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## GLOBAL POWERS

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# DENIAL AND PUNISHMENT: CHALLENGES FOR THE US DETERRENCE POLICY IN THE NEW GREAT POWER COMPETITION

**Yehor Valiarenko**

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*As the United States navigates an era of renewed great power competition, its deterrence strategy faces unprecedented challenges. Unlike the Cold War's bipolar structure, today's security environment is fragmented, with China as the primary competitor, and with additional threats from Russia and other regional actors. This article examines the evolving dynamics of U.S. deterrence policy, analysing the roles of denial and punishment in countering adversaries' actions. It highlights the need for military modernisation, economic resilience, and strengthened alliances, while addressing the topic of emerging threats such as cyber warfare and grey-zone tactics.*

Analysts and academics have for a while been describing the status of the US in the international arena as a hegemon in decline, with China firmly taking its place as the main contender for global primacy<sup>1</sup>. Over the past few decades, US administrations have employed different strategies to manage this competition. It was the first Trump administration which officially listed China among its strategic competitors, undermining the established international world order alongside Russia<sup>2</sup>. This recognition marked a clear break from

the previous engagement-oriented policy, and entailed more explicit steps aimed at deterring the expansion of Chinese political and economic influence. While retaining key milestones such as economic decoupling and increasing presence in the Indo-Pacific region, the Biden administration adhered to a more structured approach, seeking to establish a framework for competitive but regulated and predictable relations. The first months after Donald Trump entered the White House for his second presidential term have demonstrated his desire for

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1 K. Slaten, *The Decline of U.S. Hegemony: Regaining International Consent*, «Carnegie Endowment for International Peace», 15 March 2009 [<https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2009/03/the-decline-of-us-hegemony-regaining-international-consent?lang=en>].

C. Chase-Dunn, R. Kwon, K. Lawrence, H. Inoue, Last of the Hegemons: U.S. Decline and Global Governance, «*International Review of Modern Sociology*» vol. 37, no. 1, Spring 2011 [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41421398>].

2 *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, The White House, Washington, DC, 18 December 2017 [<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>].

*Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, U.S. Department of Defense [<https://dod.defense.gov/portals/1/documents/pubs/2018-national-defense-strategy-summary.pdf>].

another re-evaluation of the foreign policy priorities and approaches to dealing with the US's major strategic adversary. Official statements, as well as respective decisions of the new administration, make it possible to delineate the contour lines of US policy towards China for the next four years. It will be marked by proactive deterrence, with the predominance of hard security, and a focus on maintaining a balance of power. However, the new structure of the international system suggests challenges different from those which the US had been used to.

In the second half of the twentieth century, US deterrence efforts were primarily directed at a single adversary, the USSR. This provided a clear framework for American strategy, allowing for an approach focused on containment, alliance-building, and nuclear deterrence. Today, however, the international security landscape is significantly more complex. Unlike the Cold War era, when strategic competition revolved around a single geopolitical and ideological confrontation, the current configuration of great power rivalry is more fragmented. In some ways, the global order is moving towards a new form of bipolarity, marked by a division between those states supporting the US-led status quo, and those seeking to challenge it. At the same time, unlike the well-structured blocs of the Cold War era, the emerging competition generates a more diverse range of risks and threats, requiring adaptation of the foreign policy strategy.

While China has emerged as its primary long-term competitor, the United States faces a wide array of other challenges. Russia, despite its economic and military setbacks, remains a disruptive force, engaging in military aggression, nuclear brinkmanship, and efforts at political destabilisation. At the same time, regional actors such as Iran and North Korea continue to threaten world stability through missile development,

nuclear proliferation, and various asymmetric means. These developments complicate US deterrence efforts.

Another key feature of the modern great power competition is the increasing use of grey-zone tactics. Rather than engaging in a direct military confrontation, China, Russia, and other actors, employ cyber warfare, economic coercion, proxy conflicts, and disinformation campaigns, to undermine US interests. These tactics allow competitors to erode American influence, while avoiding the risks of an open conflict. As a result, deterrence must extend beyond traditional military capabilities, to include economic resilience, cyber defence, and strategic counter-measures in the information domain.



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Furthermore, alliances are shifting, and states often engage in selective cooperation. The erosion of US-led international institutions, and the weakening of global governance mechanisms, have created additional uncertainty. Multilateral organisations that would previously have reinforced American influence, such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization or Bretton Woods institutions face declining authority, thus reducing the institutional power of the United States.

Given these complexities, the US faces the challenge of adapting its deterrence posture to maintain strategic stability, while avoiding escalatory dynamics that could lead to conflict. This article will examine the key challenges confronting US deterrence policy.

