellous deeds – some displayed by the Greeks, some by barbarians – may not be without their glory'. This reference to the Persians as 'barbarians' should not be read as pejorative. In later centuries, the term had acquired a negative moral and cultural valence such that Plutarch could criticise Herodotus as a 'barbarophile' (Isaac, 2004, p. 273). However, for Herodotus, the term is not an insult but a self-conscious recognition of his own Greek perspective. In the second book, the historian notes that the Egyptians call

anyone who does not use their language a 'barbarian' (II.158), demonstrating the author's sensitivity to each culture's unique vantage point. While Herodotus freely adopts a Hellenocentric framework, he also recognises that other peoples placed themselves at the centre of the world.

Despite the complications and complexities that Herodotus introduces, he does point out substantial differences between the Greeks and Persians. One characteristic set of stereotypes, which informs much of Herodotus' political theory, is that of 'hard' and 'soft' peoples (Redfield, 1985, pp. 110-113). In his narration of Xerxes' invasion of Greece in 480 BCE, Herodotus understands the war as a conflict between the hardy, virile Greeks and the soft, languid Persians, whose luxury ultimately led to their demise. When the Spartan general Pausanias captured the Persian camp upon Xerxes' retreat, he scoffed at his enemies' lavish accommodations. He brought the Greek commanders to see the sumptuous tent of the Persian king 'to show [them] the folly of the Persians, who, living in this style, came to Greece to rob us of our poverty' (IX.82).

The most important difference between the Greeks and the Persians was their style of government. The Persians were ruled by a powerful monarch, while the Greeks governed themselves in (mostly) democratic city-states. To take one example, the contrast of Greek liberty and Persian despotism is clearly seen in the differing atmospheres of political speech. Wary of the king's wrath, the Persian advisers must proceed lightly (III.33-36, VII.8-12), while Greek politicians are free to warn of the dangers of tyranny and critique those in power (V.92, see Pelling, 1997, pp. 56-57; Rood, 2006, p. 276). Such themes have led scholars to read *Histories* as a tale of the conflict between western free democracy and eastern autocratic despotism (see Momigliano, 1979, p. 145ff, and the literature cited in Isaac, 2004, pp. 257-261).

Although Herodotus acknowledges these very real differences between East and West, he generally sees them as products of custom and convention, not as parts of a static ethnic or cultural identity. He writes, 'No race is so ready to adopt foreign ways as the Persian', and he notes that the Persians have adopted their clothing from the Medes, their military dress from the Egyptians, and pederasty from the Greeks (I.135). The Persians were famous for their adaptability. Even the most distinctive Persian characteristic, their despotic monarchy, was a product of intentional choice. When Cyrus' son Darius re-established the Persian kingdom, Herodotus recorded a sincere debate about whether it should be democratic, aristocratic, or monarchical (III.80-82). Although Darius, the supporter of monarchy, eventually won out, there was no innate eastern drive towards despotism in Persia. The monarchy was a product of historical development and conscious choice (Isaac, 2004, p. 268; Gruen, 2011, p. 25). In Herodotus' view, the Persians could have easily chosen another option.

For Herodotus, the Persians' softness and luxury were also products of convention. They began as a hard people subjected under the Medes, but Cyrus enticed them to revolt by contrasting the pleasures of a feast (symbolic of political independence) with the agony of their forced labour (I.125-126). After the Persians overthrew their Median masters, their morals softened as their empire grew, and by 480 BCE, they had devolved to the standard of the languid and luxurious Xerxes (Redfield, 1985, pp. 110-113). The conclusion of *Histories* drives home this point. After Xerxes' expansionary designs had been rebuffed by the Greeks at Salamis in 480 and Plataea in 479, the final scene calls back to Xerxes' grandfather Cyrus the Great. When Cyrus was offered the option of imperial expansion into finer lands, he declined, saying 'Soft countries breed soft men' (IX.122). He understood that a growing empire would bring wealth, comfort, and decline. Through their territorial conquests, Xerxes and his father had eroded the Persian strength and discipline cultivated by their venerable ancestor. Cyrus' aphorism sums up Herodotus' entire perspective on the Greek-Persian dynamic: as culture is malleable, every contact and conflict between East and West contains dynamic, transformative potential.

Yet the final episode is not really about the Persians. Herodotus intends it as a warning to the Greeks (Forsdyke, 2006, pp. 230-233). After Athens played a leading role in defeating the Persian threat in 479, it rose to power over the next fifty years and acquired hegemony over most of Greece (see Thucydides I.89-117). Athens' imperial ventures led to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, which rent Hellas asunder. Herodotus lived through the beginning of the conflict, which began in 431, and his work makes several references to the chaos wrought by the Athenian empire. By closing the work with an admonition on the dangers of Persian imperialism, Herodotus reflects this message back on the Greeks, who are on the precipice of destruction for exactly the same reasons. In the Persians, Herodotus sees a mirror image of his own people, and a warning

for their future and what they may become. East and West may have their differences, but they both fall prey to the same temptations of human nature. In sum, in Herodotus' distinction between the Greeks and Persians, we see one of the earliest cases of the emerging East-West dichotomy. Herodotus mapped the Greek-Persian distinction onto the geographical axis of East and West, but he did not hold this to be a rigid boundary. It was a boundary that was largely conventional and a porous barrier that was constantly challenged by cultural exchange.

THE RISE OF CHRISTIANITY

Our second historical tableau is set in 452 AD, just outside of Ravenna in Northern Italy, then capital of the Western Roman Empire. An army of Huns, hailing from the Pontic Steppe near the Black Sea and under the command of the fearsome Attila, is poised to pillage the city, just as they had sacked Aquileia and other towns further north along the Po Valley. They were met, not by an opposing Roman army – the emperor Valentinian III had fled the capital for refuge in southerly Rome, leaving the city in panicked disarray – but rather by an unarmed delegation headed by Pope Leo (later dubbed 'the Great'), who had ridden north from Rome seeking to persuade the Huns to turn back. 'By that time,' Beckwith (2009) remarks, 'Attila did not need much persuading. His troops were suffering due to the famine and plague in the region, and an army sent by [the Eastern Roman] Emperor Marcian had attacked the Huns' homeland in Pannonia. Attila withdrew and returned home' (p. 195). This near-sack of Ravenna marked the end of the first invasion of the West by nomadic horsemen from Central Asia in historical memory, but many more – the Avars, the Magyars, the Mongols, and the Turks – were to follow, setting a pattern that dominated much of WvE relations for the next thousand years (Keay, 2009).

Attila, as we have said, was met by Leo, bishop of Rome, then the most senior Christian leader within the now officially Christian Roman empire. That Rome eventually adopted Christianity is, from a historical perspective, a deep irony, for Christianity was itself an Eastern invader, born in the Empire's far Eastern province of Palestine as a daughter of Hellenistic Judaism. The Roman proconsul Pliny the Younger referred to earliest Christianity, which he was actively persecuting, as a 'depraved, immoderate superstition [*superstitionem pravam et immodicam*]' (1969, p. 288), while the first-century historian Tacitus, even as he decried the Emperor Nero's brutal persecution of Christians in Rome, dismissed Christianity as 'a pernicious superstition [*exitiabilis superstitio*]' (1937, 15.44, p. 283). Persecution notwithstanding, Christian missionary efforts eventually bore fruit in the conversion of increasing numbers of Romans, including the upper classes. These efforts eventually culminated in Emperor Constantine's extension of legal toleration to Christianity in 312 CE and finally in Emperor Theodosius' formal establishment of Christianity – or at least those elements of it adhering to the confession of the Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) – as the official imperial religion in 380 CE (MacMullen, 1984).

A further irony about the meeting of Leo and Attila presents itself: why was it a bishop rather than an emperor that rode out to meet the advancing horde? Leo was no doubt an exceptional individual, the man for the moment, but he found an opening to step into because of the increasing decrepitude and disarray of the Empire, particularly in the West. Since the death of Theodosius I in 394, the Empire had been ruled by two increasingly independent and even estranged Augusti, one with his capital at Constantinople in the East, and the other with his capital at Ravenna in the West. In 450, the Western empire was nearing its end, insofar as these matters can be cleanly demarcated. In 410, Rome itself had been sacked for the first time in its 900-year history; in 476, the last Western Roman emperor – at least until Charlemagne sought to renew the title – fittingly named Augustulus (little Augustus) would be deposed by the Ostrogoth king, Theodoric, who didn't bother to adopt the imperial style for himself (Heather, 2008).

This growing estrangement between Rome's East and West set the empire's two halves on decidedly different cultural trajectories, with a legacy that looms large even today. In the West, the relative political strength of church leaders, especially the Pope, provided a check on the growth of the state power, which contributed, in time, to the rise of constitutional principles such as the rule of law or limited government (Fukuyama, 2011, pp. 418-434). Equally consequential was the decision of later popes, notably Gregory the Great (r. 590-604 CE), to enforce an eccentric set of restrictions on cousin-marriage and divorce that indirectly brought about the destruction of Europe's tribal societies and their replacement by societies organised less by

kinship than by voluntary association via impersonal institutions such as law and the market (Fukuyama, 2011, pp. 73-87; Henrich, 2020, pp. 155-192). Conversely, the Greek-speaking East and its cultural heirs (e.g., Russia), which were isolated from these developments, found themselves set on a different course, more absolutist in government, more state-controlled in religion, and less individualistic in psychology (Fukuyama, p. 419; Henrich, pp. 177, 225-240).

The growing identification of Christianity with the Roman Empire in this period accounts for the religious conflict at the heart of much WvE interaction over the following 1500+ years, but in 450 or even centuries later, it would be a mistake to think of the Church as even predominantly a 'Western' institution. Even as Paul and Peter were setting their sights on Greece and Rome (cf. Acts 16:6-10), other missionaries, some of them also traditionally apostles of Jesus, such as Thomas and Jude, were heading East, into Syriac-speaking regions in the Sassanid Empire (Dognini & Ramelli, 2001). (Syriac is a dialect of Aramaic, which was likely Jesus' first language.)

The missions to the East bore enormous fruit in the Church's first several centuries, resulting in large and largely independent Christian communities in Persia (King, 2018), and thence in Armenia (the first polity to become officially Christian with the conversion of Tiridates III in 301) (Stopka, 2016), Georgia (Rapp, 2007), the Malabar coast of India (Dognini & Ramelli, 2001), and, by the 8th century, the Tang Capital of Chang'an, where Syriac-speaking missionaries arrived roughly a millennium before the first Jesuit missions introduced Catholicism to the Ming court (King, 2018).

In 451, just a year before Leo met with Atilla, the fragile communion between the imperial and extra-imperial churches was dealt a violent shock at the Council of Chalcedon, which circumscribed the ways of describing how Christ could be both fully divine and yet also fully human. Many of the Churches outside the Roman Empire rejected this Council – and others had rejected the similarly controversial Council of Ephesus (430), forming the 'Nestorian' Church of the East – resulting in a schism that divided the 'Western' imperial churches, both Greek- and Latin-speaking, from their co-religionists in Persia, Armenia, Egypt, Ethiopia, and beyond (Daley, 2018, pp. 174-232). These so-called 'Oriental Orthodox' churches flourished for centuries, though often only as tolerated minorities within officially Zoroastrian, Islamic, or (eventually) Communist empires. In the early modern period, increasing persecution led to a steady decline in their numbers, but they still count roughly 60 million adherents globally, most of them living outside of 'the West' as typically imagined today (Pew Research Center, 2017).

In summary, the late-ancient world saw several important developments in the relations between and conceptualisation of East and West, notably including the rise of Christianity as the dominant spiritual and moral force within the Roman Empire; the growing divides between the eastern and western halves of Rome, reinforced by and reinforcing growing divisions between eastern ('Orthodox') and western ('Catholic') Christians; and the first of many invasions of the West by mounted nomads from Central Asia.

THE MEDIEVAL WORLD

Our third tableau focuses on the warring tribes and empires in the medieval world. Here we leap ahead another eight hundred years or so, to 1254 at the court of the Mongol Great Khan Möngke (r. 1251-59) in Karakorum, where a Flemish Franciscan named William of Rubruck (sc. Willem van Ruysbroek) heads the Christian contingent – grudgingly joined by local priests from the Church of the East – in a theological debate with Muslim clerics and Buddhist monks (Rubruck, 1900, p. 133). William's improbable journey into the heart of the Khanate neatly illustrates many of the critical dynamics of WvE relations in the High Middle Ages, including Western Europe's struggles with the Orthodox Byzantines; the civilisational conflict between Christendom and the Islamic empires that girdled it; the violent eruption of a new nomadic force, the Mongols, out of Central Eurasia; and underlying it all, the Silk Road, which knitted the continent together from Beijing to Paris.

William's journey to the East began with his departure from Paris in 1248 on the Seventh Crusade (1248-1250), led by King Louis IX to recapture Jerusalem from the reigning Islamic Ayyubid dynasty (Jackson, 2020). The Crusades were of course at the heart of the cultural and frequently military rivalry of European Christianity and the Islamic world in the Middle Ages

(Riley-Smith, 2005). In the seventh century, the Arab tribes, newly united (according to their later traditions) by the Prophet Muhammad, burst into the predominantly Christian Levant and, over the course of roughly a century, created an empire running continuously from Spain to the borders of China (Hodgson, 1974).

The fractious Islamic states, which now controlled much of Eurasia, generally tolerated Christians, Jews, and even Zoroastrians in their midst, who were granted the protected, if decidedly second-class, legal status of *dhimmitude*, which subjected them to additional taxes and restricted their ability to preach or even build and repair their places of worship (Friedman, 2003). (Later, Frankish rulers in the Crusader states would impose similar legal disabilities on their Muslim subjects (Riley-Smith, 2005, p. 72).) By the late eleventh century, simmering European resentment boiled over in the face of reports of atrocities committed by Arabs against Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem, which inspired a movement to retake the Holy Land for Christians (Riley-Smith, 2005, pp. 1-23).

After an overwhelming success in the First Crusade, which captured not only Jerusalem but nearly all of the Levant, the European forces, overextended by the long distances and hampered by the reluctance of the suspicious Byzantines (a later and prejudicial name, as it happens; the Greek dynasts still simply described themselves as ‘Romans’) to join the fight, were slowly pushed back by the Arabs. Later Crusades consisted principally of rear-guard actions to stem the losses or largely futile efforts to reverse them (Riley-Smith, 2005).

These efforts frequently went awry, but never more disastrously than in the Fourth Crusade (1204), when a Frankish army, angry at debts owed them by the Byzantine emperor Alexios V, whom they had helped install just a month before in a palace coup, sacked Constantinople and installed a Frankish regime loyal to the Pope and the Western ‘Holy Roman Emperor’ (Riley-Smith, 2005, pp. 157-58). The Latin Empire of Constantinople was short lived (1204-1261) but still controlled the city and its hinterland when William of Rubruck passed through in 1253 on his way to the Khanate.

The sack of Constantinople did irreparable damage to relations between the Latin and Greek halves of Roman Christianity, widening a gulf that had been growing for centuries, driven by theological and political differences, notably over the primacy of the Pope, which most Greek Christians rejected or heavily qualified. While the ‘official’ start of the Great Schism between the Latins and the Greeks is typically dated to 1054 when the Pope and the Patriarch of Constantinople mutually anathematised one another (cf. Chadwick, 2003, pp. 211-212), this event did much less to shape popular sentiment than the shocking violence of the Fourth Crusade, which left the Byzantines intensely suspicious of further ‘assistance’ from the West (Chadwick, 2003, pp. 235-237). The resulting isolation of Constantinople from Christian allies was a key factor in its eventual fall to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, who then pressed deep into Europe, even besieging Vienna in 1529 and again in 1683.

Even as Latin and Greek Christians fought one another and the Islamic empires, the Mongols were rewriting the map of Eurasia. Much as the Arabs had united under Muhammad and then conquered much of the known world, the Mongols, newly united by Chinggis Khan in the 1220s, exploded out of Central Asia and toppled kingdom after kingdom. By 1250, the Khanate had united central Asia, captured most of northern China (leaving a rump Song dynasty to fester in the South until the 1270s), raced across the (now) Russian steppe, and pressed into Europe, defeating a European coalition in Poland in 1241. The Mongols only refrained from driving further into Europe because word reached them of the death of Ogedei, Chinggis’s successor as Great Khan, prompting a mad scramble of generals back to Karakorum to vie for promotion (Beckwith, 2009, pp. 333-345).

From Louis IX’s perch in the Crusader stronghold of Acre, news of the Mongols was both ominous and intriguing: they had threatened Europe but now also hung like the sword of Damocles over the Abbasid Caliphate in the Middle East. Perhaps they could be enlisted as allies against Islam? Despite the failure of several prior embassies to the Mongol court, rumours that a key Mongol leader – Sartaq Khan, ruler of the Western half of the Golden Horde – had converted to Christianity inspired Louis to make another, subtler overture by sending William of Rubruck as a Franciscan missionary to take stock of things and report back (Rubruck, 1900, p. 10).

Though William was not the first medieval European visitor to the Far East, his is the earliest surviving eyewitness account of such a journey, predating Marco Polo's more famous and more southerly travels to the court of Kublai Khan at Beijing by a generation (Polo, 1958). In William's *Itinerarium*, we see an educated European attempting to make sense of a world that had suddenly grown far larger and stranger than he had hitherto imagined; early on, he comments about his first encounter with Mongols (or Tatars, as they were known in Russia), 'I really felt as if I were entering some other world' (Rubruck, 1900, p. 12). He offers a vivid account of life in a Mongol camp, including reasonably accurate depictions of the making of yurts and *kumis*, fermented mare's milk (Rubruck, 1900, pp. 12-20). After meeting Sarqat, he was passed along – much to his chagrin and discomfort – progressively farther east, first to Sarqat's father, Baatu, and then by Baatu to the Great Khan Möngke himself in impossibly remote Karakorum (Rubruck, 1900, p. 20, 90). He describes frequent encounters with representatives of both 'Nestorian' Christianity (i.e., the Church of the East) and Armenian, 'miaphysite' Christians (Rubruck, pp. 42-48, i.a.), all of whom he regarded as heretics and treated with considerable suspicion and disdain (which they frequently seem to have returned), but with whom he also made a common cause in half-baked schemes to bring about the baptism of the various Khans he visited or to confound their non-Christian rivals (Rubruck, 1900, pp. 94-95).

Particularly interesting are William's impressions of Buddhists, as he is among the earliest Western Europeans to encounter the Dharma. He typically refers to Buddhists as 'idolaters' (e.g., Rubruck, 1900, p. 66, i.a.), which reflects both typical Buddhist worship and still more William's own efforts to locate them on his familiar religious map, where 'Christian', 'Jew', 'heretic' (a category that for most medieval Christians included Islam), and 'idolater' or 'pagan' exhausted the terrain (e.g., Augustine, 1865, 5.9–6.11). However, he also frequently refers to Buddhists as 'Tuins', which seems to reflect the Chinese epithet, *t'ao-ren*, or 'men of the Way' (Rubruck, 1900, p. 78) and he occasionally describes them in vivid detail: 'All the priests of the idolaters shave their heads, and are dressed in saffron color... Wherever they go, they have in their hands a string of one or two hundred beads, like our rosaries, and they always repeat these words, *on mani baccam*, which is "God, thou knowest", as one interpreted it to me' (1900, p. 70). Although the interpretation he was given is almost certainly spurious, the picture of a saffron-clad monk fingering his beads and chanting the traditional mantra '*om maṇipadme hūm*' is highly plausible (cf. Studholme, 2002).

