CONTESTATION

The new dynamic driving global politics

Edited by
Alice Ekman and Steven Everts

With contributions from
Jan Joel Andersson, Ondrej Ditrych, Dalia Ghanem,
Nad'a Kovalčíková, Rossella Marangio,
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European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS)

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INTRODUCTION

The politics of contestation

by
ALICE EKMAN

It is no longer sufficient or accurate to argue that the current world order is merely characterised by growing fragmentation or polarisation. Contestation dynamics have intensified in recent years, to the point they are now driving global politics. This is not only due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the overall resurgence of violent territorial contestation, but also to the escalating rivalry between the United States and China, which is structuring some of these dynamics. Perhaps most significantly, an emerging group of ambitious non-Western powers is actively challenging the existing global governance structures.

This *Chaillot Paper* identifies **three types of contestation**:

1. **Territorial contestation** – this is the most direct and violent form of contestation. In chapter 1 Jan Joel Andersson analyses the return of military conflict in its most conventional form, exemplified by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and other wars across the world. Wars have not vanished but on the contrary are on the upsurge, but in a new hybrid form in which trench warfare and mass artillery barrages reminiscent of World War I are accompanied by artificial intelligence-supported targeting, satellite-guided precision munitions and swarms of low-tech drones. Territorial contestation is not only visible across borders but also in the maritime domain. In chapter 2 Amaia Sánchez-Cacicedo explores rising tensions in the Indian Ocean,

where confrontation is less overt than in the South China Sea, but where competing powers are vying for control of ports and other strategic infrastructure. Cyberspace is another domain of contestation – and not only through cyberattacks targeting strategic critical infrastructures and assets. In chapter 3 Andrea Salvi examines how some powers are actively seeking to reshape the existing cybersecurity order.

2. **Issue-specific contestation** – this form of contestation is the most circumscribed and limited in scope. In chapter 4 Rossella Marangio looks at Africa's assertive stance on tax governance and carbon emission policies – two telling case studies which, she argues, do not signify a rejection of the multilateral system in these areas but rather a push for reform of the existing rules to make them more palatable to non-EU countries. Likewise in chapter 5 Lukas Trakimavičius underlines that there are significant divisions among countries that support climate action, while acknowledging that there is still some space for cooperation in this field. In chapter 6 Dalia Ghanem focuses on the BRICS grouping and explores how while it initially contested specific areas of governance (such as development and finance), in its new expanded BRICS+ format it seems to be shifting towards broader ambitions. This potentially poses a deeper challenge to the established global governance architecture.

3. **Normative contestation** – this is arguably the most ambitious and potentially transformative form of contestation, where actors challenge the very foundation of international norms. Normative contestation is not only rising in the form of foreign interference on national territory but also at multilateral level. In chapter 7 Bojana Zorić examines how several countries are attacking universal values, contesting the definition of human rights and promoting a form of relativism, as part of the attempt to undermine norms defended by democracies [1]. In chapter 8 Nad'a Kovalčíková explores concrete attempts to destabilise democracies, such as disinformation campaigns and manipulation operations during elections and beyond. She argues that such actions can harm democracy but also, if effectively addressed, may unintentionally contribute to enhancing democratic resilience in the long term. Several powers are deploying an offensive strategy to challenge political systems and actors they consider hostile – mainly Western democracies – both within multilateral organisations and domestically. As Ondrej Ditrych shows in chapter 9, Russia promotes a conservative narrative emphasising the West's alleged moral decline.

It is important to distinguish contestation from competition for influence or efforts to reform global governance. Emerging countries often seek to reshape institutions such as the United Nations Security Council or the International Monetary Fund. This can involve securing greater representation and influencing governing rules, without necessarily challenging existing norms, the overall agenda or the overall membership of these institutions. The case studies analysed by Rossella Marangio on tax governance and carbon emissions are illustrative in this regard. These can be seen as attempts to reform rather than contest the current governance structures, as they do not call into question or reject the governance systems as a whole.

A CONVERGENCE OF CONTESTATION DYNAMICS

Despite these nuances, contestation trends should be taken seriously for three reasons.

1. First, because we can observe **a consolidation of contestation movements targeting the 'West' in general terms.** Already during the Covid-19 pandemic, the West faced criticism regarding a perceived lack of solidarity and unequal access to vaccines. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is not seen in the same way across the world, as borne out by declining majorities in votes at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Many countries – mainly from the emerging world or so-called 'Global South' — have argued that it is not 'their war' and that the West is making the rest pay for the consequences of the war and the sanctions it has imposed. They often appear more concerned with the immediate repercussions of the war, notably in terms of food security and energy prices, than its causes, i.e. Russia's aggression. These dissensions over Ukraine have exacerbated the North-South divide, which has also deepened due to tensions and disagreements around many other issues and crises, including the Covid pandemic, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, the Israel-Hamas war, as well as issues related to debt relief, access to capital and related matters of economic governance. Many of these specific accusations and perceived injustices are part of

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a wider 'battle of narratives', whereby various countries seek to propagate a negative image of the West through distorted facts, fake news and disinformation campaigns. However, this is merely the most visible manifestation of a trend that is becoming an increasingly mainstream phenomenon across continents: the contestation of the West and of its actions.

2. Second, because **a shift from passive to active contestation** is currently underway: beyond the anti-Western rhetoric, actors are not only voicing their opposition, but also increasingly working on building alternatives to what they oppose. This is particularly true in the realm of normative contestation: new technical but also financial, cyber, security or even political norms are emerging, often intended to challenge – and in the long term replace – existing norms of reference.

3. Third, because **contestation dynamics are currently accumulating**. This involves the convergence of diverse demands and challenges to the current international order. While some of this may appear spontaneous and somewhat disorganised, a more coordinated approach is emerging under the aegis of several diplomatic powers. Not all countries actively participate in driving these trends. What is certain however is that both Russia and China are spearheading a determined and well-coordinated strategy aimed at eroding existing principles and norms and replacing them with new concepts that redefine the acquired rights of states and individuals. This endeavour extends beyond the political sphere, challenging existing security norms and architecture as well, both through rhetoric (advocating a 'new security concept' or 'new security architecture'), and actions (through the use of military force, or the threat of the use thereof).

> # Both Russia and China are spearheading a determined and well-coordinated strategy aimed at eroding existing principles and norms.

International organisations inevitably become focal points of convergence for these various contestation dynamics. At the United Nations (UN), China and Russia often coordinate their votes to challenge the condemnation of various non-Western countries (as in May 2022, when both countries vetoed a US-sponsored UN resolution that would have imposed new sanctions on North Korea after a series of intercontinental ballistic missile launches), or contest the resolutions proposed by the United States and its allies (as in March 2024, when both countries vetoed a US-backed resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and an Israel-Hamas hostage deal). Beijing, which deploys a more sophisticated and better-resourced strategy than Moscow, is leading the charge for global governance reform. China's ambitious vision, outlined once again in its 'Global Community of Shared Future' white paper released in September 2023, is underpinned by a coalition-building strategy that is already yielding results.

But contestation dynamics are not only visible within institutions, they also increasingly play out between institutions. As underlined by Dalia Ghanem in her chapter, it is too early to assess definitively if the BRICS+, a group of countries with diverse interests and positions, will become a serious rival to the G7. But China, Iran and Russia certainly have the ambition to make this expanded framework an alternative to perceived 'Western-led' institutions, and a norm-setter in the long term. Their strategy involves building an alternative network of formal institutions, which include the BRICS+ but also the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, alongside other institutions and more informal sub-regional or thematic forums.

While the current convergence of contestation dynamics appears fragmented, with various overlaps and internal inconsistencies, a clear underlying trend is emerging. Countries may have shifting priorities, and some are known to opportunistically engage in transactional

behaviour, prioritising short-term gains over long-term strategic alliances. However, the growing tendency to form alternative blocs deserves serious attention. It is now starting to reshape coalition-building dynamics and the overall *rapport de force* between groups of countries, both within and between international organisations. Acknowledging the full scope of contestation dynamics is a crucial first step in formulating effective policy recommendations, as highlighted in the concluding chapter of this volume.

TERRITORIAL CONTESTATION

CHAPTER 1

WAR AS CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The return of military contestation

by
JAN JOEL ANDERSSON

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is part of human interaction and war has been present in much of recorded history. Nevertheless, there have been repeated attempts to outlaw war. In 1918 'The High Contracting Parties' of the League of Nations agreed to not resort to war, and the commitment to refrain from the use of force against another state has been enshrined in the United Nations Charter since 1945. The norm of the non-use of force between states has been the bedrock of international law ever since. In fact, the period after World War II is arguably the longest time of peace between the great powers over the past 500 years [1]. After the end of the Cold War, another wave of optimism emerged regarding the possibility of more peaceful international relations. Both scholars and practitioners envisioned a future where war could be eradicated entirely. After all, other social practices, like slavery or duelling, were once commonplace but have largely vanished over time [2].

However, the decline in great power confrontation and the frequency of inter-state wars was accompanied by a rise of conflicts fought by other types of actors, such as networks of state and non-state actors as seen in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, in Afghanistan, and across the Middle East and Africa [3]; and by seemingly new means, like the hybrid warfare preceding the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 [4]. Perhaps reflecting the extent to which thoughts of large-scale conventional warfare had receded in much of Europe since the end of the Cold War, most European governments could simply not believe the mounting evidence pointing to an imminent Russian full-scale invasion of

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(1) Levy, J.S., 'War and Peace', in Carlsnaes, W. et al. (eds.), *Handbook of International Relations,* SAGE Publications, 2022.

(2) See, for example, Pinker, S., *The Better Angels of Our Nature: A history of violence and humanity*, Penguin Books, London, 2008; Blix, H., *A Farewell to Wars: The growing restraints on the interstate use of force*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2023.

(3) Kaldor, M., *New and Old Wars: Organised violence in a global era,* Polity, London, third edition, 2012.

(4) Andersson, J.J. and Tardy, T., 'Hybrid: what's in a name?', *Brief* No 32, EUISS, October 2015 (https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief_32_Hybrid_warfare.pdf).

Ukraine in early 2022 [5]. In fact, rather than disappearing, wars are now coming back but with new characteristics in which trench warfare and mass artillery barrages grimly reminiscent of World War I are accompanied by artificial intelligence-supported targeting, satellite-guided precision munitions, and swarms of low-tech drones [6].

ARMED VIOLENCE ON THE RISE

Many capitals around the world are currently preparing for war rather than peace. World military spending is at an all-time high, reaching $2 443 billion in 2023 according to figures released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) [7]. The ongoing wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, and tensions in East Asia, are driving governments to spend on defence at levels not seen since the Cold War [8]. A number of states are displaying a growing willingness to use military means to settle territorial disputes or political conflicts. While the Russian attack on Ukraine in February 2022 unleashed the largest land war in Europe since World War II, there are other recent armed conflicts that could lead to large-scale war. Azerbaijan, for example,

> A number of states are displaying a growing willingness to use military means to settle territorial disputes or political conflicts.

resorted to military power in September 2023 to end the long conflict with Armenia over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. The horrific Hamas terrorist attack on Israel in October 2023 that killed more than 1 100 people, mostly civilians, led Israel to invade the Gaza Strip in a major war that is still ongoing at the time of writing, with tens of thousands of causalities so far, and many fear that large-scale violence may also spread to Lebanon. In April 2024, Iran launched more than 300 armed drones, cruise missiles and ballistic missiles on Israel in retaliation for Israeli airstrikes on Iranian assets and individuals in Syria. In the Horn of Africa, Somalia is threatening war with Ethiopia just as Ethiopia has ended its bloody civil war in Tigray. Meanwhile, further East, China is rapidly modernising its armed forces, expanding its nuclear arsenal, and does not exclude the military option for 'reunification' with Taiwan while increasing its pressure on the Philippines in the disputed waters of the South China Sea. North Korea, in turn, is test-firing missiles over neighbouring South Korea and Japan, who in response are arming at a brisk pace. As it faces an increasingly hostile China and North Korea, Japan released a new National Security Strategy in 2022 and seeks to double defence spending to 2 % of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2027 [9].

An increasing number of states do not only engage in inter-state conflicts, but also militarily support non-state actors

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(5)   'Road to war: U.S. struggled to convince allies, and Zelensky, of risk of invasion', *Washington Post*, 16 August 2022 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/interactive/2022/ukraine-road-to-war/).

(6)   See, for example, Zabrodskyi, M. et al., 'Preliminary lessons in conventional warfighting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine: February–July 2022', RUSI, 30 November 2022 (https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/special-resources/preliminary-lessons-conventional-warfighting-russias-invasion-ukraine-february-july-2022); Walsh, D., 'Foreign drones tip the balance in Ethiopia's civil war', *New York Times*, 20 December 2021 (https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/20/world/africa/drones-ethiopia-war-turkey-emirates.html).

(7)   SIPRI, 'Global military spending surges amid war, rising tensions and insecurity', 22 April 2024 (https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2024/global-military-spending-surges-amid-war-rising-tensions-and-insecurity).

(8)   Dellerba, I. et al, 'Indo-pacifique:face à la menace chinoise, les pays de la région se réarment', *Le Monde*, 17 March 2024 (https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2024/03/17/indo-pacifique-face-a-la-menace-chinoise-les-pays-de-la-region-se-rearment_6222424_3210.html).

(9)   Kajimoto, T. and Yamaguchi. T., 'Japan unveils record budget in boost to military spending', Reuters, 23 December 2022 (https://www.reuters.com/markets/asia/japan-unveils-record-budget-boost-military-capacity-2022-12-23/).

State–based conflicts
2010–2022

deaths of combatants and civilians due to fighting in interstate, intrastate, and extrasystemic conflicts that were ongoing that year (thousands)

Data:

Intrastate

Internationalised intrastate

conflicts

Interstate

Data: UCDP–PRIO, 2023

fighting against governments. According to analysts, only seven such cases were documented in the decade between 2000 and 2010, but rose to 22 cases in the 2010s, and 13 cases have been recorded already in the first three years of the current decade [10]. For example, Iran-backed militias in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq regularly exchange fire with Israeli and US forces in the region. Moreover, Iran-supplied Houthi militias in Yemen target international shipping in the Red Sea with ballistic missiles and drones, with the United States and the United Kingdom retaliating with airstrikes. In January 2024, Iran itself launched missile and drone strikes on opposition groups in Iraq, Syria and Pakistan. Two days later, Pakistan promptly responded with its own drone and missile strikes against separatist militants based inside Iran [11].

The past few years have been extraordinarily violent. According to the Peace Research Institute in Oslo (PRIO), citing Uppsala University data, more state-based, conflict battle-related deaths took place in 2022 than any year since 1994. PRIO estimates that the wars in Ukraine and Ethiopia but also conflicts in Yemen, Myanmar, Nigeria, Somalia, Mali and Burkina Faso contributed to over 237,000 battle-related deaths during 2022 [12]. The International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) reports that the intensity and length of conflict has also risen year-on-year, with the number of fatalities and violent events increasing by 14 % and 28 % respectively for the year May 2022–June 2023 compared to the year before [13].

(10)   Davies, S., Pettersson, T. and Öberg, M., 'Organized violence 1989–2022, and the return of conflict between states', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 60, Issue 4, 13 July 2023 (https://doi.org/10.1177/00223433231185169).

(11)   'Pakistan fires retaliatory strike at Iran, stoking regional tension', Reuters, 18 January 2024 (https://www.reuters.com/world/pakistan-has-conducted-strikes-inside-iran-afp-report-2024-01-18/).

(12)   PRIO, 'New figures show conflict-related deaths at 28-year high, largely due to Ethiopia and Ukraine wars', 7 June 2023 (https://www.prio.org/news/3058).

(13)   International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), 'Editor's Introduction', *Armed Conflict Survey 2023*, 2023 (https://www.iiss.org/publications/armed-conflict-survey/2023/editors-introduction/).

CHALLENGES TO CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Conflict management across the world is under strain. The UN is tasked with upholding world peace. However, the UN Security Council is increasingly paralysed by the fact that its permanent veto-holding members are active participants or supporters in a growing number of conflicts. For example, Russia is currently waging an offensive war against Ukraine; the United States is strongly backing Israel in its war in Gaza; and China is threatening to invade Taiwan. At the same time, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is completely blocked by Russia. In Africa, regional organisations such as the African Union (AU), the G5 Sahel, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) have been unable to deal with the many conflicts on the continent. And in Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has had little success in managing conflicts such as in Myanmar. With Europe and the United States focused on the wars in Ukraine and in the Middle East, political attention and humanitarian resources available for other conflicts are also limited [14].

Conflict management, let alone conflict resolution, is further complicated by many armed conflicts being driven by a complex set of actors and motives. While the increase in cross-border inter-state wars is the most concerning change in recent conflict patterns, the increasing number of so-called internationalised intra-state conflicts in the last decade is also worrying. These forms of proxy wars can easily escalate into direct confrontation and war between states [15].

In many conflict zones in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, there is little central state legitimacy and control, with multiple non-state armed groups (NSAGs) involved [16]. The lack of a centralised opposition makes conflict management and negotiations challenging since identifying who the warring parties are and what they seek to achieve can be difficult [17]. In fact, some NSAGs or even the official government of the day may not even have an interest in negotiating a solution to a conflict given that all sides can be dependent on the existing war economy, relying on foreign subsidies, smuggling of illicit goods, and/or extortion of local populations. Examples of this phenomenon can be found in Mali and other parts of the Sahel [18].

WHAT ROLE FOR THE EU?

The statement by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, in 2020 that the Union 'must learn quickly to speak the language of power' is taking on a new resonance as the delivery of arms to Ukraine and training of Ukrainian soldiers

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(14)   For example, humanitarian funding available for Yemen and Syria declined sharply in 2022. See: Save the Children, 'Humanitarian aid in Yemen slashed by over 60% in five years', 25 September 2023 (https://www.savethechildren.net/news/humanitarian-aid-yemen-slashed-over-60-five-years); Associated Press, 'The World Food Program will end its main assistance program in Syria in January, affecting millions', 4 December 2023 (https://apnews.com/article/syria-world-food-program-food-aid-5daed470afbb1761dffe19e1fc4a8520).

(15)   'Organized violence 1989–2022, and the return of conflict between states', op cit.

(16)   Centre on Armed Groups, *Armed Groups in a Changing World: 2023-2025 Strategy* (https://static1.squarespace.com/static/628c94ceae15ed6eb64d03fd/t/63f7163721295060c579c14b/1677137488410/External+version+-+Centre+2023-25+strategy.pdf).

(17)   'Editor's Introduction, *Armed Conflict Survey 2023*, op.cit.

(18)   Lacher, W., 'Organized crime and conflict in the Sahel–Sahara region', *The Carnegie Papers*, September 2012 (https://carnegieendowment.org/files/sahel__sahara.pdf).

show [19]. The combined support of the EU and its Member States to Ukraine has grown considerably, reaching a level that now surpasses that of the United States. Meanwhile, the EU is developing new instruments for joint production and procurement of arms and ammunition at the EU level. Total defence spending by EU Member States reached €240 billion in 2022 with a record 24.2 % (€58 billion) dedicated to defence investment [20].

However, as the EU increasingly learns to speak the language of power it may also find its role in conflict resolution changing. From having been considered a uniquely peaceful power, or 'normative power', and arguably the first great power to rise without major enemies, the situation is now very different. Today, the EU provides lethal aid to some of its partners while finding itself no longer welcomed by others as shown by recent developments in the Sahel. The future of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations is also uncertain, even as it prepares to activate a new Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC) of up to 5 000 troops with necessary strategic enablers and command structures in 2025. Nevertheless, at a time when the leverage of, and trust in, traditional conflict management actors such as the UN, OSCE and AU are at an all-time low, the EU remains potentially a formidable foreign and security policy actor. Together with its significant economic resources, technical expertise in the Commission services, its wide network of diplomatic delegations, and through its civil and military CSDP instruments, the EU is one of the very few global actors that can provide both crisis management and humanitarian support on a large scale when international aid and development funding are being cut back everywhere else.

R*esponding forcefully and rapidly to external conflicts and crises is a priority for the EU.*

CONCLUSION

The return of inter-state military contestation over the past few years is taking place in the shadow of growing great power rivalry. Historically, such rivalries tend to correlate with increasing armed conflicts. Already, Russia and the United States have lined up on opposing sides in Georgia in 2008, in Syria since 2012, in Ukraine since 2014, and in the Sahel since 2021. Moldova and the Westen Balkans may be next. In East Asia, China is challenging Washington and its allies over the future of Taiwan and control of the South China sea, with countries across the region heavily arming. With Russia and China willing to use military means – at different levels – to challenge the existing international order, and the United States and Europe seemingly reluctant or unable to forcefully uphold it, there is little to prevent further erosion of the norm of the non-use of force between states embedded in the UN Charter.

At a time when the use of military power is surging around the world, the EU and its Member States face difficult policy choices of where and how to act as the Union takes on a greater role in security and defence. Responding forcefully and rapidly to external conflicts and crises is a priority for the EU. The recent launch of the EU Naval Operation *Aspides* to protect commercial shipping in the Red Sea and the training of tens of thousands of soldiers in the EU Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM) Ukraine show that the Union

(19) European Union External Action Service, 'Europe must learn quickly to speak the language of power', 29 October 2020 (https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/several-outlets-europe-must-learn-quickly-speak-language-power_und_en).

(20) European Defence Agency (EDA), *Defence Data 2022: Key findings and analysis*, October 2023 (https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/brochures/2022-eda_defencedata_web.pdf).

can respond when needed. But the disappointing results of several EU CSDP training and capacity-building missions in the Sahel also show the challenges in crafting EU interventions that can deliver impact on the ground[21].

The EU can and should play an important role in addressing causes of war and conflict in and between fragile states and regions. With Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine continuing unabated, the EU and its Member States must remain focused on supporting Ukraine but also stabilising the Eastern neighbourhood, including the Western Balkans. But Europe's and the global economy's dependence on maritime trade and seabed infrastructure also means the EU should also take on greater responsibility for protecting the global commons at sea. This combination of tasks would not only promote EU values and interests, but also strengthen international peace and security.

(21)　Andersson, J.J., 'Into the breach! EU Military CSDP missions and operations', *Brief* No 3, EUISS, 7 March 2024 (https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief_2024-3_Bilateral-security-cooperation.pdf).

CHAPTER 2

MARITIME CONTESTATION IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

The reengagement of regional and extra-regional powers

by
AMAIA SÁNCHEZ-CACICEDO

INTRODUCTION

Access to the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is becoming increasingly contested by leading powers. It is a theatre where the ongoing rivalry between the United States and China on the global stage intersects with the regional competition between India and China. Regional and extra-regional powers are having to step up their engagement across the IOR to counter China's growing presence and thus secure their own access to crucial sea lanes. China's partnerships with Iran and Russia add another layer of complexity to the landscape of rising contestation. Existing geopolitical tensions, such as between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as well as between Iran and Israel, further jeopardise the long-term stability of the region.

India's central geographical location and its growing reliance on seaborne trade (over 90 % by volume) are key factors driving the rising contestation in the IOR [1]. However the primary catalyst is the rollout of China's Maritime Silk Road (MSR) as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Through the MSR, China is establishing a network of 'strategic strongpoints' along its major sea lines of communication (SLOCs), facilitating the development of a robust logistics infrastructure for managing the flow of commodities back to mainland China [2]. The fear is that Beijing could gain too much control over international shipping and influence key SLOCs. In addition, the bulk of overseas ports with Chinese investment have the potential for dual civilian-military use. The BRI has further led to regional polarisation in the IOR among countries that have decided to be part of it and those who have declined; India has vehemently opposed the

(1)   Muralidharan, M.P., 'Maritime security issues from the perspective of India, Sri Lanka and Maldives', in *India and the Island States in the Indian Ocean: Evolving Geopolitics and Security Perspectives*, ICWA, 2023 (https://www.icwa.in/pdfs/IndiaIslandStatesIndianOcean.pdf).

(2)   Kardon, I., 'Geostrategic competition for military basing in the Indian Ocean Region', Brookings, 8 February 2023 (https://www.brookings.edu/articles/geostrategic-competition-for-military-basing-in-the-indian-ocean-region/).

project. China's gradual penetration of the Indian Ocean has triggered a hedging response from smaller littoral and island states, resulting in growing instability.