## Deterrence by Denial

Deterrence by denial means seeking to prevent adversaries from achieving their objectives by making aggression costly and unlikely to succeed. This approach focuses on strengthening defence and military capabilities, as well as reinforcing alliances, to ensure that any potential attack is met with a decisive response. By raising the price of aggression, and minimising the probability of success, deterrence by denial is aimed at dissuading potential challengers from pursuing hostile actions in the first place.

A critical pillar of this strategy is maintaining and increasing defence spending. The development of cutting-edge defence technologies plays a crucial role in ensuring that the US and its partners remain capable of opposing aggression. AI-driven decision-making, real-time data processing, and autonomous systems must provide strategic advantages, by improving situational awareness, response times, and operational efficiency. Similarly, establishing an advantage in microchip and semiconductor production will secure the ability to maintain a qualitative military edge over competitors, thus ensuring that future deterrence measures remain robust. Cyber capabilities must also form an integral component of deterrence by denial, allowing the US to counter digital threats, defend critical infrastructure, and deter adversaries from employing cyber warfare tactics.

Another essential element of deterrence by denial is the forward military presence of American forces in key regions worldwide. The United States remains the only country with the ability to project military power anywhere on the planet at any given time, thanks largely to an extensive network of overseas military bases. Currently, the US

Department of Defence manages or operates at least 128 bases across 51 countries, ensuring a persistent military presence in strategically important areas<sup>3</sup>. These forces enable rapid responses to crises, strengthen deterrence, and demonstrate American commitment to the security of its allies. Beyond stationing its own troops, the US has also been working on bolstering the military capabilities of partner nations, reducing their vulnerability to external threats, and ensuring that deterrence efforts are collective rather than unilateral.



***Rather than engaging in a direct military confrontation, China, Russia, and other actors, employ cyber warfare, economic coercion, proxy conflicts, and disinformation campaigns, to undermine US interests***

It is in this context that the concept of extended deterrence arises. While direct deterrence involves protecting US territory and interests, extended deterrence seeks to discourage attacks on allied nations, by assuring them of American security commitments. This approach requires sustained engagements with key partners, including NATO, the Quad, and individual countries bound by bilateral security arrangements. At the same time, extended deterrence entails the additional challenge of sustaining the credibility of American guarantees. Since the primary purpose of deterrence is to discourage aggression by raising its price, doubts about Washington's intentions might have the opposite effect. An adversary may calculate that it is better to act sooner rather than later, before the relatively favourable circumstances change and additional defence measures

3 L. A. Nicastro, A. Tilghman, *U.S. Overseas Basing: Background and Issues for Congress*, «Congressional Research Service», 10 July 2024 [<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/natsec/R48123.pdf>].

are taken. These concerns have become more pronounced in light of Donald Trump's rhetoric, questioning the relevance of long-standing NATO commitments, with many other members not achieving the desirable level of defence spending, and becoming free riders heavily relying on Washington's economic and military strength<sup>4</sup>. The challenge for American policymakers lies in finding a balance between providing credible security guarantees, and avoiding the excessive spending of resources that are becoming scarce. Another aspect that arises in this light deals with extended nuclear guarantees.

### **Deterrence by Punishment**

Deterrence by punishment envisages discouraging an adversary from taking any kind of aggressive action by threatening devastating consequences. Rather than focusing on denying the success of an attack, this approach emphasises the consequences an aggressor would face, making aggression a highly undesirable option.



***The challenge for American policymakers lies in finding a balance between providing credible security guarantees, and avoiding the excessive spending of resources that are becoming scarce***

One of the tools often employed in deterrence by punishment strategies is economic sanctions, which include trade and investment restrictions, financial and monetary pressure, as well as targeted

sanctions against specific individuals or business entities. However, even though economic restrictions are among the most frequently used means of punishment, they are also the ones raising the most doubts concerning their efficiency. Most of these doubts have been clearly showcased by the example of the sanctions against the Russian Federation after its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Since 2014, the US alone has imposed over 7,000 sanctions, encompassing Russian private and public entities engaged in a wide range of spheres of the economy<sup>5</sup>. Yet, even with its significant economic problems, Moscow still manages not only to sustain its military-industrial complex and armed forces but also to avoid any considerable deterioration in living standards. As a rule, it takes a substantial time for these economic measures to take effect and provide desirable tangible outcomes. Economies, especially those of the great powers, have a level of resilience that allows them to continue functioning fully, even with certain restrictions in place. Besides, in the modern world, it is not easy to track the adherence to the imposed sanctions, and vice versa – a sanctioned state can manage to find workarounds to still generate profits or import the prohibited goods and materials. Secondary sanctions are aimed at countering such actions, through penalties against third states violating the initial restrictions. While partly solving the problem, they require thorough research and coordination between allies. Lastly, it is important to note that with today's interdependent economies, economic restrictions might harm not only the sanctioned states but also the sanctioning ones, which are likely

4 K. Sullivan, *Trump says he would encourage Russia to 'do whatever the hell they want' to any NATO country that doesn't pay enough*, «CNN», 11 February 2024 [<https://edition.cnn.com/2024/02/10/politics/trump-russia-nato/index.html>].