William described Karakorum as a cosmopolitan city, with quarters for the 'Saracen' (=Muslim) and 'Cathayan' (= Chinese) population, twelve Buddhist temples, two mosques, and one (Nestorian) church (1900, p. 127). During his stay in this city, the Great Khan arranged a debate among the city's Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian clerics. While William's account of this episode is clearly partial (both incomplete and biased), there are hints of genuine interreligious encounter, as in the Buddhists' critique of the Christian and Muslim commitment to monotheism and creation *ex nihilo*: 'Fools say that there is only one God, but the wise that there are many' (Rubruck, 1900, p. 141). This debate is perhaps most interesting for what made it possible, namely the Khan's ambivalence towards all three of the dominant religions in his newly-taken territories. While most of the Mongol rulers – in the Golden Horde, the Il-Khanate in the Middle East, the Mughals in India – eventually converted to Islam, some in the thirteenth century also adopted Buddhism, such as the emperors of the Yuan Dynasty in China, but also, farther west, Hulegu Khan, founder of the Il-Khanate in former Persian and Abbasid territory, who was 'a Buddhist with two Nestorian Christian wives (Hildinger, 1997, p. 148; Beckwith, 2009, p. 339). In the same period, Christian missionaries of many confessions also assiduously sought the Khans' conversion, as William's journey attests. Had the rulers of the Ilkhanate become durably Buddhist or those of the Golden Horde adopted Christianity, the subsequent history of Eurasia, and *ipso facto* the wider world, might well have been altogether different.

Although William's journey was deeply enmeshed in his age's many overlapping conflicts – of Western Europe with the Byzantines, of Christendom with Islam, of all the above and many others with the Mongols – it was ultimately made possible by peaceful networks of trade and cultural exchange, the fabled Silk Road, that for centuries linked East Asia to the Levant and thence to Europe via a slender thread of Central Asian oasis towns, such as Samarkand, Merv, and Bukhara (cf. Frankopan, 2016; Hansen, 2012). In historical terms, far more significant than the movement of armies over these caravan routes in the Middle Ages was the movement of goods, ideas, and pathogens from the far East, which in this period was the richest,

most populous, and technologically most advanced region in the world, to the receptive West: 'Arabic' numerals (actually developed in India), gunpowder, paper, and the compass, along with the Black Death, made their way from Asia to Europe, where they were refined and widely adopted, making possible the revolutionary developments of the early modern period.

By the high Middle Ages, relations between East and West had once again been profoundly reshaped by ideological and geopolitical developments. Tensions between Orthodox and Catholic Christians reached fever pitch after the sack of Constantinople in 1204 and contributed in no small measure to the ultimate failure of the Crusades, which were but one front in the centuries-long conflict between Islamic and Christian dominions, while the rise of the Mongols' Eurasian empire spelled not only conquest but also unprecedented exchange along trade routes such as the Silk Road.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Our next era of interest is the European Enlightenment, of which 1772 can be considered the high-water mark. That year witnessed the publication of the final volumes of the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers* [Encyclopedia, or Reasoned Dictionary of the Sciences, the Arts, and the Professions]. The *Encyclopédie* had begun with modest ambitions more than two decades earlier, but under the editorial supervision of Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, it eventually filled thirty-three large volumes with more than 74,000 articles, 2,800 engravings, and copious other materials (see Brewer, 2011, for an overview). As a publishing and business venture, the *Encyclopédie* was ambitious. As an intellectual project, it was positively audacious. The preface to the first volume had promised that it would expose 'as much as is possible, the order and sequence of human knowledge' as well as 'the body and substance' of every science and art. In short, it aspired to give an overview of all human knowledge, including knowledge of civilisations beyond Europe.

For all its aspirations to universality, the *Encyclopédie* was the undertaking of a particular community of French intellectuals. These *philosophes* had diverse interests and convictions, but they had all been shaped by a literary culture that had an endless appetite for books and letters that recounted voyages to the East. There was a great deal of this kind of literature. By the second half of the eighteenth century, Europeans had been reporting on their encounters in the East for centuries. Western Europeans had long interacted with the civilisations of the eastern Mediterranean. Starting in the late fifteenth century, the Portuguese ventured farther east and opened up trade routes to India and China. By the time of the publication of the *Encyclopédie*, the Jesuits had been established in China for more than two centuries.

The *Encyclopédistes* were hardly unique in their fascination with the East. A keen interest in the ancient civilisations of the Near East (*Levant*) and Far East (*Orient*) was a hallmark of the Enlightenment as a whole (Osterhammel, 2018). The *Encyclopédie* included thousands of articles – long and short – devoted to describing the geography, culture, religion, and commerce of different regions of the world. Many of these articles provided information – or sometimes misinformation – about the peoples and lands of Asia. The *Encyclopédistes* relied on accounts that were often inaccurate, but they tried to communicate information as accurately as possible. At the same time, they attempted to compare Asian religions, politics, and customs with European ones. They often used these comparisons to condemn barbarism in the East and the West (Harvey, 2012). This was one of the main reasons they undertook these comparisons. At least since at least the publication of Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* in 1721, Enlightenment thinkers had made a habit of using real or imagined Eastern observers to highlight the failings of their nearer neighbours. In many of these comparisons, the peoples of the East seemed more civilised than those of the West.

The text of the *Encyclopédie* often displayed admiration for the civilisations of Asia despite the fact that 'the peoples of the vast continent are little known to us' (section on *Asie*). The entry on 'China' (*Chine*), for example, calls that country 'the most populated and best cultivated country in the world'. The author notes that the Chinese had employed paper, printing, and gunpowder long before those inventions were known in Europe. The *Encyclopédistes* were particularly enamoured with the Chinese state, which they praised as being 'very gentle' in its dealings with the people. They especially appreciated the order

of Mandarins (*Mandarine*) who received their posts based on merit rather than birth and were accordingly known for their 'intelligence and fairness.' The Mandarines were even permitted to correct the Emperor when he erred. At the same time, although the Chinese were undoubtedly the most advanced in Asia and had an efficient government, they were perceived as lacking the knack for invention and discovery that so distinguished Europe. Diderot wrote, 'in general, the spirit of the Orient is more tranquil, more lazy, more concerned with essential needs' than that of the dynamic, entrepreneurial West.

The *Encyclopédia's* evaluation of India was similarly mixed. The author of its entry (*Inde*), the prolific Chevalier Louis de Jaucourt, noted that the sciences had been established in India much earlier than in Europe or even Egypt. The Indians had excelled from ancient times in astronomy, mathematics, and manufacturing. They were even the inventors of the noble game of chess. Tragically, Jaucourt wrote, Indian science had slipped from its preeminent position even as their religion degenerated from its original theism into a superstitious polytheism. They had little ability to arrest this slide. The oppressive climate had made them timid and indolent. Moreover, they suffered from a tyrannical form of government that left the weak with no recourse against the strong.

In their evaluations of the East, the *Encyclopédistes* repeatedly hit on a few themes. They were very interested in Eastern manufactured goods – especially textiles – that often surpassed those produced in the West. They were also convinced that the standard Eastern form of government was 'despotism', as evidenced by the tyrannical governments of 'Turkey, the Mughal Empire, Japan, Persia, and nearly all of Asia.' The despotic vesting of all power in a single ruler reduced the rest of a nation's citizens to a single rank – that of slaves. This tyrannical polity necessarily had harmful effects on the population, leaving them 'timid and dejected' (*Despotisme*). However, they did not necessarily attribute the prevalence of despotism to distinctive features of Asian psychology, nor did they think despotism the universal condition of Asian peoples. China was the great exception to the rule of Eastern despotism.

The *Encyclopédistes* were also interested in the moral condition of the Asian peoples. While many Europeans stereotyped the East as mired in a decadent luxury, the *Encyclopédie* was ambivalent about whether this was an essential feature of Asia. It notes a pattern in which great empires of the East *and* West had risen from simplicity, grown despotic and decadent over time, and then fallen into ruin. However, it suggests that bad government was more to blame than luxury. The author of the entry on 'luxury' (*Luxe*) wrote, 'If to prove to me the dangers of luxury, you were to cite Asia plunged into luxury, misery, and vices, I would ask that you show to me in Asia, China excepted, a single nation where the government was concerned with the morals and happiness of the majority of its subjects.' Bad government was more to blame for the weakness of the East than predilection for leisure and consumption.

Overall, the *Encyclopédie* suggests that the Enlightenment view of the East was mixed and inconsistent. The *philosophes* drew on old stereotypes of the Asian peoples as indolent and reduced to slavery by despotic government, but they also recognised the intellectual achievements of Chinese, Indian, and Arab scholars in fields such as philosophy, religion, and mathematics. They also could not help but admire the sophistication of Asian manufactured goods such as silks. They generally did not think that cultural differences between the East and the West were inevitable. Moreover, the *Encyclopédistes* frequently used the East as a mirror that could reveal the blemishes of European states.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the *Encyclopédie's* thinking about the East is the assumption that the East is fundamentally intelligible. At least parts of the East were tormented by despotism and decadence, but this condition could be understood as the result of bad governance, something Europeans were very familiar with, and perhaps an unfavourable climate. At the same time, the comparativists of the *Encyclopédie* were conscious that they were writing about civilisations that were often older and more sophisticated than their own. The comparison between East and West often turned up much to admire. This admiration finds resonance in our final era of interest, namely the Cold War.

THE COLD WAR

Our last era of interest brings us into contemporary times, in which the dizzying pace of change has generated truly shape-shifting and complex WvE dynamics. Perhaps these are exemplified best by a nation such as South Korea, which over recent decades has been positioned as both Western *and* Eastern to an extent. In terms of focusing our attention more precisely, we might select 1988 as an especially noteworthy historical moment for the nation. First, though, it is worth giving some brief historical context to this era and the significance of South Korea. In that respect, the most salient reference point is the Cold War, arguably the most consequential and emblematic event in modern times in terms of WvE dynamics. Indeed, the war *itself* is often interpreted primarily through the lens of such dynamics, being understood as a conquest between the ‘Western bloc’ (i.e., the USA and its allies) and the ‘Eastern bloc’ (i.e., the Soviet Union and its allies).

However, this very interpretation shows how complicated these dynamics are. This point is made most vividly by considering the status of the Soviet Union. Essentially, whether this is deemed a Western power, an Eastern power, or neither, has been a perennial topic of debate – both within and outside the Soviet Union – and indeed *still is* (White et al., 2010). It is beyond our scope here to drill into the nuances of this debate, but the most salient point here is simply that it exists: there is no way to definitively categorise the Soviet Union – nor the post-Soviet states – as East or West. This very fact highlights the shifting and contentious nature of the WvE polarity, both through history and in the present. In any case, complexities of the Soviet Union notwithstanding, the Cold War involved an extensive period of hostilities between the Western and Eastern blocs, usually considered as spanning the announcement of the Truman doctrine in March 1947 (i.e., in which the primary stated foreign policy goal of the US was to contain Soviet geopolitical expansion) to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 (Gaddis, 2005).

What is the significance of South Korea here? The territory of the Korean peninsula has a long and complex history, the details of which are beyond our scope here. However, in terms of its significance to our WvE considerations, the following facts are especially salient (see e.g., Buzo, 2016). The peninsula had been united as one kingdom from the 7th century onwards, ruled first by the Goryeo dynasty (918-1392), then the Joseon dynasty (1392-1897), before becoming the Korean Empire (1897-1910). However, in 1910, the Korean Empire was annexed into the Empire of Japan, a period of rule that lasted until Japan’s surrender at the end of World War II (September 1945). Crucially, at this point, the two great allied powers, the USA and the Soviet Union, agreed to divide Korea along the 38th parallel into two zones of occupation, with the former administering the South and the latter the North.

This was initially intended as a temporary arrangement (Loth, 2004). However, as Cold War tensions between the USA and the Soviet Union began to take root, by 1948 the occupied zones had become sovereign states: in the North, backed by the Soviets, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea was established by Kim Il-Sung as a communist state; conversely, in the South, with the support of the USA, the Republic of Korea was founded by the authoritarian leader Syngman Rhee as a capitalist state. In this way, tensions between North and South became emblematic of, and indeed a proxy for, the Cold War hostilities between the USA and the Soviet Union. These troubles then of course came to a head with the Korean War, which began on 25th June 1950, when the North invaded the South, and continued until the armistice on 27th July 1953, a tense and fragile agreement that is still in place today (but which is not actually a formal peace treaty, meaning the countries are technically still at war).

Such are some of the basic historical facts and recent context regarding South Korea. Most relevant here, however, is its ambiguous status regarding WvE dynamics. Essentially, from certain perspectives, it could be regarded as an Eastern country. This is certainly so geographically; indeed, as an East Asian nation, it is almost prototypically Eastern (compared to other countries, which while technically in the geographic East are closer to the periphery). Moreover, it is also often considered culturally and socially Eastern, as we discuss further below. Yet, the relevance of discussing the Cold War is that, in that historical period at least, as a capitalist state backed by the USA, South Korea was an integral part of the *Western* bloc. Likewise, it is central to an aggregation historically used as a synonym for the Western bloc, namely the ‘first world,’ defined

by Webster as 'the highly developed industrialised nations often considered the westernised countries of the world'. This is in contrast to the 'second world' of the Eastern bloc, and the 'third world' (those countries in neither bloc), a taxonomy first proposed by French demographer Alfred Sauvy in 1952. Over time though, the taxonomy became more contentious, especially in the way – perhaps inevitably, given the nomenclature – the labels seemed to imply a ranking, particularly economically, whereby the First World came to imply countries that were more affluent and prosperous while the Third World became a signifier for poorer, less 'developed' countries, especially in Africa. As a result, towards the end of the 20th century, this framework fell out of favour, replaced by distinctions such as 'developed' versus 'developing' countries, which took over the mantle of First and Third World categories, respectively (with Second World countries falling into either, as appropriate). However, this too has its critics, not least because deeming a country developed or otherwise still brings the kind of normative judgement and symbolic baggage associated with the First and Third World labels (Lomas, 2023). In any case, South Korea remains a core member of groupings that have been vested with similar meanings to the 'first world', such as the G20 (a forum of most of the world's largest economies, though this also includes Russia, so does not map neatly onto the first and second world distinction).

If we were to view the Cold War through the prism of the Western bloc achieving victory at the expense of the Eastern bloc, South Korea is certainly among the winners. This was the reason for citing 1988 as an especially meaningful year in these dynamics. This is of course one year before the fall of the Berlin Wall, which marked the effective end of the Cold War in the 20th century (even if recent events involving Russia have left people wondering whether the war has indeed ended). Nineteen eighty-eight was the year South Korea hosted the 24th Summer Olympics, widely viewed and celebrated as the culmination and worldwide recognition of the 'economic miracle' that the country had achieved over recent years, a form of 'coming out party' for the nation (Bridges, 2008).

Indeed, its rise was remarkable, being among the fastest-growing global economies from the early 1960s to the late 1990s, and indeed recording the world's very *fastest* rise in average GDP per capita between 1980 and 1990, with World Bank data showing an annual growth rate of 8.63% (compared to the USA, for example, at only 2.37%). As a result, it was heralded as one of the four 'Asian Tiger' economies (alongside Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan). Moreover, its economic prosperity continues to this day. The country was one of the few to avoid a recession following the 2008 financial crisis, and in 2023 ranked 6th worldwide in the number of companies on the Fortune 500 with 18 companies (headed by Samsung Electronics, ranked 25th). Thus, South Korea is certainly a leading light of the industrialised world, and, moreover, in some respects – given its previous standing as part of the Western bloc – is often perceived as a relatively Westernised nation (Jeong, 2017).

However, as this paper has illustrated, East and West are relative terms. Thus, when compared to certain nations, such as North Korea, South Korea may be judged as comparatively Western, but positioned in contrast to nations such as the USA, it tends to be coded as distinctly *Eastern*. There are many such examples, for instance, in the myriad business articles that seek to compare occupational cultures among companies in South Korea and the USA. In these, we often encounter various stereotypes pertaining to WvE, though these appraisals can be both positive and negative as well as both traditional (i.e., with long-standing historical themes) and modern (i.e., trends emerging more recently).

On the negative side of the ledger, for instance, are articles bemoaning a perceived 'toxic work culture' in South Korea. Khameneh (2022), for instance, writes that 'Korean corporate culture' is characterised by 'long hours, suffocating hierarchy, and monotonous tasks', in which 'gapjil, the Korean word for authoritarian, toxic relationship dynamics, is embedded in the culture of the country's industrial giants' (paragraph 4). Indeed, this may not necessarily be an unfounded stereotype. A survey of South Koreans from 2021 showed that over 80% of respondents deemed *gapjil* a serious social problem (Yonhap, 2021). Making a similar point, the Economist (2021) accused South Korea of having a 'notoriously punishing' work culture, which it also linked to *gapjil*, suggesting it licensed 'the authoritarian attitude of senior managers who abuse their power to shout at underlings, insist on unpaid all-nighters and weekend work, assign personal errands, and force juniors to go out drinking for hours upon hours' (paragraph 2). To the latter point, another poll highlighted an issue with the Korean

tradition of *hoeshik*, mandatory after-work meal and drink gatherings, about which 95% of office-employee respondents expressed relief at not having to attend due to COVID-19 restrictions (Choi, 2022). In such analyses, even if accurate, we might nevertheless discern the kind of traditional ‘Orientalist’ stereotypes identified by Said (1979), such as a relative lack of individual freedom and autonomy that Eastern cultures – as seemingly more ‘collectivist’ – are frequently thought to be characterised by.

However, generalisations that are far more complimentary and more modern are also found. An article in *Nature*, for example, attributes South Korean global leadership in information technologies to a top-down innovation system that promotes ‘close collaboration between government, industry, and the academic community in the process of nation building’ (Dayton, 2020, paragraph 17). Similarly, an article by Roll (2021) sought to explain the notion of ‘*hallyu*’ – a Chinese term meaning ‘Korean wave’, which refers to the phenomenal growth and worldwide popularity of South Korean products and culture – with reference to the nation’s express goal to develop its ‘soft power’ and be a leading exporter of popular culture as well as features such as ‘superior quality, cutting edge designs, and a contemporary feel for the products and services’ (paragraph 14).

Indeed, such qualities have been associated with East Asian cultures more broadly, where states such as Japan and Taiwan have likewise developed particular reputations for high-end technological innovation and expertise. In that respect, we might observe a new wave of stereotypes where Eastern cultures are praised as being especially technologically advanced, excelling in intelligence, creativity, and design. However, there is still a trend of connecting such attributes to more traditional features of such societies. Japanese companies such as Toyota have been celebrated for pioneering occupational philosophies such as *heijunka*, described as a ‘lean’ production method that aims to ‘elegantly’ meet demand by reducing waste (Black, 2007). In turn, *heijunka* has been linked to Zen philosophy and practice, which similarly valorises this kind of sparse and efficient yet elegant and harmonious aesthetic and way of living (Hutchinson & Liao, 2009; Lomas et al., 2017).

These are, of course, but a few select examples of contemporary stereotypes that are attached to Eastern cultures such as Japan and South Korea in the modern age. Similarly, our primary focus in this final section on South Korea is also but one example of the complexities of WvE dynamics in recent years. However, such selectivity and partiality is a key point here. As we have sought to demonstrate throughout the article, there are many ways of conceptualising and understanding WvE distinctions. As such, we should be wary of merely viewing WvE differences through the lens of any one comparison or era, and instead be attentive to the incredible dynamic complexity of this binary.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that the WvE distinction has been a salient feature of human cultural development from time immemorial, with increasing importance over the past 2,500 years or so. We began in the era of pre-history, where etymological analyses indicated that these concepts mainly functioned as mere spatial orientation terms related to the passage of the sun, with East and West associated with sunrise and sunset, respectively. It was not until around the 5th century BCE that people began to regard *themselves* as being in either the East or West, and to attach markers of personal identity and meaning to these locations. Our first historical epoch then focused on what is widely considered to be the emergence of this kind of spatialised understanding, namely the wars between the Greeks and the Persians. However, even though Herodotus drew clear distinctions between the two peoples, he constantly subverts the idea of a static East-West dichotomy; while pointing out legitimate differences, he presents these disparities between Greeks and Persians as contingent and mutable and establishes the East-West axis as one of transformation and exchange.