Among other Indian Ocean regional powers, Australia has become the second-largest recipient of Chinese port investment, despite not being a signatory to the BRI and a 'like-minded' country [3]. France, considered a regional power, maintains a strategic presence through its Indian Ocean territories (Mayotte and Reunion), while extra-regional powers, like the United States, the United Kingdom and Japan, are demonstrably reinvesting in the region. Russia is also seeking to step up its engagement in the Indian Ocean via military partnerships and through the annual Security Belt naval exercises that it conducts with China and Iran.

AN OCEAN OF CONTESTATION

Rising contestation currently has less to do with outright military confrontation and more with securing overseas interests and crucial SLOCs. The Indian Ocean carries a significant share of global trade, with 50 % of container traffic and 70 % of oil and gas trade flowing through its waters [4].The Suez-Malacca route, a vital artery for global maritime commerce, also contains critical shipping chokepoints [5]. China's MSR aims to connect China to South and Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Africa by building deep-water seaports with

potential for naval use in strategically-located littoral and island states in the IOR. Beijing has been clear about the need to safeguard its national security, including its institutions, personnel and assets abroad [6].

This has created apprehension among smaller South Asian and other IOR countries whose ports are under Chinese ownership. This concern stems from cases like Kyauk Pyu Port in Myanmar, where China holds a 70 % stake, or Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, leased to China for an extendable period of 99 years [7]. Construction of such ports is often accompanied by Chinese investments in adjacent free economic zones with backup port industries and additional transport infrastructure. Examples include Gwadar Port in Pakistan, which is part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) connecting it to Xinjiang, and Doraleh Multipurpose Port in Djibouti, linked to the Djibouti-Ethiopia railway, among others. Australia hosts two commercial ports on lease from Chinese companies and one with 50 % Chinese ownership, all three of which could potentially be used for dual-use purposes [8].

The Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) 2022 Annual Report highlights hybrid – including aerial vehicles and drones – and cybersecurity maritime security threats as increasingly prevalent in the IOR [9]. Commercial shipping and port infrastructure are both vulnerable, given that ships are often the targets of such attacks, and as demonstrated by the ransomware attack on Mumbai's Jawaharlal Nehru Port Container Terminal. Protecting undersea cables is another issue of concern. Outside powers' interference and full or partial ownership of such infrastructure

(3)   Blair, A., 'Signal: Australia second-largest recipient of port investment', *Ship Technology,* 14 November 2023 (https://www.ship-technology.com/news/signal-australia-second-largest-recipient-of-chinese-port-investment/).

(4)   'Maritime security issues from the perspective of India, Sri Lanka and Maldives', op.cit.

(5)   Duchâtel, M., 'Blue China: Navigating the Maritime Silk Road to Europe', ECFR, 23 April 2018 (https://ecfr.eu/publication/blue_china_navigating_the_maritime_silk_road_to_europe/).

(6)   State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 'China's Military Strategy', May 2015 (http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm).

(7)   Liu, Z.Z, 'Tracking China's control of overseas ports', Council on Foreign Relations, 6 November 2023 (https://www.cfr.org/tracker/china-overseas-ports).

(8)   Ibid.

(9)   IFC-IOR India, *Annual Report 2022* (https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/ifc-ior/reports.html).

adds to the uncertainty. A recent incident involving the simultaneous but unexplained damage to four undersea telecommunications cables along the Bab el-Mandeb Strait highlights this vulnerability. They will be hard to repair due to the continuing Houthi attacks on commercial vessels.

Proliferation of dual-use ports and military bases

According to official Chinese sources, only Djibouti has followed the 'first civilian, then military' port model thus far [10]. Yet, the US Department of Defense lists Angola, Cambodia, Equatorial Guinea, Indonesia, Kenya, Myanmar, Pakistan, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand and the UAE as potential locations for Chinese military logistics facilities [11]. Nonetheless, by the time China officially opened its PLA base in Djibouti in 2017, it had effectively already become a military hub in the IOR; the United States, Japan, Italy and France (including German and Spanish contingents) had already set up military bases there, followed by Saudi Arabia most recently. Similarly, other regional actors are expanding their military presence: the UAE has set up a military base in Eritrea, Türkiye has established one in Somalia while

Russia aims to do so along the Sudanese Red Sea coastline.

Chinese physical presence in Indian Ocean waters has now evolved beyond dual-use ports to include surveillance research 'spy' vessels, mission-ready ships deployed across strategic ports and facilities specifically designed to support military activities [12]. It is estimated that nearly half of the ports with Chinese terminals have access to dry docks and a number of these have hosted 'technical stops' where substantial repair work on People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) vessels and equipment has taken place [13]. There are also Chinese-built submarine bases, such as BNS Sheikh Hasina Submarine Base in Bangladesh, where two Chinese submarines sold to the Bangladeshi Navy are anchored [14].

The growing number of Chinese coastal deployments with military potential along the 'String of Pearls' [15] has heightened New Delhi's threat perception as well as the concerns of extra-regional powers. India has responded with its own 'Necklace of Diamonds'. This involves a combination of building strategic ports (such as Chabahar in Iran or Sittwe in Myanmar) and securing access rights to crucial ports and bases [16] across strategic locations in the IOR [17]. There is an Indian Ocean Navy outpost in North Agalega island (Mauritius) with capacity for a deep-sea port,

(10) Funaiole, M., Hart, B. and McElwee, L. 'Dire Straits: China's push to secure its energy interests in the Middle East', CSIS, 3 February 2023 (https://features.csis.org/hiddenreach/china-middle-east-military-facility/).

(11) U.S. Department of Defense, Annual Report to Congress, *Military and Security Developments involving the People's Republic of China 2022*, October 2022 (https://media.defense.gov/2022/Nov/29/2003122279/-1/-1/1/2022-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF).

(12) Funaiole, M., Hart, B. and Powers-Riggs, A., 'Surveying the seas: Chinese dual-use research operations in the Indian Ocean', CSIS, 10 January 2024 (https://features.csis.org/hiddenreach/china-indian-ocean-research-vessels/).

(13) Kardon, I., 'China's global maritime access: alternatives to overseas military bases in the twenty-first century', *Security Studies*, Vol. 31, No 5, 2022, pp. 885–916.

(14) Funaiole, M. et al., 'Submarine diplomacy: A snapshot of China's influence along the Bay of Bengal', CSIS, 17 November 2023 (https://features.csis.org/snapshots/china-submarine-diplomacy/).

(15) The concept of 'String of Pearls' was coined in the US as far back as in 2004 to describe how China's investments in seaports across the littoral areas of the Indian Ocean could be used to create a network of naval bases stretching from China to Pakistan.

(16) Including Diego Garcia whose sovereignty is disputed between the United Kingdom and Mauritius.

(17) See the map 'India and the EU in the Indian Ocean' in Blarel, O., 'Security and Defence: Maritime cooperation' in Sanchez-Cacicedo, A. (ed.) 'EU-India relations: Gaining strategic traction?', *Chaillot Paper* No 181, EUISS, February 2024, p. 38 (https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/eu-india-relations).

which is also the case of the geostrategically located Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Indian territory) [18], which lie in close proximity to a suspected Chinese secret intelligence post in Myanmar's Coco Islands [19]. New Delhi is further strengthening its presence by providing naval training, organising joint patrols and undertaking joint naval exercises with regional and extra-regional countries. But China is doing likewise.

Instrumentalisation of littoral and small island nation-states in the IOR

Littoral and small island states in the IOR are increasingly caught between China and India, exhibiting 'swing behaviour' as they navigate between both powers. It is noteworthy that, except for Bhutan, India's immediate neighbours have all joined the BRI. This fragmentation weakens New Delhi's regional leverage and benefits Beijing. China is further consolidating its position by becoming a key arms supplier to countries in the region. It is now the top supplier of arms to Pakistan and Thailand, directly challenging the United States in the case of Bangkok. It ranks furthermore among the top five suppliers to Tanzania and Sri Lanka. It is similarly challenging India's position in Myanmar and that of both the United States and India in the case of Sri Lanka. Interestingly, India is the top arms supplier to the Maldives [20].

The recent shift in Maldivian foreign policy illustrates the potential risks that hedging

> E xcept for Bhutan, India's immediate neighbours have all joined the BRI.

strategies pose to the stability of the IOR. The Maldives' antagonistic behaviour towards New Delhi has become publicly visible following the September 2023 presidential elections that brought Mohamed Muizzu to power. In contrast to his predecessor, soon after taking office Muizzu opted to attend the China-led Indian Ocean Region Forum instead of the India-led Colombo Security Conclave. The ongoing spat between India and the Maldives is escalating to the point that India was requested to withdraw its military personnel from the geo-strategic island by 15 March 2024. Soon after that, the Maldives signed a military pact with China for the provision of military assistance. Male recently also authorised the Chinese research vessel Xiang Yang Hong 3 to dock in its port.

India has actively sought to limit Chinese access to Sri Lankan ports. In 2023 the Indian government managed to persuade Colombo to impose a one-year moratorium on foreign research vessels. New Delhi wanted to avoid what they perceive as Chinese research 'spy' vessels from accessing Sri Lanka's ports yet again. India had learned its lesson after the Chinese-Sri Lankan Hambantota port deal in 2017. Furthermore, when the Sri Lankan government cancelled a joint India-Japan Memorandum of Understanding for the East Container Terminal project in Colombo in 2021, the Indian Adani Group, in a strategic move, acquired a majority stake in Colombo Port's West International Container Terminal in a joint venture with Sri Lankan partners. The US government supported this with additional funding after China pledged

(18)   Alden, C. and Schoeman, M., 'Fighting more than pirates: Security in the Western Indian Ocean', in Council for Strategic and Defence Research (CSDR), *Synergizing Indo-UK Strategic Vision for the Western Indian Ocean*, New Delhi, 2022 (https://csdronline.org/csdr-special-report-strategizing-indo-uk-vision/).

(19)   Pollock, J. and Symon, D., 'Is Myanmar building a spy base on Great Coco Island?', Chatham House, 31 March 2023 (https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/the-world-today/2023-04/myanmar-building-spy-base-great-coco-island).

(20)   SIPRI, Arms Transfers Database, 2018–2023 (https://armstransfers.sipri.org/ArmsTransfer/TransferData); Carnegie Endowment, 'The Indian Ocean Strategic Map – Arms Transfers' (https://carnegieendowment.org/publications/interactive/indian-ocean-map/?page=Arms-Transfers).

Contesting access to the Indian Ocean Region
India's and China's strategic presence and investments

India
- ◯ Overseas ports with Indian investment/right of commercial use
- ◆ Naval outposts
- ◇ Domestic naval presence

China
- ◯ Overseas ports with Chinese investment and potential for naval use
- ◆ Naval presence
- ● Other Chinese investments

Iran

Saudi Arabia

Pakistan

UAE
Oman

Sudan

Yemen

Military base
Djibouti

Bangladesh

Chinese-built submarine base

Suspected Chinese intelligence post

Myanmar/Burma

China

India

Sri Lanka

Kenya

Tanzania

Singapore

Timor–Leste

Mozambique

Madagascar

Australia

Live fire
India's and China's partners in joint naval exercises in the Indian Ocean since the beginning of 2023

India-US-China competition as arms suppliers
Top five suppliers to IOR littoral states, 2018-23

● China   ● India   ● United States   ○ other

Rank	Indonesia	Maldives	Myanmar/Burma	Pakistan	Sri Lanka	Tanzania	Thailand	United Arab Emirates
1	● United States	● India	○	● China	● United States	○	● China	● United States
2	○	○	● China	○	● China	● China	○	○
3	○	○	● India	○	● India	○	● United States	○
4	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
5	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

major investment in a large logistics complex at Colombo port some months earlier [21].

IDENTIFYING NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

To begin with, there is a need to address the Indian Ocean in and of itself as a security and geostrategic construct. The obvious challenge to this is the size and diversity of the region: it encompasses continental powers, some large economies such as India, Australia or Indonesia, alongside small nation-states and low-income economies. Furthermore, countries like Iran or Pakistan may often diverge from India, Australia and France in their respective relationships with China and the United States. Cooperation is thus unlikely while additional contestation is predictable in such a complex and diverse geopolitical landscape.

However, despite the current fragmentation driven by China's growing influence across the IOR, there might be potential for cohesion if effectively managed by its rivals. China's increasing geo-economic and 'soft' military penetration of the IOR is likely to lead regional actors to turn to Washington as the preferred security provider, as long as it does not seek to dominate. The United States has experience of building coalitions in the Indian Ocean as evidenced by initiatives like the Combined Maritime Forces (CMFs) [22]. India, together with key regional powers such as Australia, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia and Singapore, would likely need to co-operate with such US-led initiatives.

Additional contestation is predictable in such a complex and diverse geopolitical landscape.

In the long-term, and despite its closest neighbours' potential concerns, India has a central role to play in shaping IOR regional architecture. This can counterbalance attempts at extra-territorial dominance by China or the United States. For this to succeed, regional cohesion is essential. In this context, India is playing a key role in consolidating the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), which has 23 IOR resident countries as members, including France, but excluding Pakistan, Myanmar and Saudi Arabia. It also has eleven dialogue partners, which include China, the United States, Japan, South Korea, Türkiye and a number of European countries. The EU has recently become IORA's 12th Dialogue Partner.

India must be the key vector for a stronger EU investment in the IOR. New Delhi has already conducted joint naval exercises with EU NAVFOR Somalia in the Gulf of Aden and the Gulf of Oman, respectively. The IFC-IOR in India further plays a crucial role in strengthening maritime security in the region. It has become a key maritime information-sharing hub that hosts Liaison Officers from partner countries, including the QUAD [23] members, as well as neighbouring countries, France, Italy and the UK.

Operationally-speaking, the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), serving littoral states in Southern and East Africa, has its own executive arm for maritime security: the Regional Information Fusion Centre in Madagascar and the Regional Centre for Operational Coordination in Seychelles. Both Regional

(21) Srinivasan, M., 'Adani's Sri Lanka port terminal project to get funding from U.S. government', *The Hindu*, 8 November 2023 (https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/adanis-sri-lanka-port-terminal-project-to-get-funding-from-us-government/article67512233.ece); 'Chinese state-owned firm to build major Sri Lanka port complex', *The Hindu*, 1 May 2023 (https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/chinese-state-owned-firm-to-build-major-sri-lanka-port-complex/article66800609.ece).

(22) Grare, F. and Samaan, J.P., *The Indian Ocean as a New Political and Security Region*, Palgrave Macmillan, Switzerland, 2022, p. 208.

(23) Referring to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between Australia, India, Japan and the United States.

Centres have reached out to extra-regional actors such as the EU and the UK. They conducted their first joint operation, *MARLIN*, with EUNAVFOR Operation *Atalanta* in December 2021 through the EU-funded Regional Maritime Security Programme (MASE). India has further sought increased EU involvement with littoral states in Southern and East Africa through the Djibouti Code of Conduct/ Jeddah Amendment. This is particularly relevant in light of the ongoing Red Sea crisis and Houthi attacks against commercial shipping. There is also growing room for collaboration between the EU and key IOR powers via ESIWA's [24] expanded mandate that now includes safeguarding maritime infrastructure, counterterrorism, as well as addressing cyber- and hybrid threats.

The EU must scale up its bilateral investment and security relations with small littoral and island IOR countries, particularly along the coasts of Southern and East Africa, where it already has more of a foothold. It could start with trust-building mechanisms – such as CRIMARIO II's Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) initiative – or the securitisation of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). These efforts can be complemented by expanding bilateral and trilateral naval exercises, ideally involving India and a third like-minded partner, such as Japan or the United States.

littoral and island states. We can expect these countries to display increasingly unpredictable 'swing behaviour' as they navigate their relationships with both India and China. While the elites of smaller littoral and island nation-states in the IOR possess agency, they are also vulnerable to manipulation by leading powers. To safeguard its own maritime security interests, it is imperative for the EU to make strategic investments, both political and financial, in securing the stability of the Indian Ocean.

CONCLUSION

The IOR is likely to see an intensification of competition, driven not only by China but also by actors like Iran and Russia – and their proxies. For now, China's gradual but steady expansion has filled the power vacuum that previously existed in the region, prompting a renewed focus by extra-regional powers anxious about securing access to crucial SLOCs and strategic locations across the IOR's

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(24) Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia (ESIWA) (https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/esiwa-enhancing-security-cooperation-and-asia_en).

'THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING' OF CYBERSPACE

Contestation in multilateral cyber negotiations

by
ANDREA SALVI

INTRODUCTION

The last three decades have been marked by the increasingly ubiquitous presence of cyber and digital technologies in the political sphere. States now rely heavily on information and communication technology (ICT) capabilities for their core functions, and these have significantly influenced the way they interact with one another, both in peacetime and in wartime. The emergence of digital and cyber empires has seen competing attempts by great powers to regulate technology and its effects on the economy [1]. However, the impact of ICT technologies extends well beyond the campuses of the Bay Area or the glass skyscrapers of Shenzhen. The omnipresence of cyber technologies – and particularly the threats stemming from them – has led states to turn towards multilateral forums in search of governance solutions. Several proposals have emerged and reflect different models of governance that lie at the heart of a growing international debate. The central question remains: which institutional mechanism will emerge as the dominant force in cyberspace governance?

While this question has been raised by many countries seeking the ideal multilateral framework for cyberspace governance, proposed ways ahead are profoundly different. This divergence stems from a fundamental clash between two contrasting approaches: authoritarian multilateralism and liberal multilateralism. These competing visions are directly linked to geopolitical tensions and differing perspectives on the future of the international order.

This chapter explores how contestation in cyberspace has unfolded in multilateral forums, particularly in the UN. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has been a central agora for discussion; notably through the recent endorsement of the Programme of Action and the new phase of the UN Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies. As noted by Raymond and

(1)   Bradford, A., *Digital Empires: The global battle to regulate technology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2023.

Sherman (2023) [2], the UNGA has become the key forum for shaping the future of cybersecurity governance in relation to international security, with liberal democracies increasingly leveraging their capabilities in UN diplomatic procedures to steer the framework towards a more inclusive and cooperative model [3]. This trend aligns with the patterns of the liberal international order, whereby multilateral diplomacy is a crucial instrument supported by major democracies [4]. In contrast, states with authoritarian tendencies have progressively been more active in UN forums. This chapter examines how, beneath the surface, the model of authoritarian multilateralism is a game of great power politics, played with multilateral instruments. By focusing on the current dynamics of multilateralism in cyberspace, especially on the strategic manoeuvring within the OEWG and the push to establish its successor, it highlights the efforts of 'revisionist powers' to reshape multilateral forums in accordance with their preferred governance model. The chapter illustrates such dynamics through examples based on current UN cyber processes, most notably the OEWG.

CONTESTED MULTILATERALISM IN CYBERSPACE

Cyberspace presents a compelling case study to understand how multilateral contestation unfolds. Cyber processes reflect a complex interplay between diverse geopolitical interests, ideological divides, and a considerable variance in technical and technological capabilities.

Cybersecurity discussions within the UNGA have evolved at a steady pace in the last two decades. State-driven efforts in cybersecurity governance have been marked by intense power politics and substantive disagreements along the liberal–authoritarian axis [5]. Authoritarian regimes have attempted to leverage processes to propagate their model of multilateralism, thereby influencing the global governance of cyber norms and shaping the direction of the international rule-based order [6].

The work of Raymond and Sherman (2023) – which constitutes the theoretical pillar of this chapter – identifies two contrasting approaches to multilateralism in cyberspace: 'authoritarian' and 'liberal' [7]. These approaches reflect fundamentally different visions of principles that should guide international cyber governance.

(2) Raymond, M. and Sherman, J., 'Authoritarian multilateralism in the global cyber regime complex: The double transformation of an international diplomatic practice', *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 45, No 1, 2023, pp. 1–31.

(3) Levinson, N. S., 'Idea Entrepreneurs: The United Nations Open-Ended Working Group & Cybersecurity'. *Telecommunications Policy*, Vol. 45, No 6, July 2021, pp. 102–142 (https://doi.org/10.1016/j.telpol.2021.102142); 'Authoritarian multilateralism in the global cyber regime complex: The double transformation of an international diplomatic practice', op.cit.

(4) Ikenberry, G. J., *After Victory: Institutions, strategic restraint, and the rebuilding of order after major wars*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2001; Reus-Smit, P. C., *The Moral Purpose of the State: Culture, social identity, and institutional rationality in international relations*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1999; Ruggie, J. G., 'Multilateralism: The anatomy of an institution', *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No 3, 1992, pp. 561–598 (https://doi.org/10.1017/s0020818300027831).

(5) Carr, M., 'Power plays in global internet governance', *Millennium*, Vol. 43, No 2, 2015, pp. 640–659 (https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829814562655); Urgessa, W. G., 'Multilateral cybersecurity governance: Divergent conceptualizations and its origin', *Computer Law & Security Review*, Vol. 36, April 2020 (https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clsr.2019.105368).

(6) Finnemore, M. and Hollis, D. B., 'Constructing norms for global cybersecurity', *American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 110, No 3, 2017, pp. 425–479 (https://doi.org/10.1017/s0002930000016894); Raymond, M., 'Social practices of rule-making for international law in the cyber domain', *Journal of Global Security Studies, Vol. 6, No 2, 2020* (https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogz065).

(7) 'Authoritarian multilateralism in the global cyber regime complex: The double transformation of an international diplomatic practice', op.cit.

Over the past decade, Russia and China have significantly ramped up their efforts to shape the discourse on multilateral cyber governance within the UN, as evidenced by a marked increase in proposals and statements [8] at the UNGA, the OEWG and the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on Advancing responsible State behaviour in cyberspace in the context of international security. Authoritarian states have strategically portrayed their efforts towards greater control of information flow as exercises in sovereignty and legitimate domestic prerogatives, often cloaking these efforts in the rhetoric of promoting stability and international accountability [9].

Authoritarian states engage in a tactic of 'rhetoric adaptation', using procedural manoeuvres to advance their own agendas without fully embracing the collaborative spirit of multilateral engagements [10]. This approach reflects a different understanding of cyber-sovereignty, advocating governance models that prioritise control, regulation, and the ability of states to dictate the terms of cyber engagement. They employ narratives of collective stability to justify stringent internet controls, framing such measures on 'information security' as essential for safeguarding national security. In this way, authoritarian states are actively trying to embed authoritarian principles within the governance of cyber-related issues. A clear example is Russia's proposal on a cybercrime convention currently being negotiated at the 'Ad Hoc Committee to Elaborate

a Comprehensive International Convention on Countering the Use of Information and Communications Technologies for Criminal Purposes'. The associated resolution was passed in November 2019 by the UNGA's Third Committee to move the centre of gravity of cybercrime discussions away from the already established international framework, the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime drawn up by the Council of Europe [11].

Liberal multilateralism in contrast is broadly characterised by commitment to openness, inclusivity, and a multi-stakeholder approach to governance. The model springs directly from the spirit of liberal democracies, and prioritises cooperation, advocating for voluntary norms, the application of international law in cyberspace, and broad stakeholder participation [12]. It champions a global, open, free, stable and secure cyberspace with minimal restrictions. However, it is important to recognise a certain variance of stances within this approach, particularly in how different actors interpret and implement these principles. For example, the EU's approach to cyber governance embodies a nuanced version of liberal multilateralism. Unlike the more *laissez-faire* approach characterised by minimal regulatory interventions, the EU model incorporates a proactive regulatory stance. This model seeks to balance openness with regulatory measures that uphold shared interests and values, inherently emphasising cooperation.

The EU model seeks to balance openness with regulatory measures that uphold shared interests and values, inherently emphasising cooperation.

(8)   Radu, R., 'Negotiating meanings for security in the cyberspace', *Info*, Vol 15, No 6, 2013, pp. 32–41. (https://doi.org/10.1108/info-04-2013-0018); 'Idea Entrepreneurs: The United Nations Open-Ended Working Group & Cybersecurity', op.cit.; 'Social practices of rule-making for international law in the cyber domain', op.cit.

(9)   Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Doctrine of information security of the Russian Federation*, 2016 (http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/information/DIB_engl/).