5 *Russia Sanctions Dashboard (Current as of 19 January 2025)*, «Castellum.AI» [<https://www.castellum.ai/russia-sanctions-dashboard>].



to lose their trading partners and have their supply chains disrupted. This has proved to be a challenge in the case of sanctions against Russia, and, given the scale of the Chinese economy, will most certainly have an even more negative impact should the necessity of such measures against China arise.

Therefore, while the US, as the world's biggest economy, is able to impactfully employ sanctions as a foreign policy tool, it should also be ready for a limited counter-productive effect of such measures, unless they are imposed in combination with other steps. The main focus should be on ensuring the diversification of reliable economic partners and supply chains, lest the potential aggressor believes that the probable negative repercussions for the American economy will prevent Washington from imposing effective economic restrictions.

Another key issue is nuclear deterrence. Since the mid-twentieth century, this has been an indispensable aspect of the great power competition and, respectively, a cornerstone of US foreign policy. The strategies in this area have evolved in accordance with the changing international environment, from the threat of massive retaliation to a more flexible response and, more recently, to tailored deterrence. The American nuclear deterrent is comprised of the full nuclear triad: intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and

strategic bombers, thus ensuring variable capacities for guaranteed punishment in case of any attack on the US.

The US and the USSR (and later Russia) elaborated a system of bilateral treaties comprising the strategic security system that was aimed at avoiding a nuclear war. This system remained among the major cornerstones in US-Russian relations also after the end of the Cold War. However, at the turn of the 21st century, with the changes in the international political and security landscape, this system started to gradually decline.

Back in 2001, with Russia economically weakened and attempting democratic transformation, the George Bush administration declared its intention to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, citing the need to defend itself against terrorists and rogue states potentially acquiring weapons of mass destruction<sup>6</sup>. In response, Russia formally withdrew from the START II treaty, which thus never fully came into force<sup>7</sup>. The issue of strategic stability reemerged as a part of the Obama administration's Reset policy. In 2010, the New START treaty envisioning the next stage of strategic arms reduction was signed<sup>8</sup>. Nine years later, Donald Trump accused Russia of not complying with the provisions of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force treaty and declared that the US would withdraw from it<sup>9</sup>. The New START, which

6 *President Discusses National Missile Defence*, Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, President G. Bush, 13 December 2001 [<https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/12/20011213-4.html>].

7 *Заявление Министерства иностранных дел России о правовом статусе Договора между Россией и США о дальнейшем сокращении и ограничении стратегических наступательных вооружений (Statement by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the legal status of the Treaty between Russia and the United States on Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms)*, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 14 June 2002 [[https://mid.ru/fr/foreign\\_policy/international\\_safety/1599136/?lang=ru](https://mid.ru/fr/foreign_policy/international_safety/1599136/?lang=ru)].

8 *New START Treaty*, The U.S. Department of State [<https://www.state.gov/1/new-start-treaty/>].

9 *President Donald J. Trump to Withdraw the United States from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty*, The Trump White House Archives, 1 February 2019 [<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-withdraw-united-states-intermediate-range-nuclear-forces-inf-treaty/>].

was to remain in force until 2021, was the only major bilateral treaty on nuclear arms control left. Within weeks of Joe Biden taking the oath as the new US president, he agreed to prolong the treaty for another five years. However, as soon as in 2023, against the backdrop of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine, Vladimir Putin suspended Russia's participation in the New START<sup>10</sup>, thus undermining the last remaining pillar of nuclear arms control.



***A significant challenge for the US administration will be to elaborate an approach to establishing a new nuclear arms control system that will not only facilitate renewed dialogue with the Russian Federation but will also be multilateral and adaptable, so as to incorporate China and address the issues***

China was not bound by any of the treaties mentioned above. On the one hand, its nuclear arsenal is not even close in size to that of Russia and the US. According to estimates for 2024, Russian and American nuclear stockpiles amounted to around 4.3 and 3.7 thousand nuclear warheads, while China had only around 500<sup>11</sup>. On the other hand, as the Pentagon report stipulated, China's nuclear arsenal has been rising at a faster rate recently, and Beijing is set to at least double it in the next five years<sup>12</sup>.

These tendencies are only exacerbated by the disruptive policies of rogue states like North Korea and threshold states like Iran, which contribute to regional instability and undermine international efforts to counter proliferation and avoid any use of nuclear weapons.