The second era witnessed the rise of Christianity as a dominant cultural form across much of Eurasia, one whose fractiousness, already on display in the 5th century, helps to explain some important cultural variations between Western Europe and its neighbours, both in the Orthodox world and farther East. In the third era, we found Eurasia as a stage for clashing armies and vibrant trade, as Latin crusaders vied with Orthodox Byzantines, both battled Islamic armies, and all the rest looked

with trepidation on the explosion of the Mongols from Central Asia. The fourth era saw the Europeans of the Enlightenment trying to systematise their knowledge of the East following centuries of increasing interaction, finding much to admire and some things to criticise. Finally, we turned our attention to the present day, where we focused in particular on South Korea in the Cold War and its aftermath as emblematic of the complexities and tensions of WvE dynamics in the modern era.

It is hoped that this analysis will deepen and enrich the understanding and discourse around WvE in contemporary scholarship. While Said's analysis of Orientalism is rightly still influential and relevant, his analysis – which mainly attends to the issues surrounding the relationship between Western Europe and the East in the 19th century – is only one part of the WvE story. As we have seen, the WvE polarity is a complex and contested binary, whose boundaries and contours have constantly shifted, with East and West being relative terms (e.g., the ancient Greeks were West compared to the Persians, but East in contrast to Rome). Indeed, this dynamic tension between the polarity has been a continual source of creation, innovation, and change, whether ideas about government, Nestorian Christianity, European gunpowder, or Toyota automobiles. As such, this paper will ideally encourage scholars to adopt a more subtle and nuanced understanding of its dynamics, to avoid the conventional stereotypes that often haunt discourse in this area (e.g., simplistically painting the West as individualistic and the East as collectivistic) and to engage more thoughtfully and creatively with this fundamental distinction that remains – despite all its issues – a central way of parsing and conceptualising the world in which we live.

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SMALL STATES IN GREAT POWERS' GEOPOLITICS: ARMENIA'S ROLE IN THE US POLICY ON THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the geopolitical importance of small states for great powers. The study focuses on the role and significance of Armenia – a small, landlocked state – through the evolution of American regional policy in the South Caucasus region.

Recognising the limited capability of small states, the paper argues that the geostrategic location enhances the small state's importance to great powers, thereby strengthening the position of the small state in the international system. The article concludes that despite geographical isolation, economic weakness, and scarcity of human and natural resources, Armenia is an important country for US national interests. The US interest in Armenia is due to its important geopolitical location at the crossroads of rival geopolitical interests, a number of US strategic priorities in the South Caucasus, Eurasia, and the Middle East as well as Armenia's proximity to energy resources in the Caspian region and other strategically important countries in the region. Another significant factor of the US interest in Armenia is the Armenian-American diaspora community, which projects a certain influence on US domestic policy and US policy in the South Caucasus.

Keywords: small states, geopolitical importance, foreign policy, Armenia, United States.

INTRODUCTION

With the increase in the number of small states in the twentieth century due to decolonisation after World War II, the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, today's international system is largely composed of small states. While the end of the First World War increased the importance of European small states in the world, the dissolution of the USSR brought to the political arena the newly formed small states whose geographical location, natural resources, political and economic orientation, and other factors are important to regional geopolitics and world politics.

As in many areas of political science, there is no clear consensus in the literature on the definition of what constitutes a small state (Maass, 2009). Variables such as population size, geographic size, lack of economic development, limited diplomatic resources, lack of military capacity, and vulnerability to resist the pressures of the great powers are used to formulate the definition of a small state and to describe its power and functions (Thorhallsson, 2018). In today's world, however, it is not enough to explain the size of a state simply by explaining these variables. Other factors, such as its geopolitical importance, role in international organisations or non-governmental organisations, response to global issues, and level of education and technological development, are also important for determining the size of a state in the global context.

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Despite the large and growing body of literature devoted to a variety of issues in small-state scholarship (Ingebritsen et al., 2012; Thorhallsson & Anders, 2006; Thorhallsson & Steinsson, 2017), the majority of studies have focused on the inherent vulnerabilities and different strategies that small states adopt to alleviate the power asymmetry of international relations (Thorhallsson, 2018; Bailes et al., 2016). It is believed that small states have little capacity to influence global affairs (Keohane, 1969). The global international system is formed primarily by the interaction of the great powers pursuing their national interests, while small states are forced to accept the emerging balance of power and the imposed rules of the game (Vital, 1967; Hey, 2003; Thorhallsson, 2018). Yet, notwithstanding the objective limitations of small states, including the lack of human, economic, and natural resources, to influence world politics, small states are of great importance in today's world. In an era of great power competition, the zone of influence of the great powers in the world is heavily dependent on the policies of small and medium-sized states and their alliance choices (Walt, 1985). With that, little attention has been given to how post-Soviet newly independent small states have adapted to international policies and, in particular, their importance to major actors in world politics.

This paper examines the geopolitical importance of small states for great powers using Armenia as a case study. The issue of small states' geopolitical role for global actors is of particular interest and relevance, especially in the context of the contemporary clash of interests between global, regional, and local powers for geopolitical influence and the volatile developments in the Eurasian region and the world at large. The research will elaborate on the 'geopolitical importance' variable of the small states theory. Using geopolitics as a methodological framework for the research, the study will analyse the role of Armenia in the context of US geopolitical interests and policy priorities in the South Caucasus region and will showcase how a small state like Armenia can become important for greater powers to further their influence, interests, and policies in a situation of geopolitical contestation and rivalry. The study addresses the following research question: What is the role of Armenia in US geopolitical interests and regional policy in the South Caucasus?

The analysis is based on methods and approaches of qualitative research design. To conduct the study, I use a case study historical-comparative research method and qualitative content analysis techniques. The primary case selection criterion is that Armenia qualifies as a small state based on the definition provided in the small states scholarship. Another reason that contributed to the selection of this particular case, considering the requirement of the general framework, is Armenia's post-Soviet background and geostrategic location. The historical-comparative research method is used to examine the United States' policies, geopolitical considerations, and priorities in the South Caucasus region under various White House administrations in the post-bipolar period to show how Armenia as a small state has maintained its position in US interests throughout time.

Data collection consists of archival documentation, articles, newspapers, policy papers, published materials, and studies on US geopolitical interests and foreign policy priorities, including studies by Olcott, M. (2002), Khelashvili, G. & Macfarlane, N. (2010), Cornell, S., Starr, F. and Tsereteli, M. (2015), Rumer, E., Sokolsky, R. and Stronski, P. (2017), Poghosyan, B. (2022), and many others who have written extensively on the topic of this research. The materials used to conduct the research also include strategic documents, primarily US National Security Strategies (1994, 2015, 2017, and 2022), the US Department of State's Integrated Country Strategy (ICS) for Armenia (2022), official reports and information provided by the US Embassy in Armenia and US and Armenian state agencies as well as reports and working papers prepared by various institutions and thinktanks.

The article is divided into four main parts. The first elaborates on the concept of small states and geopolitics. The second describes the geopolitical importance of the South Caucasus and gives detailed insights into the primary drivers of US policy in the region. The third part presents the geopolitical interests of the United States vis-à-vis Armenia and offers a comparative insight into Armenia's role through the evolution of US policy on the South Caucasus. The results of the study are summarised in the final part.

CONCEPT OF SMALL STATES AND GEOPOLITICS

There is a longstanding debate in International Relations academic discourse on the precise conceptualisation of small states. The problem of defining smallness is epitomised when the need to make a differentiation between the small state and the non-small state, the small state and the medium state, the small state and the microscopic one, and small states in developed and developing countries in terms of their characteristics. As Thorhallsson and Wivel (2006) point out, small states are best defined as states that are not great powers. Such a position could well be taken as a starting point in understanding small states. However, this definition is clearly insufficient to explain the capabilities of states or to classify them in terms of their size. Thus, it would be useful to provide some clarification to better understand the concept.

In small-state studies, population is the most common criterion to define the size of a state. In most studies, the threshold of the resident population variable varies from less than 10-15 million to as low as one million (Thorhallsson, 2018). In addition to population size, other traditional variables used by scholars to categorise states include geographic size, military strength, economic development, and resources. David Vital (1967) coupled population size with GDP and identified small states as those that have a population of 10-15 million people together with a GDP of at least USD 300 (economically more developed) or a population of 20-30 million people along with a GDP of less than USD 300 (economically less developed). According to Thorhallsson and Steinsson (2017), most definitions of small states emphasise the lack of resources and capabilities that define power and influence.

Studies described small states as being unable to cope with foreign policy challenges or make independent decisions. Rothstein (1968, p. 29) identified a small state as one 'which recognises that it cannot obtain security primarily by the use of its own capabilities and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions, processes, or developments to do so'. Characterising small and weak states, Handel (1981) argues that the national strength of small states is based primarily on external factors (such as international regimes, organisations, or alliances), while great powers enjoy an abundance of domestic sources of power (such as natural resources, human capital, organisational capabilities, industrial development). Vital (1967) points out that, unlike large states, small states are unable to mobilise resources to be sustainable on their own. Developing Rothstein's and Handel's arguments and addressing notions of vulnerability in military and economic security terms, scholars argued that small states may not be able to defend themselves from hostile attacks and rely on other states and international organisations for defence and diplomatic support (Vayrynen, 1971; Bailes et al., 2016); therefore, they need to hold bilateral agreements with stronger countries and form or join alliances to survive, both politically and economically, in the world of larger states and great powers (Keohane, 1969; Thorhallsson, 2018).

Studies also focused on the influence that small states could have on various regional and international processes. Scholars argue that, due to their limited military capabilities, small states lack foreign policy options (Hey, 2003). In contrast to larger states, small states operate within narrow margins, as any ill-considered policy or reckless move may have serious consequences for their very national existence. With a limited set of human capital and natural resources to engage stronger powers, while vulnerable to external changes, small states need to adopt particular security strategies to ensure their survival, such as staying neutral, band-wagoning, balancing, or complementing (Walt, 1985; Thorhallsson & Steinsson, 2017; Thorhallsson, 2018). Consequently, according to Keohane (1969), small states are unable to have a major impact on the international system on their own. However, Handel (1981, p. 6) argued that despite their weakness, small states 'have demonstrated a remarkable capacity to survive despite all the dangers they faced due to their lack of power'. As Handel (1981, p. 257) put it, sometimes they 'can manoeuvre within the international system to obtain help from other states'.

Thus, being heavily dependent on the external environment and vulnerable to asymmetrical power relationships, the question of security and survival remains central for small states. At the same time, the possible advantages small states can use to manoeuvre and broaden avenues for influence are, *inter alia*, their geopolitical importance, the availability of their natural resources, their alliances with great powers, and their participation in international organisations.

In turn, no consensus has formed on the applied meaning of the concept of 'geopolitics' either. Originally coined by Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén in 1899, the concept of 'geopolitics' reflects the interaction of geography, politics, and power. Beginning as a study to describe 'the state as a geographic organism or phenomenon in space; that is as land, territory, area, or, most pregnantly, as country' (Kjellén, 1917, p. 46), the notion of 'geopolitics' has been further developed by a number of scholars and has evolved into a widely accepted and commonly employed concept.

The geopolitical framework used in this study is primarily based on the concept of the sphere of influence that states can exercise in certain territories. Given the diversity of meanings given to 'geopolitics', the present research will use the following definitions as a starting point. Hagan (1942, p. 485) defines geopolitics as 'a contemporary rationalisation of power politics'. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski (1986, p. xiv), geopolitics 'reflects the combination of geographic and political factors determining the condition of a state or region, and emphasising the influence of geography on politics'. Dalby (1988) defines geopolitics as the analyses of international affairs in terms of competition between superpowers. As per Van der Wusten and Dijkink (2002, p. 20), geopolitics can be used for 'a type of analysis using data concerning the international position of a country in light of its geographical features'.

Without going into the details of the development of geopolitical theory, several key concepts should be explained to understand the geopolitical reasoning of the study.

In his *Politische Geographie* published in 1897, Ratzel argued that the state is a biological organism acting in accordance with biological laws. According to Ratzel, the essential characteristics of a state are determined by its territory and location, and its prosperity depends on how well it adapts to the environment (Rumley et al., 1973). Integrating Ratzel's arguments and ideas on the traditional geopolitical division between sea powers or *Thalassocracy* (states whose power derives from supremacy on the seas) and land powers or *Tellurocracy* (the supremacy by possessing large stretches of land) into his theories, Haushofer considered the formation of a strong continental block to include Europe and the North and East of Asia – an alliance between Russia, Germany, and Japan – as the alternative to threats coming from the sea powers, mainly England and the USA, which in his opinion, have started so-called 'anaconda politics' (being in control of the Planetary Ocean, hence the shores, the sea powers could control the mainland, wrapping around and killing by strangling what is on the continent) (Costachi, 2011).

In his fundamental work 'The Geographical Pivot of History', Mackinder (1904) analysed the factors influencing how world power is concentrated in the hands of certain powers and expressed some aspects of geographical causation in world history based on the historical confrontation of land powers and sea powers. Mackinder divided the world into three strategic areas: pivot zone or *Heartland*, inner-crescent, and outer-crescent. According to Mackinder, the vast zone of continental and arctic drainage of Central Asia had long been the geographical pivot of history and remained the 'pivot of the world's politics'. Vaguely defined to include the region of central Eurasia from central Europe eastward across Siberia and the Himalayas to eastern China, this area was referred to by the British geographer as the pivot zone or the *Heartland*. Mackinder came to the conclusion that control of the *Heartland* could become the basis for global domination by one or a combination of continental powers. Thus, he considered it necessary that the maritime powers take steps to adapt to the threat posed by the continental powers.

Developing Mackinder's *Heartland* thesis, American political scientist Nicholas Spykman (1942, p. 8) argued that it was the 'inner-crescent or marginal crescent', the periphery (in Spykman's terminology, the *Rimland*), which really was critical, rather than the *Heartland*. Unlike Mackinder, Spykman believed that this particular land was of crucial strategic importance to control Eurasia.

Based on the theory of the *Heartland*, former US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski (1997, pp. xiii-xiv) characterised the rivalry between the USA and the USSR as a geopolitical struggle for control over Eurasia and the world. In Brzezinski's words, 'ever since the continents started interacting politically, some five hundred years ago, Eurasia has been the center of world power [...] American foreign policy [...] must employ its influence in Eurasia in a manner that creates a stable continental equilibrium, with the United States as the political arbiter [...] it is imperative that no Eurasian challenger emerges,

capable of dominating Eurasia and thus also of challenging America'. In *The Grand Chessboard*, he calls for the development and adoption of a new comprehensive and long-term geostrategy for the whole of Eurasia. According to Brzezinski (1997), it is vital for the United States to control and arrange the major geostrategic pieces on the Eurasian chessboard as well as the key geopolitical centres of Eurasia in order to preserve America's long-term and stable leading role in the world.

GEOPOLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND THE PRIMARY DRIVERS OF US POLICY IN THE REGION

The dramatic changes that took place in the early 1990s – the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War – were the consequences of as well as powerful stimuli for large-scale shifts and changes in the geopolitical structure and world map in the post-war decades. First of all, the state that, to a large degree, occupied, in Mackinder's terminology, the zone of the 'pivot of the world's politics' or the *Heartland* disappeared from the political map of Eurasia, which changed all the major geopolitical definitions on the Eurasian continent. Second, the geopolitical map of the world has undergone significant changes due to the fragmentation of the post-Soviet space into 15 sovereign states, the geopolitical changes on the European continent as a result of the unification of Germany, the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia as well as the obvious pro-Western orientation of most countries of Eastern and Central Europe, including the Baltic states.

The South Caucasus region is particularly important due to its geopolitical significance. The strategic importance of the region, which includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, is largely due to its geographical location. The region is located between the Black and Caspian seas and borders Russia in the north and Turkey and Iran in the south. Situated in the middle of Eurasia, the South Caucasus is a convenient strategic foothold for influencing neighbouring states, such as Russia, Turkey, Iran, the Central Asian republics, and China.

Today, the South Caucasus, having been for many centuries the arena of Russian-Turkish, Russian-Iranian, and Iranian-Turkish political, economic, and military confrontation, to a large extent remains an object of vital interest for many centres of power. The South Caucasus is located at the intersection of the interests of the United States, Russia, Turkey, Iran, China, the European Union (EU), and a number of countries in the Arab-Islamic world. The region has played and continues to play a key role in the process of shaping the foreign policy of a number of countries in the Caucasian, Eurasian, and Middle Eastern directions (German, 2022; Cornell et al., 2015; Fallahi & Shafiee, 2020; Balla, 2014).

In the post-Soviet period, the region acquired special significance when significant oil and gas fields were discovered in Azerbaijan and Central Asian countries. In addition, the transit potential of additional Caspian energy resources plays a major role in raising the strategic importance of the South Caucasus to local and global powers. Of particular significance nowadays are the pipeline projects for the transit of energy resources from the Caspian Sea to Europe, reducing its dependence on Russia (Rondeli, 2004).

At present, the region has serious prospects of becoming an important hub of integrated transcontinental transport systems along the North-South and East-West lines. The existing and planned trade and communication routes are important in providing transport corridors connecting Europe and Asia, Russia, and the countries of the Middle East and South Asia. This region is of great importance in rebuilding the Great Silk Road and China's 'One Belt, One Way' initiative (Silk Road Strategy Act, 1999; Inan & Yayloyan, 2018). Experts claim that 'the Caucasus is the most direct and hence crucial link in the emergence (or re-emergence, after centuries of dormancy) of land-based continent-wide trade corridors that connect China and India with Europe and the Middle East, and vice versa' (Cornell et al., 2015, pp. 17-18). The region therefore plays a central role in Western strategic and commercial access to and from the heart of the Eurasian continent as well as in future interactions between Europe and the Middle East.

The geopolitical importance of the region is also associated with its conflict potential, predetermined by ethnocultural, religious, and political diversity, the disputed boundaries among the countries, the frozen conflicts, the existing unrecognised

and partially recognised states as well as the lack of constructive solutions to the conflicts. Nowadays, the security environment in the South Caucasus is deteriorating continuously and steadily as a result of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war and the Ukrainian crisis (Macfarlane, 2022).

At the same time, in the spirit of classical geopolitics, the South Caucasus is a traditional sphere of confrontation between the Sea and the Land states, between *Thalassocracy*, associated with the West and the ideology of Atlanticism, and *Tellurocracy* associated with the East and Russia and the ideology of Eurasianism, respectively. It is a sphere of confrontation between Russian and Western European geopolitical interests called the 'Eurasianism-Atlanticism' dualism in geopolitics, the control over which is of strategic importance to global geopolitical actors (Bekiarova, 2019, p. 2).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States became one of the key powers actively pursuing its South Caucasian vector of foreign policy, which, thanks to its economic and political-military power, began to intensively influence the development of the geopolitical situation in the region. Even though some experts argue that none of the US interests in the South Caucasus fall under the 'vital' category, the United States has important security and economic interests in the region (Rumer, Sokolsky, & Stronski, 2017).