(10)   Fung, C. J., 'China's use of rhetorical adaptation in development of a global cyber order: a case study of the norm of the protection of the public core of the internet', *Journal of Cyber Policy*, Vol. 7, No 3, 2022, pp. 256–274 (https://doi.org/10.1080/23738871.2023.2178946).

(11)   'Authoritarian multilateralism in the global cyber regime complex: The double transformation of an international diplomatic practice', op.cit.

(12)   'Multilateral cybersecurity governance: Divergent conceptualizations and its origin', op.cit.

Tracing voting dynamics
Changes in voting patterns reflected in A/RES/78/16 and A/RES/78/237

Programme of action
Programme of action to advance
responsible state behaviour in the use
of information and communications technologies
in the context of international security (A RES 78 16)

Open-ended working group
Developments in the field of
information and telecommunications
in the context of international
security (A RES 78 237)

Yes

Yes

Abstained

No

Abstained

No

Non−voting

Non−voting

Belarus
Burundi
China
North Korea
Iran
Mali
Nicaragua
Russia
Syria

EU Member
 States
Most EU
 candidate
 countries
Some other
 European
 countries
United States
 and Canada
Japan and Korea
Some Pacific
 Islands
Israel
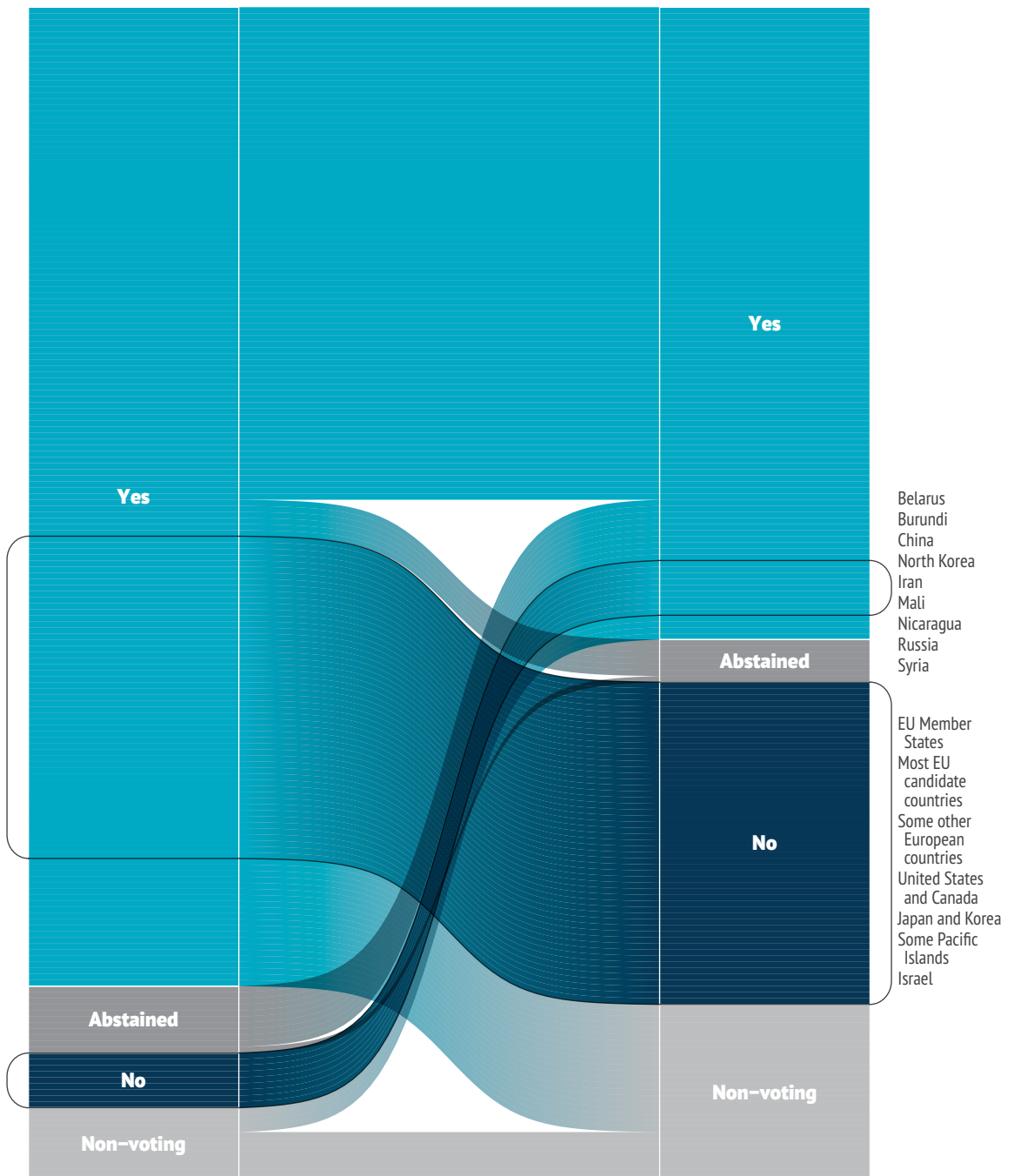
Data: UN, 2024

Authoritarian and liberal approaches to multilateralism have resulted in vastly different concrete proposals, each a direct reflection of the respective underlying governance visions. As Raymond and Sherman observe in their study, while major democracies generally demonstrate strong commitment to multilateral arrangements, the cyber domain presents unique challenges in this regard. Major democracies are actively engaged in blocking and countering proposals by authoritarian states that constitute a threat to the very foundations of the multilateral system.

CONTESTATION OF FUTURE MECHANISMS: THE OEWG AND THE POA

The OEWG, now in its second mandate (2021-2025), embodies the complexity of formulating cyber norms amidst diverse global geopolitical perspectives. It is currently the primary forum for the consensus-based advancement of international norms and interpretation of international law in cyberspace. As such the OEWG plays a critical role in determining the future of cyber governance and, consequently, the trajectory of international politics in relation to ICT. Major actors like Russia regularly push for a legally binding international treaty to enforce cybersecurity norms, aiming for a more controlled cyber ecosystem [13]. At the other end of the spectrum, liberal democracies advocate for a flexible, inclusive, voluntary approach based on existing norms. The issue of multistakeholder participation further complicates the already complex landscape of cyber governance. Given the interconnected nature of cyberspace

and the private ownership of most cyber capabilities, non-governmental stakeholders are essential for a holistic cyber governance approach. However, within the OEWG the participation of such actors has been hindered by some authoritarian states raising concerns about the inclusivity of the process.

Finding consensus within the OEWG is a significant challenge, given the deeply entrenched geopolitical divisions among member states. The group's first mandate (2019-2021) culminated in the release of a final report in March 2021. The report's success was in part due to its division into two parts: a consensus section and a 'Chair Summary' containing proposals that did not meet with general agreement. One notable proposal in this summary was the 'Programme of Action' (PoA), originally put forward by 45 states. The proposal was welcomed by the UNGA in November 2022 through resolution 77/37 and endorsed a year later in resolution 78/16. In this context, the PoA aspires to overcome the longstanding ideological and strategic impasses that have characterised cyber governance discussions. The proposal's implementation-oriented and inclusive approach has garnered widespread support. It proposes a dynamic framework to address and anticipate emerging cyber challenges, emphasising positive accountability, capacity building, and the implementation of agreed norms to foster global cyber stability. The initiative seeks to transcend constraints of previous forums, aiming to bridge the divide between divergent interests. It advocates for a consensus-building and yet agile, action-oriented mechanism under UN auspices.

Despite being sponsored by a vast majority of states and receiving widespread support from various non-governmental stakeholders in civil society and the private sector, the PoA encounters significant opposition from authoritarian states, most notably Russia. They

(13)   Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, 'Statement by the Russian delegation at the seventh session of the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Security of and in the Use of ICTs 2021-2025', 8 March 2024 (https:// docs-library.unoda.org/Open-Ended_Working_Group_on_Information_and_Communication_Technologies_-_(2021)/ Russia_-_OEWG_ICT_security_-_____statement_-_RID_08.03.2024_-_ENG.pdf).

criticise the initiative as an attempt by Western countries to impose their liberal vision of cyberspace governance. Furthermore, they express concerns that the PoA could undermine the established role of the OEWG and propose alternative frameworks that prioritise state sovereignty and a greater degree of government control over cyberspace. Russia has been a particularly vocal critic, leading the charge for a UN Convention on Cyber Security that would formalise cyber governance through legally binding agreements. This approach aims to solidify state-centric control over digital spaces, contrasting with the flexible, consensus-driven model promoted by the PoA. In 2023, coinciding with the endorsement of the PoA proposal, the UNGA also approved the Russia–backed resolution 78/237 titled 'Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security'. This resolution calls for continued OEWG discussions on developing additional legally binding cyber norms and exemplifies Moscow's pushback.

The debate surrounding these resolutions and the national positions they represent underscores the delicate balance between contrasting approaches to multilateralism. While authoritarian states push for a model that prioritises stricter approaches, proponents of the PoA advocate for a governance framework that ensures cyber stability through inclusive and cooperative efforts. The fact that both resolutions were passed at the UNGA adds a layer of complexity to contestation in cyberspace. As shown in the diagram on page 23, there is a considerable overlap in 'Yes' votes, which constitute the majority in both proposals. On the other hand, there is a stark contrast between the main supporters of 78/16 and 78/237, with the EU and likeminded states supporting the former, and Moscow – among others – spearheading the latter. This tactic of framing the debate in terms of opposing blocs – consistently used by Russia to discredit other initiatives – is perilous at best as it carries the concrete risk of undermining the broader multilateral effort. At the conceptual level, it further exacerbates tensions and divisions, making contestation itself the crucible of the system. At a more practical level, it poses the risk of creating a double track for cyber diplomacy, which would be unsustainable for most UN Member States. That, in turn, entails the risk of creating a stalemate in multilateral governance processes that would seriously hamper progress towards international cyber security. Notably, the 2023 UNGA proposal places much more emphasis on renewing the OEWG's mandate, 'backtracking' from the more adamant call for a legally binding treaty from 2022.

> **T**he ongoing discussions within the OEWG reflect the broader struggle to define the present and future institutional framework for cyberspace.

While the PoA is alive and well despite attempts to undermine it, its viability hinges upon the international community's ability to shape it as an instrument to reconcile competing visions. This necessitates a mechanism that intrinsically respects the diverse interests, priorities and values of the global community. While the initiative focuses on action-oriented outcomes and capacity building – embodying a pragmatic approach to enhancing multilateral governance – its success will require open dialogue, and a willingness among states to compromise and collaborate. As clearly emphasised by proponents and signatories, the PoA aspires to create a permanent forum where discussions on progress and further measures can take place, not to impose a vision of cyberspace tailored for a specific region or group of states.

CONCLUSION: THE ROAD AHEAD

All in all, the ongoing discussions within the OEWG reflect the broader struggle to define the present and future institutional framework for cyberspace. The resistance from

authoritarian states to non-binding solutions and their refusal to embrace inclusive initiatives such as the PoA underscores the clash between governance models, mirroring larger global tensions.

Achieving a consensus-driven formula for the governance of cyberspace is a complex endeavour given these two diverging approaches to multilateral engagement. In turn, framing the debate as a clash between opposing blocs aligns with the interests of authoritarian states¸ who play the multilateral game to pursue their own political agendas.

In light of the ongoing contestation explored in this chapter, the PoA could be a functional bridge-building instrument for overcoming these challenges. Its main merits are embodied in its practical focus, which can promote dialogue, inclusivity and transparent governance through concrete activities such as capacity building and norm implementation. If correctly designed as part of a collective effort that embraces the multilateral spirit of the UNGA, this mechanism has the potential to bridge ideological divides, foster collaboration, and leverage the expertise of the multi-stakeholder community, while ensuring that sovereign states retain ultimate decision-making authority in cyberspace.

In this context, the EU's proactive and partnership-oriented approach to cyber governance may offer a fruitful perspective. It upholds shared interests and values while aspiring to build an inclusive and cooperative cyberspace. This is not merely a posture but reflects the very DNA of Europe's approach to multilateralism and can act as a palliative to cyber contestation, bridging significant ideological and operational divides. The challenge? Putting this vision into practice to foster consensus-building and sustainable compromises.

ISSUE-SPECIFIC CONTESTATION

WINDS OF CHANGE

Africa's assertive stance on tax governance
and carbon emission policies

by
ROSSELLA MARANGIO

INTRODUCTION

Africa is becoming increasingly assertive on the world stage. Its demands for a greater role in international governance have grown steadily at least since the end of the Cold War. This trend is being amplified by a confluence of factors: booming demographics, economic growth, and the opportunities to forge new and diverse partnerships [1]. In the area of development finance, Africa is advocating for a fairer system and questioning how international norms are set, particularly with regard to agenda-setting powers. Disputes over global taxation rules and the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) highlight this challenge to established norms and Africa's growing demand for a more equitable voice in international decision-making.

Looking at these two case studies, this chapter argues that Africa's growing contestation of international norms is a response to its perception of being marginalised in global decision-making processes. However, this challenge does not necessarily signify a rejection of the entire multilateral system. Instead it should be seen as a call for reform: a reassessment and improvement of how international norms are set, offering potential common ground for reconciling competing interests.

AN OVERDUE GAMBIT? AFRICA'S PUSH FOR A UN TAX CONVENTION

Tax regulation has become a complex issue in international governance, with involvement from various bodies such as the UN second committee, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the G20 as well as through multilateral and bilateral treaties. Disagreements among countries are increasingly evident, often linked to their

[1]   'The new Scramble for Africa', *The Economist*, 7 March 2019 (https://www.economist.com/leaders/2019/03/07/the-new-scramble-for-africa).

level of economic development. While there is recognition of the need to address issues like tax avoidance at the international level, debates focus on the preferred decision-making forum and the extent of each country's commitment.

In November 2023, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) approved a resolution, sponsored by Nigeria on behalf of the Africa Group, calling for an intergovernmental framework convention under the aegis of the UN to reform the international taxation system. The vote, with 125 in favour, 48 against, and 9 abstentions, highlighted a divide between developed and developing economies. Developed economies tended to favour a lighter approach, as suggested by a UK-sponsored amendment that was rejected, while developing countries supported a more binding framework convention. While Russia's support for the resolution, despite its criticism of the OECD, was not surprising, Türkiye's abstention was less expected. Despite its preference for a non-binding instrument, Türkiye chose to stand in solidarity with its African partners [2]. In contrast, EU Member States and other developed economies, when explaining their negative vote, highlighted the importance of avoiding duplication of efforts and building on progress achieved, especially within the framework of the Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS) project launched by the OECD and the G20 in 2013. This project established 15 measures aiming at tackling practices that allow multinational enterprises to exploit loopholes to avoid paying tax [3]. The 'Inclusive Framework on BEPS', created in 2016, allows broader participation including non-members

Debates focus on the preferred decision-making forum and the extent of each country's commitment.

of the G20 and OECD, and it currently comprises 145 countries and jurisdictions – such as Hong Kong and Macau. This framework is based on a three-tier structure – an assembly for all members, a 24-country steering group, and working groups. It facilitates coordination on implementing the 15 actions, four of which are considered as minimum standards to implement within the project.

However, the UNGA resolution casts doubt on the effectiveness of current tax-rule setting processes, highlighting agenda-setting and process follow-up as crucial factors influencing policy outcomes. Given the importance of mobilising domestic resources, including taxes, for development financing, the Africa Group's resolution directly challenges norm-setting procedures and advocates for broader participation. The BEPS Inclusive framework has made some progress in enhancing the ability of developing economies to influence outcomes, for instance offering capacity-building initiatives and ensuring translations of relevant documents. But its institutional set-up poses challenges for under-resourced public administrations in low-income countries. These challenges include the frequency of meetings held in Paris, language barriers, and travel costs [4]. The issue of international cooperation on taxation had already gained prominence as a core concern for the Africa Group in 2020 when the President of the 74th UNGA, Tijjani Muhammad-Bande of Nigeria, established a panel of experts to investigate financial integrity for sustainable development. The panel's report called for strengthening policy frameworks for sustainable development, and

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(2) UN, 'Second Committee approves nine draft resolutions, including texts on International Tax Cooperation, External Debt, Global Climate, Poverty Eradication', GA/EF/3597, 22 November 2023 (https://press.un.org/en/2023/gaef3597.doc.htm).

(3) OECD, *Action Plan on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting*, 19 July 2013 (https://www.oecd.org/tax/action-plan-on-base-erosion-and-profit-shifting-9789264202719-en.htm).

(4) Christensen, R. C., Hearson, M. and Randriamanalina, T., 'At the table, off the menu? Assessing the participation of lower-income countries in global tax negotiations', ICTD Working Paper 115, December 2020 (https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/20.500.12413/15853/ICTD_WP115.pdf?sequence=9); OECD, *Developing Countries and the OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework on BEPS: OECD Report for G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors*, October 2021 (https://www.oecd.org/tax/beps/developing-countries-and-the-oecd-g20-inclusive-framework-on-beps.htm).

Resolution on a UN framework convention on tax cooperation
UNGA voting

Since 2016, participation in the OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework on BEPS and its steering group has extended beyond OECD and G20 members. An analysis of their membership in comparison to the geographical distribution of votes at the UNGA on a UN framework convention highlights an emerging divide based on different degrees of economic development. Notably, developing countries appear to challenge existing rules for agenda- and norm-setting, indicating a preference for the UN as a negotiation forum.

Non-vote   Against   Abstain   In favour
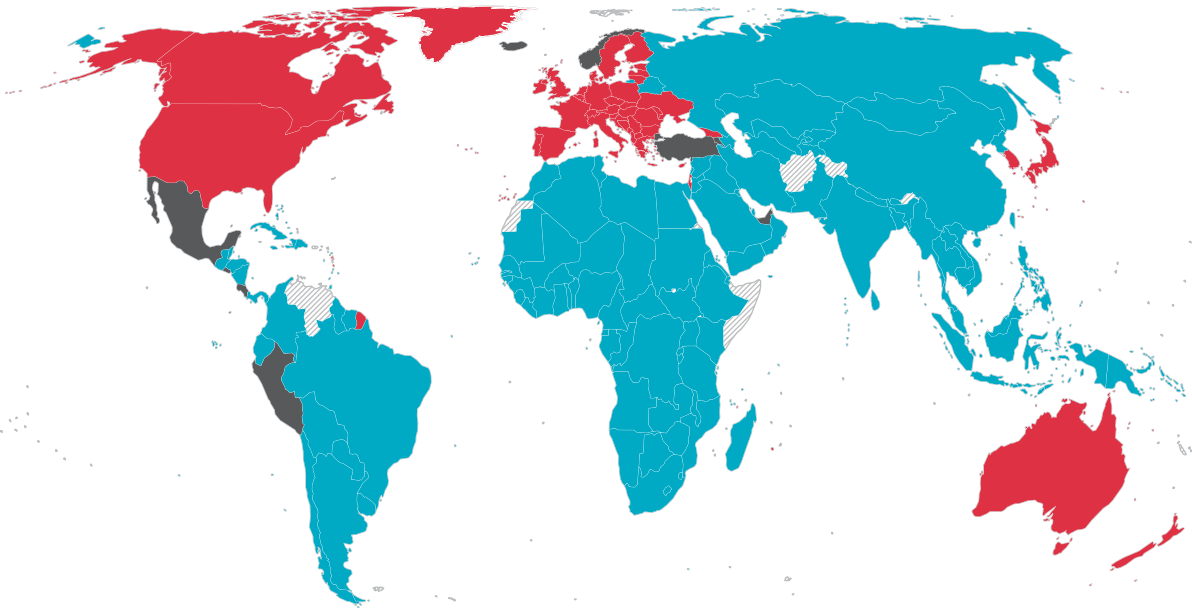
Variable membership
OECD/G20 Inclusive framework on BEPS

G20
The **European Union** is a member of the G20

The **African Union** was admitted to the G20 in 2023.

Inclusive framework on BEPS

Steering Group of the BEPS Inclusive Framework

Following the invasion of Ukraine, no invitations are issued to **Russia**

OECD

Data: UN, OECD, G20, Inclusive framework on BEPS, 2024

in a more forceful statement, declared the need for 'nothing less than transformation of the [*global*] financial system' [5].

In August 2023, a report by the UN Secretary-General also highlighted the need to evaluate inclusiveness and effectiveness in international tax cooperation, focusing on processes like participation, agenda-setting, decision-making and implementation. Regarding the BEPS Inclusive Framework, the report noted that associated countries that are not OECD or G20 me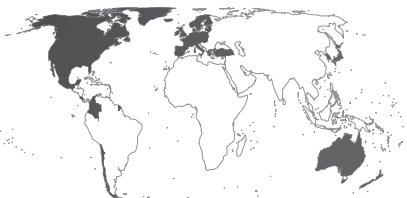mbers are expected to commit to norms that were created before they could participate in shaping them. They are thus excluded from equal participation in agenda-setting. The report therefore proposed three options for increased tax cooperation:

1. a multilateral convention with a regulatory binding text;

2. a legally binding framework convention on international tax cooperation; and

3. a framework for non-binding coordinated actions in international tax cooperation [6].

In their common position of September 2023, EU Member States preferred a non-binding agreement, echoing their vote at the UN second committee [7]. However, the resolution sponsored by the Africa Group favoured a framework convention, emphasising a legally binding multilateral instrument developed as a political rather than technical process. Developing countries may benefit from this option due to the potential for broader negotiation possibilities, including issue-linkage, pressure to implement political reforms domestically, and

achieving equal participation in agenda- and norm-setting [8].

The adoption of the resolution for an intergovernmental framework convention aimed at a binding instrument signals a shift in international finance negotiations and indicates that contestation of agenda- and norm-setting processes is proving effective. As the resolution states, an *ad-hoc* intergovernmental committee is to submit the draft terms of reference for the convention by August 2024, for discussion during the 79th UNGA in September of the same year. However, further resistance from developed countries towards participating in or advancing negotiations is possible, if not probable. This suggests a potentially lengthy and challenging road ahead.

AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES ON CBAM: BALANCING INTERESTS, BUILDING DIALOGUE

A second case study concerns the recently approved EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). This mechanism is designed to support global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by aligning with the phasing out of the EU Emission Trading System (ETS). It also aims at preventing unfair price competition from non-EU producers who do not adhere to emissions reduction policies. While

(5) UN, *Financial Integrity for Sustainable Development: Report of the high-level panel on international financial accountability, transparency and integrity for achieving the 2030 Agenda*, 2021 (https://factipanel.org/docpdfs/FACTI_Panel_Report.pdf).

(6) UN Report of the Secretary-General, 'Promotion of inclusive and effective international tax cooperation at the United Nations', A/78/235, 26 July 2023 (https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4019360?v=pdf).

(7) Council of the EU, 'Position on behalf of the European Union and its Member States on tax cooperation at the United Nations', 12967/23, Brussels, 22 September 2023 (https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12967-2023-INIT/en/pdf).

(8) Cadzow, L., Hearson, M., Heitmüller, F., Kuhn, K., Okanga, O. and Randriamanalina, T., 'Inclusive and effective international tax cooperation: Views From the Global South', ICTD Working Paper 172, 2023 (https://www.ictd.ac/publication/inclusive-effective-international-tax-cooperation/).

essential for achieving the ambitious target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 % by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, the ETS also poses a risk of disadvantaging EU producers due to increased production costs.

Therefore, the CBAM regulation aims to address this risk by limiting 'carbon leakage', which occurs when production shifts to countries with lower emissions standards, undermining emission reduction efforts [9]. During its transition phase (from 1 October 2023 to 31 December 2025), the CBAM requires importers to report on the direct and indirect emissions associated with imports of some carbon-intensive products, namely cement, iron and steel, aluminium, fertilisers, electricity and hydrogen.

During the process of approving the EU regulation on CBAM, the European Parliament considered the potential impact on developing countries. The possibility of exemptions or allocating CBAM revenue to support their green transitions was discussed. However, the final text did not include exceptions for developing countries and the support to green transition in the EU's external action was limited to already allocated amounts for external action and climate finance.