Given these facts, a significant challenge for the US administration will be to elaborate an approach to establishing a new nuclear arms control system that will not only facilitate renewed dialogue with the Russian Federation but will also be multilateral and adaptable, so as to incorporate China and address the issues relevant to smaller nuclear and threshold states. Otherwise, it will be only a matter of time until we see a new nuclear arms race, with unpredictable consequences.

The primary issue with deterrence by punishment, especially prominent in the case of nuclear deterrence, is the need to ensure a sufficient level of credibility that the punishment will actually be carried out. This issue is raised particularly often in discussions on extended nuclear deterrence, namely the American nuclear umbrella over other states through bilateral (South Korea, Japan) or multilateral (NATO) agreements. The main singularity in such arrangements is that they are meant not only to deter potential aggression or coercion towards American allies but also to dissuade them from acquiring their own nuclear capabilities. This increases the importance of such reassurances, and raises the stakes exponentially unless they are provided.

10 Путин объявил о приостановке участия РФ в СНВ-3 (Putin announced the suspension of Russia's participation in START-3), «Interfax», 21 February 2023 [<https://www.interfax.ru/russia/887170>].

11 SIPRI Yearbook 2024, «Stockholm International Peace Research Institution», 17 June 2024 [<https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/YB24%2007%20WNE.pdf>].

12 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2024, U.S. Department of Defence, 18 December 2024 [<https://media.defense.gov/2024/dec/18/2003615520/-1/-1/0/military-and-security-developments-involving-the-peoples-republic-of-china-2024.pdf>].

## The Way Forward

In navigating the complexities of modern great power competition, the United States must adopt a nuanced deterrence strategy that effectively combines elements of both denial and punishment. The ultimate objective should be to shape an environment where adversaries perceive aggression as both unfeasible and costly. This requires a comprehensive, flexible, and adaptive approach that reflects the evolving security landscape.

Deterrence by denial must remain at the core of US strategy, ensuring that potential adversaries cannot easily achieve their objectives. This necessitates sustained investment in advanced military capabilities, including artificial intelligence, cyber resilience, and next-generation defence technologies. Additionally, strengthening regional alliances through deeper integration of military assets and inter-operability will be crucial. In particular, the Indo-Pacific and European theatres demand persistent US engagement, to preserve or even enhance the deterrent posture. However, Washington must also acknowledge the economic and logistical challenges of maintaining an extensive global military presence, and must prioritise strategic deployments accordingly, at the same time, without putting its commitments into doubt.

Deterrence by punishment must be refined, to enhance its credibility and effectiveness. While economic sanctions remain an essential tool, they should be employed more strategically, with a focus on limiting adversaries' ability to circumvent them. Greater coordination with allies and partners, including over secondary sanctions and export control measures, will be essential in maximising their impact.

Furthermore, punitive measures should extend beyond economic tools, to include targeted diplomatic and cyber responses, therefore ensuring a more integrated deterrence framework.

Nuclear deterrence remains a key pillar of US security, yet it requires recalibration to address emerging threats. The erosion of the Cold War-era arms control architecture presents both risks and opportunities. Washington must lead efforts to establish a multilateral framework for nuclear stability that incorporates China alongside Russia, while simultaneously reinforcing extended deterrence commitments to allies. Transparency, crisis communication mechanisms, and tailored deterrence strategies will be necessary, to prevent miscalculations and escalation.

Overall, against the backdrop of a developing international environment, deterrence must be viewed not as a static framework but as a dynamic and evolving process. To maintain strategic stability and avoid unnecessary escalation, the US must calibrate its deterrence posture to the realities of the contemporary great power competition, particularly ensuring that it remains credible, sustainable, and capable of addressing a broad spectrum of security challenges.

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# «TRUMP CARDS» OF DEMOCRACY: WINNING THE GAME AGAINST AUTOCRACY

**Zurab Bezhanishvili**

*International Community for Georgia  
Development and Progress*

*Global politics is entering a new era, Global Competition 2.0, where old and new players redefine their strategies. While realpolitik remains a dominant paradigm, a new approach, game policy, is emerging as a counterweight to authoritarian offensives. Unlike traditional power struggles, game policy is a great simulation — an adaptive strategy that blends disinformation, hybrid warfare, and strategic unpredictability, to challenge adversaries. In this article, we will answer the following questions — what is Global Competition 2.0? What is the confrontation between real policy and game policy? And what does all of this mean for Ukraine?*

Democracies, often perceived as vulnerable in the battles between superpowers, still hold trump cards. Institutional resilience, technological innovation, and coalition-building remain key advantages against autocratic regimes that rely merely on coercion and control. Yet, survival in this high-stakes competition requires adaptation, the leveraging of soft power, economic interdependence, and digital influence, as weapons of resistance.