The important geopolitical position of the region, the presence of vast energy resources, and the region's role in the security architecture of the Greater Middle East are among the factors that determine the long-term strategic interests of the United States vis-à-vis the South Caucasus region (Olcott, 2002). From the US perspective, this region lies between two zones that were for many decades considered very important to the United States. To the north, it borders Russia, which inherited the USSR's nuclear potential and whose potential as an antagonistic power to the US has become evident in recent years. To the south, the region borders NATO member Turkey, an important partner to the United States in American Middle Eastern policy and, as a secular Islamic state, in the US strategy towards the Islamic world. It also borders the Islamic Republic of Iran, a country that has been hostile to the United States since 1979 and whose nuclear initiatives are of great concern. The South Caucasus is considered by Anglo-American strategists as the most important key region in the global construction of new political relations in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, designed to prevent the resuscitation of the Russian superpower and the growing influence of Iran and China (Cornell et al., 2015). Moreover, being included in such geopolitical constructs as 'Greater Middle East' and 'Eurasian Balkans', the influence on this region is the key to global control (Brzezinski, 1997).

Turning to economic issues, although the South Caucasus itself does not represent a significant market for American goods, mainly due to its insignificant size, the strategically important geographical location of the region makes it a potentially important crossroads of world trade. Through the South Caucasus, the United States gains access to the rich natural resources of Central Asia and the Caspian region as well as control over transportation and energy routes important for American and Western companies (German, 2008).

The military-strategic location of the South Caucasus is also particularly important for the United States. Together with Central Asia, the South Caucasus is considered a connecting bridgehead between Europe and East Asia in the post-bipolar US security system (Cornell et al., 2015, p. 13). Additionally, the military-strategic importance of the South Caucasus region is determined by its proximity to the Middle East, where the United States has long-term strategic interests and vulnerabilities, and the Persian Gulf zone, which has been declared a zone of 'vital interest' for the United States (Odom, 1999). The South Caucasus region has potential strategic importance as an alternative transit point for American military assets in the event of serious security challenges in the Middle East. At the same time, the region is considered a strategic buffer zone against a broad spectrum of security threats, such as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, Islamic extremism, uncontrolled migration, and drug and human trafficking, emanating from the vulnerable Middle East (Cornell & Starr, 2006, pp. 21-23). The South Caucasus is also a potentially useful land bridge for the logistical support of American units operating in Southwest Asia. Nowadays, given the shift in US strategic interest towards the Asia-Pacific region, the South Caucasus region is important for the further strengthening of the United States on the Asian continent, both in the context of maintaining global leadership and in terms of American policies towards China, India, the Persian Gulf states, and the states on the southern outskirts of Eurasia (Clinton, 2011).

The strategic importance of the South Caucasus for the United States may also be determined by the fact that, in the long term, in the case of further Islamisation and divorce between Turkey and the United States and NATO, the region could be a potential alternative to Turkey as a strategic partner on the Euro-Asian chessboard. Experts claim that the Islamisation of Turkey has been slowly progressing over the past few decades (Baker, 2018). The growing strength of political Islam in Turkey is evidenced by the success of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), a party with Islamic roots led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in the last two national elections. Despite being defined as a 'conservative-democratic' party, experts argue that it has a hidden Islamic agenda and that its dominance threatens the secular democratic character of the Turkish state (Rabasa & Larrabee, 2008). As for the NATO-Turkey controversy, aside from the Turkish-Greek rivalry that has always impeded NATO's unity, the recent fierce dispute between Ankara and the rest of NATO was the inevitable result of the growing rapprochement between Turkey and Russia, in particular, Ankara's 2017 decision to purchase the Russian S-400 air defence system and Turkish declarations of collaboration with Russia to develop a fifth-generation fighter, which led to Washington's subsequent decision to impose sanctions and exclude Turkey from the F-35 fighter programme (Zandee, 2019).

Another set of factors that determine the strategic interest of the United States in the South Caucasus is related to the three unresolved conflicts in the region. The unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetian, and Abkhazian conflicts have a significant impact on the processes and main directions of development of interstate relations in the South Caucasus countries. The United States is interested in resolving regional conflicts as such unresolved conflicts hinder the process of cooperation and the building of an effective system of regional security (Cohen, 1998). Moreover, armed conflicts in the region pose a serious security threat as they may involve other countries in one form or another, thus becoming potential sources of international military and political problems. In addition, the situation is complicated by oil geopolitics, namely the intertwining of the problems of peacekeeping and oil diplomacy into a complex geopolitical knot (Halbach, 2005). The 2022 Ukraine war has further emphasised the significance of the region for the West in terms of the deterrence of Russia in the post-Soviet space as well as strategic stability in the NATO neighbourhood.

Another dimension of US foreign policy in the region is the promotion and strengthening of democracy as well as the proliferation of America-centric values on the Eurasian continent, which has become an important cornerstone of the strengthening and growth of America's regional and global interests in accordance with the US grand strategy of liberal hegemony (Poghosyan, 2022).

Moving beyond domestic aspects, among the key drivers of the US policy towards the South Caucasus, ethnic Diasporas and interest groups should also be mentioned, mainly Armenian-American lobby groups and oil interest groups that have a selective influence on the US policy in the region (Khelashvili & Macfarlane, 2010).

ARMENIA'S ROLE IN THE US POLICY ON THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

First decade of partnership: from the establishment of diplomatic relations to the events of September 11

Armenia is the smallest country in the South Caucasus and unlike oil-rich Azerbaijan and pro-western Georgia, the landlocked country has, arguably, little to offer. Yet, despite being geographically isolated, economically weak, and sparsely populated, Armenia is an important country for US national interests.

Geopolitically situated in the heart of Eurasia at the crossroads of various civilisations, rival geopolitical interests, and integration projects, from a geopolitical point of view, Armenia occupies an important position as a gateway between Europe and Asia and West and East as well as a link between North and South. According to the ideologists of Eurasianism, in the Moscow-Tehran axis, Yerevan automatically becomes an important strategic link for the spread of the Eurasian impulse from the Centre to the Iranian *Rimland*, which binds Russia to Iran and cuts Turkey off from continental spaces. Through Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, Turkey can gain access to Azerbaijan and further to Central Asia. In this sense, Armenia, as a wedge

driven into the Turkic-speaking world, serves as an important strategic base to prevent Turkish expansion to the North and East – to the regions of the Central Asian Turkic world (Дугин, 1999). At the same time, Armenia serves as a transit route for Iran via Georgia to the Black Sea, Russia, and Europe. Moreover, in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) project, Armenia can offer new connectivity opportunities through its territory between India, Iran, Russia, and Europe (Tasnim News Agency, 2011).

In the early stages of Armenia's independence, due to difficulties in state-building, severe socio-economic conditions, the dire shortage of energy resources, the burden of the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and closed borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey resulting in the country's near-total isolation, the country adopted Russia-oriented foreign and security policies as evidenced by bilateral security and economic agreements between the two states. Armenia is a member of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Since 1995, a Russian military base has been located in Gyumri as a stronghold of Russia in the region. In addition, from a strategic point of view, Armenia is part of the buffer zone created around Russia in the Caucasus, but at the same time, it does not border Russia. Given Washington's interest in preventing Russia from regaining dominance in the South Caucasus, as well as the nature of Armenian-Russian relations, the United States is objectively interested in reducing Russia's influence in Armenia and strengthening the Euro-Atlantic political influence in the country (The White House, 1994).

At the same time, in view of US concerns about the spread of Islamic extremism (Lane, 2023), Armenia's territorial proximity to Iran and the nature of Armenian-Iranian relations further increase Armenia's geopolitical significance. As a Christian country with a rich Western culture that has close relations with countries of the Islamic world, such as Iran, Syria, and Libya, as well as the developed Armenian communities in the Middle East, Armenia could serve as a conduit for Western cultural and political influence in the region as well as a 'bridge' in a possible US-Iranian dialogue (Priego, 2007, p. 9).

Another important factor predetermining US interest in Armenia is its proximity to the rich oil and gas sources of the Caspian Sea. Armenia is considered a potential transit state for oil and gas transportation to the West. Experts claim with the increase in perspectives of Iran coming out of the international sanctions regime after reaching an agreement regarding its nuclear programme, Armenia may become a transit country for Iranian energy resources to the Western markets (O'Byrne, 2019).

The United States recognised the independence of the Republic of Armenia on 25 December 1991, after which diplomatic relations between the Republic of Armenia and the United States were established on 7 January 1992.

In the early years after the breakup of the Soviet Union, the United States was new to the region and ill-prepared for what followed. Due to the absence of vital interests in the region, as well as the historical tradition of participation in the region before the collapse of the USSR, the United States had no clear strategic interest and motivation for strategic engagement in the region. During the years of Soviet rule, Washington's approach to the region was integrated into its broader policy towards the USSR. Unsurprisingly, in the early years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US government adopted a 'Russia first' approach, concentrating on relations with Moscow – as Russia remained the privileged interlocutor for American leaders while shaping its foreign policy in the post-Soviet space – at the expense of the other newly independent republics (Rumer, Sokolsky & Stronski, 2017, p. 5).

During this period, Washington focused on issues directly related to US national security. At the dawn of the beginning of the post-Soviet period – that is, after the colossal geopolitical explosion following the collapse of the USSR – the future foreign policy of Russia and the issue of nuclear weapons of the USSR were the most serious problems for the United States. Its main goal at this stage was to ensure stability in the post-Soviet space and to prevent Russia from returning to the former system of relations with the post-Soviet republics (Brzezinski, 1997, pp. 118-119).

However, in the early years after independence, the newly independent Armenian state received special attention and affection from Washington. Relations with Armenia were strengthened largely thanks to the active and well-organised Armenian-

American community and Armenia's adherence to the principles of democracy. The US policy towards Armenia was based on two main principles: preserving and maintaining the independence of the Republic of Armenia and integrating Armenia into the world community of market democracies (Olcott, 2002).

An important aspect of the US policy towards Armenia in this period was the adoption of Section 907 to the 'Freedom Support Act'. Owing to the considerable efforts of the Armenian diaspora, Congress condemned the policy of blockade imposed by Azerbaijan and Turkey against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh by adopting Section 907 in 1992 as an addendum to the Freedom Support Act, which prohibited Azerbaijan from receiving US financial and technical assistance so long as the Azeri hostilities towards Armenians continued and the blockade against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh persisted (Freedom Support Act, 1992). In addition, the Armenian community lobbied actively to stop US economic and military aid to Turkey through the 'Humanitarian Aid Corridor Act', which prohibited the provision of US federal aid to countries obstructing the delivery of US humanitarian aid to third countries (Humanitarian Aid Corridor Act, 1994). In addition, Armenia was the largest recipient of American humanitarian aid among the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries and ranked third in the world (after Israel and Egypt) in terms of its volume per capita (Gregg, 2002, pp. 23-24).

The second half of the 1990s became the starting point for a new American strategy in the South Caucasus, which was largely due to the US energy priorities in the Caspian region, the completion of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the Baltic states by August 1994 and of the nuclear arsenal from Belarus, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan by 1996 as well as the deterioration of US-Iranian relations, as evidenced by the imposition of sanctions against Iran in 1996 (Iran-Libya Sanctions Act – ILSA) and the strengthening of the policy of its international isolation (Kauzlarich, 2001).

Another important aspect that prompted the United States to intensify its actions in the South Caucasus was the adoption of the new Russian foreign policy towards the CIS, the so-called 'New Strategic Course' in 1995, in which the territory of the CIS was declared as a zone of 'main vital interest of the Russian Federation in the fields of economy, defence, security, and protection of the rights of Russians, the provision of which is the basis of national security'. The 'New Strategic Course' also stressed the necessity of 'strengthening Russia as a leading force in the formation of a new system of interstate political and economic relations in the post-Soviet space' (Указ Президента Российской Федерации, 1995).

The central element of the new US policy was a reassessment of Russia's foreign policy, which, according to the Clinton administration, had become more rigid and less stabilising than before. Another objective was to contain Iran and Islamic fundamentalism (Kauzlarich, 2001). The key point of American policy in the Caucasus during this period was the policy in the oil and gas sector and the creation of the East-West transit corridor. The United States supported the construction of several pipelines in the region in order to reduce world energy prices by diversifying global energy supplies as well as to reduce the importance of routes through Russia and Iran (Rumer, Sokolsky & Stronski, 2017).

The change in American policy has borne fruit in the shortest possible time. After a 12-day visit to the United States by Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev in 1997, where he met with President Bill Clinton and some members of Congress, a number of promising documents with the US were signed. Notable among these were four new contracts with Exxon, Mobile, Chevron, and Amoco. From the US perspective, these new energy projects were to stimulate economic aid and infrastructure development (including pipelines) and support for strengthening independence, security, democracy, and civil society development as well as to promote US business and strategic interests in the region (Cornell et al., 2005).

Another outcome of the shift in US policy was the rebalancing of relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan. The growing US interest in Caspian energy created a domestic 'oil lobby' that effectively opposed the influence of Armenian diaspora lobby organisations in US relations with the two states. This was particularly evident in the US government's political support for the construction of a large Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the parallel Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline to transport Azerbaijani oil and gas through Georgia to the Black Sea and further into the Mediterranean Sea, bypassing Armenia and thereby strengthening its regional isolation (Cornell et al., 2005).

A clearer strategy towards the states of the South Caucasus region emerged during the second term of the Clinton administration when it became clear that the development of Caspian resources, the creation of trans-Eurasian communications, and the implementation of geopolitically advantageous oil transportation routes for the United States could not be successful without establishing the stability and security of the states of the region and strengthening sub-regional stability in the zone of passage for oil and gas pipelines (Talbot, 1997; Cohen, 1998).

Thereby, since the second half of the 1990s, the priority direction of Armenian-American relations has been the solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the rapprochement between Armenia and Turkey (primarily by opening the border between the two countries), and the inclusion of Armenia in the Euro-Atlantic structures. According to the American plan, the solution of these issues would not only contribute to the delineation of critical communications and the establishment of a secure transport system in the region to ensure the safe operation of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines, but would also greatly contribute to solving more important foreign policy and strategic tasks: the ousting of Russia from the region (including by eliminating Armenia's security dependence on Russia), the reduction of Iran's influence, the strengthening of Turkey's position in the region, the development of the East-West regional axis, and the creation of a situation of preferential control over the region (Nichol, 2008; De Waal, 2010; Cornell et al., 2015).

To this end, in early 1997, the United States stepped up its efforts to settle the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by becoming co-chair of the OSCE Minsk Group together with France and Russia. As co-chair of the Minsk Group, the US supported the 1996-1997 negotiations by proposing solutions based on a 'step-by-step' approach that delayed the settlement of the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. Still, the opposing approaches of the conflict sides cut those initiatives short (Hopmann, 2014).

At the same time, since the second half of the 1990s, some ambivalence in the attitude of the United States towards Armenia has been noted. This can be explained by the fact that Washington was not satisfied with a number of important aspects of Armenia's foreign policy closely related to the country's geopolitics. The US political establishment did not approve of the strengthening of Armenia's ties with Russia and the expansion of Armenia's political and economic contacts with Iran (Hunter, 1994). At the same time, the difficult socio-economic situation and growing corruption led to the political demoralisation and illegitimacy of the Armenian political establishment. As a result, Armenia lost its once-very positive democratic image in the eyes of the West. Another factor hindering the development of Armenian-American relations was the position of the Armenian government on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, which became more hardline after the ouster of Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan by his successor Robert Kocharyan (former President of Nagorno-Karabakh). However, the growing nature of US-Azerbaijani relations, particularly in the energy sphere, should be noted as the main constraint in the development of Armenian-US relations at this stage.

The arrival of a new Republican administration in Washington in early 2001 led to a change in the priorities of the US policy towards the South Caucasus. The policy of President George W. Bush was based primarily on the deployment of the National Missile Defence system; therefore, oil interest was secondary to US priorities at this stage. However, conflict resolution was still an important element of the US political agenda for the region (Jaffe, 2001). In this regard, perhaps the most notable US initiative during this period was Colin Powell's efforts to untie the Nagorno-Karabakh knot by the authority of the top US political leaders through a series of bilateral meetings between the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Key West in April 2001 (Hopmann, 2014). However, no success was achieved in the negotiation process. The two leaders left the meeting convinced that the terms of the proposal for a negotiated peace, in particular over the possible status of Nagorno-Karabakh, would be unacceptable to their peoples.

Further development of Washington's approach to the region was influenced strongly by the September 11 terrorist attacks, the consequent declaration of the War Against Terrorism, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The protection of US security interests around the world became a top priority for the Bush administration. Armenia, along with the other two South Caucasian countries, joined the war on terror and contributed troops to the US-led coalitions in Iraq and Afghanistan (Carney, 2011).

One of the results of George W. Bush's policies during this period was the lifting of Section 907 restrictions for the fullest implementation of the War Against Terrorism. In October 2001, the Senate passed a bill allowing the president to withdraw Section 907 if he decided that it was in the interests of US national security to do so (H.R. 2506-107th Congress, 2001). Starting with President George W. Bush in 2002, both Republican and Democrat US presidents have waived Section 907 annually ever since despite the continued blockade of Armenia by Azerbaijan and Turkey and intense protests by the Armenian-American community (US Department of State, 2003).

After September 11, the issues of the newly independent states, their democratic transitions, the energy infrastructure corridors, and even the conflict resolution in the South Caucasus became second-tier priorities on the US foreign policy agenda.

US-Armenia relations in the 2000s: from 'rose revolution' to the Ukrainian crisis

The situation changed after the 'rose revolution' in Georgia in 2003, which led to a reorientation of US policy in the South Caucasus. The new Georgian government demonstrated a strong commitment to democratic and market reforms by taking bold steps to fight corruption, launching a massive privatisation campaign, and many other reformist initiatives. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan was increasingly retreating to a more oppressive authoritarian regime amid the transfer of Heydar Aliyev's presidency to his son, Ilham, massive corruption, and abuse of power. Armenia's democratic transition was also uncertain, as political power was largely concentrated in the hands of a small group of political and business elites responsible for the growth of oligarchic monopolies, corruption, and fractional rivalry. In light of these developments, and also because the energy infrastructure construction in the region was mostly completed, the United States shifted the focus of its policy in the South Caucasus from Azerbaijan's energy resources to Georgia's democratic reforms and Euro-Atlantic aspirations (Rumer, Sokolsky & Stronski, 2017).

The war between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 was another turning point in the evolution of US policy towards the South Caucasus. Russia's resistance to Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, which ended in the August war, made it clear that it would not tolerate the expansion of NATO and the EU in the 'sphere of privileged interests' (Clover, 2008). However, the August war in Georgia had wider implications for the region. Having lost its regional favourite, US policy towards the South Caucasus had actually lost its focus and intensity, which later paved the way for a transfer of policy leadership in the South Caucasus to the European Union (Rumer, Sokolsky & Stronski, 2017). This move in favour of the EU (and also, arguably, Turkey) was aimed at reducing the risk of disagreements with the Russian Federation and rebooting the relationship with Moscow (Khelashvili & Macfarlane, 2010).

In the case of Armenia, shortly after the Russian-Georgian war, the most important diplomatic initiative of the United States was the intensification of dialogue between Armenia and Turkey aimed at restoring diplomatic ties and opening the Armenian-Turkish border. However, this initiative was not crowned with success, since the Turkish side associated the opening of the border with the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict under an agreement acceptable to Azerbaijan (De Waal, 2010).

By the end of the Bush administration, given the increasing salience of Russian policy in the region coupled with growing Russian assertiveness, the US policy toward the South Caucasus focused mainly on managing the status quo in the region, preventing a new conflict between Russia and Georgia, avoiding the disruption of the sluggish negotiation process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and helping Georgia to navigate a potentially difficult political transition in the post-August war era. Another goal was to maintain access to the region as a gateway to the Afghan war theatre (Rumer, Sokolsky & Stronski, 2017).