Initially, reactions in Africa were mixed. The *2023 African Economic Outlook* published by the African Development Bank (AfDB) saw the CBAM as a potential opportunity to enhance Africa's green transition with additional EU funding derived from the CBAM [10]. However,

once it became clear that the EU regulation limited the possibilities for additional climate financing, the AfDB's Director clearly advocated for an exemption from the CBAM for developing countries [11]. The rationale included concerns about potential setbacks to development and the risk of undermining the principle of common but differentiated responsibility outlined in the Paris Agreement. South Africa had already voiced its concern that the CBAM risks having an adverse effect on green transitions in Africa by increasing pressure on local economies [12]. In contrast, the September 2023 Africa Climate Summit declaration proposed a global carbon taxation regime that would include a carbon tax on fossil fuel trade, maritime transport and aviation, possibly accompanied by a global financial transaction tax to provide finance for climate-positive investments [13]. Such a tax would be likely to impact companies in more developed economies.

> # The CBAM risks having an adverse effect on green transitions in Africa by increasing pressure on local economies.

In 2023, economic projections by the African Climate Foundation and the London School of Economics highlighted the risk of negative impacts on economic growth in many African countries when the CBAM is phased in (starting in 2026). According to the study, the severity of the impact would depend on the volume of exports to the EU and the types of products that will be subject to the CBAM. Even in scenarios with minimum overall impact, trade diversion to countries like China and India is considered likely for African exports, ranging from 0.30 % to 5.14 % for fertilisers and from 9.34 % to

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(9) 'Regulation (EU) 2023/956 of 10 May 2023 establishing a carbon border adjustment mechanism', *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 130/52, 16 May 2023 (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023R0956).

(10) African Development Bank, *African Economic Outlook 2023* (https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/african-economic-outlook-2023).

(11) 'Development bank head at COP28 urges African exemption from EU carbon tax', Reuters, 2023 (https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/development-bank-head-cop28-urges-african-exemption-eu-carbon-tax-2023-12-06/).

(12) 'L'Afrique du Sud se fâche contre la taxe carbone européenne', *Le Monde*, 21 July 2023 (https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/07/21/l-afrique-du-sud-se-fache-contre-la-taxe-carbone-europeenne_6182889_3212.html).

(13) African Union, 'The African Leaders Nairobi Declaration on Climate Change and Call to Action', Nairobi, 6 September 2023 (https://media.africaclimatesummit.org/Final+declaration+1709-English.pdf?request-content-type=%22application/force-download).

12.82 % for iron and steel [14]. The World Bank's vulnerability index identifies Mozambique and Zimbabwe as highly exposed due to their significant exports to the EU of aluminium and iron and steel, respectively [15]. An article published by the French Development Agency estimates that Mozambique's exports to the EU could see around 2 % of well-paid jobs affected by the CBAM [16]. Moreover, increased administrative procedures, reliance on extractive industries and limited resources for investing in renewables pose additional challenges for African economies. These have potential repercussions both for domestic economies and trade.

Thus, while the CBAM serves the objectives of reducing greenhouse emissions and fair competition globally, it has sparked concerns among external partners, particularly in developing African countries. These concerns arise from discrepancies between the CBAM and established international norms on differentiated responsibilities in climate change mitigation (set out in the Paris Agreement) and development financing (Addis Ababa Agenda). In fact, the limitation of support for the green transition in developing countries to existing resources, coupled with increased administrative burdens, is viewed as challenging the norms of fairness and differentiated responsibilities. This could potentially further complicate the Africa-Europe partnership, as African countries may perceive the adoption and implementation of the CBAM as imbalanced and unresponsive to their requests. However, it could also be an opportunity for developing joint actions that can support green transitions in Africa, especially in the extractive industries sector.

CHARTING A NEW PATH: POSSIBILITIES FOR EU-AFRICA SYNERGIES

The increasing contestation of agenda-setting is closely tied to the perception that it directly influences norm-setting. The cases of the UN framework convention on international taxation and CBAM highlight Africa's growing assertiveness in claiming a greater role in global governance and challenging existing norms. This trend has been gradually unfolding since the rise of multilateralism, fuelled by feelings of marginalisation and heightened competition among major economies, like the United States and China. However, Africa's pursuit of agency aims at expanding its influence collectively within international forums, transcending the existing competition among its partners.

In areas such as development finance and climate finance, Africa emphasises established international norms, notably the principles of equity and differentiated responsibilities enshrined in the Paris Agreement. However, challenging existing norms and agenda-setting within global institutions such as the UN does not equate to a rejection of multilateralism *per se*. Rather it reflects a call for greater weight within multilateral forums and the application of the equity principle to pre-existing norms and decision-making procedures. This approach also presents opportunities for reconciling competing interests and ultimately strengthening, rather than weakening, multilateralism.

(14) African Climate Foundation and the London School of Economics and Political Science, *Implications for African Countries of a Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism in the EU*, 2023 (https://www.lse.ac.uk/africa/assets/Documents/AFC-and-LSE-Report-Implications-for-Africa-of-a-CBAM-in-the-EU.pdf).

(15) Maliszewska M. et al, 'Trade and Development Chart: CBAM's impact on exports to the EU', World Bank, 4 December 2023 (https://blogs.worldbank.org/trade/trade-and-development-chart-cbams-impact-exports-eu).

(16) Magacho, G., Espagne, É. and Godin, A., 'Impacts of CBAM on EU trade partners: consequences for developing countries', AFD Research Papers, Issue 238, 2022 (https://www.cairn-int.info/journal-afd-research-papers-2022-238-page-1.htm?contenu=bibliographie).

Therefore, the EU should capitalise on its partnership with the African Union to identify common ground for cooperation on addressing shared challenges, such as the need to establish effective international taxation norms and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Regarding the UN framework convention on international taxation, the EU could collaborate with African partners to build upon existing work within the Inclusive Framework on BEPS, minimising duplication of efforts and enabling corrective actions if needed.

Regarding the introduction of the CBAM, the transition period provides an opportunity for the EU to assess potential trade diversion and administrative burdens on African imports, along with their socio-economic impact. The Global Gateway, as a strategy for investments in the infrastructure, energy and digital domains, offers the possibility to explore how to best harness the potential of investment schemes, especially in renewables. Partnering with African investment and development banks could both generate climate finance and facilitate green transitions. In addition, technological transfer and waste management remain areas in which the AU–EU partnership could capitalise in the environmental domain.

By prioritising partnership, the EU can reassure African partners of its commitment to collaborative and mutually beneficial undertakings as envisioned in the Joint Vision 2030 agreed upon at the 2022 AU–EU summit. The EU and Africa share a common interest in addressing both green transitions and mobilising finance for development. This creates a timely opportunity to translate these goals into concrete actions.

CHAPTER 5

THE BUMPY ROAD TO NET-ZERO

Climate action in a divided world

by
LUKAS TRAKIMAVIČIUS

INTRODUCTION

In a world characterised by strife, climate action stands as a beacon of light. With each passing year a growing number of countries are becoming more serious about tackling greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. So far, around 145 countries have announced or are considering net-zero targets. Major polluters like the EU, the US and Japan have committed to net-zero by 2050, while China and India have set targets for 2060 and 2070, respectively [1]. In total, all of the existing pledges cover close to 90 % of global GHG emissions [2].

The COP28 summit, held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in December 2023, also offered a glimmer of hope by achieving a landmark agreement to 'transition away' from fossil fuels [3]. This was a historic outcome because for the first time ever, countries have mentioned the term 'fossil fuels' in the final text of a UN climate summit, thereby shifting the focus to the root of the climate crisis. Yet, despite this success there were also disappointments. Small island states like Fiji and others were alarmed by the lack of commitment to peak GHG emissions by 2025, safeguarding the goal of limiting global warming to 1.5°C. Meanwhile, serious concerns persisted in the 'Global South' regarding the absence of strong decisions on climate equity and finance for adaptation.

Moreover, there are significant divisions among countries that support climate action. As argued by Rossella Marangio in her chapter on Africa in this volume, there are tensions between developed and developing countries regarding the principle of common but differentiated responsibility enshrined in the Paris Agreement. Moreover, there is clear evidence that fossil fuel–producing countries are still all too eager to profit from the growing demand for oil, while great powers such as China and the US are beginning to view the energy

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(1) Climate Action Tracker, 'CAT net zero target evaluations', 14 December 2023 (climateactiontracker.org/global/cat-net-zero-target-evaluations/).

(2) Ibid.

(3) UN, 'COP28 ends with call to "transition away" from fossil fuels; UN's Guterres says phaseout is inevitable', 13 December 2023 (news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1144742).

transition through an increasingly competitive, geoeconomic lens.

This chapter argues that climate action stands out from other global challenges. While risks and tensions abound, there is a growing consensus on the overall goals, compared to the past. In fact, even amidst such challenging times, climate action remains a central focus for international cooperation, both bilaterally and multilaterally, while other issues struggle to maintain momentum.

THE OLD GUARD: OPEC AND THE OIL PRODUCERS

Despite the increasing support for climate action, some countries still oppose a swift phase-out of fossil fuels. This is particularly the case with the cartel of 12 countries that are part of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) – established in 1960 with the goal of promoting the interests of its oil-producing members. At times, they are also joined by their allies known as the OPEC+ group, which includes 10 other oil-producing countries.

> S ome OPEC governments have been among the most vocal opponents of collective action to combat climate change.

Given its vested interest in supporting the oil economy, it is no surprise that OPEC and its member states have had a complex and contentious relationship with global ambitions to drive down GHG emissions. In fact, since the start of UN climate talks in the 1990s, some OPEC governments have consistently been among the most vocal opponents of collective action to combat climate change. Russia, for instance, a key OPEC+ group member, has a track record of making outlandish claims about climate change. In 2017, Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed that the amount of GHG emissions produced by volcanic eruptions exceeded that generated by human activity [4]. The following year, he also stated that 'changes of global character, cosmic changes, some invisible moves in the galaxy' are the real drivers of climate change [5].

OPEC and its member states also tend to downplay the impact of burning fossil fuels on global warming. Not long ago, in 2019, the former secretary general of OPEC, Mohammed Barkindo, publicly complained about the work of climate campaigners. He described them as 'perhaps the greatest threat to our industry going forward' and added that 'civil society is being misled to believe oil is the cause of climate change' [6]. Meanwhile, during COP28, Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber, the president of the summit, came under fire for his statement that there was 'no science' to support a phase-out of oil and gas [7]. In the same year, OPEC also continued to defend its stakeholders by attacking the International Energy Agency (IEA) after the latter released a report stating that the oil and gas industry faces a 'moment of truth' as it must choose between fuelling the climate crisis or embracing the shift to clean energy [8].

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(4) Ibid.

(5) 'Skepticism to acceptance: How Putin's views on climate change evolved over the years', *Moscow Times*, 7 September 2017(www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/07/01/skepticism-to-acceptance-how-putins-views-on-climate-change-evolved-over-the-years-a74391).

(6) 'Climate campaigners "greatest threat" to oil sector: OPEC', France 24, 2 July 2019 (www.france24.com/en/20190702-climate-campaigners-greatest-threat-oil-sector-opec).

(7) Friedman, L., 'Climate summit leader tries to calm uproar over a remark on fossil fuels', *New York Times*, 4 December 2023 (www.nytimes.com/2023/12/04/climate/cop28-aljaber-fossil-fuels.html).

(8) Dahan, M., 'OPEC head accuses IEA of vilifying fossil fuel industry', Reuters, 28 November 2023 (www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/opec-head-accuses-iea-vilifying-fossil-fuel-industry-2023-11-27/).

Granted, in light of mounting scientific evidence about the human role in causing global warming and evolving international norms, most OPEC countries have over the years softened their stance on climate change. Rather than denying the human influence on global warming and the role of fossil fuels in its acceleration, since the early 2010s they have shifted their focus towards advocating for a slower transition away from oil while seeking to obstruct international efforts to curb GHG emissions.

For example, back in 2015, Saudi Arabia – arguably the most influential OPEC member – was accused of nearly wrecking the Paris Climate Agreement by resisting efforts to enshrine ambitious goals in the text of the agreement and objecting to the mention of 1.5°C as a new climate target [9]. More recently, during the COP28 negotiations, the head of OPEC, Haitham Al Ghais, sent a letter to OPEC+ member delegations, urging them to 'proactively reject any text or formula that targets energy, i.e. fossil fuels, rather than emissions' and warning about 'politically motivated campaigns' that could put their 'prosperity at risk' [10]. This sparked international outrage, with some arguing that such language would endanger small countries vulnerable to sea level rise caused by global warming [11].

Yet, despite these and similar efforts, it does not seem likely that any of the OPEC countries can offer a viable alternative vision for the future, and the shifting language towards climate action indicates that the cartel is being forced to adapt to changing international norms, not the other way around. Also, it is worth noting that OPEC is not a monolithic structure, as its members have different perspectives on the energy transition. Some of its member states have already established net-zero goals, and countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE have emerged as significant investors in clean energy.

GREEN IS THE NEW BLACK: CHINA-US TECH RIVALRY

As the world's first and second-largest GHG emitters, China and the United States are the two most important actors in the battle against climate change. However, both of these great powers are also known for their deep-seated rivalry, extending well beyond the realm of traditional diplomacy. Going forward, it is unclear to what extent these tensions will slow down or accelerate the energy transition.

China's transition to clean energy is motivated not only by climate concerns but also by economic and political considerations. As early as the 2000s, the Chinese leadership recognised the detrimental impacts of air pollution and fossil fuel consumption, which spurred environmental protests both in the streets and online. Meanwhile, Beijing was also worried about the country's acute dependence on energy imports at a time of fast-paced economic growth, particularly oil and natural gas. Consequently, since the mid-2010s, the government has made clean technologies a top priority, not only as part of a strategy to reduce GHG emissions but also as a means to strengthen energy security and reinforce economic competitiveness.

Through strong political support and generous state subsidies, China has gradually emerged as a global champion in the clean technology sector. In 2022, the country boasted a massive 190

(9)   Goldenberg, S., 'Saudi Arabia accused of trying to wreck Paris climate deal', *The Guardian*, 8 December 2015 (www. theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/08/saudi-arabia-accused-of-trying-to-wreck-the-paris-climate-deal).

(10)   Saba, Y. and Dahan, M., 'OPEC head to OPEC+: reject COP28 language on fossil fuel phase-out', Reuters, 8 December 2023 (www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/opec-chief-urges-members-reject-any-cop28-deal-that-targets-fossil-fuels-2023-12-08/).

(11)   Boreistein S., et. al., 'A leaked OPEC letter shows the oil cartel's worry over the COP28 climate talks, environmentalists say', AP, 9 December 2023 (apnews.com/article/cop28-climate-protests-opec-fossil-fuels-0085b295b9637adae16ddf8fed 5e499a).

gigawatts (GW) of solar PV module manufacturing capacity, allowing it to produce eight out of every ten solar panels worldwide [12]. Furthermore, it occupies a dominant position in the wind energy market, supplying nearly 60 % of installed wind turbines globally [13]. Additionally, Beijing accounted for over 75 % of the world's battery manufacturing capacity in 2022, effectively controlling the global battery supply chain [14].

For the United States, the energy transition is about addressing climate change, but also about challenging China's grip over the clean technology market. Despite temporarily withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement four years ago, the US has since demonstrated a significant shift in its stance to climate action [15]. In 2022, it passed the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) — widely seen as a response to Beijing's clean technology subsidies — which will invest around $370 billion to accelerate decarbonisation efforts and prop up the country's clean energy industry [16]. Simultaneously, the US has been rapidly expanding its renewable energy deployment, with states like Texas emerging as unlikely leaders in wind and solar, highlighting a broader national trend [17].

The US currently trails behind China in clean technology manufacturing, but this gap could narrow soon.

The US currently trails behind China in clean technology manufacturing, but this gap could narrow soon. In 2022, the US had a 7 GW solar PV module manufacturing capacity, but this is anticipated to increase to an overall 36 GW by 2030, potentially meeting almost half of the country's demand [18]. In an effort to reduce its reliance on Chinese batteries, Washington is also ramping up domestic production capacity, which could increase from 70 GWh in 2022 to 876 GWh by 2030, a move that could achieve near-independence from Beijing for its battery needs [19]. It is important to note that these projections are based on current government priorities, which could still radically change following the 2024 US presidential elections.
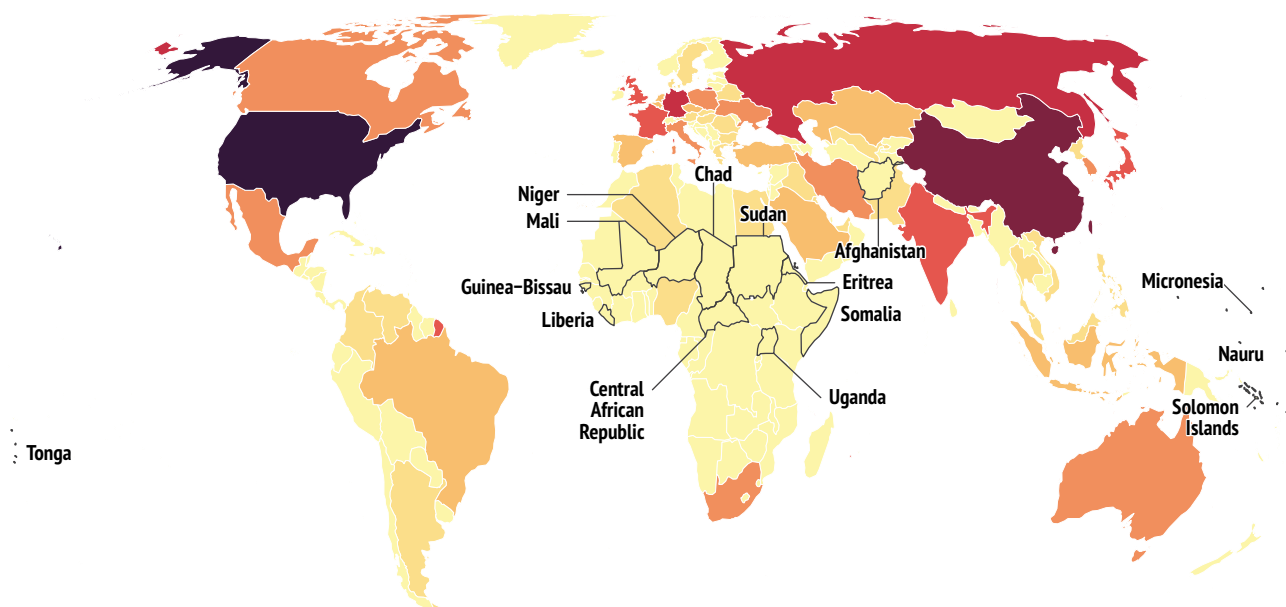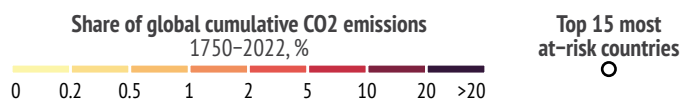
The intensifying competition between the United States and China has also sparked broader concerns about green protectionism and how this could slow down the energy transition. This is because, by reshoring manufacturing of clean energy technologies to domestic markets, countries might pull capital away from developing markets and trigger a chain-reaction of similar policies from other developed countries. In fact, to counter the IRA, countries like Japan, Australia and

(12)   IEA, 'The State of Clean Technology Manufacturing', An Energy Technology Perspectives Special Briefing, 19 May 2023 (iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/0a421001-6157-436d-893c-c37eeab54967/TheStateofCleanTechnologyManufacturing. pdf).

(13)   IEA, *Energy Technology Perspectives 2023*, January 2023 (iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/a86b480e-2b03-4e25-bae1-da1395e0b620/EnergyTechnologyPerspectives2023.pdf).

(14)   IEA, 'World Energy Investment 2023 – Overview and key findings', May 2023 (www.iea.org/reports/world-energy-investment-2023/overview-and-key-findings).

(15)   Peltier, E. and Sengupta, S., 'U.S. formally rejoins the Paris climate accord', *New York Times*, 19 February 2021 (www.nytimes.com/2021/02/19/world/us-rejoins-paris-climate-accord.html).

(16)   IEA, 'Inflation Reduction Act of 2022', 11 December 2023 (www.iea.org/policies/16156-inflation-reduction-act-of-2022).

(17)   Becker, S., 'Texas' unique energy industry is helping the State become a renewables leader', CNET, 1 January 2024 (www.cnet.com/home/energy-and-utilities/texas-unique-energy-industry-is-helping-the-state-become-a-renewables-leader/).

(18)   IEA, 'Announced manufacturing projects and domestic production requirements in the Inflation Reduction Act for solar PV in the United States, 2022–2030', 10 May 2023 (www.iea.org/data-and-statistics/charts/announced-manufacturing-projects-and-domestic-production-requirements-in-the-inflation-reduction-act-for-batteries-in-the-united-states-2022–2030).

(19)   IEA, 'Announced manufacturing projects and domestic production requirements in the Inflation Reduction Act for batteries in the United States, 2022–2030', 10 May 2023 (www.iea.org/data-and-statistics/charts/announced-manufacturing-projects-and-domestic-production-requirements-in-the-inflation-reduction-act-for-batteries-in-the-united-states-2022–2030).

Climate justice
Those who polluted are not the ones at risk

Share of global cumulative CO2 emissions
1750–2022, %

0   0.2   0.5   1   2   5   10   20   >20

Top 15 most
at-risk countries

Data: Our World in Data, 2021; University of Notre Dame, ND–GAIN, 2021

Canada unveiled similar initiatives in 2023 [20]. Meanwhile, the EU responded in part by passing the Net-Zero Industry Act, aiming to scale up the production of clean energy technologies.

Yet, at the same time, a counter argument could be made that all of this competition might accelerate the energy transition and inject badly needed capital into clean energy industries. In no small part thanks to various government initiatives, global clean energy investments rose to nearly $1.8 trillion last year, shattering all previous records [21]. While this sum still pales in comparison to the $4.8 trillion needed to be spent annually from 2024 to 2030 to get the world on a net-zero pathway, it represents the closest the global community has ever come to having a fighting chance of reaching net-zero [22].

However, there also exists a potential downside. Escalating geopolitical tensions between Beijing and Washington could lead China to weaponise its control over the supply chains of clean technologies. A taste of this tactic was offered in 2010 when rare earth exports to Japan were threatened during a spat over the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku islands in the East China Sea. More recently, in 2023, China flexed its muscles by implementing export controls on

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(20)   Ibid.

(21)   BloombergNEF, 'Global clean energy investment jumps 17 %, hits $1.8 trillion in 2023, According to BloombergNEF Report', 30 January 2024 (about.bnef.com/blog/global-clean-energy-investment-jumps-17-hits-1-8-trillion-in-2023-according-to-bloombergnef-report/).

(22)   Ibid.

gallium, germanium, and high-grade graphite. While so far these steps had little to no impact on the clean energy market, there is a risk that a more aggressive approach could imperil energy security and push climate goals further out of reach.

THE EU AND CLIMATE DIPLOMACY

Despite promising progress in global climate action efforts, achieving carbon neutrality remains a challenging task. Oil-exporting countries, while no longer outright climate deniers, continue to cling to fossil fuels and hinder ambitious global targets. Meanwhile, the US–China rivalry adds a further layer of complexity. Rising green protectionism might harm developing countries, but tough competition could also accelerate clean energy investments.

Beyond these headline challenges, deep divisions persist. As demonstrated by the COP28 summit, developed and developing nations clash over 'climate justice' and who shoulders the financial burden of the energy transition. Within developing countries, concerns about the timing of net-zero and the uneven impacts of global warming further complicate matters. Finally, the question of who compensates for climate damage remains unanswered.

In light of these issues, climate champions like the EU have a significant role to play in addressing climate change. Going forward, it must continue playing a leading role during UN climate summits, maintain pressure on oil-producing countries, while also supporting developing countries by promoting clean technologies, capacity-building and co-innovation, and making sure that issues such as adaptation and climate justice remain at the top of the agenda. Ultimately, the EU needs to focus on strengthening its domestic clean technology industry so that it will be in a position to lead in a world increasingly shaped by geopolitics.