For Ukraine, the stakes are existential. As a frontline state in the democratic struggle against authoritarian expansion, its survival depends on mastering the rules of this new game. Can Ukraine and like-minded nations turn strategic simulation into an effective counter-offensive? This paper explores how democracies can outplay their opponents — not just by responding to threats but by reshaping the global battlefield on their own terms.

## **Games of Political Systems — a Threat to Democracy.**

The analytical logic of this paper considers the political system (PS) as part of the social environment (SE) that it controls. The aspiration of political systems for global dominance is a natural property of any system's tendency to expand<sup>1</sup>.

A system will expand into the available space, based on its existing resources. Such an expansion can be triggered either by the vulnerability and accessibility of the expansion space, or because such expansion is strategically or vitally necessary for the PS.

An example of a critical necessity is that of Russia, whose political system makes it consistently seek to restore the territories of the former Soviet Union. The loss of such vital geographical areas signals the

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1 Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California 1995 pp. 192-195

potential disintegration of the Federation,<sup>2</sup> as it is economically and demographically unfeasible for Russia to establish new defence infrastructure on unprotected plains.

An example of strategic necessity is China's rapid expansion on a global scale. The outbreak of the war in Ukraine diverted the resources of the EU and the US, which thus began losing ground in the MENA region, South America, and Asia. Seizing upon this weakness, the Chinese PS quickly filled this vacuum<sup>3</sup>.

PSs in the process of expansion and enlargement traditionally use a long-term and systematic approach, aimed at achieving specific political goals<sup>4</sup>.

In the context of Ukraine, various global powers employ distinct strategies: the EU advances the expansion of its social environment, Russia resorts to military force, and the United States engages in strategic political and geo-economic manoeuvring.

Ukraine, having become a focal point for these competing interests, possesses significant leverage:

- For the EU, this leverage translates into securing resources, and safeguarding against Russian aggression.
- For Russia, it represents a strategic opportunity to expand its influence and control over critical infrastructure within Europe.

- For the United States, Ukraine serves as a means to undermine both Russia and Ukraine, thereby creating conditions favourable to the imposition of its own terms regarding the trade in resources, and international political dynamics.
- For China, Ukraine holds significant strategic value, as it seeks to strengthen ties with the European Union, counterbalance U.S. influence, and ultimately assert dominance over Russia.

Unprecedented shifts and uncertainty within the U.S. political system are primarily driven by the successful expansion of China, whose autocratic system, enhanced by advanced technology, has demonstrated greater manoeuvrability in the global struggle for dominance.<sup>5</sup>



***The EU advances the expansion of its social environment, Russia resorts to military force, and the United States engages in strategic political and geo-economic manoeuvring***

Digital empires,<sup>6</sup> characterised by their high adaptability, operate outside the confines of traditional strategic doctrines. Continuous tactical realignments and real-time strategic adjustments made by states and policymakers, resemble a competitive game. The digital era has further «gamified» politics, with real-time decision-making,

2 Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperative*, Published by Basic Books, New York, 1997, pp.86-97

3 Grzegorz Stec, How China views the EU amid the Russia-Ukraine war: Contradictions of transatlantic relations and strategic autonomy, Aug 04, 2022 <https://merics.org/en/merics-briefs/how-china-views-eu-amid-russia-ukraine-war-global-gateway-departing-eu-ambassador>

4 Henry Kissinger, *World Order* Penguin Press, New York 2014 pp. 366-367

5 Christopher S. Chivvis, A Realistic Scenario for Coexistence Between China and America in the Mid-2030s; in *U.S.-China Relations for the 2030s: Toward a Realistic Scenario for Coexistence*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, New York 2024 pp. 5-19,

6 Anu Bradford, *Digital Empires: The Global Battle to Regulate Technology*, Oxford University Press 2023, pp. 5-38

disinformation strategies, and AI-driven models significantly influencing state behaviour.

Given the potential shift in the United States, a leading democracy, towards autocracy under the influence of external factors, it is not inconceivable that China could simultaneously evolve into a democracy through internal processes.



***As digital technologies provide political systems with enhanced resources for dominance, both internally and externally, they inherently foster expansion and conflict***

Ukraine's failure to get security guarantees from the United States, the European Union, or Russia, all of them engaged in a complex, multi-level geopolitical game while their economies remain interlocked, suggests that these powers are approaching a deep crisis. This scenario underscores the necessity of China's involvement to restore balance, thereby mitigating the impact of the monopolistic gamification of war, driven by the political systems of the Western powers.