With the election of Barack Obama, the United States revised its foreign policy vis-à-vis the South Caucasus. The impact of US involvement in Iraq, the uncertainty in Afghanistan, the unresolved Iranian nuclear issue, and the aftermath of the global financial and economic crisis led to a change in US foreign policy. The main priorities of the US were focused on the

formation of a more balanced regional security system in the region, not separated from efforts to improve relations with Russia (Khelashvili & Macfarlane, 2010). This required the resolution of conflicts, stability, and cooperation in the region by involving regional powers.

President Obama's first foreign policy initiative was an attempt to break through international mediation on the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement in 2009. Aside from foreign political and geopolitical factors of US involvement in the mediation process, there were some subjective factors. Faced with the realities of big politics, President Obama was forced to rely on Turkey as an ally in the 'Muslim world' and reneged on his promise to recognise the Armenian Genocide that he made during his election campaign. Therefore, the only dignified exit strategy for Obama was direct engagement in the mediation of the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement (Shugaryan, 2016). In addition to certain geopolitical benefits for the US in the Black Sea/Caucasus region, the prospect of establishing diplomatic relations and opening the border between the two countries was also important in the framework of US global security interests, the fight against terrorism, and the promotion of US interests in Eurasia and the Middle East. In this vein, under the Swiss-American mediation, the 'Zurich Protocols' on the normalisation of Armenian-Turkish relations were signed by the foreign ministers of Armenia and Turkey in Zurich in 2009. However, the protocols have never been ratified by either party.

At the same time, since regional stability was at the top of the US agenda in the South Caucasus, the United States, together with Russia and France, as co-chairs of the Minsk Group, also tried to promote a consensus between the parties in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and to negotiate a solution based on mutual compromise. Hence, the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was one of the main topics on the agenda during US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's regional visit to the South Caucasus in July 2010 (Reuters, 2010).

Another major shift in US policy vis-à-vis the South Caucasus was triggered by events in Ukraine in 2014. Despite the temporary improvement of the relations between the United States and Russia due to the Obama administration's 'reset' policy, starting in 2014, the differences between the two nations ran deep, and relations strayed mainly due to the crisis in Ukraine, the Kremlin's annexation of Crimea, and the war waged by Russian forces in eastern Ukraine (Trenin, 2014).

The Ukrainian crisis demonstrated that Moscow would fight back against the enlargement of NATO and the EU into the post-Soviet space, claiming an exclusive geopolitical sphere of influence around its periphery. The Kremlin sought to gain, or rather regain, its influence over its 'near abroad' using leverage such as energy and security as well as Eurasian integration projects (Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации, 2015).

As a result of Russia's intervention in Ukraine and the unlawful annexation of Crimea, the United States and its European partners expelled Russia from the G8. Both sides exchanged mutual accusations and imposed a series of economic and political sanctions, which have been in place since 2014.

At the same time, Russia, a long-standing ally of Syria, obstructed US policy aims by supporting the Bashar al-Assad government against rebels backed by the United States. As experts from Carnegie Endowment put it, after the annexation of Crimea 'in Syria, the Kremlin has capitalised on its intervention to highlight Russia's return to global prominence,' thereby reasserting Russia's great-power status (Rumer, Sokolsky & Wess, 2017, p. 13).

Ukraine's crisis marked the end of the post-Cold War era, when Europe, Russia, and the United States united to achieve common security without divisions or spheres of influence. There was an urgent need to shape a new policy framework of engagement with the South Caucasus. Meanwhile, 'in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis, the three states of the South Caucasus find themselves in a geopolitical no man's land between Russia and the West' (Rumer, Sokolsky & Stronski, 2017, p. 20).

The growing struggle between the West and Russia in Eurasia has significantly frustrated Armenia's delicate multi-vector foreign policy, making it difficult to manoeuvre between the country's Europeanisation and security partnership with Russia. Having succumbed to the Kremlin's political pressure due to the country's overreliance on Russia in traditional security,

energy, and economic matters, in September 2013 Armenia cancelled its plan to sign its already negotiated Association Agreement with the EU and made a geopolitical choice in favour of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Subsequently, however, Armenia succeeded in regaining a degree of balance in its foreign politics. As a result of resumed negotiations with the EU, the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) was signed on November 24, 2017, creating a new framework for further cooperation between the EU and Armenia (Gevorgyan, 2021).

The unpredicted victory of Donald Trump brought new approaches and shapes to the US foreign policy agenda. During Trump's presidential campaign, new commitments to advancing American interests were proposed. According to this new approach of the Trump administration, in all US foreign policy global issues, American national security and economic interests were to prevail. This found its reflection in adopting the 'America First' foreign policy principle. In addition, in contrast to President Obama's National Security Strategy, which stated that the protection of democracy and human rights is related to all enduring national interests (The White House, 2015), the Trump administration in its first National Security Strategy made it clear that it is 'not going to impose our values on others' (The White House, 2017).

President Trump's new approach to foreign relations issues seemed to provide a new opportunity to improve relations with Russia and to resume talks and dialogue on a number of complex issues. In this vein, Trump's apparent interest in lowering traditional American commitments abroad, particularly to NATO allies, was seen in Russia as another positive signal, given Russia's anxious attitudes to NATO's eastward enlargement and expanding the Alliance's military potential in Eastern Europe (Sanger & Haberman, 2016). However, time proved that the structural differences between the two nations were not amenable to an easy solution, and Trump's expectations to lift US-Russian relations from the crisis crashed into reality over the conflict in Syria.

At the same time, US relations with Turkey suffered as a result of the country's transition to an increasingly authoritarian political system. Ankara came under pressure from the West over its purchase of Russian S-400 air defence systems. In response, the US imposed sanctions against Turkey for its purchase of Russian weapons as part of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act. Given Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's rapprochement with Vladimir Putin, it became clear that Ankara was unlikely to play the role of the West's partner in the South Caucasus, but rather pursue its own agenda in the region.

Meanwhile, the 2018 'Velvet Revolution' and the subsequent power transition in Armenia promised new opportunities for the advancement of US-Armenia relations. While the leaders of the new administration did not seek to change Armenia's foreign policy priorities or alter Armenia's geopolitical alignments, Armenia's commitment to strengthening its democratic path was positively received in the West (The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, 2018).

The Trump administration showed some signs of readiness to play a more active role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution given its significance in reducing Russia's influence in the region. In particular, the visit of US National Security Advisor John Bolton to the region in October 2018 showed that the US stood for a compromise that would bring both Azerbaijan and Armenia closer to the West. It is noteworthy that commenting on Armenia's potential security alternatives, John Bolton stressed that 'the surest way to reduce excessive outside influence in Armenia is to reach a resolution on Nagorno-Karabakh'. The US National Security Advisor also spoke of possible US arms sales to Yerevan, an ally of Russia in the South Caucasus (Tamrazyan, 2018).

Overall, however, while Russia was pursuing a tougher line, claiming its exclusive geopolitical sphere of influence, the United States, for the time being, focused on other global and regional issues, from fighting against the 'Islamic State' in Iraq and Syria to the challenge of a rising China, remaining a bystander in the South Caucasus and leaving many uncertainties about Washington's policy in the South Caucasus (Rumer, Sokolsky & Stronski, 2017).

The Perspectives of US-Armenia Relations after the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War

The Nagorno-Karabakh war of 2020 and the election of Joe Biden, whose main foreign policy goals were aimed at strengthening the transatlantic alliance between the US and Europe and returning the US to its leadership role among world democracies to address the urgent global challenges, marked another milestone in US policy towards the South Caucasus (The White House, 2022b).

Starting on September 27, 2020, with an Azerbaijani offensive, the Nagorno-Karabakh War lasted 44 days and ended in Armenia's near-total defeat, with a Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement finalised on November 9, 2020. In addition, the January 11, 2021, meeting of Presidents Vladimir Putin and Ilham Aliyev and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan set in motion the creation of transport links between Armenia and Azerbaijan (The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, 2020).

This not only completely altered the balance of power between Armenia and Azerbaijan, but also fundamentally changed the military and political map of the South Caucasus and created a new regional order. As mediator and guarantor of stability in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, with Russian boots on the ground, Moscow managed to wield leverage in the South Caucasus, sidelining the role of the United States and France as Minsk Group co-chairs and maintained influence both in Armenia and Azerbaijan following the collapse of the Soviet Union. At the same time, the Azerbaijani victory in the war, achieved with the massive diplomatic and military support of Turkey (ranging from supplying Turkish Bayraktars and sending Syrian mercenaries to fight on the Azerbaijani side to threatening Armenia at the diplomatic level) has significantly bolstered Azerbaijan's and Turkey's positions, reinforcing their political and military influence in the region and cementing Ankara as a new security actor in the region. Meanwhile, the US, the European Union, and the OSCE – the international mediator of the conflict for over two decades – have been unable to project any influence in the region both during the clashes and in the conflict settlement process (Meister, 2021).

Moreover, Azerbaijan has further exacerbated the crisis by continuing to bring its troops into the territory of Armenia. Starting in May 2021, Azerbaijani troops crossed several kilometres into Armenian provinces Syunik and Gegharkunik, occupying around 41 square kilometres of the internationally recognised territory of Armenia. Azerbaijan refused to withdraw the troops from Armenian territory despite repeated calls to do so by the US, the EU, France, and Russia. In July and November 2021, new clashes occurred, as a result of which Azerbaijan occupied additional Armenian territories.

Armenia's defeat in the Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020, as well as the continuing tensions along its border, in particular the invasion of Armenia's sovereign territory by Azerbaijani troops, stressed the importance of the United States' more active involvement in the region by strengthening its role as co-chair of the Minsk Group and in other diplomatic efforts to regain its place in South Caucasus geopolitics. This found its reflection in the Integrated Country Strategy for Armenia adopted by the US Department of State in May 2022 (US Department of State, 2022).

Another important event in US-Armenia relations during Biden's presidency was the official recognition of the massacres and deportation of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire in 1915-1923 as genocide by President Joe Biden in 2021, which made him the first US president to use the word 'genocide' in an annual presidential speech addressed to Armenians (The White House, 2021). This historic move was in line with the Biden administration's foreign policy agenda to promote democratic values and to further human rights on the international stage. It was welcomed by Armenia and the Armenian diaspora, especially in light of the events that took place in the region starting in 2020.

US antagonism towards Russia has grown exponentially following Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, which has had ramifications around the world and significantly increased the confrontation between Russia and the West. Following the Russian invasion, the United States, the G7, and the EU imposed a series of harsh financial, economic, and political sanctions on Russia, aimed at collapsing the Russian economy and deterring Russia's aggressive policies. In this vein, the United States has been pursuing a strategy aimed at further limiting Russia's role in the post-Soviet area and reducing Russia's great-power capabilities (Gvozdev, 2023).

The war in Ukraine has also exacerbated regional tensions in the South Caucasus. By taking advantage of the created power vacuum in the region as Russia focused its attention almost entirely on Ukraine, in September 2022, Azerbaijan launched a new offensive and occupied more territories of sovereign Armenia, thereby forcing Armenia to accept all Azerbaijani demands (Grigoryan, 2023).

With Russia's limited reaction to Azerbaijan's attacks against Armenia and the inability of the CSTO to stop the ongoing hostilities on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, the EU led the negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan on a future peace treaty, countering Russia's unilateral actions in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Isayev et al., 2022). The United States has also stepped up its diplomatic and other efforts to make a new role for itself in the negotiation process between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh as well as to encourage and facilitate the rapprochement between Armenia and Turkey. Amid renewed hostilities by Azerbaijan on the border with Armenia, on September 17, 2022, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken called Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Aliyev several times, seeking to contribute to the establishment of the ceasefire. Then, on September 19, 2022, Blinken organised a trilateral Armenia-Azerbaijan-US meeting on the margins of the UN General Assembly (US Embassy in Armenia, 2022a).

Furthermore, around the time of the mid-September Azerbaijani aggression, the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi, joined by Chairman of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce Frank Pallone, and representatives Anna Eshoo and Jackie Speier, arrived in Armenia for a three-day visit to convey 'the strong and ongoing support of the United States' for Armenia for their security and democracy (US Embassy in Armenia, 2022b). Since Armenia's independence 30 years ago, Pelosi has been the highest-ranking US official to visit Armenia. The Speaker of the US House of Representatives held meetings with Prime Minister Pashinyan and other senior Armenian officials to discuss US-Armenian relations and the current security situation. She strongly condemned Azerbaijan's attacks on the sovereign territory of Armenia as well as the role and policy of Turkey in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (US Embassy in Armenia, 2022b). In addition to geopolitical interests, the visit had some domestic political motives aimed at securing the support of a large Armenian-American community for the Democratic candidates in the mid-term elections of November 2022.

Nancy Pelosi's visit caused a pro-American movement in Armenia. Given Russia's ambiguous position during the Nagorno-Karabakh war of 2020, an increasing number of Armenians are turning to Washington for support in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. At the same time, several pro-Western political parties call on the government to withdraw from the CSTO or at least freeze Armenia's membership in the Russian-led military alliance (RFE/RL, 2022).

Washington's engagement in the Armenian-Azerbaijani talks reached a new level on September 27, 2022, when US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan held a meeting at the White House between Armen Grigoryan, the Armenian Security Council Secretary, and Hikmet Hajiyev, a senior foreign policy advisor to Aliyev (The White House, 2022a).

Throughout 2023, the United States significantly increased its involvement in the South Caucasus region, particularly in fostering peace negotiations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Through a series of statements and diplomatic meetings, the US administration demonstrated its commitment to supporting negotiations between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Notably, on February 18, during the 2023 Munich Security Conference, US Secretary of State Blinken convened a tripartite meeting with Prime Minister Pashinyan and President Aliyev, marking a pivotal moment in advancing bilateral peace talks (U.S. Department of State, 2023a). Subsequently, in early May 2023, another round of negotiations was conducted at the George Shultz National Training Center for Foreign Affairs, with the participation of foreign ministers from both Armenia and Azerbaijan. During these discussions, Ministers Ararat Mirzoyan and Jeyhun Bayramov engaged in meetings with US Secretary of State Blinken and US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan (US State Department, 2023b). The final negotiations of 2023, facilitated by US mediation, occurred between June 27-29, once again at the George Shultz National Training Center for Foreign Affairs, where Minister Mirzoyan and Minister Bayramov convened for discussions (US State Department, 2023c).

Thus, after the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the US intensified its policies in the South Caucasus. Having created the American platform for the Armenian-Azerbaijani peace talks, along with the Russian and European talks, the United States restored its role as an active player in the South Caucasus region, successfully beating Moscow's monopoly on mediation between Armenia and Azerbaijan and further limiting Russia's role and influence in the region.

CONCLUSION

Acknowledging the vulnerabilities and limited capability of small states, this paper concludes that geostrategic position enhances small states' importance to great powers, thereby contributing to strengthening a state's positioning in the international system. Having analysed the role of Armenia for the United States in the context of US geopolitical interests and policy priorities in the South Caucasus, the study shows how a small landlocked state can become important for greater powers to further their influence, interests, and policies.

The geopolitical interest of the United States in Armenia is due to its important geostrategic location at the crossroads of rival geopolitical interests and integration projects, a number of strategic priorities of the US in the South Caucasus, Eurasia, Asia, and the Middle East as well as Armenia's proximity to energy resources in the Caspian region and other strategically important countries in the region, namely Russia, Turkey, and Iran. Another significant factor of US interest in Armenia is the Armenian-American diaspora community, which projects certain influence on US domestic policy, US policy in the South Caucasus, and mainly US-Armenian relations.

For most of the post-Cold War period, US policy in the South Caucasus lacked a strong strategic impulse due to a lack of vital interests, strategic urgency, and a historical tradition of participation. At the same time, the increasing antagonism between the West and Russia due to the war in Ukraine and the increasing role of Russia and Turkey in the South Caucasus in connection with the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, which significantly changed the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus region, have provided a structural basis for a more strategic American approach to the region. The United States has intensified its policies in the region to reflect the changing dynamics and to play a more active role in regional processes.

The critical goal of the US in the Armenian direction, taking into account American geopolitical interests and foreign policy priorities in the region, is to minimise the political-military and economic influence of Russia in Armenia and to weaken Armenian-Iranian ties, while maximising US political influence. Therefore, the US is interested in breaking up the Russian-Armenian alliance, ending Armenia's membership in the CSTO, and bringing Armenia into closer integration with the Euro-Atlantic community. To secure and advance American strategic interests, the US has been interested in strengthening Armenia's sovereignty and independence as well as ensuring security, stability, and democracy in the country. The main priorities of the United States also included the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict within the framework of international structures (eliminating Russia's unilateral actions), the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement (primarily opening communications), the inclusion of Armenia in the regional East-West axis as well as the use of the vast Armenian diaspora in promoting American interests.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the importance of Armenia as a small state for the United States is a very complex topic and, given the rapidly changing situation, it certainly invites further research on this dynamic part of the world.

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

JYRKI KÄKÖNEN¹

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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NEW ERA OF UNCERTAINTIES: HOW US FOREIGN AID WORKS IN TIMES OF WAR

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ABSTRACT

Russia's full-scale military aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 has brought immense damage to the people of Ukraine and Europe, their critical resources and infrastructure, and the whole idea of sustaining peace based on democratic principles. Rebuilding peace and democracy in this challenging time requires a lot of effort; foreign aid serves as the instrument for achieving this goal. It is noteworthy that since the invasion in 2022, Ukraine has become the top European recipient of US Foreign aid for the first time since World War II. This article examines the foreign aid relationship between the US and Ukraine in the years 2022 and 2023 and suggests that foreign aid is an important foreign policy tool despite certain criticisms regarding the effectiveness of the aid, its oversight mechanisms, and the diverse range of critical approaches, which argue that aid is perceived as a capitalist instrument serving the interests of a strong capitalist West rather than those of developing countries. Contrary to criticism, this article suggests that US aid to Ukraine in this difficult time is important in illustrating that democracy can survive in the global arena, undermining Russia's future aspirations of attacking others, and supporting a secure environment for cooperation among states. This article studies the determinants of US foreign aid from the perspective of the donor and the recipient country, as a two-way and complex process, through the prism of liberalism. Based on the liberal tradition, we can assume that US assistance in Ukraine is focused on aiding Ukraine in countering authoritarian Russia and safeguarding democratic principles but is also influenced by the recipient's commitment to liberal values, including the promotion of peace, a robust economy, and a thriving democracy.

Keywords: foreign aid, US-Ukraine aid relations, US strategic interests, recipient influence on donor decisions, Russia-Ukraine conflict, liberalism.

INTRODUCTION

The promotion of liberal ideas through foreign aid is one of the foreign policy goals of the US and powerful Western states. The end of the Cold War saw the launch of a wave of democratization and led to the strengthening of liberal ideas. Today, liberal ideas face new challenges, such as threats that range from populism to authoritarianism. The United States has used foreign aid as a tool for rebuilding peace and democracy for over 50 years now. US foreign aid falls into four general categories: humanitarian aid to address the immediate needs of a population in crisis; developmental aid to help develop economies in the long term; military aid for explicit purposes of defence; and political-economic aid to support political stability, economic policy reforms, and democratic institutions. It can provide support in the countries where the US has strategic interests and supports activities related to peace talks, human rights, political and criminal justice reforms, etc. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).

Before I suggest an analysis of the US-Ukraine aid relationship from 2022-2023, I would first like to address different perspectives on the efficiency or even counter-productivity of the aid.