CHAPTER 6

BEYOND 'FORUM SHOPPING'

A strategic EU approach to the evolving BRICS+

by
DALIA GHANEM

INTRODUCTION

On 30 January 2024, the BRICS Sherpas and Sous-Sherpas met in Russia, and the traditional group photo featured a new cast. The original BRICS members – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa – were joined by five new countries: Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. This expanded framework, now dubbed 'BRICS+', could mark a significant shift in global governance.

BRICS+ aims to foster 'mutually beneficial cooperation' in the economic, political, security and social spheres through the 'promotion of a more representative, fairer international order, a reinvigorated and reformed multilateral system, sustainable development and inclusive growth'[1]. On paper, BRICS+ represents a formidable force. With the new members, it represents approximately 45.5 % of the global population, compared to just 10 % for the G7. Its combined GDP of $28.5 trillion remains lower however than the G7's figure of $43.8

trillion[2]. With the addition of the newcomers, which include two of the world's three largest oil producers and the most powerful countries in the Gulf, the BRICS group has become more consequential than some analysts initially anticipated[3].

With this latest expanded membership, a larger BRICS bloc is likely to play a more significant role in the discussion around global governance. For instance, on the financial front, to rival the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the BRICS has created alternative institutions like the New Development Bank (NDB). On the political front, the BRICS serves as a diplomatic counterweight to Western dominance in global affairs, empowering members like Russia to resist international pressure and being isolated by the West. This was demonstrated at the time of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 when Putin used the platform to garner support amidst international criticism. Even on the cultural level, the BRICS is trying to expand

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(1)   XV BRICS Summit, Johannesburg II Declaration, 'BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Mutually Accelerated Growth, Sustainable Development and Inclusive Multilateralism', Sandton, Gauteng, South Africa, 23 August 2023 (https://brics2023.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Jhb-II-Declaration-24-August-2023-1.pdf).

(2)   World Bank, 'World Development Indicators 2022' (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD).

(3)   See for instance: van Agtmael, A., 'Think again: The BRICS', *Foreign Policy*, 8 October 2012 (https://foreignpolicy.com/2012/10/08/think-again-the-brics/).

Calm after the (brain)storm

Alternatives to the Western-led order proposed and implemented by the BRICS

	Status/ year of inception	
Western Banking System	2010	BRICS Interbank Cooperation Mechanism (BICM)
US-controlled networks	unclear	BRICS Submarine Cable Project
World Bank	2012	New Development Bank
IMF	2015	Contingent Reserve Arrangement
S&P, Moody's, Fitch ★★★☆	under discussion	BRICS credit rating agency ★★★☆
CNN BBC FRANCE 24	2017	TV BRICS
US Dollar $	under development	BRICS Pay
Western fiat currencies	unclear	BRICS Cryptocurrency
International Space Station (ISS)	unclear	Joint Research Module for Russia's Orbital Station
US Dollar/ Euro € $	under discussion	Common currency

its media presence to offer alternative viewpoints to established Western channels.

BRICS+ represents a platform for these countries to voice alternative perspectives and narratives. While BRICS+ may not pose an existential challenge to the West, its growing influence warrants close observation as it has the potential to become a significant challenger in the future. The key to the BRICS' strength hinges on its ability to effectively coordinate its collective efforts. The group's diverse membership, political systems, economic priorities and lack of a unified ideology raise

questions about its long-term cohesion. Nonetheless, the future is likely to see a dynamic landscape of issue-based coalitions such as the BRICS+. This phenomenon, dubbed 'forum shopping' [4], reflects a world where countries strategically choose platforms that best suit their immediate needs. Countries beyond the traditional Western sphere will have a greater say in shaping global norms and regulations. As such, the BRICS remains a force to be reckoned with.

BRICS: FROM AN INVESTMENT BLOC TO A POLITICAL CLUB

The BRICS grouping, initially known as 'BRIC' [5] – a term coined by the economist Jim O'Neill in a Goldman Sachs report before South Africa's inclusion in 2011 – has defied initial scepticism and predictions of minimal impact to become a recognised brand on the global stage. Despite internal disagreements and diverse economies, as of 2024, no less than 40 countries are seeking or looking at the possibility of BRICS+ membership [6].

On the political front, the bloc now aims to foster collaboration through high-level ministerial meetings spanning various sectors, including more recently defence, education, health, artificial intelligence and climate change. The BRICS has expanded its agenda since its inaugural summit in 2009, with the number of declarations increasing from 15 commitments to 94 at the fifteenth annual BRICS summit in Johannesburg in 2023. This expanding agenda encompasses diverse issues, ranging from trade disputes and Syrian stability to fostering diplomatic ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia. To further strengthen the BRICS's cohesiveness and global influence, regular engagement takes place among legislators, government agencies, think tanks and academics.

BRICS membership elevates countries' standing on the world stage. Their enhanced international status enables them to pursue independent foreign policies and avoid international isolation. This diplomatic advantage manifests in tangible ways, such as showcasing economic growth through new development plans or publicly presenting a united front with other world leaders, especially at times of international tension. As previously mentioned, Russian President Vladimir Putin utilised the BRICS as a platform to deflect criticism following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, demonstrating his international support base and resilience [7]. The BRICS provided Putin with a geopolitical platform to show the West that he had friends in other parts of the world and was far from isolated. During China's BRICS presidency, the platform was strategically leveraged to maintain Russia's presence within the multilateral sphere. This served to counter the depiction of Russia as a 'pariah state'. Moreover, several BRICS members demonstrated a willingness to maintain diplomatic ties with Russia, reflecting a broader sentiment within the bloc. In addition, all BRICS countries have maintained trade ties with Russia. Furthermore, India and China have increased their imports of Russian oil, gas and other commodities at discounted prices due to Russia's need for new markets. On 17 March 2024, after Putin's re-election, BRICS+ leaders were the first to congratulate

(4)   Henneberg, I. and Plank, F., 'Overlapping regionalism and security cooperation: Power-based explanations of Nigeria's forum-shopping in the fight against Boko Haram', *International Studies Review*, Vol. 22, No 3, September 2020, pp. 576–599 (https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viz027).

(5)   'Building better global economic BRICs: Jim O'Neill's game-changing paper on the importance of BRICs economies', Goldman Sachs, 1 November 2001 (https://www.goldmansachs.com/intelligence/archive/building-better.html).

(6)   'The BRICS are getting together in South Africa', *The Economist*, 17 August 2023 (https://www.economist.com/international/2023/08/17/the-brics-are-getting-together-in-south-africa).

(7)   Boadle, A., 'BRICS neutrality on Ukraine a diplomatic win for Putin', Reuters, 15 July 2014 (https://www.reuters.com/article/us-brics-summit-putin-idINKBN0FJ2MV20140714/).

Another brick in the wall
BRICS and its new members contrasted with the G7 nations

BRICS   G7   New BRICS members

Canada
United States
United Kingdom
France
Germany
Italy
Russia
China
India
Japan
Iran
Egypt
Saudi Arabia
Ethiopia
United Arab Emirates
Brazil
South Africa
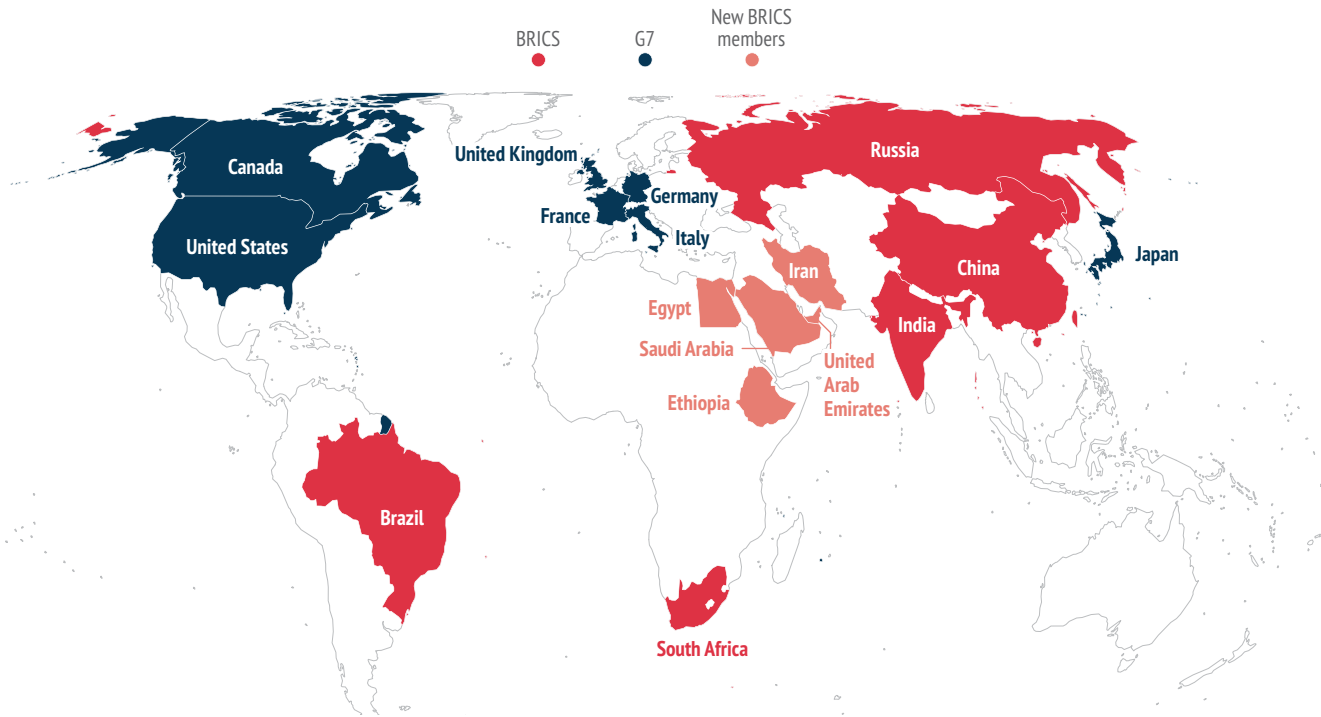
Data: European Commission, GISCO, 2024

him and he received messages from Iran, followed by China, India, South Africa, Brazil and Egypt. Others such as Algeria and Mali, but also Latin American countries such as Venezuela and Nicaragua, congratulated Putin as well. Their congratulations highlighted the sharp contrast with the reactions of European and Western leaders and the solidarity among the BRICS+ group in shielding Putin from international isolation [8].

Similarly, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro drew solace from BRICS during his tumultuous term in office. Following his 2019 election to the Brazilian presidency, he initially aimed to forge better ties with Donald Trump to whom he was sometimes compared due to his brash leadership style, even being dubbed the 'Tropical Trump'. However, after Joe Biden defeated Trump in the 2020 presidential contest, he was snubbed by the United States and its allies. Bolsonaro's overt support for Trump, his delayed acknowledgement of Biden's victory, and alignment with Trump's election fraud claims significantly strained relations with Washington.

On the financial front, in addition to trying to challenge Western hegemony in international institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, the BRICS aims to establish a common currency and help Africa's effort towards integration including through the operationalisation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). For now, the BRICS has established its currency swap lines and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) to mitigate short-term balance of payments pressures.

(8)   'BRICS leaders congratulate Putin on his re-election as president', BRICS TV, 21 March 2024, (https://tvbrics.com/en/news/brics-leaders-congratulate-putin-on-his-re-election-as-president/).

A major point of contention for the BRICS group is the voting structure within the IMF, citing a disparity between their economic weight and voting power. Currently, they account for a combined 25.6 % of global GDP, yet their voting rights at the IMF only amount to 15 %. This imbalance gives them less influence over IMF decisions compared to other countries [9]. China, for instance, despite having the second-biggest GDP after the United States, gets fewer votes than the Benelux states. Efforts from America and Europe to address this unequal state of affairs have been sluggish. As a result, in 2014, at their Fortaleza summit, the BRICS launched the New Development Bank (NDB).

Capitalised at $50 billion, primarily by BRICS members, the NDB, headquartered in Shanghai, aims to mobilise resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in Emerging Markets and Developing Countries (EMDCs). Since its inception, the NDB has provided $32 billion in financing for 96 projects across its five founding members [10]. In 2021, the NDB broadened its membership, welcoming Bangladesh, Egypt and the UAE – comprising a collective population of nearly 280 million – into its fold, with Uruguay still designated as a 'prospective member' on its website. In contrast, with its vast network of almost 190 partner countries, the World Bank disbursed $98 billion in 2021 alone, encompassing 'credits, loans, grants,

> # A major point of contention for the BRICS group is the voting structure within the IMF.

and guarantees' [11]. In April 2020 the NDB also created the Emergency Assistance Facility to combat the Covid-19 crisis, showing its commitment to its members [12]. Nonetheless, the NDB faces significant hurdles. Initially, it struggled to secure funding within its member countries, forcing it to borrow heavily from Wall Street and Chinese state-owned banks [13]. Ironically, a significant portion of the borrowed funds, about two-thirds, is in dollars, which undermines the bank's original intention of reducing its dependence on the currency. The situation has been further complicated by the Ukraine war, which has made Wall Street lenders wary of the NDB. This, coupled with a recent credit rating downgrade by Fitch, has pushed the NDB to triple its borrowing premium, raising concerns about its long-term viability [14].

On the cultural front, the BRICS seeks to counter 'Western narratives' by expanding its media presence in Africa through TV BRICS. The channel has partnered with broadcasters in Kenya, South Africa, Egypt and Mozambique, aiming to provide alternative perspectives to BBC, CNN, and France 24. TV BRICS represents a potent soft power tool with a potential reach of over 3.5 billion people [15]. However, it is still in its early stages of development, and its effectiveness in influencing audiences and shaping narratives on a global scale remains to be seen. This initiative is further bolstered by the fact that individual BRICS members, such as China

(9)　IMF, 'IMF members' quotas and voting power, and IMF board of governors' (https://www.imf.org/en/About/executive-board/members-quotas).

(10)　New Development Bank website (https://www.ndb.int/about-ndb/).

(11)　Millar, P., 'How the BRICS nations failed to rebuild the global financial order', France 24, 24 August 2023 (https://www.france24.com/en/economy/20230824-how-the-brics-nations-failed-to-rebuild-the-global-financial-order).

(12)　New Development Bank, 'NDB Board of Directors and Senior Management visit NDB's China COVID-19 Emergency Assistance Programme in Hubei Province; Reaffirm continued support to finance inclusive growth,' 16 September 2023 (https://www.ndb.int/news/ndb-board-of-directors-and-senior-management-visit-ndbs-china-covid-19-emergency-assistance-programme-in-hubei-province-reaffirm-continued-support-to-finance-inclusive-growth/).

(13)　Saeedy, A. and Wei, L., 'A bank China built to challenge the dollar now needs the dollar', *The Wall Street Journal*, 16 June 2023 (https://archive.is/maxWa#selection-353.0-365.12).

(14)　Gold, S., 'BRICS-led development bank takes credit ratings hit over Russia links', Devex, 20 July 2022 (https://www.devex.com/news/brics-led-development-bank-takes-credit-ratings-hit-over-russia-links-103674).

(15)　Siele, M., 'BRICS influence in Africa grows with TV media deals', SEMAFOR, 14 December 2023 (https://www.semafor.com/article/12/14/2023/brics-tv-takes-on-bbc-voa-france-24-in-africa).

and Russia, already possess well-established media outlets with a global footprint. These national media giants such as Russian RT and Sputnik or Chinese CCTV, rebranded CGTN, can leverage their existing networks and resources to amplify messages aligned with the broader BRICS narrative, or vice versa.

BRICS+: CAN GRAND IDEAS TRANSLATE INTO IMPACT?

Since its foundation in 2009, the BRICS bloc has significantly expanded its agenda and membership. However, two key questions remain: to what extent have their numerous pledges been fulfilled, and can their shared macroeconomic and geopolitical interests overcome their individual, competing interests in achieving those goals?

Despite a shared unease about being too dependent on the current Western-led international order, the BRICS's effectiveness is limited by its overly diverse membership. The group's members have vastly different political systems and strategic goals. Brazil, India, and South Africa are classified as 'flawed democracies', while Russia, China, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, the UAE and Ethiopia are not democracies. Furthermore, Russia, China and India possess nuclear weapons, while the others do not.

This diversity challenges the bloc's cohesion and ability to achieve consensus on key issues. The group is divided into reformists – more open to considering changes to the international system, such as reforms of the World Trade Organization or the United Nations Security Council – and negationists who are more resistant to reforms. Besides, China, the driving force behind South Africa's accession in 2001, seeks to expand the BRICS to counter the United States and its allies and challenge the G7. From Beijing's perspective, the BRICS, alongside multilateral groupings like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and subregional platforms such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), represent potential counterweights to the influence of the United States and its allies. However, other BRICS members are hesitant to expand the bloc's membership. South Africa is particularly wary of further expansion, but it is also reluctant to challenge China, which pushed for its inclusion in the bloc. India, too, views itself as a rival to China for leadership in the 'Global South'. Nevertheless, no member wants to be seen as preventing the 'BRICS family' from growing, and no one wants to alienate China, which dominates the group economically. China's economy, as measured by GDP, is approximately 45 times larger than South Africa's economy. China accounted for 70 % of the BRICS' economic output in 2023 compared to 47 % in 2001 [16]. Similarly, China's trade dominance within the bloc has grown, accounting for 69 % of all BRICS trade in 2023. This dominant position has recently caused friction as Brazil, fearing for its industry, has launched anti-dumping investigations against China in response to a surge in cheap industrial imports. These investigations could exacerbate tensions between the two BRICS partners [17]. Furthermore, these economic disparities raise questions about the bloc's ability to establish a common currency or pursue a free-trade agreement.

> **I**ndia, too, views itself as a rival to China for leadership in the 'Global South'.

The BRICS faces challenges, such as its diverse membership, China's dominant economic position, and the lack of a shared ideology. Unlike

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(16)   'The BRICS bloc is riven with tensions', *The Economist*, 17 August 2023 (https://www.economist.com/international/2023/08/17/the-brics-are-getting-together-in-south-africa).

(17)   Harris, B., 'Brazil launches China anti-dumping probes after imports soar', *Financial Times*, 17 March 2024 (https://www.ft.com/content/8703874e-44cb-4197-8dca-c7b555da8aef).

the G7, which is united by shared democratic values, the BRICS lacks such cohesion. However, its members share the common goal of a multipolar world, one that challenges US and Western hegemony. Building consensus within the bloc will be a complex task, requiring significant diplomatic efforts from BRICS+ members. Yet the BRICS will continue to aim to shape the international order, particularly in the face of shifting power dynamics and the rise of emerging economies.

To navigate this complex landscape, the EU can adopt a nuanced approach that combines strategic competition with potential areas of collaboration with the BRICS+. On the collaborative front, the EU can leverage international forums like the G20 and the UN, to engage with BRICS+ countries to find solutions to pressing global issues. Furthermore, the EU can identify areas of specific expertise within BRICS+ countries and foster targeted partnerships. For instance, the EU could collaborate with Brazil on rainforest preservation efforts, drawing on their extensive knowledge and experience.

However, the EU must also acknowledge the element of strategic competition within this relationship. The EU can build upon its existing economic ties with individual BRICS+ members and deepen engagement with them, to prevent a vacuum. As a major trading partner, the EU can deepen these relationships by promoting fair trade practices that benefit both sides. Additionally, the EU should prioritise investment in innovation and infrastructure projects.

Finally, the EU needs to strengthen its communication strategy regarding global governance and development goals. By effectively communicating its values and vision, the EU can position itself as a serious player in a multipolar world.

This multifaceted approach will allow the EU to navigate the rise of BRICS+ effectively. By combining cooperation on global challenges with strategic competition in key areas, the EU can secure its influence in the evolving global order.

NORMATIVE CONTESTATION

CHAPTER 7

HUMAN RIGHTS ON TRIAL

Universalism under attack

by
BOJANA ZORIĆ

A WORLD OF MANY WORLDS

'Human rights have been more and more violated, and I cannot say the world is driving to a future based on peace and cooperation. The contrary, I see more and more human rights abuses, and less and less cooperation'[1]. So declared Josep Borell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in Geneva on the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The UN stands at the forefront of developing human rights norms. It establishes these norms through a diverse set of instruments, including covenants and conventions, as well as declarations, resolutions and guiding principles and codes of conduct[2]. While these do not create legally binding obligations, they lay down fundamental values to be shared and respected by all signatories.

This chapter explores two key dimensions of contestation dynamics:

1. issue-based contestation regarding the universal application of human rights as defined by the UN – the analysis examines how widespread this contestation is and who the main challengers are; and

2. normative contestation, exemplified by the concept of 'normative power Europe', understood as the EU's ability to promote and shape norms and values within the rules-based international order. These norms, namely the consolidation of democracy, rule of law, fundamental freedoms and human rights, are enshrined in the *acquis communautaire*[3].

The chapter identifies three main trends. First, the concept of normative power Europe faces growing challenges from emerging

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(1) European External Action Service (EEAS), 'Human Rights: Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the 25th EU-NGO forum for human rights', 4 December 2023 (https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/human-rights-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-25th-eu-ngo-forum-human-rights_en).

(2) For more on universal human rights documents, see: United Nations, 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights); 'International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination' (https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-elimination-all-forms-racial); 'International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights' (https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights); 'International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights' (https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights).

(3) For more on normative power Europe, see: Manners, I., 'Normative power Europe: A contradiction in terms?', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No 2, 2002, pp. 235–258.

Universal vs. relativist approach to human rights

UNIVERSALITY

Human rights are **interdependent** and **interrelated.**

Human rights are **indivisible.**

Human rights are universal and **inalienable.**

Human rights entail **participation** and **inclusion.**

RELATIVISM

Human rights depend on **history**, **culture**, and **politics.**
Human rights and civil and political rights take a backseat to **economic rights** and **development.**

Human rights are subject to **negotiation** and **compromise.**
Human rights challenge norms based on **traditional** and **family values.**

Human rights are overruled by **collective rights.**

There is **no role** for civil society.

alliances that contest universally-defined human rights. Second, the weakness of legal instruments for enforcing and protecting human rights at the international level hinders the application of these norms. Third, an alliance of Western-centric actors consistently advocates for universally accepted human rights norms at the UN. While other actors may challenge this position, they generally fail to offer viable and long-term alternatives. Instead, they promote a model of cultural relativism or form minilateral groupings that serve to enhance their own power standing and to achieve short-term gains. Nevertheless, their actions pose a significant challenge to the prevailing ethos of human rights universalism.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND POWER POLITICS

Disagreements over the interpretation of internationally accepted human rights norms are a regular occurrence in international forums. This trend may be observed in two votes that took place at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in October 2023: 'Responding to the human rights and humanitarian crisis caused by the ongoing armed conflict in Sudan' and 'Situation of human rights in the Russian Federation' (see graph on page 53).

The UNHRC consists of 47 members[4], elected for staggered three-year terms, with one-third of mandates being renewed annually. It is tasked with 'promoting and protecting human rights globally.' However, the principle

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(4)   The regional breakdown of the Council is as follows: African states and Asia-Pacific states: 13 members each; Eastern European states: 6 members; Latin American and Caribbean States: 8 members; Western Europe and other states: 7 members.

enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – whereby states should promote 'universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms' – is not always reflected in practice. In two observed cases, Cuba as a member of the UNHRC voted against the resolutions on Sudan and the Russian Federation. To justify its vote on the Russian Federation resolution, the Cuban representative underlined that 'politicised and selective measures against certain countries in the human rights sphere [*in this case Russia*], are only intended to point the finger at certain states for political purposes. At the same time, we see clear examples of selectiveness, political manipulation, and double standards' [5].

For countries like Cuba, underlining 'politicised and selective measures' against certain countries may be a means to shift the discussion away from human rights abuses and a poor human rights record back home. Similarly, China (which also voted against both resolutions) frequently criticises the international system for 'double standards'. Beijing officially promotes a form of relativism when it comes to human rights, arguing that each country should 'promote and protect human rights in light of their national realities and the needs of their people' [6]. It thus advocates for a selective approach in the interpretation of human rights and their enforcement based on individual countries' circumstances. Likewise, Vladimir Putin accuses the international system of 'political bias, hypocrisy, and undisguised selectiveness' [7] in its enforcement of human rights standards. These claims come despite documented crackdowns on dissent within Russia, where the authorities have

China frequently criticises the international system for 'double standards'.

prosecuted hundreds of peaceful protestors against the war in Ukraine and introduced a law criminalising 'confidential cooperation with a foreign state, international or foreign organisation' [8]. The notion of human rights has always been subject to some degree of ambiguity. However, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and the conflict in Gaza have exacerbated this trend, leading to more direct and forceful challenges to the application of international humanitarian law.