The reform of the American state, and the increasing influence of AI-driven agents within the centralised governments of both the U.S.<sup>7</sup> and China,<sup>8</sup> are ushering

these nations into a common playing field. Their interactions and mutual influences, particularly through AI in developing strategies, should encourage cooperation between their social environments. However, as digital technologies provide political systems with enhanced resources for dominance, both internally and externally, they inherently foster expansion and conflict. This dynamic makes the emergence of a bipolar world, ultimately leading to a confrontation between the rising powers, inevitable, even if there is a switch in places, with the US becoming an autocracy and China a democracy.

This judgment is grounded in studies showing wave-like dynamics of alternating periods of democratic<sup>9</sup> and autocratic<sup>10</sup> strengthening, alongside similar patterns in technological<sup>11</sup> development. Historically, the highest and lowest peaks of these waves have been marked by global wars or economic crises.

An authoritarian PS seeking expansion poses a constant threat to democracies, which are stable but static, with limited expansion potential. Democracies have amorphous PSs, shaped by subsystems and organisations of social environment that lack the power to effectively counter external threats.

In democracies, societal equilibrium ensures balance, limiting expansion through control of state institutions but still fostering

7 Lauren Gambino, Trump signs executive order expanding power of Elon Musk's Doge agency, *The Guardian*, 27.02.2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/feb/26/trump-executive-order-musk-doge>

8 João da Silva, What does Jack Ma's return to the spotlight mean? *BBC*, 21.02.2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5yvyl710jpo>

9 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, University of Oklahoma Press 1991 pp. 3-31

10 Debre, Maria J. and Thomas Sommerer. 2023. Weathering the Storm? The Third Wave of Autocratization and International Organization Membership. IGCC Working Paper No 20. [escholarship.org/uc/item/7g9450nx](https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7g9450nx)

11 Daniel Šmihula, Waves of technological innovations and the end of the information revolution, *Journal of Economics and International Finance* Vol. 2(4), pp. 58-67, April 2010 <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=27564048b4c81fdd85ce12ad14bf6637cd34e498>

necessary development. Communication and joint development among systems enhance the SE, with natural growth needs fulfilled by the enlargement of the environment — an idea that underpinned the EU's creation<sup>12</sup>.

In contrast, autocracies restrict SE development, allowing subsystems to grow only to the point where the PS can maintain control. Autocracies inherently pursue external expansion, mobilising their entire environment to this end.



***Given Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the EU's social environment is in a particularly fragile state, in no position to effectively resist intervention***

Democratic mechanisms for limiting the expansion of political systems through state institutions contribute to the creation of a peaceful environment, conducive to the development of all systems. However, the presence of an authoritarian PS, striving for expansion, creates a constant threat to democracies, which are what autocracies target first.

An authoritarian PS, striving for total hegemony, hinders the formation of a completely self-regulating SE. The latter requires constant and strict protection.

The European Union is an intriguing case, having adopted a strategy of rapid expansion, in response to critical security needs. This expansion engaged the post-Soviet nations with autocratic tendencies. That has impeded the EU's swift development. Moreover, Brexit can be seen as a logical response to this ill-considered enlargement. The inclusion of autocratic political systems into the EU's robust social environment is inherently contradictory, creating vulnerabilities that expose the Union to Russian aggression and American or Chinese manipulation. The presence of illiberal states, such as Hungary<sup>13</sup>, Slovakia<sup>14</sup>, and others in Eastern Europe poses a threat comparable to that of Russian aggression. Russia is unlikely to directly invade the EU; rather it is more likely to promote ethnic conflicts, arrange terrorist attacks involving migrants, and attempt to provoke intra-European wars.

Thus, given Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the EU's social environment is in a particularly fragile state, in no position to effectively resist intervention. Meanwhile, illiberal internal political systems are strengthening within the EU, which will increasingly align with Russian, Chinese and US objectives. Ukraine's successful military response has provided the EU with an opportunity to modernise rapidly, potentially excluding countries prone to authoritarianism for the sake of economic stability and protection of democracy, thereby restoring the balance between its social environment and political system<sup>15</sup>.

12 Treaty on European Union, 1992, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A11992M%2FTXT>

13 Veronika Józwiak, *Hungary Maintains Course on Russia One Year after the Invasion of Ukraine*, PISM, 4.04.2023, <https://www.pism.pl/publications/hungary-maintains-course-on-russia-one-year-after-the-invasion-of-ukraine>

14 Rob Cameron, «Peter Pellegrini: Russia-friendly populist elected Slovak president», BBC, 7.04.2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-68754112>

15 Jörn Fleck and James Batchik, *Europe needs a seat at the table in Ukraine negotiations*, Atlantic Council, February 13, 2025 <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/europe-needs-a-seat-at-the-table-in-ukraine-negotiations/>



Globally, dominant powers, empires, and political centres stimulate the spread of democracies,<sup>16</sup> because it is easier to negotiate or bribe<sup>17</sup> individual representatives of the SE than to deal with aggressive, expansion-oriented authoritarian PSs, which require constant multi-step strategies, dynamic tactical and strategic games, and ongoing conflict. The only point of negotiation among major powers is the division of the world into spheres of influence.