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Some observers have questioned the legitimacy of the Western aid model. Some might argue that foreign assistance does not always bring positive results and that it could on the contrary bring harm to the recipient country. Critics usually cite “aid to corrupt governments in Africa or US anti-communist aid to Latin American rebels and regimes. Numerous examples exist of hospitals, schools, and other facilities that were built with donor funds but have not been used. In some instances, critics even argue that foreign aid may do more harm than good, by reducing recipient government accountability, fuelling corruption, damaging export competitiveness, creating dependence, etc.” (Lawson, 2016). Critics also argue that “democracy assistance is code for manipulative great power interference in the socio-political business of a sovereign state – a particularly invasive form of governmentality and world ordering. Consequently, criticisms of democracy assistance roam well beyond questions of effectiveness, into ethical queries about the overall appropriateness of politically centred developments program” (Mandaville & Mandaville, 2007). However, according to the liberalist approach of the International Relations Theory, aid plays an important role in the democratization process. The flow of aid from rather strong advanced democracies to emerging democracies is seen as a great contribution to global peace and economic development. It could also be suggested that countries have a moral responsibility to help those in need, whether these are basic needs to survive or more complex issues such as protecting statehood and institutions.

Another aspect of criticism towards the Western aid model is the effectiveness of the aid, which could be ambiguous, primarily due to the lack of comprehensive evaluations aimed at assessing their real-world impact. In the case of US foreign aid, it is significant to highlight that the evaluation mechanism of the effectiveness of the aid has been there for decades. “The importance and methodologies of evaluation of foreign aid have been varying over time starting from 1961 since USAID was established. The process of evaluation responded to political and fiscal circumstances. Starting from 2003 accountability to Congress became a major evaluation priority with the foreign assistance to support military activities in Iraq and Afghanistan” (Lawson, 2016).

It is also interesting to look at whether foreign aid goes to corrupt governments. “New York University professor and former World Bank economist William Easterly made the case in his 2006 book, *The White Man’s Burden* that development aid is dominated by top-down planners and bureaucrats with little accountability and that there is scant evidence that aid boosts a country’s long-term growth. Nobel laureate Sir Angus Deaton argues that aid gives a lifeline to corrupt governments, insulating them from the political pressures that would create a better functioning state” (McBride, 2018). The criticism regarding aiding corrupt governments could be addressed with an argument suggested by George Ingram that only a fifth of US economic assistance goes to governments, 20% goes to non-profit organizations, 34% to multilateral organizations, and 25% elsewhere. Typically, when the US supports a country that is ruled by a corrupt or autocratic government, assistance goes through private channels, NGOs, or multilateral organizations and enhances the accountability of the US economic assistance (Ingram, 2019). This indicates the US efforts to avoid the possible negative effects assistance might bring.

To sum up the aid-related arguments, it could be suggested that foreign aid has both positive and negative aspects and that its efficacy depends on a variety of factors. Although there are valid concerns about the misuse of aid funds and the potential negative or manipulative effects of aid on recipient countries, measures have been taken to prevent such misuse and ensure that aid is used effectively. Furthermore, “The research has shown that it can lead to significant progress in reducing poverty, improving food security, and enhancing the well-being of individuals. Moreover, measures have been put in place to prevent the misuse of aid funds, thereby increasing its efficacy” (Wu, 2022).

When it comes to promoting democracy, diplomacy and support for peaceful processes are likely to be more effective than using military force. Overall, foreign aid can be an important tool for promoting international development and stability, but it should be provided with caution and evaluated regularly to ensure that it is achieving its intended goals.

The 2022 US national security strategy outlines that America’s fate is linked to events beyond its shores, including challenges such as the global pandemic, economic downturn, decline in democracy, and growing rivalry from authoritarian states (National Security Strategy, 2022). The unlawful military aggression of Russia against Ukraine in 2022 had far-reaching

consequences on the citizens, resources, and vital infrastructure of Ukraine and Europe. This act of aggression shattered the fundamental concept of maintaining peace based on democratic principles. The Russian military intervention in Ukraine was perceived as an assault on democracy in wider Europe and even the world. Thus, it is crucial to support Ukraine for three primary reasons: first, to demonstrate that democracy can endure on the global stage; second, to curb Russia's future aspirations of assaulting a peaceful nation; and third, to foster a more prosperous and secure environment for cooperation among states in the liberal world order. Aiding Ukraine, from the US perspective, in these circumstances could prove to have more benefits rather than faults.

To contextualize the main goal of the article, I will analyse the arguments in favour of US aid to Ukraine and weigh them against the criticism of the motives and effectiveness of aid. Considering the wide response the world had to Russia's illegal attack on Ukraine, and democratic principles in general, this article will cover an empirical analysis of the foreign aid dynamics between Ukraine and the United States from the beginning of the attack in 2022 until now. The article will also cover a theoretical analysis of the aid relationship based on liberal tradition but will also examine aid through structuralism and critical theories.

As mentioned, Russia's illegal attack on Ukraine was perceived as a general threat to democracy. Soon after Russia invaded Ukraine, the member states of the Council of Europe (CoE) agreed to suspend the membership of Russia in the organization due to its violation of the fundamental principles of international law, such as invading a country and committing massive war crimes. The European Stability Initiative in its newsletter says that Europe's club of democracies needs to protect itself from countries blatantly violating its rules (ESI, 2022). The UN General Assembly resolutions of the eleventh emergency special session condemn the 24 February 2022 declaration by the Russian Federation of a special military operation in Ukraine. One year after the Russian invasion, during the eleventh emergency special session of the UN, member states also deplored the dire human rights and humanitarian consequences of the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, including the continuous attacks against critical infrastructure across Ukraine with devastating consequences for civilians, and decided to suspend the rights of membership in the Human Rights Council of the Russian Federation (GA Resolutions ES – 11/6 2023).

Freedom House “urged democratic countries to remain unwavering in their support for Ukraine and its people, including by providing direct budgetary support to the Ukrainian government, with appropriate oversight, to withstand the considerable economic and social shocks the invasion has caused” and underlined that “democracies must prepare to support Ukrainian reconstruction as it rebuilds and further strengthens its democratic institutions” (Freedom House, 2023).

Why is 2022-2023 a critical period for evaluating the US-Ukraine aid relationship? As mentioned above, this could be answered by the importance of showing the world that democracy can survive. “What happens next in Ukraine matters enormously, because this will send a powerful signal – encouraging or discouraging – to anyone attempting to become democratic, especially if they live within striking distance of well-armed autocracies such as China, Russia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Such signals will be read carefully throughout Asia, but also in Latin America, Africa, and even Europe itself” (Acemoglu & Johnson, 2023).

Since the beginning of the war, President Biden's administration has shown immense support to Ukraine in terms of emergency, military, and humanitarian assistance. Freedom House president Michael J. Abramowitz, on the 1st anniversary of Russia's full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, urged democratic governments to “publicly recognize that Ukrainian victory is the only acceptable outcome of this unjust war, anything less guarantees future aggression from Moscow. While the provision of weapons and technical and security assistance is needed to achieve victory on the battlefield, democracies must also provide support for human rights defenders, journalists, and citizens who are engaged in the vital wartime work of documenting human rights violations, collecting evidence of war crimes, and assisting those whose lives have been forever changed by the war” (Freedom House, 2023).

What are the determinants of US foreign aid to other countries in general? The determining factors of aiding other countries would be to help promote global stability; advance the donor country's national interests; and address humanitarian needs as well as support economic development. The United States aims to create a more prosperous and secure environment, prevent conflicts, and build partnerships (USAfacts, 2023) through liberal order.

The United States has given out over \$3.75 trillion in foreign aid since the end of World War II. The aid has varied over time due to various geopolitical circumstances, economic conditions, and national priorities (USAfacts, 2023). In specific periods, US aid addressed concrete regions and was determined by its own concrete interests, such as fighting communism in Asia in 1946-1977, containing the communist threat in Latin America in 1961-1968, fighting AIDS in Africa from 2004 to the present, establishing a stronghold in the Middle East from 1976 to the present, where the US saw Egypt and Israel as important players for promoting regional stability, and fighting the war on terror from 2003 to the present (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). I would add to the list aiding stability in Europe from 1992 to the present, under which I assume support for the transitioning of post-Soviet states into democracies. Peace and security investments make up one of the largest sectors of American assistance aid, enabling other states to combat terrorism, counter international crime, or stop the spread of weapons of mass destruction (Cohen, 2020). Different US administrations choose different approaches to foreign aid. President Trump's administration was not the biggest advocate of democracy aid; however, things changed with the Biden administration, which defined support for democracy as one of its priorities (National Security Strategy, 2022).

The US strategic interest in helping to maintain and further build a peaceful and strong Europe could have been the determinant for giving aid to Ukraine in the aftermath of the Cold War. Furthermore, due to the extremely challenging security situation in Europe these days, it is very interesting to look at aid relations between the two countries since Russia's full-scale military aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, which certainly elevated the importance of different types of aid. Upon Russia's 2022 military aggression against Ukraine, the US provided different types of aid almost uninterrupted until September 2023, when Congress did not vote for a state budget with the attached Ukraine assistance (Copp & Baldor, 2023).

What factors have mostly determined the aid to Ukraine in the past two years? Is the US strategic interest the main determinant for providing aid or does Ukraine's openness to democracy also play a role in aid decision-making? Why did US aid to Ukraine not have full support in Congress in September 2023? The answers to these questions and the analysis provided in the article could indicate that the United States does not always make decisions regarding aid based solely on its strategic interests, but also pays attention to the openness of the recipient country towards democratization. In openness, I assume the openly declared democracy values of the recipient country, the reforms made towards democracy, and the transparency in using received foreign aid.

The article will study whether a donor country gives aid based on its own interests or, beyond that, whether other factors and circumstances may influence the aid. I suggest that rather than a one-way process, it may be a two-way, complex process. In this article, I argue that the US national interests and its own domestic support for foreign policy on the one hand, and Ukraine's determination in fighting the war against a common enemy (Russia) since 2022 and its readiness or shortfalls in cooperating with the West in terms of advancing and protecting democracy on the other, are both determining factors for the US aid to Ukraine.

The research on the possible influence of the recipient country on the donor country will be an important addition to the international relations academic space. The fact that American foreign aid is determined mainly by its strategic interests has been well studied in the literature for years, while the possible influence of the recipient's openness to democracy on the donor's aid decision-making is not similarly well studied, especially in such a concrete case as the US-Ukraine aid relationship from 2022-2023.

RESEARCH GAP

In this section, I will demonstrate that, even though there are a lot of articles studying foreign aid, most of them focus on aid effectiveness and donor perspective, while there is limited work addressing how the recipient country can influence foreign aid. The goal of this article is to enrich the existing literature on foreign aid by adding the recipient's perspective.

Alberto Chong and Mark Gradstein claim that the existing empirical literature on foreign aid has been almost entirely devoted to the issues of aid allocation and the effects of aid in recipient countries (Chong & Gradstein, 2007). There are a vast number of articles that concentrate mostly on the outcomes of US aid in the recipient country and on why giving foreign aid is so important to the United States itself, such as 'Sponsoring Democracy: The United States and Democracy Aid to the Developing World, 1988-2001' by James M. Scott and Carie A. Steele T. In the article, the authors talk about democracy assistance from the United States through the US Agency for International Development (USAID) to investigate the impact of democracy aid on democratization in Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia between 1988 and 2001. In another article, 'Does aid support democracy?' by Rachel M. Gisselquist, Miguel Niño-Zarazúa, and Melissa Samarin, the authors study whether aid has a positive impact on democracy and how. What factors most influence its impact?

Other interesting research on the topic includes: 'Aid and good governance: Examining aggregate unintended effects of aid' by Geske Dikstr, an article which speaks about the unintentional negative effects of aid on good governance, whether the effect of aid on democracy has become more positive since the Cold War, and the effect of aid on government capacity and reducing corruption; 'Twenty Years of Western Democracy Assistance in Central and Eastern Europe' by Pavol Demes, which discusses the need to adapt democratic assistance to the specific needs and expectations of each country; 'Has Assistance from USAID been Successful for Democratization? Evidence from the Transition Economies of Eastern Europe and Eurasia' by Andreas Freytag and Jac C. Heckelman, an article in which the authors study the extent to which aid can help serve the aim for which it has been paid; and 'Does "Democracy Aid" Promote Democracy? What Works and What Does Not' by Yoonbin Ha, a very interesting article in which the author makes it clear that he would concentrate on donors and not recipients because foreign aid is part of foreign policy. Many scholars study the impact of aid on democratization: "Goldsmith (2001) found a positive but small relationship between aid and democratization in Africa. Carapico (2002) concludes that aid did not have such an effect in the Arab world and may have even had the opposite impact. Burnell (2000) and Sogge (2002) are also skeptical of a relationship between development assistance and democratization. Likewise, studies of the impact of aid conditionality on recipient country political reform are mostly skeptical (Collier 1997; Crawford 1997)" (Scott & Steele, 2011).

However, there is a lack of research on whether and to what extent the recipient and its democratic aspirations determine the donor's foreign aid.

The current article aims to contribute to the existing literature by studying the two-way process of aid dynamics. Even though many recipient countries are not mature democracies, willingness for socio-economic modernization, achieving good governance, and economic freedom will delay or avert the backsliding of democracy. Thus, it is important to see how willing Ukraine is to democratize and how much attention is paid to this factor by the United States in a particular war condition where the necessity to aid Ukraine supposedly calls for no strategic questions.

Despite this lack of research in 'recipient triggers for aid', the evidence that the recipient country influences aid to some extent in the donor country may be found in James Scott's and Carrie Steele's article where they say that part of US aid allocation decisions is based on strategic calculations of where aid may do the best and where democratization is both preferred and possible (Scott & Steele, 2011). The authors also mention that although the connection between general foreign aid and democratization has been underdeveloped theoretically, scholars have argued that general development assistance should promote democracy in numerous ways, which includes enhancing civil society and constraining recipient behaviour through conditionality (*ibid.*). Conditionality is what would indicate the two-way process of aid dynamics, meaning that if a recipient country fulfils the democratization conditions it should be able to receive aid from a donor.

If we have a look at US aid allocation policies to different countries, we can see the changes it has undergone. In certain cases, aid allocation was motivated by economic development in the receiving country; in others, policy conditionality includes “the support for democracy, respect of human rights, rule of law and good governance. The US Foreign Assistance Act in 1974 vowed that no assistance would be extended to governments involved in human rights violations. Humphrey-Cranston Congressional Amendment, approved in 1974, suggested that no security assistance may be provided to any country the government of which engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights” (Ali, 2018).

It is also worth mentioning that not all US aid is given based on the conditionality of democratic aspirations and the protection of human rights from the recipient country. “Although the US government did a commendable job by passing legislation to link the provision of aid to respect for human rights, previous research shows that these laws have rarely been implemented. Lars Schoultz’s study illustrates that in contrast to these laws, the US provided more aid to governments that were accused of human rights violations. Michael Stohl, David Carleton, and Steven Johnson found that during the regimes of both President Nixon and Ford, governments engaged in human rights violations were provided considerable aid. Likewise, in the tenures of President Carter and Reagan respect for human rights was not a significant factor in determining the sanctioning of aid to several developing countries across the world. Their findings show that numerous countries that were considered vital for safeguarding US foreign policy goals received US aid irrespective of their dismal display of political and civil liberties” (Ali, 2018).

Another interesting factor while analysing the impact of the recipient country’s democratic aspirations on the donor country’s aid allocation policies would be to look at the factors that affect the support of foreign aid among voters in donor countries. The authors Chong and Gradstein claim that aid is linked with inequality, corruption, political leaning, and taxes in donor countries but has little relationship with the economic conditions in the receiving country. The authors emphasize that aid generosity is found to be mainly affected by donor country governments’ efficiency and less by the recipient one (Chong & Gradstein, 2007).

To sum up, foreign aid plays an important role in advancing development and democratization, though it is criticized by many. Numerous articles in the International Relations field largely focus on the impacts of US aid in recipient countries and the significance of foreign aid to the United States itself. However, there appears to be a gap in research regarding whether and to what extent the recipient country influences the decision-making of the donor in providing aid. This study aims to contribute to the existing international relations literature on foreign aid by examining the two-way dynamics of the aid process. The research presented in this article indicates that some of the decisions regarding US aid allocation are shaped by both the strategic considerations of the donor and the recipient’s openness to democracy.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This article is based on empirical research on the foreign aid dynamics between Ukraine and the United States from the beginning of Russia’s full-scale aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 until now. I use qualitative methods for data collection. The data I have gathered covers information on US aid to Ukraine, on US national interests in aiding Ukraine, and on Ukraine’s democratic aspirations and readiness to defend peace and security in Europe during the research period.

The research and analysis of the gathered qualitative data helps find answers to the questions mentioned in the introduction: What factors have mostly determined US aid to Ukraine in the past two years? Is US strategic interest the main determinant of providing aid to Ukraine or does Ukraine’s openness to democracy also play a role in aid decision-making? “Empiricism is based on a broad assumption that knowledge can be accumulated through experience and observation. Theories of IR can be generated through careful observation and experimentation” (Lamont, 2015). In this article, I try to establish whether giving aid in the case of US-Ukraine relations from 2022-2023, during Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, is a two-way

process rather than a one-way process. For this, I try to observe the general aid-giving policy of the United States as well as US aid to Ukraine in the specific period. I also study Ukraine's efforts to democratize even in challenging war times as well as how the country tries to be open and cooperative with the West. In the case of the current article, observing the relationship between the aid-giving of a donor and the Western aspirations of the recipient would help conclude whether the donor gives aid only based on its strategic interests or considers the recipient's attitudes.

For the research, mainly qualitative methods are used based on Christopher Lamont's 'Research Methods in International Relations'. The qualitative data provided in the article includes internet-based research and archival or document-based research. I use primary source documents such as official documents and public speeches of officials as well as secondary sources such as analytical and media articles, opinions, and reports issued by American and/or Ukrainian governmental and non-governmental agencies and research organizations. The selection of these specific sources is based on their relevance to the research objectives, as explained below. The analysis of academic work used during the research provides a foundational framework for understanding the US-Ukraine general aid relationship through the prism of liberalism, contributing to the theoretical underpinning of this research as well as critical theoretical analysis.

Regarding US foreign aid, I explore data gathered from Jonathan Masters and Will Merrow's article 'How Much Aid Has the US Sent Ukraine?' The authors suggest that since World War II, Ukraine has become the European country receiving the most US aid. In addition, I use Jim Garamone's article from the US Department of Defense, which provides information on the amounts and nature of aid and the support of President Joe Biden's administration to Ukraine. Information from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) as well as the Congressional Research Service is used to describe congressional decisions regarding assistance. Another important source for gathering foreign aid-related data and analysing it is USAID assistance and their assessments of Ukraine's democratic aspirations through their official website as well as in articles published by CSIS. Information regarding strong US support for aiding Ukraine is also found in primary sources such as the speeches of President Joe Biden, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken, and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin.

Gathering data on US National interests towards aiding Ukraine is done through analytical papers such as Anthony Smith's 'Supporting Democracy After the Invasion of Ukraine' by Carnegie Europe. The article indicates that Ukraine's defence against Russia's war is an attempt to defend world democratic values and US national interests. President Biden's speeches also reflect that supporting Ukraine is a worldwide commitment to support freedom everywhere, and Secretary Blinken's speeches indicate that the US administration has a clear vision that Ukraine's fight against Russia is a fight for the security of the rest of Europe and European values intertwined with US national interests. The Willson Center's article is used for collecting data on the US National Interest: written by Syzov Vitaliy. 'Four Reasons Why Supporting Ukraine is a Good Investment' explains that strengthening Ukraine means strengthening the US's international position. Another important source for the data about US national interests is the bipartisan task force analysis, which addresses the global decline in democratic freedom and the authoritarian dangers to US national security. It also talks about elevating democracy support as part of US foreign policy. The task force is comprised of Freedom House, the CSIS, and the McCain Institute. The George Bush Institute, Freedom House, and the Penn Biden Center also suggest an analysis that confirms that the American commitment to democracy remains strong. For research purposes, American interest in aiding democracy looks through certain perspectives from the US Summit for Democracy.