The concept of human rights is a potent political instrument that is often used to create rifts within alliances and amplify divisions between states. One key reason for the varying interpretations of universal human rights is the lack of robust mechanisms to enforce them. International law defines these rights but there are often no serious consequences for violations. Consequently, states that violate these mutually accepted norms typically face verbal condemnation rather than legal sanctions through the multilateral system. This weakness in the multilateral system, in turn, undermines the credibility of human rights as a meaningful instrument for influencing foreign policy.

The voting on these two resolutions showed similar patterns among UNHRC members:

> Europe (including EU Member States) and the United States of America demonstrated a strong and principled stance on human rights by voting <u>in favour of</u> both resolutions.

(5)   UN web TV, A/HRC/54/L.21 Vote Item 4 – 48th Meeting, 54th Regular Session Human Rights Council, 2023 (https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1q/k1q22mux55).

(6)   'A people-centered approach for global human rights progress', Remarks by H.E. Wang Yi, State Councillor and Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China, at the High-level Segment of the 46th Session of The United Nations Human Rights Council (http://geneva.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/dbdt/202102/t20210222_9899531.htm).

(7)   Address by the President of the Russian Federation, 24 February 2022 (http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843).

(8)   Human Rights Watch, 'World Report 2023', 2023 (https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2023/01/World_Report_2023_WEBSPREADS_0.pdf).

> Most Latin American states (Argentina, Costa Rica and Paraguay) voted in unison with Europe, except for Bolivia which voted <u>against</u> both resolutions.

> Central Asian representatives (Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan) voted <u>against</u> the Russia resolution but <u>abstained</u> on Sudan, while Uzbekistan <u>abstained</u> in both cases. This suggests a negative trend in both countries' attitudes towards human rights enforcement.

> Within the BRICS group, China voted <u>against both resolutions</u>, while India and South Africa <u>abstained</u> in both cases. Russia was expelled from the Human Rights Council following the war in Ukraine. Brazil was not a member of the Council at the time the vote took place.

Unlike Europe and its partners which consistently support universal human rights, other states are less united in their approach. The states that predominantly vote against or abstain from human rights resolutions also tend to have higher rates of human rights violations (like Russia, China, Cuba and Bolivia)[9]. This approach not only weakens the international order, but it also fails to present a compelling alternative framework for human rights that would be widely accepted by other states.

While these voting patterns offer valuable insights, it is important to recognise that disagreements on human rights issues are not always about human rights *per se*. Other political considerations and alliance commitments also come into play. This was clearly demonstrated by the UNHRC declaration on the situation in Palestine[10] in April 2023[11]. Having

taken place before the current conflict in Gaza, the resolution passed with much more consensus (38 votes in favour, 80 % of the total votes) than the ones on Russia and Sudan. There were also fewer countries abstaining (7) and only two voting against. It also revealed divergences among European states and the United States of America that had not been observed in the previous two cases (e.g. the United States voted against together with Malawi, while Ukraine, the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom, among others, abstained). This is not an isolated case, but rather highlights a growing rift and exposes the complex political dynamics underlying resolutions labelled as 'human rights' issues.

EUROPE AS INTERNATIONAL TORCHBEARER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The EU has various policy instruments at its disposal to shape normative conceptions and promote and disseminate European values and ideas beyond its borders. The EU was founded on the values of 'respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights' (Article 2 TEU), with fundamental rights constituting 'general principles of the Union's law (Article 6 TEU)[12]. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted in response to 'barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind' during World War

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(9) For more on human rights violations in Belarus, see: UN, 'A/HRC/53/53: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus, Anaïs Marin', 3 May 2023 (https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc5353-report-special-rapporteur-situation-human-rights-belarus-anais); and on China, UNHCR, 'OHCHR Assessment of human rights concerns in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, People's Republic of China', 31 August 2022 (https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/countries/2022-08-31/22-08-31-final-assesment.pdf).

(10) This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

(11) Full name of the resolution: 'A/HRC/55/28: Human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the obligation to ensure accountability and justice'. Report of the United Nations Commissioner for Human rights, 23 February 2024.

(12) See Treaty on European Union (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX%3A12008M021).

II. This commitment to human rights aligns with the UN Charter, various conventions on human rights and the Helsinki Final Act, bolstering the EU's influence as a normative power in the multilateral arena.

Through its civilian approach to foreign policy the EU exerts normative power by leveraging economic and other channels of influence with the aim of inducing countries to cooperate and further integrate, both within and beyond the EU's borders. This approach is fundamentally different from how countries like the United States, China or Germany project their power globally. It also makes the exercise more complicated as the EU is made up of a group of diverse countries which makes it difficult to formulate or agree on a unified approach. It also has a complex decision-making system requiring consensus among Member States, and limited coercive or military capabilities, among other constraints. As a normative power, the EU has consistently promoted human rights policies in its relations with third countries but has often been unsuccessful in instigating change in the behaviour of these countries. Moreover, the EU is challenged by a number of states that hold different interpretations and understandings of the concept of normative power and the values it embodies.

While as a normative power Europe promotes human rights based on equality and self-determination of peoples, countries like China or Russia favour a top-down approach, where state sovereignty trumps human rights enforcement. This explains why these countries systematically perceive criticisms of their human rights record and calls for universal human rights as illegitimate interference in their domestic affairs and a violation of their sovereignty. China, for example, continues to define human rights through the narrow lens of 'increasing people's sense of gain, happiness and security' **(13)**, leaving no room for deeper reflection on civil and political rights, even at the UN level. The State

Who stands together?

UNHRC voting patterns on human rights issues
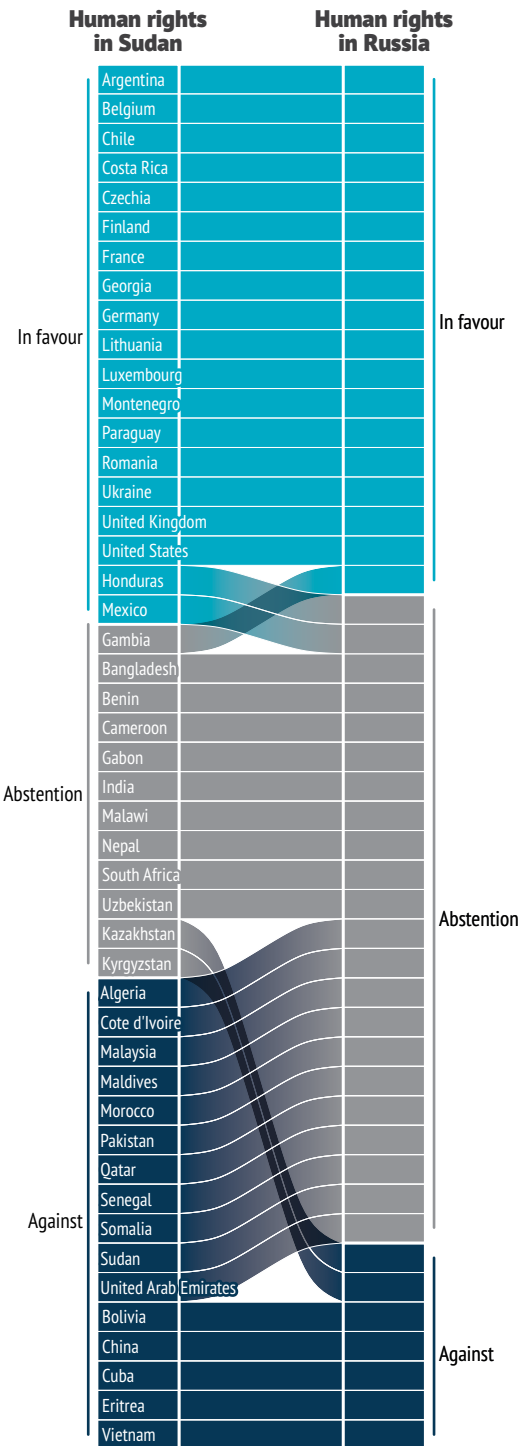
Data: UN, 2024

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(13) 'A people-centered approach for global human rights progress', op.cit.

Council Information Office of China has been issuing reports on human rights violations in the United States [14] for several years as a response to international pressure on Beijing for human rights violations, including in the Uyghur region.

In the Eastern neighbourhood and the Western Balkans, Russia has been actively contesting and undermining the EU's normative influence, as explored by Ondrej Ditrych in his chapter on Russia in this volume. It does so by supporting like-minded state and non-state actors, leveraging political proxies, funding media outlets to spread pro-Russian narratives and disinformation, and cultivating ties with influential individuals. Additionally it provides economic incentives to politicians or businesses that promote Russian interests. These tactics are designed to manipulate public opinion and sow doubt and confusion about the EU's intentions and effectiveness. Russia continues to exploit the volatile security situation in these regions to its own advantage, further impeding the nation-building process at the expense of democratic values. Russia employs similar tactics to discredit the Western liberal order within the EU itself. It seeks to weaken the unity of Member States, including by supplying narratives to far-right political parties and actors in Germany, France and Slovakia to undermine public support for Ukraine [15].

Albeit using different strategies, presidents Putin and Xi both rely on the same authoritarian methods to erode the existing international order and challenge the concept of universal human rights. While doing so, they seek to forge alliances based on shared interests with a select group of actors. This fuels

> **T**he world is increasingly divided over the notion of universal human rights.

growing divisions within multilateral forums and organisations and on critical global issues.

WHAT HUMAN RIGHTS AND FOR WHOM?

There is no international consensus on the definition of human rights among states and the world is increasingly divided over the notion of universal human rights. Europe's approach to human rights, which reflects Western-centric values and norms, faces constant challenges at the UN, and risks becoming marginalised. Moreover, states have diverging views on global politics and on how competition plays out in the international arena.

As a civilian power, the EU has traditionally relied on a foreign policy that blends its normative power, rooted in human rights promotion, with its material power, primarily economic strength. However this carefully crafted approach can be undermined by the complexities of the EU's institutional architecture and internal structure, which sometimes makes it difficult to reconcile the goals and perspectives of various EU institutions and Member States. The lack of a unified voice weakens the EU's overall influence, including on critical issues like human rights, and creates space for the emergence of short- and long-term alliances that challenge the current *status quo*.

The analysis of the UN voting cases illustrates the degree to which the world is deeply polarised. The existing and emerging alliances challenging the widely accepted normative

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(14) For more, see: The State Council Information Office, The People's Republic of China, 'Full text: The Report on human rights violations in the United States in 2022', 2023 (http://english.scio.gov.cn/scionews/2023-03/28/content_85196298. htm).

(15) See European Parliament, 'MEPs condemn continuous Russian efforts to undermine European democracy', Press Release, 8 February 2024 (https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20240202IPR17323/meps-condemn-continuous-russian-efforts-to-undermine-european-democracy).

power Europe concept fail to put forward a credible and stable alternative. What is more, these alliances tend to be short-lived and focused on specific issues. Nonetheless, this does not diminish the gravity of the situation. Challenging universalism, including in the norms and human rights domain, sets a dangerous precedent, emboldening 'challengers' to further undermine democratic values and institutions and to fuel tensions and instability, both domestically and internationally. The allure of European power must evolve to suit a rapidly changing and more diverse world. The EU model of integration, with its associated norms, is seen as a challenge by authoritarian countries that have different visions of the evolving global order. This contestation is particularly evident in the realm of human rights.

Human rights embody key values that safeguard basic rights and allow states to strive towards a better world. Europe should continue to be a torchbearer in this regard, irrespective of its size, the global context, or internal fragmentation. After all, if not Europe, then who will take on this critical role?

DEMOCRACY UNDER SIEGE

Navigating internal and external challenges

by
NAĎA KOVALČÍKOVÁ

INTRODUCTION

2024 is shaping up to be a record year for democratic participation, with elections scheduled in countries representing over half the global population. However, recent years have demonstrated a trend towards a rise in autocracies relative to democracies, raising concerns about potential challenges to democratic norms and principles ahead.

The stakes are high. Preserving and strengthening democratic systems and public trust in them is of critical importance. The EU, in particular, faces the challenge of navigating legitimate political contestation within pluralistic European societies and beyond while simultaneously countering efforts to undermine democracy and manipulate public discourse. The urgent need to build both short-term and long-term democratic resilience is heightened by increasing domestic polarisation, and persistent foreign interference activities that seek to exploit existing societal cleavages.

This chapter argues that in a context of declining trust in democratic institutions, and the rise of autocratic models of governance and information manipulation in the public sphere, contestation *within* and *of* the democratic system can be a double-edged sword. While it can potentially harm democracy, it may also contribute to its resilience, while empowering legitimate forms of contestation.

TRUST IS A MUST, BUT NOT A GIVEN

Declining public trust poses a significant challenge to democracy. A Pew Research Center survey conducted in 2017 [1] revealed that although a majority of respondents from 38 nations across the world favoured democracy, many were also willing to consider non-democratic alternatives. More recently, a December 2023 survey by the European Commission showed that over half of polled EU citizens were not at all or not very satisfied

with the state of democracy (51 %) [2], representing a significant increase compared to 2022 (36 %) [3]. Similar trends are evident in the United States, where recent Gallup polls show a steady decline in citizens' confidence in their political institutions [4]. Authoritarian adversaries are adept at exploiting this erosion of trust, by contesting national democracies as a credible and effective model of governance. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, democratic governments had to temporarily restrict civil liberties in an effort to manage the crisis, across EU Member States and globally. This, amidst a climate of rampant disinformation, led to a steep decline of trust in national institutions in many countries. Authoritarian regimes exacerbated this state of affairs by questioning the origins of the virus, highlighting failures in democracies and portraying authoritarian systems, e.g. China or Cuba, as being more effective than democratic ones in tackling the pandemic.

Declining trust can negatively impact citizens' engagement in democratic processes and weaken their commitment to democracy itself. While Democracy Index scores for electoral participation in Western Europe have rebounded to pre-pandemic levels, this trend has not been reflected globally [5]. It is important to remember, however, that citizens' participation in elections, although a crucial aspect, is just one factor to be taken into account when evaluating the state of democracy [6]. Many citizens perceive that structural injustices and inequalities are not being satisfactorily addressed. There is a lot more to be done. This sense of injustice has been compounded by economic challenges, including the cost of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, decades-high inflation and slowing global economic growth. Moreover, while inequality between countries has declined (although remaining significant according to the 2022 World Inequality Lab report), inequality within countries has increased and now surpasses the gap between countries, accounting for 32 % of global inequality [7]. These factors all contribute to rising public frustration directed against governments.

The challenge to democracy is further amplified by foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI). Authoritarian actors continue to exploit grievances for geopolitical gain, seeking to weaken democracies and promote their own autocratic systems. For instance, in February Viginum, the French government service for monitoring foreign digital interference, exposed a sophisticated Russian strategy designed to undermine EU Member States' support for Ukraine by promoting anti-Ukraine and pro-Russian social media accounts [8]. Such tactics further erode public trust in the decisions and actions of democratic authorities. A recent survey conducted by UNESCO and Ipsos across 16 countries found that a high number of respondents (87 %) were concerned about the potential impact of disinformation on their country's upcoming

(2)   European Commission, 'Eurobarometer Survey', December 2023 (https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2966).

(3)   European Parliament, 'EP Spring 2022 Survey', June 2022, p.118 (https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2792).

(4)   Newport, F., 'Crisis in confidence 2023', Gallup, 31 December 2023, p.5 (https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/547766/crisis-confidence-2023.aspx#:~:text=The%20first%20of%20these%20is,deficit%20recorded%20a%20year%20ago).

(5)   Economist Intelligence Unit, 'Democracy Index 2022', 2023 (https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2022/). Five aspects to rate the state of democracy are measured: electoral process and pluralism, the functioning of government, political participation, democratic culture and civil liberties. International IDEA's Global State of Democracy (GSoD) identifies four: representation, rights, rule of law and participation.

(6)   Ibid.

(7)   Chancel, L., Piketty, T., Saez, E., Zucman, G. et al., 'World Inequality Report 2022', World Inequality Lab, pp. 68 and 58 respectively (https://wir2022.wid.world/www-site/uploads/2023/03/D_FINAL_WIL_RIM_RAPPORT_2303.pdf).

(8)   Viginum, 'PORTAL KOMBAT: A structured and coordinated pro-Russian propaganda network', 12 February 2024 (https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/files/files/Publications/20240214_NP_SGDSN_VIGINUM_PORTAL-KOMBAT-NETWORK_PART2_ENG_VF.pdf).

elections this year **(9)**. This highlights the critical need to strengthen societal resilience against autocratic influence and information manipulation.

AUTOCRATIC INFLUENCE AND THE DISTORTION OF THE DIGITAL PUBLIC SPHERE

According to the V-Dem Institute report published earlier this year, in 2023 there were more than twice as many countries worldwide experiencing substantial autocratisation (42 altogether) than those experiencing significant democratisation (18) **(10)**. This trend is raising concerns about the appeal of democracy and, by extension, its implications for European and global security. And while a larger share of the global population still lives in democracies (45.4 %, according to The Economist Intelligence Unit's 2023 Democracy Index), compared to autocracies (39.4 %) **(11)**, autocratic regimes are increasingly contesting democracies and their long-term viability. In particular, there has been a deterioration in

Autocratic regimes are increasingly contesting democracies and their long-term viability.

freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly and association in all world regions **(12)**, as well as an increase in violent conflict negatively impacting global democracy scores **(13)**.

Freedom of expression and media freedom must be defended when democratic principles are contested. Authoritarian regimes often restrict media freedom and pluralism **(14)**. However, the information landscape has evolved: while traditional media remains important, information now also circulates increasingly on digital platforms and other online channels, enabling public access to a diverse range of opinions and information. These platforms serve as tools for manipulation by autocratic actors or their proxies who constantly adapt tactics to exploit systemic loopholes in the digital public sphere. Such actors aim to distort legitimate debate on a wide spectrum of issues, e.g. on conflicts in the Middle East, on historical grievances, on the West vs. other parts of the world, thus creating artificial divisions, for example between the EU and the US. The EUvsDisinfo database provides examples of fabricated narratives spread through various online outlets. These narratives target sensitive topics in a way designed to manipulate perceptions and inflame tensions, such as via the claim that 'the West and the US [are] ferrying Islamic State members to Afghanistan to use them against China' or the fictitious assertion that the 'USA [has] occupied Germany as a colonial power for eight decades' **(15)**.

(9)   Ipsos, 'Elections & social media: the battle against disinformation and trust issues', 7 November 2023 (https://www.ipsos.com/en/elections-social-media-battle-against-disinformation-and-trust-issues)

(10)   V-Dem Institute, *Democracy Report 2024: Democracy winning and losing at the ballot*, 5 March 2024, p.6 (https://v-dem.net/documents/43/v-dem_dr2024_lowres.pdf).

(11)   Economist Intelligence Unit, 'Democracy Index: Conflict and polarisation drive a new low for global democracy', 15 February 2024 (https://www.eiu.com/n/democracy-index-conflict-and-polarisation-drive-a-new-low-for-global-democracy/).

(12)   International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), *The Global State of Democracy 2023: The new checks and balances*, 2 November 2023, p.20 (https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/2024-02/the-global-state-of-democracy-2023-the-new-checks-and-balances.pdf).
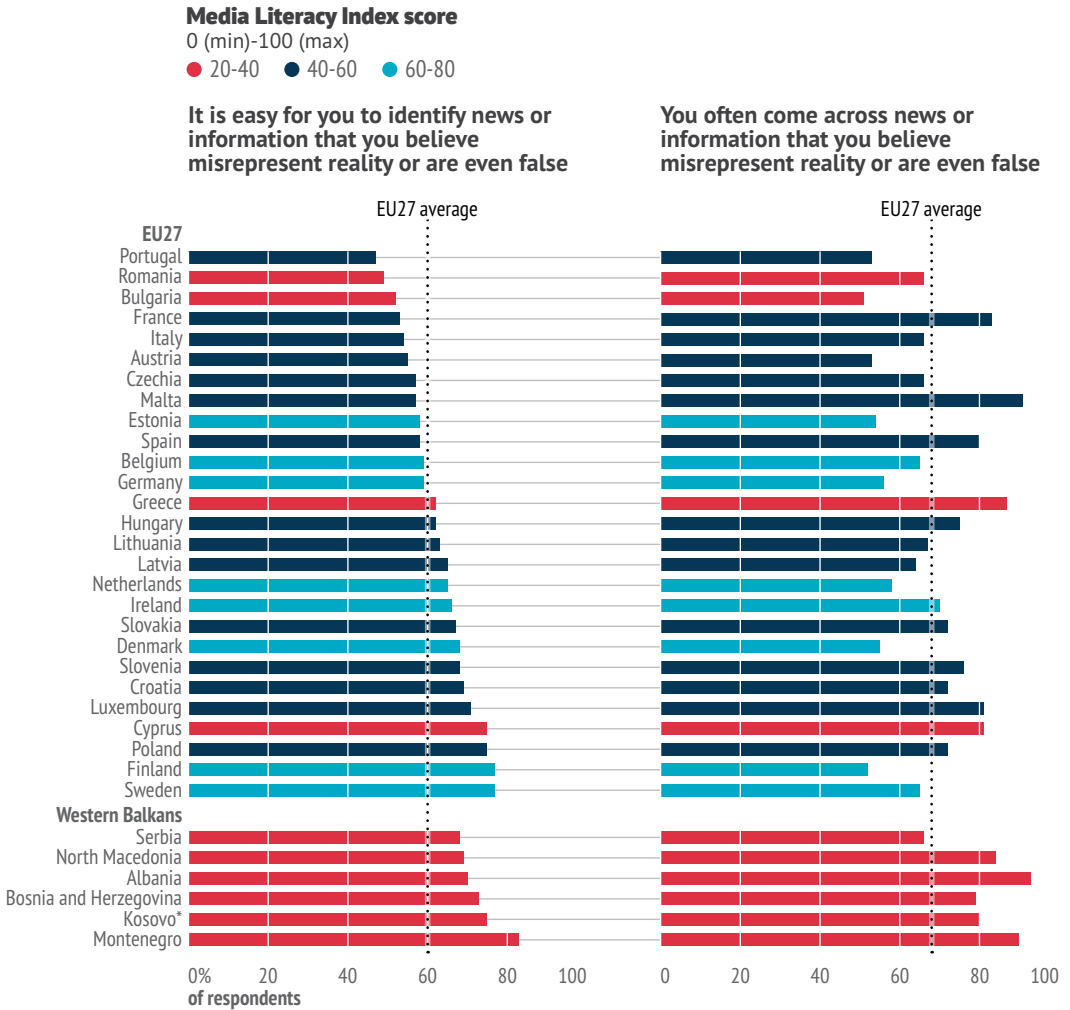
(13)   Ibid.

(14)   Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net 2021: the global drive to contain Big Tech*, 2021 (https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/FOTN_2021_Complete_Booklet_09162021_FINAL_UPDATED.pdf).

(15)   EUvsDisinfo, 'Disinformation Cases Database' (https://euvsdisinfo.eu/disinformation-cases/).