Currently, many autocracies possess PSs with the resources for expansion, and there is ample space for gradual growth. The desire for a multipolar world is driven by dominant political systems (DPS), with the view of dividing global space into spheres of influence, thereby allowing them freedom to employ coercion mechanisms within their own «backyards.»<sup>18</sup>

However, when a multipolar world is established and DPS divide up spheres of influence<sup>19</sup>, a second round of confrontation begins between these systems, until the multipolar world eventually turns into a bipolar one.

### Sliding the Scales: Manipulating Thresholds in Political Games

The growing complexity of the world, the advent of new technologies, and the increasing diversity of actors have led to the total gamification of life<sup>20</sup>. All the players now have the ability to influence one another,

and strategies are gradually losing their effectiveness, due to the rapid dynamics and a need for immediate responses and improvisation.

The game approach in politics enables simultaneous development of multiple strategies, allowing them to be deployed in turn depending on circumstances. Different axes, each with its own type of game, emerge, forming a multi-dimensional scale. When PSs engage with this scale, relations begin to take the form of multi-faceted political games.

A generalised overview of this scale includes the following elements in order of priority:

1. Realpolitik Rationality.
2. Ideological Framing and Moral Attitudes.
3. Digital Leverage.
4. Geoeconomic Manoeuvring.
5. Legal-Institutional Power Play.

A political system's degree of power depends on the extent to which it concentrates resources to manipulate the thresholds on the above five elements, promoting its expansion. The presence of such an ability distinguishes the modern game approach from the classic, monolithic, and sluggish strategic concepts that have lost their relevance.

In earlier periods of colonialism and globalisation, two dimensions were used for these purposes: the rationality of realpolitik, and moral/ethical considerations. The moral and ethical threshold moves from the theological absolute — Paradise, descending

16 Bridget Hess, How Democracy Has Been Weaponized, *The Stork*, May 3, 2023, <https://www.iestork.org/how-democracy-has-been-weaponized/>

17 Isabella Kwai, Trump Pauses Enforcement of Law Banning Foreign Bribery, *The New York Times*, 11.02.2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/11/us/politics/trump-fcpa-bribery-law-corruption.html>

18 Henry Kissinger, *World Order*. Penguin Press, New York 2014 P. 9-10

19 Josep Borrell, Multipolarity without multilateralism, *EEAS*, 24.09.2023 [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/multipolarity-without-multilateralism\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/multipolarity-without-multilateralism_en)

20 Elena Giordano, Gamification in Politics: how does it influence Political Participation? Sep 29, 2020 <https://elena-giordano.medium.com/gamification-in-politics-how-does-it-influence-political-participation-c4936170cf1b>



through socialist utopias of a «bright future» and communist ideals of «apple orchards on Mars» — to the liberal values of liberty, equality, and brotherhood, and further into even greater freedoms, hyperfreedoms, and superfreedoms.

In practice, this is manifested in a total dependence of society on moral and ethical attitudes, as well as in the appearance of those actors who have the resources and mechanisms to influence the movement of these thresholds along the elements on the sliding scale.

The rationality of 'real politics', which moves from manipulation of satisfying the needs of society, systems, crowds; towards harsh dictatorship and terror. The world still contains a space where the general rules of the game apply, alongside the area where exclusive rules are enforced for a special pool of dominant political systems.

*General rules*, — this is controlled by DPSs through international organisations such as the erstwhile League of Nations, and the UN. This game space asserts the legitimacy of the world's division by the PDS, as well as the legitimacy of the use of force against the social environment, political systems, and its subjects, violating the world order, or seeking to escape from the influence of one or another dominant political force.

Diplomacy and mediation help to draw dependent countries into these games of global legitimacy.

*Exclusive rules (between DPSs)*. Each political system possesses its own set of resources and trump cards that define the type of game it can play. The games are manifested

in diplomacy, global trade, economic deals (including shadow deals), or wars.

The presence of nuclear weapons makes this space more hierarchical and negotiable. The primary players recognise the existence of different pools, each claiming the spoils corresponding to its status.

Russia's aggression has elevated Ukraine's strategic position, granting it «trump cards» that must be effectively played. The failure of American pressure on Ukraine,<sup>21</sup> which would have provided the US with a dual advantage over both Ukraine and Russia, coupled with the EU's reluctance to continue supporting Ukraine, (because of Hungary's position)<sup>22</sup> grants Ukraine greater autonomy in shaping its resistance strategy.