Regarding recipient country triggers on foreign aid, data will be gathered about Ukraine's democratic reforms from secondary sources such as the analysis suggested by Michael Runey in his article 'Supporting Ukraine's Democracy after the War'. Ukraine's anti-corruption, anti-monopoly, and market regulation efforts and the continued support of the US towards democratic reforms are reflected in Secretary Blinken's speeches. Data is also collected on Ukraine's national perspective of defending democratic principles from the analytical work 'How Democracies can respond to the Invasion of Ukraine' by Laura Thornton. Freedom House reports are assessed to study the political rights and civil liberties in Ukraine in 2021 and 2022 to compare how and whether the situation in that realm changed before and after the war. Data on Ukraine's European aspirations is also presented through the USAID analysis. Monica Toft in her work also assesses Ukraine's national policies.

In analysing recipient country triggers on US aid, I also look at US domestic political resilience regarding aiding Ukraine, which is based on the insufficient transparency of the spending of the aid on Ukraine's end. This contributes to the argument of whether recipient country developments might have an effect on aid decision-making. In that regard, important works are presented by Grayse McCormick and Julia Mueller.

For the theoretical analysis, I use different approaches from donor perspectives as well as liberalist assumptions and critical theories. I will be focusing on Onur Sen's work on strategic aid, which tries to explain the motives and choices of international donors, on the liberalist assumptions that are presented in Jackson and Sorensen's book *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*, and on Clara Mayerl's work on the Democratic Peace Theory. For my theoretical arguments, I also use Alim Eray's (2019) comparative analysis of the Ukraine crisis through the prism of offensive liberalism and liberal internationalism as well as Larsen Henrik's 'Which Kind of Realism Should Drive Western Support'. For critical theories, I collected data from Barnabe Malacalza's 'The Politics of Aid from the Perspective of International Relations Theories'.

In this analysis, I excluded sources that were not directly related to US aid to Ukraine during the specified time frame. There are certainly academic limitations to the article based on the real-life policy decisions the US makes to aid certain authoritarian countries based on its strategic interests, and I may be biased in my selection criteria since I believe that democratization would only bring more peace and is the only way for countries to align themselves with the West. Being close to Western values means also being close to economic development and political stability. Other limitations considered in the article are that I may not have accessed complete data on US aid provided to Ukraine and certain official and media sources might have subjective biases.

THEORETICAL EXPLANATION

Giving foreign aid could be categorized and explained through the prism of various IR theories. Donor countries could give aid based on their self-interest, global security, goal to improve their international status, etc. Onur Sen in his dissertation suggests that from a realist perspective, donor countries give foreign aid to increase their physical security and further their economic interests. "A liberal approach would suggest that donors give aid to produce global public goods, stability and alleviate problems from global inequality" (Sen, 2018).

It could be assumed that donor countries use their security and economic interests and their interests related to recipient needs and performances when making foreign aid decisions. According to Onur Sen, aid is related to the power index and regime type of the donor country. "If a donor prioritized security and economy then its decisions are Realist; if needs and performances of recipients – Liberalists" (Sen, 2018).

The United States is both a high power and a democratic country and its foreign aid tradition dates back years. It is a founder of democratic order, and its main goal is to sustain and develop it. At the same time, US decision-making about foreign aid also includes the aspects of improving the economic and democratic performances of the recipient countries (Sen, 2018). Thus, US decision-making is not strictly about national interest but also considers developments in the recipient country as argued in the current article.

Liberal IR theorists see the connection between peace, democracy, and aid. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, "democratic sponsor states" such as the United States and others in Western Europe publicly committed themselves to supporting and expanding democratic governance in the developing world (Scott & Steele, 2017).

Liberalism plays an important role in explaining US-Ukraine aid relations. "Republican liberals argue that liberal democratic constitutions and forms of government are of vital importance for inducing peaceful and cooperative relations between states. All liberals agree that in the long run cooperation based on mutual interests will prevail. The positive liberalist outlook was strengthened after the end of the Cold War and was supported by the defeat of communism and the expected universal victory of liberal democracy" (Jackson & Sorensen, 2013).

“Republican liberalism is built on the claim that liberal democracies are more peaceful and law-abiding than are other political systems. The argument is not that democracies never go to war; democracies have gone to war as often as non-democracies. But the argument is that democracies do not fight each other. Why are democracies at peace with one another? The first is the existence of domestic political cultures based on peaceful conflict resolution. The second element is that democracies hold common moral values which leads to the formation of what Immanuel Kant called a ‘*pacific union*’” (Jackson & Sorensen, 2013).

The United States aims to democratize countries by all means in the name of liberal ideas to expand the zone of peace (Mayerl, 2014). We can assume that US aid to Ukraine is exactly for the Kantian purpose of peace. The Russian Federation and its actions do not affect the narrow circle of states in Europe but pose a threat to the regional security of the continent, thus also affecting NATO allies. “Ukraine is now on the front lines of Russia’s containment. Ukrainians are paying the highest price for this, in the lives of their people. If Ukraine failed to tackle Russia, the threat of Russian aggression would remain” (Syzov, 2023).

Jackson and Sorensen also argue that “peace between democracies is strengthened through economic cooperation and interdependence. In the Pacific Union, it is possible to encourage what Kant called ‘the spirit of commerce’: mutual and reciprocal gain for those involved in international economic cooperation and exchange” (Jackson & Sorensen, 2013).

To sum up, following liberal tradition, we can assume that US aid to Ukraine is responsive to the recipient’s liberal values and principles of sustaining peace, a strong economy, and a strong democracy. In US-Ukraine relations from 2022-2023, democratizing Ukraine is not a direct aim, but the aim is to help Ukraine defeat authoritarian Russia and defend democratic principles. This reflects the importance the US attaches to Ukraine’s democratic aspirations. “Adopting these and other critical reforms (good governance, transparency, accountability) to increase Ukraine’s transparency, and competitiveness – to bolster the rule of law – will help attract more private investment. Both of us (Governments and International Financial Institutions) have a hugely important role to play in Ukraine’s recovery” (Blinken, 2023).

The Ukraine crisis and US support for Ukraine could also be explained through the prism of liberal internationalism by John G. Ikenberry. According to the author, the US has a liberal project, the aim of which is to create an international order based on open markets, international institutions, cooperative security, a democratic community, etc. The US’s role in this is critical since it has the capability as a leading liberal power. Ikenberry also points out that states, as rational actors, decide to participate in this liberal order because through this order they maximize their interests. According to the author, the US liberal order is not coercive but is cooperative and inclusive, with economic, political, and security ties among its members (Eray, 2019).

Ukraine’s war against the authoritarian aggressor, Russia, brought Ukraine closer to defending democratic values and thus helped Ukraine come closer to Western ideology. Considering the importance of having Ukraine fight for Western security and values, however, pushed the United States to give more aid to Ukraine and express stronger moral support. “Viewed through Ikenberry’s prism, given liberal states’ inclination to embrace nations that show an interest in joining liberal international order, it should be expected of the West to offer Ukraine the required assistance in the latter’s efforts to westernize” (Eray, 2019).

However, it is also important to note the controversies linked to liberal notions. First would be an argument about whether states can impose or mandate the ‘good life’ (in our case, peace and prosperity) to their citizens. Lyle A. Downing and Robert B. Thigpen argue that “Because persons have the right to choose their personal good, the state may neither mandate a conception of the good life nor enforce virtues inextricably linked to a particular way of life” (Downing & Thigpen, 1993). However, the authors suggest a solution to this through liberalism, which can reformulate this idea into an idea of the common good, meaning that “liberalism can provide a significant role for the concept that is consistent with the democratic right of self-government. Distinguishable from both the mandatory right and the personally chosen way of life, the common

good may be politically chosen to enhance the lives of persons generally” (ibid). With that, we could assume that through supporting democracy and democratic values, there is clear support for the ideas of the common good, for instance, peace and prosperity.

It is also interesting to look at the war through a classical realism prism: “While Western nations see no vital interest in Ukraine, they do see the interest in preserving established principle in Europe that aggression must not be allowed to pay off. Western states want to equip Ukraine to withstand Russia not to unleash the precedent of revisionist claims that will undermine the long-lasting European order” (Larsen, 2022). So, to sum up, arming Ukraine will bring the higher benefits of weakening Russia’s military capabilities and creating a stronger Europe and NATO.

However, as mentioned in the introduction, critics argue that US foreign aid has not always effectively achieved its intended goals. Ian Vasquez argues that “There is no correlation between aid and growth, aid that goes into a poor policy environment does not work and contributes to debt, aid conditioned on market reforms has failed, countries that have adopted market-oriented policies have done so because of factors unrelated to aid” (Vasquez, 2022). Nevertheless, it is important to remember that there are measures to prevent the misuse of aid and to ensure that it is used effectively, as mentioned in the introduction chapter.

From the perspective of theoretical criticism, it is interesting that international relations theorists consider democracy transition a risky process. It is important to aid the process with caution. “Using military force to spread democracy fails for several reasons... it could be the violent resistance towards using force to spread democracy... successful democracies are not just the written constitution or elections, it takes time to bring systemic change” (Walt, 2016).

It is also interesting to look at the critical theories of aid that are comprised of a very heterogenous group of approaches to international relations, “namely structuralism, dependency, neo-Marxism, imperialism, and underdevelopment theories; neo-Gramscian approaches; and post-structuralism and decolonialism. They look at the problem of the world order as a whole, giving proper attention to economic interests and social forces and seeing how they relate to the development of political and economic structures” (Malacalza, 2019, p. 18). It is notable that aid is seen as a capitalist tool that is used by the ‘core’ to exploit the ‘periphery’, in other words, aid is used as an imperialistic tool that serves the interests of capitalist centres or as a hegemonic mechanism that lays down general rules of behaviour of states (Ibid.). That may be true to a certain extent. The US is the world’s largest contributor of official development assistance and we can assume that the United States uses bilateral aid to advance its strategic priorities. However, according to the OECD, the key priorities in US foreign aid encompass such global and important areas as health and security, combating the climate crisis, and advocating for democracy and good governance, while opposing authoritarianism and addressing the issues of discrimination and inequality (OECD, 2023).

It is also argued that developed countries have a moral obligation to help developing countries based on visions of international peace (Hattori, 2003). David Lumsdaine makes this assumption explicit, arguing that “foreign aid cannot be explained based on the economic and political interests of the donor countries alone, and any satisfactory explanation must give a central place to the influence of humanitarian and egalitarian convictions upon aid donors” (Hattori, 2003). According to liberalism, the aid policy is distanced from the capitalist class and is based on humanitarian considerations, democratic values, and economic prosperity.

On the question of whether foreign aid benefits the US or the recipient, including in the US-Ukraine case analysed in the article, the answer is that aid benefits both. “Foreign aid typically aims to support security as well as the economic, social, and political development of recipient countries (true in our case) and their people. At the same time, such assistance also advances one or all of the following overriding US interests: Contributing to US national security by supporting allies in promoting stability; Reflecting the core US value of caring for others in need—providing humanitarian assistance to victims of war, violence, famine; Advancing US and recipient economic interests by building economies and markets” (Ingram, 2019). All three are true in the US-Ukraine aid relationship.

To sum up, liberals see aid as a contribution to the democratization process, and the flow of economic aid from developed countries to developing countries is seen as a positive way to maintain world peace and prosperity.

In conclusion, foreign aid provided by donor countries can be viewed through different theoretical perspectives; however, the fundamental one is liberalism. The decision-making process of donor countries is influenced by factors such as their own national interests but also recipient needs and performance. The United States, being a high-power democratic country, has a foreign aid tradition that aims to sustain and develop the liberal order while also fulfilling its national interests. US aid to Ukraine is aimed at defending democratic values and Western security interests, preserving the established principles of European order, weakening Russia's military capabilities, and rewarding democratic developments in Ukraine. Therefore, understanding the theoretical underpinnings of foreign aid can help in analysing and interpreting the actions of donor countries in the international arena.

US AID TO UKRAINE

The Biden administration was heading towards 2022 with diverse components integrated into US foreign assistance, including combating climate change, responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, and countering authoritarianism, but since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Ukraine became the top recipient of US Foreign aid. "It is the first time that a European country has held the top spot since the Harry S. Truman administration directed vast sums into rebuilding the continent through the Marshall Plan after World War II" (Masters & Merrow, 2022).

US aid to Ukraine varied over time starting from Ukraine's independence from the Soviet Union to the present day. Throughout the period 2022-2023, President Joe Biden's administration expressed immense support for Ukraine in terms of foreign aid, including military, humanitarian, and economic support. Through aid, the United States underlined its commitment to support Ukraine for the long term. "This aid is tangible proof of America's belief in the Ukrainian people" (Garamone, 2022).

From 2022 until now, the US Congress has passed four spending packages in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine: \$113 billion in total. While Congress holds the power to decide on the amount of assistance, it is the administration that decides how the money is directed. There has been oversight of the assistance through the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the offices of the Inspectors General (OIG) (Hoffman et al., 2023).

It is important to note that the nature of aid is changing with the development of the war. Throughout 2022, there were several announcements of different types of aid in different disbursements. "Military equipment the United States provides has changed as the Russian invasion has continued. Originally, the US provided anti-armor and anti-aircraft munitions, including the javelin and stinger systems. After the Ukrainian military drove the Russians back from Ukraine's capital of Kyiv, the nature of war has changed... the Nature of the combat changed, and the fighting required more artillery pieces and capabilities" (Garamone, 2022). In that sense, it is notable that after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014, "the Obama administration provided Ukraine nonlethal security assistance, including body armor, helmets, vehicle, night and thermal vision devices, heavy engineering equipment, advanced radios, patrol boats, rations tents...medical kits and other related items. In 2017, the Trump administration announced US readiness to provide lethal weapons to Ukraine like sniper rifles, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, counter-artillery radars, satellite imagery and analysis capabilities, air surveillance systems, etc." (Welt, 2023). However, in 2022, the type of assistance became more advanced defence equipment (Welt, 2023).

Support for United States aid to Ukraine was bipartisan for most of the 2022-2023 period. Congress swiftly reacted to the situation in Ukraine, authorizing different types and amounts of aid and tranches. Following Russia's renewed invasion of Ukraine, Congress authorized or proposed increased funding for existing security assistance to authorities. In 2022, the United States Congress passed three aid packages totalling \$68 billion, and in November 2022, the administration submitted a new aid request of \$37.7 billion, which would bring the total to \$105.5 billion (Cancian, 2022). Public laws P.L. 117-128 and

P.L. 117-328 require Secretaries of State and Defense to report measures taken to account for the lend-lease of US weapons transferred to Ukraine since 24 February 2022. Additionally, the Democracy Defense Lend-Lease ACT of 2022 provides means to bypass bureaucratic barriers for leasing or lending US defence articles to Ukraine (Welt, 2023).

It is important to see that security assistance does not come alone. The bipartisan task force, which was created by Freedom House, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), and the McCain Institute to address issues of US Strategy to Support Democracy and Counter Authoritarianism, issued recommendations specifying the importance of economic assistance “We should distribute foreign aid and security assistance in ways that help reduce corruption and leverage the private sector ... through mechanisms that promote investment in countries, which show progress in countering corruption” (Freedom House et al., 2021). This task force analyses the importance of connecting economic and democratic policies to fight against authoritarianism and supports inclusive and sustainable economic development.

USAID is one of the key national agencies that distributes foreign aid to different countries, defines criteria for the aid, reports on it, elaborates, and adjusts the foreign aid policies accordingly. Ukraine is no exception. USAID helped Ukraine before and during the times of war to emerge as independent and democratic. Since the start of Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine on 24 February 2022, USAID focused on both urgent needs and sustaining “development goals like helping Ukraine maintain a well-functioning state with strong institutions free of corruption, fostering inclusive economy, free media, strong civil society and to help build a health system that is transparent and responsive to the needs of the Ukrainian people” (USAID, 2023).

How long will it take to spend the aid? There is no exact answer to this question. Money for operations is spent relatively quickly, whether through DoD for military operations or USAID for Humanitarian actions. Procurement funds for equipment take more years to spend, which means that some of the Aid allocated may get spent in 2026 (Cancian, 2022). This long time frame is also an indication that the US plans to help Ukraine rebuild its military, even if the war ends in the near term (Toft, 2023).

To help meet Ukraine’s wartime needs and recover successfully, USAID has provided \$13 billion in direct budget support, helping the government of Ukraine (GoU) fund basic public services such as healthcare, education, and emergency response. \$1.4 billion was provided for humanitarian assistance and urgent needs, and over \$800 million was provided in development assistance to strengthen Ukraine’s energy sector, governance institutions, agriculture, and small business and civil society, while also considering what will be needed for recovery and reconstruction (USAID, 2023).

Even though most of the assistance, military/security and humanitarian, is directed to the needs of the war, it is interesting to see the traits of the aid related to democracy strengthening, including the fight against corruption and supporting the increase in transparency, building public trust and continuing donor aid, attracting private sector investment, safeguarding the country’s institutions, and accelerating European integration (USAID, 2023).

It is important to note that despite the difficult war situation and everyday battles with Russia’s brutal acts of aggression, Ukraine’s government and business sectors have shown signs of being serious about pushing institutional reforms to combat corruption. According to the head of the National Anti-Corruption Prosecutors Office, nearly 300 investigations have been launched and a record of 58 indictments have been sent to the court last year. President Zelensky personally took steps to fight corruption and fired regional military recruitment officials based on allegations of corruption. This progress was also validated when, in March 2023, the European Council’s group of States against corruption removed Ukraine from the list of countries deemed globally unsatisfactory (Hoffman, 2023).

It is thus especially interesting to see how, even during the war, Ukraine tries to present efforts to indicate a willingness for democratization in order to secure support from the West, even though strategic support is there.

In their joint press conference on 6 September 2023, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Dmytro Kuleba addressed the issues of US aid to Ukraine. Secretary Blinken specifically underlined that during his six trips to Ukraine, he always saw “the determination, the resilience, and that commitment on the part of all Ukrainians to build a future where they can live safely and live freely in a thriving democracy fully integrated in Europe” and also highlighted

that “in the crucible of President Putin’s brutal and ongoing war, the United States and Ukraine have forged a partnership that is stronger than ever and growing every day” (Blinken & Kuleba, 2023). This highlights the special aid relationship that was formed in the period 2022-2023 between the two countries and also indicates the important role Ukraine’s strive for democracy and freedom has in the bilateral relationship formed during Russia’s war on Ukraine.

The importance of democracy in this war could also be seen in the \$300 million that was allocated by the United States to support law enforcement efforts to restore and maintain law and order in liberated areas. Blinken said in 2023, “we’re making new investments to enhance the transparency in Ukraine’s institutions and bolster the rule of law so that Ukraine is even more responsive to the needs of people” (Blinken & Kuleba, 2023). USAID provided \$102 million for the European Democratic Resilience Initiative (EDRI) to support free press and counter disinformation as well as to enable the documentation of human rights violations and protect activists and vulnerable groups in Ukraine and surrounding cities (USAID, 2023).

In conclusion, the chapter highlights the significant role that the United States has played in providing aid to Ukraine, particularly in response to Russia’s invasion in February 2022.