Actual and perceived media literacy

People across Europe tend to overestimate their capacity
to identify misrepresentation of reality in the information space

Media Literacy Index score
0 (min)-100 (max)
● 20-40   ● 40-60   ● 60-80

It is easy for you to identify news or information that you believe misrepresent reality or are even false

You often come across news or information that you believe misrepresent reality or are even false

EU27 average

EU27 average

EU27
- Portugal
- Romania
- Bulgaria
- France
- Italy
- Austria
- Czechia
- Malta
- Estonia
- Spain
- Belgium
- Germany
- Greece
- Hungary
- Lithuania
- Latvia
- Netherlands
- Ireland
- Slovakia
- Denmark
- Slovenia
- Croatia
- Luxembourg
- Cyprus
- Poland
- Finland
- Sweden

Western Balkans
- Serbia
- North Macedonia
- Albania
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Kosovo*
- Montenegro

0%   20   40   60   80   100
of respondents

0   20   40   60   80   100

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 (1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Data: Open Society Institute Sofia, The Media Literacy Index, 2023;
European Comission, Eurobarometer Oct/Nov 2023

These tactics extend beyond online disinformation campaigns. A recent case in France shows how FIMI can be used for purposes of societal destabilisation. In autumn 2023, the authorities uncovered a foreign-orchestrated operation, allegedly directed by 'an individual from Russia', that involved Stars of David being spray-painted on the walls of buildings in Paris. This took place shortly after the beginning of the Israel-Hamas conflict, and was clearly intended to stoke tensions. Hostile media information campaigns further amplified these anxieties[16]. FIMI has a wide reach, targeting not just countries and organisations,

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(16) Follorou, J., 'Une opération de déstabilisation russe a visé plusieurs pays européens', *Le Monde,* 22 February 2024 (https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2024/02/22/une-operation-de-destabilisation-russe-a-vise-plusieurs-pays-europeens_6217989_3210.html).

The rising trend of autocratisation amidst 2024 elections

By 2023, more countries have experienced negative changes in their democratic status than positive changes, in contrast to 2003

In 2003, 11 countries were **autocratising** and 35 were **democratising.**
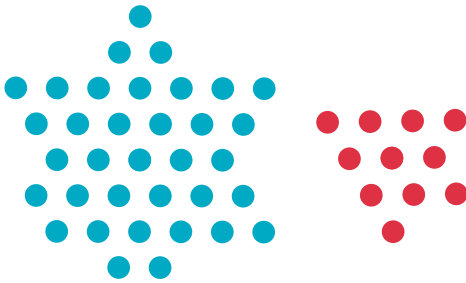
In 2023, 18 countries were **democratising** and 42 were **autocratising**, out of which a total of 24 **hold legislative and/or presidential elections in 2024**.
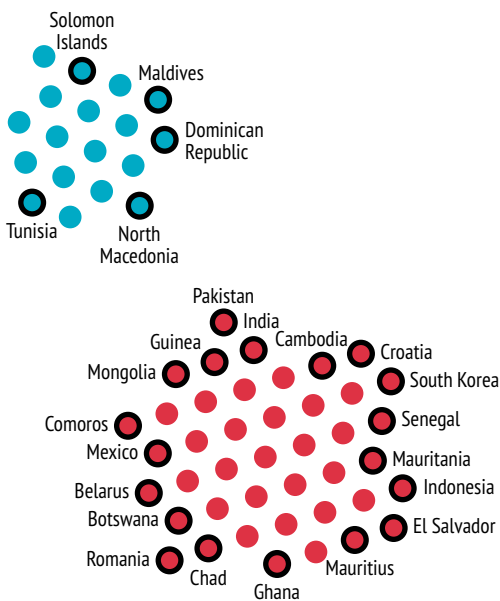
Solomon Islands
Maldives
Dominican Republic
Tunisia
North Macedonia

Pakistan
India
Guinea
Cambodia
Croatia
Mongolia
South Korea
Comoros
Senegal
Mexico
Mauritania
Belarus
Indonesia
Botswana
El Salvador
Romania
Chad
Ghana
Mauritius

Data: V-Dem Institute, *Democracy Report*, 2024; *The Guardian*, Elections tracker, 2024; EUISS own collection of data compiled from multiple sources, as of April 2024

but also groups and individuals. The latest European External Action Service report from January 2024 [17] revealed that 30 % of analysed FIMI attacks targeted 149 different organisations, including major international institutions like the EU, NATO and the UN, as well as the armed forces of Ukraine. Prominent media outlets like Euronews, Reuters, Deutsche Welle or *The New York Times* were also targeted.

In addition, a media literacy index combining media freedom and the quality of education with other indicators has demonstrated that while not necessarily autocratic, some countries experiencing inter-state tensions and internal instability rank among the countries with the lowest media literacy [18]. Consequently, they are highly vulnerable to disinformation [19]. Moreover, across Europe there appears to be a disconnect between perception and reality when it comes to media literacy. While many people feel highly exposed to manipulated information, and believe they can identify it, actual media literacy skills tend to be lower and sometimes even much lower, as the diagram on page 59 demonstrates.

Digital actors such as social media companies also play a significant role in this contest between autocracies and democracies. For example, in late January, a large-scale pro-Russian disinformation campaign targeting Germany was uncovered by the media. The campaign, operating on the social media platform X, utilised an extensive network of fake accounts to launch a month-long messaging blitz which amounted to a 'sophisticated and concerted onslaught' on Germany's support to Ukraine. The disinformation campaign claimed that due to its provision of weapons, aid and admission of Ukrainian refugees, the German government was neglecting German citizens' needs, thereby aiming to undermine public

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(17) European External Action Service (EEAS), '2nd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats', 23 January 2023 (https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2024/EEAS-2nd-Report%20on%20 FIMI%20Threats-January-2024_0.pdf).

(18) Such as trust in society or the use of new tools of participation.

(19) Open Society Institute Sofia, 'Media Literacy Index 2023', 24 June 2023 (https://osis.bg/?p=4450&lang=en).

backing for the government's efforts [20]. This incident has raised concerns about how such methods could be used also to interfere in the upcoming elections, especially in the context of countries with eroding democracy. Some listed as autocratising in the 2023 Democracy Index report have already experienced election-related interference. Moreover, democratic values and principles are vulnerable to interference both from external and internal forces. The language and tone of reactions to the fake posts targeting German citizens bore a striking resemblance to rhetoric used by the German far-right party AfD, which is highly critical of the government and has known connections to Russia. It has also recently been alleged that an AfD parliamentary aide was conducting spying activities for China [21].

BUILDING TRANSNATIONAL DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE

Building democratic resilience requires a multi-pronged approach. One key element is improving trust in democratic governance. This can be achieved by addressing structural issues, information manipulation and the broader challenge of autocratic tendencies. Constructive contestation channelled by countervailing institutions plays a vital role in this process. Such formal or informal entities, including civil society networks, protest movements, human rights organisations, electoral management bodies and supranational institutions, serve as important checks on executive power and empower citizens to play a role in decision-making.

Two noteworthy and related trends are emerging at the transnational level. On one hand, we have been witnessing the growth of institutionalised transnational initiatives to counter the challenge of undemocratic actors by helping to build a broader democratic ecosystem globally. The World Movement for Democracy, founded in India in 1999 and based in Washington, D.C., focuses on democratic renewal, civil society engagement and youth participation. More recently, there has been a new global initiative in the form of the Summits for Democracy, launched in December 2021. The third and most recent summit, held in the Republic of Korea from 18 to 20 March this year, resulted in agreements on funding and programmes to better address information manipulation and other digital threats to democracy, among other outcomes. The summit took place in Seoul just several weeks before South Korea's general elections, which were held on 10 April, coinciding with a period of heightened political tensions during which the president, along with some other candidates, was targeted by deepfake videos. Additionally, reports of crackdowns on free speech and on local independent journalists raised concerns about the host country's own democratic practices. These pro-democracy transnational initiatives currently represent the largest international gatherings of both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders working to defend against authoritarianism. However, they have also revealed the need to bridge the gap between government and civil society actors more effectively and less technocratically, particularly compared to other competing summits and forums, and produce more actionable outcomes. The presence of some countries with questionable democratic records at these summits has also given rise to some criticism. Moreover, non-invited authoritarian countries, such as Russia and China, have also voiced strong objections, contesting the legitimacy of the summits and

(20)   Connolly, K., 'Germany unearths pro-Russia disinformation campaign on X', *The Guardian*, 26 January 2024 (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/26/germany-unearths-pro-russia-disinformation-campaign-on-x).

(21)   Wax, E. et al, 'Germany arrests EU Parliament aide over bombshell China spying claims', *Politico*, 23 April 2024 (https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-arrests-eu-parliament-afd-staffer-afd-spy-china-jian-g-mep-krah/).

accusing them of being divisive and stoking ideological confrontation [22].

The Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC) is another noteworthy pro-democracy initiative. This international cross-party group of legislators aims to 'maintain the integrity of their political systems, and actively seek to preserve a marketplace of ideas free from distortion' in an increasingly contested world. While several initiatives have been launched to address interference carried out by China globally, IPAC members have been recently targeted by cyberattacks themselves, as revealed on 25 March by the United States Department of Justice, in an attempt to intimidate them.

Beyond these international efforts, a groundswell of domestic movements pushing for deeper democratisation has emerged across various regions beyond the EU over the last decade. Movements such as the non-violent pro-democracy Umbrella Movement emerged in Hong Kong in 2014, demanding 'genuine universal suffrage' to ensure that future government executives would be accountable to the public (rather than just pre-approved by the Chinese government) and behave more democratically. Similarly, Taiwan's Sunflower Movement organised resistance against a controversial bill potentially representing a further risk to Taiwan's independence from China. Parallels can also be drawn with Ukraine's Maidan Revolution, a pro-democracy and pro-European uprising against authoritarianism. We have also seen significant pro-democracy protests in Belarus contesting the results of the 2020 presidential elections, to which the authorities responded with a violent crackdown. Pro-democracy movements have also emerged in Azerbaijan, with the N!DA movement striving to uphold democratic values and defend constitutional rights. While many of these pro-democracy initiatives, both transnational and domestic, take place independently of each other, a growing body of shared experience is accumulating in building democratic resilience against the threat of autocratisation. Transnational lessons and actors involved, bolstered by domestic resistance movements, are leading to a confluence of efforts within global initiatives. As a result, we see the rise of more institutionalised transnational countervailing institutions.

CONCLUSION

In the past decade democracies have faced intensified pressure, both internally and externally, in a context of declining political trust, rising autocratisation and information manipulation. In response, the European institutions have increasingly focused on building more resilient democracies in the EU, *inter alia,* through the promotion of free and fair elections, media freedom and literacy, and by developing measures to counter information manipulation. Recent key EU efforts in this vein include establishing the EEAS East StratCom Task Force, the Action Plan against Disinformation, the EU Code of Practice on Disinformation and the European Democracy Action Plan. In addition, two European Parliament Special Committees (ING and ING2), the Digital Services Act, the Media Freedom Act, the Defence of Democracy package and other initiatives all contribute to addressing challenges to democratic stability.

> # A groundswell of domestic movements pushing for deeper democratisation has emerged across various regions beyond the EU over the last decade.

(22)   Antonov, A. and Gang, Q., 'Russian and Chinese Ambassadors: Respecting people's democratic rights', *The National Interest*, 26 November 2021 (https://nationalinterest.org/feature/russian-and-chinese-ambassadors-respecting-people%E2%80%99s-democratic-rights-197165).

To enhance the EU's ability to counter illegitimate and harmful contestation *of* and *within* democracies, this chapter proposes three key recommendations:

> **First, the EU could develop capacities to connect FIMI incidents, tools and domains and systematically expose them at all levels.** Weakening of democracy is often linked with structural inequalities and limited freedoms, but also with information manipulation by the EU's autocratic rivals and their networks. Exposing the interconnections between actors, incidents, tools and tactics behind disinformation campaigns, both national and international, but also local, can help systematically weaken these manipulative efforts, build resilience and safeguard democracies at all societal levels [23].

> **Second, sharing and implementing good practices is essential.** Prior to the next European Parliament (EP) elections on 6–9 June, some initiatives have already been undertaken to protect against interference. The EP has launched a campaign #Use Your Vote and #Don't Be Deceived, some Code of Practice signatories have committed to mobilise efforts to support the EU democratic process, and at the national level, for example, the Swedish Psychological Defence Agency has launched a 'Don't Be Fooled' awareness campaign to enhance societal resilience. All EU Member States would benefit from similar tailored and coordinated campaigns during and indeed beyond election periods, as would EU candidate countries, to mitigate spillover effects in the European public sphere.

> **Third, the EU could empower transnational democratic pluralism to enhance its democratic ecosystem and counter autocratic trends**. By fostering a more systematic approach to engaging with pro-democracy countervailing institutions, e.g. through the Summit for Democracy, the EU can amplify legitimate domestic voices and boost citizens' trust in the democratic system through reinforced transnational cooperation and coordination.

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(23)   Klepper, D. and Wu, H., 'How Taiwan beat back disinformation and preserved the integrity of its election', Associated Press (AP), 29 January 2024 (https://apnews.com/article/taiwan-election-china-disinformation-vote-fraud-4968ef08fd13 821e359b8e195b12919c).

RUSSIA'S CONSERVATIVE UTOPIA

A means to global influence

by
ONDREJ DITRYCH

INTRODUCTION

Moscow's geopolitical project aims to fundamentally reshape global politics. The Kremlin hails the rise of a multipolar order, going so far as to claim a special role in contributing to stabilising the balance of power and 'maintaining [global and regional] peace and security' [1]. But more than anything else this reflects Russia's desire to regain recognition as a world power after its loss of superpower status in the 1990s. Russia's strategy for adapting to this new reality involves circumventing Western strengths and exploiting weaknesses and vulnerabilities. This approach features a new combination of familiar tactics ranging from propaganda to influence campaigns and the nexus between military and business interests (exemplified by the Wagner empire) as a means of conducting 'guerilla geopolitics' [2].

This chapter examines an underappreciated aspect of Russia's challenge to the current global order: the Kremlin's projection of 'Normative Power Russia' (NPR) – a concept used in this chapter and inspired by the theoretical notion of 'Normative Power Europe' popularised by Ian Manners [3] – as a set of practices and strategies aimed at disseminating norms that support the pursuit of Russia's interests abroad. NPR specifically centres on projecting an image of Russia as a 'conservative political utopia' [4]. 'Conservatism' has been a cornerstone of Putin's rule from the beginning. The Kremlin's strategy of seeking to carve out influence within a global clash

(1)   Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 'Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации' [The concept of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation], 31 March 2023 (https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/?lang=en).

(2)   Galeotti, M., 'Hybrid, ambiguous, and nonlinear?', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 27, No 2, 2016, pp. 282–301.

(3)   See: Manners, I., 'Normative Power Europe: A contradiction in terms?', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No 2, 2002, pp. 235–258.

(4)   The discussion of this concept here takes inspiration from Andrzej Walicki's study *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth Century Russian Thought*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1975.

between traditional and progressive values is not new [5]. However, the concept of a conservative political utopia challenging the Western model of political order has recently taken on greater international significance. It serves as a tool for Russia to contest the existing global normative order, build networks of allies and influence, and deflect criticism of its breaches of the basic norms of international relations.

REWRITING GLOBAL POLITICS

NPR stands as a counterpoint to the notion of Normative Power Europe (NPE) [6] coined by Ian Manners in the early 2000s to describe the distinct nature of the EU's international agency based on persuasion and socialisation of others into its normative order, and also discussed by Bojana Zorić in her chapter in this volume. Both NPE and NPR can be described as normative entrepreneurship projects, with Europe and Russia each claiming a certain exceptionalism in how they exercise power on the international stage. In contrast to NPE, NPR's approach is characterised by a more pronounced element of *contestation* – of the very foundations of Western power and of the existing regional security architecture in Europe. It can be specifically linked to Russia's global hybrid warfare strategy which deploys disinformation tactics and builds influence networks in addition to more conventional diplomatic practice.

At the international level, NPR contributes to the effort to undermine the political and economic foundations of US and Western power such as the dominance of the dollar, or control

Examples of Russian breaches of the Helsinki Accords

The Helsinki Accords were agreed upon in 1975 by both the Western and Eastern European states. The declaration's Decalogue entails ten principles defining the European security architecture.

Breached?

I   Sovereign equality, respect for the rights inherent in sovereignty
In 2015, Russia pressures Armenia into not signing the EU's Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA).

II   Refraining from the threat or use of force
Since 2014, Russian wages its war of aggression on Ukraine.

III   Inviolability of frontiers
Since 2014, Russian wages its war of aggression on Ukraine.

IV   Territorial integrity of states
In 2008, Russia invades Georgia's South Ossetia and Abkhazia region.

V   Peaceful settlement of disputes
Since 1991, Russia exploits protracted conflicts in the post-Soviet region, purposefully frustrating all efforts at their resolution.

VI   Non-intervention in internal affairs
In 2007, Russia wages three weeks of massive cyber-attacks on Estonia's vital infrastructure.

VII   Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief
Since 2022, Russian armed forces commit the war crimes of torture, rape and other sexual violence, and deportation of children.

VIII   Equal rights and self-determination of peoples
In 2014, Russia invades Crimea and annexes the territory following a highly-disputed referendum.

IX   Cooperation among states
Russia obstructs the proper functioning of the OSCE and blocks most of its cooperative mandates.

X   Fulfillment in good faith of obligations under international law
In 2019, Russia breaches the INF Treaty through its deployment of the SSC-8 missile system.

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(5)   Stoeckl, K. and Uzlaner, D., *The Moralist International: Russia in the global culture wars*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2022. See also: 'Vladimir Putin: Liberalism has outlived its purpose,' *Financial Times*, 28 June 2019 (https://www.ft.com/content/2880c762-98c2-11e9-8cfb-30c211dcd229).

(6)   'Normative Power Europe: A contradiction in terms?', op.cit.

over global infrastructure. By dividing the world between an allegedly decadent West weakened by its embrace of progressive values and the 'global majority' that adheres to traditional values, Moscow seeks to delegitimise the *status quo* – the liberal international order that constrains (and, in the view of the Kremlin elite, jeopardises) its authoritarian and imperial regime. At the same time, NPR seeks to legitimise Russia's leadership in challenging this order. Moscow advances its NPR agenda at the international level through initiatives such as a United Nations Human Rights Council resolution promoting the understanding of traditional values as complementary to human rights [7]. However, its approach is contradictory in some aspects. While Russia declares that it is committed to restoring the UN-based global architecture, at the same time it pursues the establishment of parallel international bodies like the BRICS (recently expanded to become the 'BRICS+' – discussed by Dalia Ghanem in her chapter in this volume). The existing ones, Russia argues, are subservient to the interests of the West that designed and controls them.

Russia's attempt to impose a new security architecture on the European continent exemplifies its contestation of the existing order at the regional level. From the Kremlin's perspective, in addition to legally binding constraints on NATO expansion and the *de facto* demilitarisation of the new member states as outlined in President Putin's security treaty proposal from 2021 [8], this new architecture should feature a reconfiguration of the continent favourable to Russia's interests. It should also restore a European 'concert of powers' with special responsibilities and zones of interest allocated to major powers, including of course Russia itself [9]. Moscow blames the West collectively for disrupting the post-World

Moscow blames the West collectively for disrupting the post-World War II security architecture.

War II security architecture. However Russia has demonstrably breached the founding norms of this architecture, including sovereign equality, non-intervention, absence of the threat or use of force, and respect for human rights.

Russia's attempts to rewrite the international and European orders exhibit distinct conservative characteristics. This endeavour aims to restore a bygone era and return to a historical *status quo*, seeking a political utopia that predates the current (alleged) era of Western hegemony and universalism. It is also inherently defensive, underscoring the need to protect Russia's own sovereignty, recently expanded to include 'cultural sovereignty' anchored in distinct 'spiritual and moral values' [10]. Yet, ironically, at the same time this narrative incorporates an organic view of politics and a certain vitalistic optimism that posits an inevitable, 'natural' process of history in which 'the old' (that is, *the West*) decays and becomes extinct while 'the new', of which Russia is a part, is born to thrive and prosper.

(7) United Nations General Assembly, 'Resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council 16/3, Promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms through a better understanding of traditional values of humankind', A/HRC/RES/16/3, 8 April 2011 (https://documents.un.org/doc/resolution/gen/g11/124/92/pdf/g1112492.pdf?token=TswirBGuctlLF2Ejrg&fe=true).

(8) See Pifer, S., 'Russia's draft agreements with NATO and the United States: Intended for rejection?', Brookings, Washington D.C., 21 December 2021 (https://www.brookings.edu/articles/russias-draft-agreements-with-nato-and-the-united-states-intended-for-rejection/).

(9) For a historical overview of striving for recognition as a *leitmotif* of Russia's foreign policy since Peter the Great, see Neumann, I., 'Russia as a Great Power (1815–2007)', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, Vol. 11, No 2, 2008, pp. 128–151.

(10) See 'Указ Президента Российской Федерации № 35 О внесении изменений в Основы государственной культурной политики, утвержденные Указом Президента Российской Федерации от 24 декабря 2014 г. № 808' [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 35 'On amendments to the fundamentals of state cultural policy approved by decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated December 24, 2014 No. 808'], 25 January 2023 (http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202301250004).

A CONSERVATIVE UTOPIA: WHERE LIFE IS STILL 'NORMAL'

The concept of a 'conservative utopia' underpins these efforts to revise the international order. Russia seeks to enhance its power of attraction by projecting a certain image of itself as a 'naturally ordered' society. The regime's conservative vision translates to domestic policies like restricting abortion access, prosecuting LGBT+ people under an 'anti-gay propaganda law' (2013) [11] or designating the LGBT+ movement as extremist (2023). The government furthermore espouses a policy of encouraging women to bear more children (the country's reproductive politics is now also concerned with providing human resources for the war) and has even decriminalised domestic violence (2017) [12]. This image of a morally upright and virtuous Russia is contrasted with that of a decadent West that is being destroyed by the 'dictatorship' of its elites through their embrace of multiculturalism, immigration, and gender freedom policies [13]. These, along with the societal ills associated with urban life and the rise of digital technologies, are seen as contributing to the West's demise [14]. To avoid
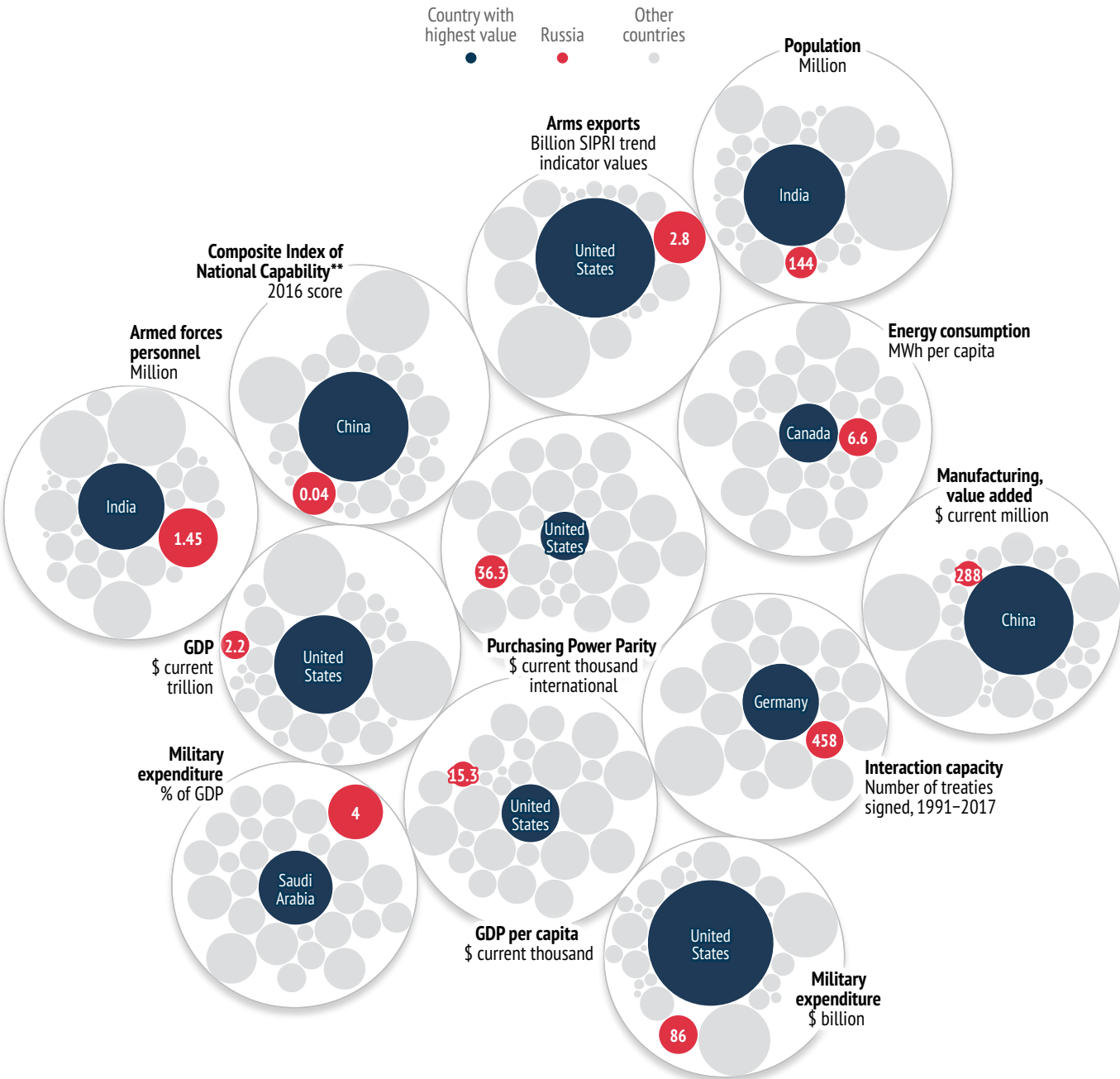
the same fate, the Orthodox Church, closely aligned with the state's conservative agenda domestically, has recommended in a recent manifesto that Russians move out of big cities and that 80 % of them should live 'in their own individual houses on their own land' – indicating that the conservative utopia is also a distinctly rural one [15].

Spiritual decadence here somehow correlates with material decline and a loss of vitality. In contrast to Western 'posthuman values' [16] and its 'destructive ideologies' of 'egoism, licentiousness and immorality' [17], Russia is supposedly grounded in timeless moral principles centred on family values, religion, a strong emphasis on masculinity [18] and a patriarchal structure that aligns with the regime's obsession with strong sovereign statehood (*государственность*). Where Western progressives politicise nature by foregrounding environmental concerns and the effects of climate change, Russia's state conservatism aims to 'naturalise' politics. The vision of Russia as a communist utopia where ultra-rapid development under Soviet rule was the guiding principle ('tomorrow means yesterday') [19], has given way to a nostalgia for a 'natural' social order 'as it once was'. This emphasis on tradition notwithstanding,

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(11)   The law, passed in the Duma without a single opposition vote, prohibits propaganda in favour of 'nontraditional sexual relations' among minors, for example by considering heterosexual and homosexual relations as equal. In the same session, the Duma also passed a law imposing jail sentences for 'offending religious feelings'. See Elder, M., 'Russia passes law banning gay propaganda,' *The Guardian*, 11 June 2013 (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/11/russia-law-banning-gay-propaganda).

(12)   The law decriminalised violent acts committed by family members, imposing only administrative penalties (often fines) for domestic violence causing injuries that do not require hospital treatment. Walker, S., 'Putin approves legal change that decriminalises some domestic violence,' *The Guardian*, 7 February 2017 (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/07/putin-approves-change-to-law-decriminalising-domestic-violence#:~:text=It%20makes%20%E2%80%9Cmoderate%E2%80%9D%20violence%20within,more%20than%20once%20a%20year).

(13)   'Extracts from Putin's speech at annexation ceremony', Reuters, 30 September 2022 (https://www.reuters.com/world/extracts-putins-speech-annexation-ceremony-2022-09-30/).

(14)   See for example Karaganov, S., 'An Age of Wars? Article One', *Russia in Global Affairs*, 1 January 2024 (https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/an-age-of-wars-article-one/).

(15)   Russian Orthodox Church, 'Настоящее и будущее Русского мира' [Present and Future of the Russian World], Order of the 25th World Russian People's Council, 27 March 2024 (http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/6116189.html).

(16)   Ibid.

(17)   'Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 09.11.2022 № 809 'Об утверждении Основ государственной политики по сохранению и укреплению традиционных российских духовно-нравственных ценностей' [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated November 9, 2022 No. 809, 'On approval of the fundamentals of State policy for the preservation and strengthening of traditional Russian spiritual and moral values'], 2022 (http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202211090019).

(18)   See for example Taylor, B., *The Code of Putinism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018.

(19)   Fučík, J., *V zemi, kde zítra již znamená včera* ['The Country Where Tomorrow Means Already Yesterday'], Svoboda, Prague, 1932.

Dangerous, but not so big

Power distribution among G20 states, the European Union, and the ten most populous EU Member States*

Country with highest value ●   Russia ●   Other countries ●

Population
Million

India — 144

Arms exports
Billion SIPRI trend indicator values

United States — 2.8

Composite Index of National Capability**
2016 score

China — 0.04

Energy consumption
MWh per capita

Canada — 6.6

Armed forces personnel
Million

India — 1.45

Manufacturing, value added
$ current million

China — 288

GDP
$ current trillion

United States — 2.2

Purchasing Power Parity
$ current thousand international

United States — 36.3

Interaction capacity
Number of treaties signed, 1991–2017

Germany — 458

Military expenditure
% of GDP

Saudi Arabia — 4

GDP per capita
$ current thousand

United States — 15.3

Military expenditure
$ billion

United States — 86

* The G20 consists of Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Türkiye, United Kingdom, United States and the European Union; The remainder of the ten most populous EU member states are Spain, Poland, Romania, the Netherlands, Belgium, Czechia, and Sweden.

** The Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) assesses a country's national capabilities in the context of conflict and conflict–readiness through six key variables: total population, urban population, military personnel, military expenditure, energy consumption, and iron and steel production. It calculates the index by averaging each country's percentage share of the global total for each variable, then dividing by six (the number of variables considered). CINC scores typically range from 0.00 (indicating minimal national power) to around 0.23 for the current leader, China.

Data: CINC, 2016; *International Affairs*, Vol. 99, No 6, 2023; SIPRI, 2023; World Bank, 2022.

Russia's conservative ideological programme lacks coherence. It draws on and eclectically combines diverse strains of domestic conservative or traditionalist thought.

Early Putinism combined conservative ideology with reform initiatives. This period also witnessed moments of 'insularism' aligned with 'geopolitical conservatism', although Russia still maintained some cultural ties with Europe. However, there has been a gradual shift towards a more imperial, orthodox and civilisational version of conservatism. This vision rejects isolationism and casts Russia as a distinct 'country-civilisation' with a historical mission and global 'responsibility'. Similar to 19th century Orthodox and Slavophile conservative movements, this ideology depicts Russia as set on a spiritual mission to defend civilisation against barbarism ('cultural disarmament') and challenges materialism and individualism. However, while replicating their embrace of the idea of empire[20], the mission is not to remake the world according to a universal ideology. Unlike Tsar Alexander I who aimed to restore order in Europe after the French Revolution and thus save it from decline, this contemporary mission is limited in scope. It emphasises Russia's particular civilisational identity, hence drawing more on the Eurasianist strain of Russian conservative thought.

Russia in this discourse presents itself as a kind of 'city on a hill' – a beacon of civilisation. However, in practice, the regime opportunistically instrumentalises traditional and spiritual values for its own ends, leading to

There has been a shift towards a more imperial, orthodox and civilisational version of conservatism.

inconsistencies, tension and contradictions in how these values are presented. The commitment to traditional values is complemented by the portrayal of Russia as a force for global emancipation and liberation from (Western) domination. The notion of Russia as a dynamic and modern civilisation exists alongside the vision of a rural, 'demodernised' society that rejects modern science in favour of traditional values[21]. Nationalistic sentiment is accompanied by the glorification of Russia's imperial past and calls to revive the empire, a perspective that clashes with the notion of a nation as a territorially bounded political entity. The grand sense of a global historical mission coexists uneasily with a deep-seated paranoid fear of external enemies. Even recent attempts at ideological indoctrination, like the mandatory university course 'Foundations of Russian Statehood' (*Основы российской государственности*) introduced in 2023, reveal the incoherent and superficial character of Russia's official ideology. The curriculum promotes the familiar trope of a young and dynamic 'country-civilisation' and aims to instil 'conservative and religious' thought in the new generation, but ultimately reads more like a political marketing campaign rather than a serious ideological manifesto[22].

This does not mean that Russia's vision of a conservative utopia has not elicited admiration in conservative circles abroad, including in the West. The much-publicised visit of the American conservative media personality Tucker Carlson to Moscow in February 2024 is just the latest example of this trend. Carlson's visit – which as well as his interview with

(20)   See Tsygankov, A.P., 'In the shadow of Nikolai Danilevsky: Universalism, particularism, and Russian geopolitical theory', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 69, No 4, 2017, pp. 571-593.

(21)   Russian Orthodox Church, op.cit.

(22)   Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation, 'Основы российской государственности' [Foundations of Russian Statehood], Document No. MH-11/1516-ПК, 21 April 2023 (https://fgosvo.ru/uploadfiles/method/ Ps_MON_MN_11_1516_PK_21042023.pdf); Krasheninnikov, F., 'The Kremlin finally puts together an ideology', Blog Post, Wilson Center, 30 May 2023 (https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/kremlin-finally-puts-together-ideology); Pertsev, A., 'The faux ideologies of late-stage Putinism', *Carnegie Politika*, 2 August 2023 (https://carnegieendowment.org/ politika/90292).

Vladimir Putin featured segments shot in a Moscow metro station and a local supermarket – invites comparison with reports of awestruck 'political tourists' visiting the USSR, including during the 'polycrisis' of the 1930s that followed the Great Depression. Ironically, Carlson, a prominent figure of the American right, now employs a tactic once used by some on the left: countering Western 'propaganda' by 'facts' about the Russian utopia. The Moscow metro continues to function as a propaganda tool: it serves to impress visitors with its grandeur, showcasing a country that is not currently witnessing (forced) famine and political purges as in the 1930s but does suffer from serious structural economic problems and growing political repression. The methods of *kultpokaz* (government-orchestrated cultural displays) may be presumed to have evolved but remain in place.

These analogies should not conceal, however, the longer history of connections of some traditionalist circles in the West with Russia. A number of traditionalist civil society groups in the West, as well as political parties and NGOs – including the well-known World Congress of Families, founded in Russia in 1995 – have connections with Moscow. Long critical of the liberal mainstream, they easily find common ground with Moscow's conservative politics [23].

Russia leverages the image of a 'conservative utopia' to exert influence on various constituencies on the international stage. First, it targets conservative constituencies in neighbouring countries. encouraging local resistance to closer ties with the EU – which is portrayed as a breeding ground for 'progressivism' and 'decadence', in stark contrast to the 'natural social order' embodied by Russia.

Russia leverages the image of a 'conservative utopia' to exert influence on various constituencies on the international stage.

The Orthodox Church also plays a strategic role in promoting these efforts abroad. Second, the image of this conservative utopia establishes a shared wavelength allowing Russia to connect with authoritarian leaders worldwide. These leaders also seek legitimacy by positioning themselves against progressive values and as champions of 'traditional values'. While this does not necessarily translate into alliances, it creates a shared framework for interaction on various issues, including sanctions. Third, the 'conservative utopia' narrative feeds into a broader transnational network of illiberal actors. This network includes fringe political parties, NGOs or 'alternative media' outlets. Russia's aim in cultivating this network is to sow discord within the West and to diminish the power of attraction of Western countries in the 'battle of narratives' unfolding in the developing world.

CONCLUSION

How successful are Russia's projection of a conservative utopia, and NPR, as a means of global influence? Their effectiveness should not be overestimated. Yet in various degrees and at times indirect and intangible ways, exerting influence through NPR ultimately does serve Russia's national interests.

Russia's call for greater global pluralism may well resonate with many around the world, and this may even be true too of the anticolonial and counterhegemonic narratives that are part of the Kremlin's repertoire. However, such receptiveness should not be misconstrued as a triumph for NPR or an endorsement of Russia's role as a successful or even a leading

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(23) Stroop, C., 'A Right-Wing International?', *Public Eye*, Winter 2016 (https://politicalresearch.org/2016/02/16/russian-social-conservatism-the-u-s-based-wcf-the-global-culture-wars-in-historical-context).

force in shaping global norms. In the current international landscape where the exercise of hegemonic power can no longer dictate the global order, geopolitical calculations often trump ideology and material gains count more than words.

Despite its limitations, NPR provides a platform and a set of codes that antiliberal forces can exploit while challenging the values on which the EU and its external action are founded. In the final instance, NPR's effectiveness does not lie in exporting a certain model of government, but rather in advancing Russia's broader objectives. The Kremlin has been an opportunistic but resourceful tactician, seeking to use the limited means at its disposal to exploit systemic vulnerabilities and undermine its Western enemies. To develop effective responses to the challenges that Russia currently poses to the EU, it is imperative to have a thorough understanding of the tools and tactics that it uses to contest and rewrite the global order to make it safe for its empire.

CONCLUSIONS

How should the EU handle a world of contestation?

by
STEVEN EVERTS

The evidence gathered in this *Chaillot Paper* supports the central thesis: there is a new dynamic driving global politics. This is a world where different forms of contestation are shaping the international landscape. European leaders and policymakers must devise their response strategies accordingly.

Doing so is challenging, as it demands more from Europeans, in three key respects:

> **First, it requires more realism and new mental maps**. Europeans have to accept that the dominant prism through which they once looked at the world is no longer valid. For decades, Europeans built their policies resting on an optimistic, 'post-modern' outlook [1]: a world where rules are respected, sovereignty is shared and where growing economic inter-dependence brings peace. Now, with regret perhaps, Europeans must acknowledge that they live in a power-political world where core tenets, rules and organisations are contested. **Updating mental maps also means Europeans rethinking how to define 'security', or how they relate to key continents and regions.**

> **Second, it demands more agility and judgement**, navigating the nuances and specificities of the various types of contestation that exist. In particular, EU leaders will need to find the right balance between upholding and enforcing existing laws and norms – and doing so in a consistent manner - with greater openness towards norm development in new domains, or to adjust forms of global governance to reflect new demographic, economic and other trajectories. **Europe must find a balance between 'pushing back' against hardcore revisionist powers and developing new forms of partnerships with the wider emerging world**.

> **Third, it requires smarter strategies, i.e. abandoning policy frameworks that no longer work, setting clearer priorities and making more creative use of EU tools and instruments.** Handling contestation will involve tough choices and trade-offs. In terms of resources, it means maximising the impact of existing resources but, sometimes, also investing in greater EU-level leverage and new capacities.

Developing successful strategies for Europe to survive and thrive in a world of contestation will not be easy, nor cheap. But it is a task that cannot be avoided: it must be a top priority for the new EU leadership taking office in 2024.

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(1)   See Cooper, R., *The Breaking of Nations: Order and chaos in the twenty-first century*, Atlantic Press, 2003.

COUNTERING CONTESTATION

It is worth taking these three tasks in turn and setting out what they entail.

First, for decades Europeans had the hopeful – some might say naïve – belief that the world would eventually become 'like us': a system of rules, market integration and democratic government. It combined a downplaying of the role of nationalism, ideology and identity and an overplaying of rational arguments. But trends and events have proved different.

Already in 2019, the incoming HR/VP Josep Borrell drew attention to the risks of this misdiagnosis in his European Parliament hearing with this plea that 'Europe must learn to speak the language of power' [2]. Five years on, we have seen a sharpening and acceleration of the trends that lay behind this argument. It is clear that we are in a new dynamic of international relations marked by three types of contestation: territorial, normative and issue-specific.

A distinctive feature of this new dynamic is that a growing number of countries pursue it proactively and, in part, collectively. We see patterns of alignment and contestation overlapping in different domains. There is a drive by China and Russia to counter and demolish what they see as an illegitimate, Western-led order and replace it with new concepts that condition the acquired rights of states and individuals. This is especially salient in the normative domain (human rights, cyber etc) but also applies to the territorial and issue-specific domains. It would be a mistake for Europeans to underestimate the implications of this trend, which also drives dynamics at the UN

and the growth of rival forms of institutions and conferences. The battle is ferocious: over terminology, over votes, investments, technology standards and security assistance.

Countering this type of revisionist contestation requires Europeans to push back hard: some norms truly need enforcement and upholding – especially the UN Charter including the non-use of force, or the universality of human rights. International law and common security principles can only survive if Europeans and others are ready to put power behind them. Democracy can only survive if we successfully counter the relativist push on individual rights globally, as well as counter foreign interference at home.

But dealing successfully with contestation also requires Europeans to update their mental maps, for instance how they see Africa or acknowledge the strategic stakes in the Taiwan Strait. Updating their mental maps also relates to how Europeans must redefine the nature of the concept of security, for instance on the notion of economic security, 'total defence' and societal resilience.

What makes contestation distinct is the notion that there are rival visions of international society.

STRIKING A BALANCE

Secondly and equally importantly, Europeans should not lump everything together. The record shows that contestation comes in many forms.

For a start, contestation as such is distinct from competition or fragmentation which are 'normal' features of international politics. What makes contestation distinct is the notion that there are rival visions of international society. Contestation is often about promoting

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(2)   European Parliament, 'Hearing with High Representative/Vice President-designate Josep Borrell', Press release, 7 October 2019 (https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20190926IPR62260/hearing-with-high-representative-vice-president-designate-josep-borrell).

Navigating contestation

The spectrum of challenges to EU norms and institutions

Three types of contestation

Territorial

Issue-specific

Normative

Contestation trends

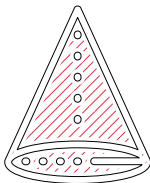**Convergence of contestation dynamics** within and between international organisations...

... many **targeting Western-shaped** institutions and norms...

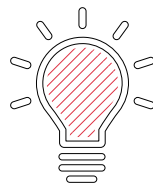...more **pro-actively** and **collectively**
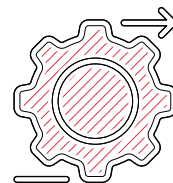
Response strategies

More realism and new mental maps

Europeans must re-think how to define 'security', or how they relate to key continents and regions.

Smarter strategies

Europe must find a balance between 'pushing back' against hardcore revisionist powers and developing new forms of partnerships with the wider emerging world.

More agility and judgement

Europe must abandon policy frameworks that no longer work, setting clearer priorities and making more creative use of EU tools and instruments.

alternatives to either universally established, or more specifically Western-shaped, concepts and organisations.

In handling contestation, Europe must strike a careful balance. It must combine greater enforcement of existing rules (UN Charter, non-use of force, universality of human rights), with norm innovation (for instance on cyber) and addressing global justice demands (on debt, climate finance but also on seats at top tables), to make the system more just and fit for purpose.

Some may be tempted to argue that Europe faces a binary choice. But that would be a strategic error. It can and must both push back against the hardcore revisionists and develop new forms of partnerships with the emerging world.

Indeed, Europe cannot afford an excessively 'conservative' strategic posture, clinging on to a system of rules and organisational practices that are no longer fit for purpose. Getting the balance right is not easy. As this *Chaillot Paper* shows, there are many different patterns of alignment and 'camps within camps' (such as internal BRICS+ cleavages).

Navigating a world of growing contestation requires Europeans to invest in modern and bigger partnerships. There is a lot of talk these days that this is an *à la carte* world [3] where countries pick and mix, taking whatever they can from whoever, maximising short-term gains. Europe's value proposition to the world should demonstrate its commitment to build longer-term partnerships. Doing a deal is a bet on today; building a partnership is a bet on the future. Here the difference between trade versus investment comes in: while China is

becoming the biggest trade partner for many countries; the EU often remains the biggest investor. And while the EU is rarely the fastest actor internationally, it can and does commit for the longer term.

In the coming years, it will be important that the EU sticks to the notion of building partnerships – rather than go along with the trend of doing *ad-hoc* deals and 'anything goes' transactionalism.

SMART STRATEGIES

This brings us to Europe's third and perhaps hardest task: investing in smarter 'strategies for influence', setting sharper priorities, maximising impact and mobilising more resources.

Devising smarter strategies begins with abandoning policies and frameworks that no longer work, such as the catch-all European Neighbourhood Policy. We need more tailored approaches reflecting local and current realities.

> **D**evising smarter strategies begins with abandoning policies and frameworks that no longer work.

All this also requires greater prioritisation. Given ongoing global trends [4] on technology, climate and demography, Europe will have to make sharper strategic choices. Everything is important but upholding core tenets of the UN Charter or established European security principles is not the same as shaping new norms on global taxation or influencing regional maritime balances in the Indian Ocean.

It also means being more consistent. Europe cannot ignore the perception of double standards and a sense in large parts of the emerging world that Europe is selective in its

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(3) Garton-Ash, T., Krastev, I. and Leonard, M., , 'Living in an *à la carte* world: what European policymakers should learn from European public opinion', Policy Brief, ECFR, 15 November 2023 (https://ecfr.eu/publication/living-in-an-a-la-carte-world-what-european-policymakers-should-learn-from-global-public-opinion/).

(4) European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS), ESPAS Global Trends Reports (https://espas.eu/gtr.html).

indignation. If the EU declares that UNSC Resolutions and international law are sacrosanct; if it pleads for the respect for the non-use of force, and the need to protect the lives of civilians, it should do so everywhere: in Ukraine but also in Gaza. Some of the criticisms of double standards levelled at the EU are unfair, manipulated, or selective themselves. But the issue exists and hence the EU must make a concerted effort to address it, in terms of substance and communications.

Finally, navigating a world of contestation will require extracting maximum impact out of existing resources. The EU should be ready to be ruthless in scrutinising the effectiveness of its spending programme, its diplomatic efforts, the impact of CSDP missions etc. What are the results achieved? What is the rate of return per hour or euro spent?

At times it will also demand greater resources at European level. Prevailing in the ongoing battles over cyber, election integrity, climate action and all the other domains listed in this *Chaillot Paper* will require more resources. A more robust EU, with greater financial and operational capabilities, will have enhanced appeal, be it as a security partner or as the purveyor of the Global Gateway, the EU's large-scale infrastructure plan.

Ultimately, foreign policy is about shaping the choices and actions of others. This is getting harder in a world of contestation. Winning friends and influencing people requires political effort and new ways of thinking. But it also costs money and investments in new security capacities.

ABBREVIATIONS

AfCFTA
African Continental Free Trade Area

AfdB
African Development Bank

ASEAN
Association of Southeast Asian Nations

BEPS
Base Erosion and Profit Shifting

BRI
Belt and Road Initiative

BRICS
Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa

CBAM
Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism

CSDP
Common Security and Defence Policy

EEAS
European External Action Service

EEZ
Exclusive Economic Zone

ETS
Emission Trading System

FIMI
Foreign information manipulation and interference

GDP
Gross domestic product

GHG
Greenhouse gas

GW
gigawatts

GWh
gigawatt hour(s)

ICO
Indian Ocean Commission

ICT
Information and Communications Technology

IEA
International Energy Agency

IFC-IOR
Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region

IMF
International Monetary Fund

IOR
Indian Ocean Region

IORA
Indian Ocean Region Association

IPAC
Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China

IRA
Inflation Reduction Act

LGBT
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

MSR
Maritime Silk Road

NDB
New Development Bank

NGO
Non-govermental organisation

NPR
Normative Power Russia

NSAG
Non-state armed group

OECD
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OEWG
Open-ended Working Group

OPEC
Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

OSCE
Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PoA
Programme of Action

PLA
People's Liberation Army

PLAN
People's Liberation Army Navy

PRIO
Peace Research Institute in Oslo

QUAD
Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

SIPRI
Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

SLOCs
Sea lines of communication

TEU
Treaty on European Union

UAE
United Arab Emirates

UDHR

Universal Declaration of
Human Rights

UK

United Kingdom

UN

United Nations

UNESCO

United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural
Organization

UNGA

United Nations General
Assembly

UNHRC

UN Human Rights Council

US

United States

USSR

Union of Soviet Socialist
Republics

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Contestation dynamics have intensified in recent years, to the point they are now driving global politics. This shift is not only due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the resurgence of violent territorial conflicts worldwide, but also to the escalating rivalry between the United States and China. Perhaps most significantly, an informal coalition of countries is actively promoting an anti-Western discourse and challenging established global governance structures and institutions. There is a fierce global battle over norms, votes, investments and much else.

This *Chaillot Paper* explores how European leaders and policymakers should navigate a world where diverse forms of contestation are amplifying and converging.

Developing successful strategies for Europe to survive and thrive in a world of contestation will not be easy, or cheap. But it is a task that cannot be avoided: it must be a top priority for the new EU leadership taking office in 2024.

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