The nature of the assistance provided to Ukraine has evolved in response to the changing dynamics of the conflict, with a shift towards advanced defence equipment to meet the demands of the ongoing war. Beyond military and humanitarian aid, the chapter also highlights the importance of supporting democracy and countering corruption in Ukraine. Strengthening democratic institutions, increasing transparency, and fostering free press are seen as essential elements in building public trust, attracting private sector investment, and accelerating European integration. The Ukrainian government’s efforts to combat corruption and the recognition of its progress by the US are significant indicators of the country’s determination to reform and democratize and could have a determining influence on US aid allocation decisions.

In essence, the chapter portrays a multifaceted and dynamic relationship between the United States and Ukraine, where aid not only addresses immediate needs but also fosters long-term goals of democratic development, economic prosperity, and national security. This partnership is not only a response to an ongoing conflict but also a testament to the shared values and aspirations of both nations.

THE ROLE OF US NATIONAL INTERESTS IN AIDING UKRAINE

There are national factors that determine US funding to Ukraine, including national interests and domestic dispositions.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has changed the security architecture of Europe and threatened the democratic world. This war became a war to protect not only one nation but the whole of Western values against authoritarian aggressors. “Lives are being sacrificed to preserve Ukraine’s freedom. But observers in other democracies now see that their freedoms are at stake too and that democratic values are a strategic priority,” said Anthony Smith, co-author of the article published in *Carnegie Europe* (Youngs et al., 2022).

Democrats and Republicans in Congress and the American people have all been strong and unwavering in their support for Ukraine. President Biden stated that “supporting Ukraine’s ability to fight off Russian aggression, to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity is a worldwide commitment... Freedom for Ukraine, freedom everywhere” (Biden, 2023).

During President Biden’s administration, US aid towards strengthening democracy has been expressed through different opinion makers and thinktanks and has enjoyed bipartisan support. The bipartisan task force (mentioned above p 17) on US Strategy to Support Democracy and Counter Authoritarianism is an example of that. “The Task Force was created to address the significant global decline in democratic freedom and the rise in authoritarianism that endangers US national security and the post-World War II political order... On April 14, the Task Force released its general recommendations, and in the report, they call an action from United States leadership and suggest 7 strategies for governments, civil society, citizens, and the private sector to fight challenges of democratic values and institutions” (Freedom House et al., 2021).

The task force members believe that US national security and the future of democracy are so interconnected that they recommended elevating democracy to become the 'fourth D' of US foreign policy, alongside Diplomacy, Development, and Defense. They advocated for President Biden to declare democracy at home and abroad as a core value and a core national interest and for the US to increase investment in the pillars of open accountable, inclusive, and democratic society (Freedom House et al., 2021). Such advocacy could be seen as one of the supporting determinants of increased US foreign aid to Ukraine, especially after Russia's aggression.

USAID has worked for years to help Ukraine strengthen its anti-corruption efforts together with supporting independent media and strong civil society. Through these prior efforts, USAID could establish the basis for preventing, monitoring, and countering corruption to ensure that funding meets the needs it was intended for and reaches Ukrainians (USAID, 2023). This indicates that one of the aid-determining factors could be exactly such assurances as part of a two-way aid allocation process. Since the invasion, Ukraine's National Agency on Corruption Prevention (NACP), which USAID helped establish, has been supporting the war effort in multiple ways, including addressing corruption risks related to the provision of humanitarian and other aid. NACP is also advocating and managing sanctions policy, engaging in asset tracking and recovery and coordinating humanitarian aid delivery to local communities (USAID, 2023).

Domestic opinion is an important factor in determining the longevity of the aid. In December 2022, 65% of Americans said they favour supplying arms to Ukraine and 66% said they supported sending money directly, according to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, a non-partisan political thinktank (Toft, 2023).

In the research carried out by the George W. Bush Institute, Freedom House, and the Penn Biden Center, one of the main findings confirmed that American commitment to democracy remains strong. "Sweeping majorities want to live in a democracy, and they endorse US support for democracy abroad" (George W. Bush Institute et al., 2018).

Overall, 71% of respondents favoured the US government taking steps to support Democracy and Human Rights abroad. Ninety-one per cent agreed that "We can't control what happens in the world, but we have a moral obligation to speak up and do what we can when people are victims of genocide, violence, and severe human rights abuses", and "84% majority agrees that when other countries become democratic it contributes, to our well-being" (George W. Bush Institute et al., 2018).

The messaging is an important factor in administering foreign aid; the above-mentioned survey suggested that citing concrete success stories when talking about programmatic support for democracy and human rights abroad might be helpful. An impressive 88% reported feeling strongly or somewhat strongly that the United States was right to support the post-Soviet democratic transformation of Central Europe (George W. Bush Institute et al., 2018).

It is important to highlight that the current US administration has a clear vision that Ukraine's fight against Russia is a fight for the security of the rest of Europe and the European values that are intertwined with the United States' national interests. "Moscow's actions in Ukraine threaten to set new precedents on European soil, undermining these basic international principles vital to peace and security" (US Department of State, 2022). Strengthening Ukraine in this war would also mean strengthening the United States' international position; the war in Ukraine revealed the supremacy of the Western military industry (Syzov, 2023).

Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III announced that the US is going to maintain momentum throughout the winter so that Ukraine can consolidate gains and seize the initiative on the battlefield. According to the Secretary of Defense, assistance to Ukraine is important to help fight for its freedom and to defend the rules-based international order that keeps the world secure (Austin, 2022).

In conclusion, the factors that determine US funding to Ukraine are complex and multi-faceted. These include national interests, domestic dispositions, and the importance of promoting democracy and human rights. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has highlighted the need to protect democratic values and the importance of supporting allies against authoritarian

aggression. US aid towards Ukraine shows the importance of democracy in US foreign policy, and the messaging around success stories can be a helpful tool in administering foreign aid. The current US administration has a clear vision that Ukraine's fight against Russia is not just for its own security, but for the security of the whole of Europe and the promotion of Western values. In this context, the continued US aid to Ukraine is crucial to help fight for Ukraine's freedom and to defend the rules-based international order, defined by the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Final Act, and the Charter of Paris for New Europe that keeps the world secure. The 2023 Summit for Democracy highlighted that "By supporting Ukraine, democratic countries are helping those who want the right to decide for themselves and to live in a democratic state free from outside interference. Getting this message across to other countries and their citizens—particularly in Africa, Asia, the Balkans, and Central and Eastern Europe—is vital to sustaining the attractiveness of a democratic model of governance. Such nations need to be sure that other democratic countries will not leave them behind if they pursue the path of peace, democracy, and prosperity, even against the pressure of more powerful autocracies" (Zareba, 2023).

RECIPIENT COUNTRY TRIGGERS ON FOREIGN AID

Ukraine's determination to fight against the common enemy and its readiness to defend Western values and advance its democracy influences US bilateral aid towards it.

Even though there is consensus in the democratic West on the importance of supporting Ukraine, it is key to also recognize Ukraine's efforts and readiness to defeat Russia on a unified front, on the one hand, and to commit to strengthening the country's democratic consolidation, especially in the post-war environment on the other. "The most recent period of reform, which has included major decentralization and direction of resources to the regions, has coincided with a significantly larger share of Ukrainians agreeing that democracy is the preferable form of government in public opinion surveys," GsoD reported in 'The Global State of Democracy' (Runey, 2022).

As early as the beginning of March 2022, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed Congress and underscored the broader consequences of Russia's war in Ukraine, connecting it to the struggle for global democracy. In this regard, he underscored "the commitment to the defense of Ukraine and Democracy all over the world" and mentioned that "Ukrainian people are defending not only Ukraine but are fighting for the values of Europe and the world" (Thornton, 2022). Zelenskyy's connecting Ukraine's fight against Russian aggression to the fight for global democracy could have aimed to draw more support from the US and its Western partners.

Secretary Blinken also highlighted "We are engaged in assisting the Government of Ukraine on anti-corruption efforts and on efforts to ensure the accountability and full transparency of all the assistance we're providing" (Blinken, 2023). Earlier, Secretary Blinken also positively assessed Ukrainian government reforms toward democracy. "The Ukrainian Government has made meaningful strides in bolstering these institutions, even as it fights for survival, and Kyiv has taken tangible and difficult steps to align its standards and practices with the European Union, particularly since the EU granted Ukraine candidate status a year ago. Earlier this month, Ukraine passed reforms to align its energy market regulations with the European Union, strengthening measures to combat market manipulation and insider trading. And we look forward to the Rada taking up anti-monopoly legislation very soon" (Blinken, 2023). Blinken also pledged continued assistance to invest in Ukraine's long-term efforts to strengthen good governance, transparency, and accountability (Blinken, 2023).

Freedom House's Freedom in the World reports of 2022 and 2023 provide information on political rights and civil liberties in Ukraine in 2021 and 2022. It is important that the overall score out of 100 was 61 in the 2022 report and declined to 50 in 2023. However, it is clear that despite the war situation, Ukraine managed to maintain the democratic reforms throughout the two years and the only decline in scores was caused due to Russia's unjustified, illegal attacks and Ukraine's inability to take control of the situation on the ground.

In the 2022 report, general findings indicate that Ukraine has enacted positive reforms since President Viktor Yanukovich left office due to wide protests in 2014; however, corruption and attacks against journalists and civil society activists remained a challenge. In the report, political rights were given a total of 61 out of 100. In the electoral processes section, the election of the head of Government and chief national authorities through free and fair election got the highest (4 out of 4), and elections were generally deemed competitive and credible; however, electoral laws and framework and their implementation by relevant election management bodies were criticized (2 out of 4). The right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings (3 out of 4) was relatively positively assessed, mentioning that oligarchs exert significant influence over politics either directly or indirectly, including through financial support for various political parties and lobbying for the appointment of loyalists to key institutional positions. Corruption was assessed as a serious problem (1 out of 4), and an open and transparent government was also granted a low score (1 out of 4) (Freedom House Report, 2022).

In the section on civil liberties, free and independent media was scored as average (2 out of 4) and freedom of assembly was assessed relatively positively (3 out of 4). An average score was given to freedom of non-governmental organizations, particularly those engaged in human rights and governance-related work (2 out of 4). According to the report, civic groups that emerged since Yanukovich in 2014 can influence decision-making at various levels of government (ibid.). Another important indicator assessed in the report is the rule of law, among them, the independent judiciary, where Ukraine got a lower score (1 out of 4) due to corrupt and politicized courts. As for freedom for trade unions and labour organizations, Ukraine scored higher (3 out of 4) (ibid.).

Overall, this data indicates that democracy reforms in 2021 were average, balancing between relatively lower and higher assessments of certain indicators.

As mentioned above, the 2023 report assesses the situation in 2022 where, mainly due to reasons of war, Ukraine got a lower score compared to the previous year (50 out of 100). Russia's invasions led to the deterioration of some political and civil liberties enjoyed by Ukrainians (Freedom House Report, 2023).

Despite implementing some war-related legal changes that drew international and legal criticism for their impact on civil liberties according to the Freedom House Report, the Government of Ukraine still managed to implement policies towards democratization, which was a clear signal of Ukraine's Western aspirations. During the year, Ukrainian authorities appointed a new chief anticorruption prosecutor, who quickly reopened stalled cases, launched new investigations, and ratified the Istanbul Convention—the Council of Europe's treaty on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Freedom House Report, 2023). Despite the critical war situation, electoral processes higher scores remained the same as in 2022. However, the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings was given a lower score (2 out of 4) compared to the previous year. "The score declined from 3 to 2 because Russian forces violently suppressed Ukrainian political activity in occupied areas, and the Ukrainian government implemented a new law allowing swift bans on political parties that were identified as 'pro-Russian'" (Freedom House Report, 2023). Another democratic disruption caused by Russia was assessed via additional criteria, bringing a score of minus 2. "The Russian forces have sought to eliminate Ukrainian ethnic and national identity in areas under their control, in part by seizing or destroying cultural sites and materials, punishing use of the Ukrainian language, and abducting and transferring hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian children to Russia" (Freedom House Report, 2023). Indications of Government efforts to maintain democratic processes could be why the scores did not change compared to last year in areas such as media freedom, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom for non-governmental organizations, particularly in human rights and governance-related work, even though "in 2022, under martial law, civil society organizations were banned from using foreign bank transactions. However, Ukrainian lawmakers allowed such groups and individual volunteers who transferred charity funds to combatants and employees of security agencies to be exempted from income tax" (Freedom House Report, 2023).

Meanwhile, it is important to note that European integration prospects are a major driving force of Ukraine's democratic reforms; the recent candidate country status and accession negotiations have enhanced determination towards reforming the country. Ukraine is open to declaring its democratic aspirations within the international community and discussing the

challenges and perspectives of good democratic governance in the post-war period. First Deputy Speaker of the Ukrainian Parliament Oleksandr Korniyenko underlined the importance of good democratic governance as one of the key reform areas for Ukraine at the high-level dialogue held in Strasbourg in the Council of Europe Headquarters during the 2022 World Forum for Democracy (Council of Europe, 2022).

USAID views the decision of the European Commission on granting Ukraine candidate status as a recognition of Ukraine's achievement in democracy building and protecting democratic values. "The reforms required for accession to the EU are also an integral part of Ukraine's democratic developments and have been and will continue to be a core part of USAID's partnership with Ukraine" (USAID, 2023).

Ukraine has demonstrated strong levels of national unity, leadership, and military competence during the war; "even perfect intelligence support and the most advanced US weaponry wouldn't have made much of a difference if Ukraine hadn't shown such skill, courage, and grit in the face of Russia's overwhelming advantages" (Toft, 2023).

Another argument that highlights the importance of recipient country triggers on foreign aid could be the serious criticism from the Republican Party in September 2023 at Congress towards Ukraine's aid, which was based on insufficient transparency in the administration of the aid by the Ukrainian side. "Most of our voters are skeptical about additional aid to Ukraine, and they should be," Sen. Josh Hawley said "We still don't have any independent oversight of the spending, no independent accounting of where it's going, how it's being spent. I just think that's outrageous" (McCormick, 2023).

This could serve as evidence that backs up the argument of whether the US takes democracy aspiration and openness into account when making aid decisions. Even though some of Ukraine's efforts are in general assessed positively as mentioned by Secretary Blinken, the questions asked in Congress had a negative influence on approving the State budget with Ukraine's aid attached to it (Mueller, 2023). However, despite the September controversies regarding aid, the United States Pentagon approved a new \$150 million aid package to Ukraine and urged Congress to authorize more (Clark, 2023). This could support the argument that United States aid decisions are determined by donor's national interests, with attention paid to the recipient's openness and democratic aspirations.

In conclusion, Ukraine's determination to fight against a common enemy, Russia and its readiness to defend Western values and advance its democracy have influenced US bilateral aid towards Ukraine. Ukraine has managed to maintain its democratic reforms throughout the two years, with the only decline in scores caused by Russia's unjustified, illegal attacks. The Freedom House reports of 2022 show that Ukraine has enacted positive reforms since 2014, but corruption and attacks against journalists and civil society activists remain a challenge. In the Freedom House 2023 report, it is clear that despite implementing some war-related legal changes that drew international and legal criticism for their impact on civil liberties, the government still managed to implement strong policies toward democratization, which was a clear signal of Ukraine's Western aspirations. However, questions emerged in the US regarding the spending of US aid in Ukraine and the transparency of the process, and this has halted certain aid decisions, which is an important argument regarding aid recipient factors also being determinants of a donor's aid decisions.

Based on the information provided in this chapter, we could assume that the recipient country influences foreign aid from the donor country. The determination of Ukraine to fight for democracy, defend its values, and elaborate on democracy reforms, even under war circumstances, positively affects aid from the United States. However, doubts regarding the transparency of aid allocation inside the recipient country negatively affect bipartisan support for US aid.

CONCLUSION

Democracy promotion has been on the agenda of powerful Western states, especially the United States, for decades as a tool against the spread of authoritarianism. There are clear benefits to the aid but there is also criticism towards it; however, Russia's recent aggression against Ukraine has pushed the US and the Western states to enhance their efforts in protecting

democracy. “This would be a logical response to the clear and distressing evidence provided by Russia’s war of the danger that autocrats pose not only to their people but also to their neighbors” (Youngs et. Al. 2022). Addressing Russian authoritarianism and aiding Ukraine is a movement towards peace in the world rather than turning a blind eye to it. This article covered the analysis of democracy aid based on the donor country’s national interest and the recipient country’s determination towards democratic development since the beginning of the 2022 Russian aggression in Ukraine.

This article demonstrated that the US made decisions regarding foreign assistance to Ukraine based on its national interests, assuming that a secure and peaceful Ukraine would mean peace in Europe and stronger NATO vs weaker authoritarian Russia. Thus, the US made Ukraine its top European country for receiving foreign assistance in this fight for freedom. The domestic opinion on US foreign aid was also an important determinant of the aid policy. Another important factor is that the US aid towards strengthening democracy had bipartisan support at the national level most of the time.

United States foreign aid was also triggered by the strong-willed fight from Ukraine and their declared and continued aspirations for democracy. It is evident that despite the ongoing conflict, Ukraine has been able to uphold its democratic reforms for two years, with the only setback being the result of Russia’s unwarranted and illegal attacks, which made it difficult to manage the situation on the ground. As mentioned in the article, according to the Freedom House 2023 report, the decline in overall scores in 2022 was mainly attributed to the war, with Russia’s invasion causing a deterioration in certain political and civil liberties that Ukrainians had been enjoying. This development may have prompted the United States to provide more assistance to prevent Russia’s aggression not only towards Ukraine but also towards its democratic system. Additionally, the decision by the European Council to grant Ukraine candidate status is seen by USAID as a recognition of Ukraine’s achievements in building and safeguarding democratic values, with the reforms required for EU accession being a crucial part of USAID’s partnership with Ukraine and its democratic progress. However, we have seen that when questions arise regarding the transparency of aid in the recipient country, this hinders decision-making regarding aid allocation by the donor.

Foreign aid can be understood through various lenses provided by international relations (IR) theories. Critical theorists argue that the intended objectives of US foreign aid are not realized as they are supposed to be. They suggest that this instrument has to be used with caution, not to damage the state’s internal affairs at the expense of supporting development. A diverse range of critical approaches suggests that aid is perceived as a capitalist instrument that serves the interests of a strong capitalist West rather than those of developing countries.

Classical realism illustrates how a state’s national interests can influence decisions to support another country in its fight against a common enemy.

Nevertheless, liberalist approaches demonstrate how states can cooperate and support each other in building a liberal international order that prioritizes peace and democracy. Through the prism of liberalism, the United States follows a foreign aid tradition designed to advance the liberal world order. US assistance to Ukraine safeguards democratic values and Western security interests. Additionally, it responds to democratic progress in Ukraine. Consequently, understanding the theoretical foundations of foreign aid helps in the analysis and interpretation of donor countries’ actions on the global stage.

While valid concerns exist regarding the potential misuse of aid funds and the negative or manipulative impacts it may have on recipient nations, measures have been implemented to prevent such misuse and ensure the righteous use of aid. In essence, foreign aid can serve as a crucial instrument for fostering international development and stability. Nevertheless, its provision should be approached with caution, and regular evaluations are imperative to ascertain its fulfilment of the intended objectives.

The analysis of the US foreign aid to Ukraine during the period of Russia’s aggression demonstrates that US aid decision-making is not purely driven by the donor’s self-interest but also by the democratic performance of the recipient country and its fight for Western values. This conclusion is supported on the one hand by empirical evidence through the statements of high-level officials, actual decisions, and expert analysis, and on the other hand by theoretical arguments.

Ukraine should continue to demonstrate its aspirations to defend democracy as this influences foreign aid. The United States and the West, however, must also ensure that Ukraine sustains and expands its success after the war. The democratic reforms must be safeguarded and expanded so that international confidence in Ukraine stays strong and proves that democracy is sustainable both during and after the war.

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