### ***The key advantage of a democratic environment lies in decentralisation***

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The key advantage of a democratic environment lies in decentralisation. As Western support diminishes, Ukraine's shift towards a guerrilla defence strategy, and targeting the enemy's strategic assets on its territory, will become critical in maintaining the resistance, especially as holding the front line becomes increasingly untenable.

Encouraged by the deals with the US, Russia will try to seize Kyiv again, relying on Belarusian help. Russia may make itself vulnerable through the involvement of Belarusian territory and strategic facilities in the theatre of partisan military operations.

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21 President Trump and Ukrainian President Zelenskyy in Oval Office, Feb. 28, 2025, The White House, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajxSWocbye8>

22 Hungary Blocks EU Draft on Security Guarantees and Military Aid for Ukraine, *Global Governance News*, 3.03.2025, <https://www.globalgovernancenews.com/hungary-blocks-eu-draft-on-security-guarantees-and-military-aid-for-ukraine/>

One «trump card» Ukraine holds is restoration of its status as a nuclear power. Cooperation with China, which seeks to block all sources of rare earth metals from the United States, will contribute to achieving this goal.

Another strategic advantage may be secured by joint production, both military and non-military, with other countries, based on the principle of material exchange for shared use of production capabilities. Most importantly, this involves the creation of a comprehensive resistance network, in collaboration with nations from various regions, to counter any form of aggression.

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***The rise of populism, psychological models, virtual networks, and the manipulation of public opinion through digital technologies, highlight a profound crisis in the global social environment***

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These goals can be easily achieved by properly setting thresholds on action that can be taken, and choosing effective game strategies. The availability of digital technologies provides PSs with an unprecedented scale of control over the SE, enabling them to model the subordinated global social network.

These new resources empower political systems to strengthen, expand, and change their characteristics. New rules of the game and new systems of relations emerge, along with new players, creating a need to modify both the general and the exclusive rules.

This process is tough for the SE and conflict-prone for the PS. The emergence of this new dimension of virtual-digital abstraction creates an environment of hyperbolised power in the political space, leaving the social system helpless.

Ukraine should follow the example of Qatar<sup>23</sup> and, with the help of the GCC countries and others interested in the joint production of information, create its own global media infrastructure. It is also necessary to feed off Estonia's experience, and create a CyberDefence Centre of Excellence.

The rise of populism, psychological models, virtual networks, and the manipulation of public opinion through digital technologies, highlight a profound crisis in the global social environment. The impact of the virtual-digital dimension on public consciousness resembles the North Korean model, where users become dependent on imposed moral and rational labels, thereby subordinating themselves to a system that limits their choices.

The virtual-digital space enables PSs to standardise human thinking, similar to the way the fashion industry operates, aligning individual demands with parameters favourable to the PS.

Based on this, Ukraine's population faces the risk of oppression from multiple directions. Global national projects, involving society both within Ukraine and beyond, will foster a decentralised social structure that supports a centralised defence system. This approach will ensure the necessary balance of factors for social stability, and maintain high motivation for resistance among the population.

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23 <https://www.aljazeera.com/about-us>

## The Modern Theatre of Geopolitical Games: — an Elusive «Trump Card»

The modern geopolitical theatre is interactive, whereby the randomness and quality of the actors play an increasingly pivotal role, despite the safeguards provided by cyber-intelligence. Political systems and social environments now differ, based on digitalisation, technological advancement, institutional communication quality, and the availability of qualified human resources. These distinctions manifest as:

- Digital empires (DE) of the USA and China
- Dominant political systems (DPS)
- Regional countries (RC)
- The unique formation of the EU as a digital democracy (DD)

Along with other resources and geopolitical factors, the global players possess a set of «trump cards» that shape their entry, exit, and effectiveness in geopolitical games.

The interaction of these various levels, and the emergence of new games through strategic adjustments, intensifies geopolitical conflict. The ongoing clash between the US and China introduces the complication of a digital war of high intensity, largely imperceptible to societies, complementing the traditional confrontation strategies.

In principle, China replicates the model of a digital empire inspired by the United States, yet the original system holds inherent advantages, such as the established global systems and standards: trade relations, international law, diplomacy, financial and banking systems, the network society, the Internet, ideology, and human rights. As China continues to grow, these systems begin to be weaponised against it, though with limited success at this stage.

The low effectiveness of geoeconomic weaponisation against China is due to China's possession of «trump cards» that give it control over vital raw materials. Dominant political systems, primary users of the global order created by the US, are now influenced by China. At some point, the increasing vulnerability of the US will compel it to dismantle the system it established. This global crisis will impact all nations, including the US and the EU. As a result, China is working to build its own global network and world order, to avoid the total collapse of its economy due to this «antibiotic.»

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***China replicates the model of a digital empire inspired by the United States, yet the original system holds inherent advantages, such as the established global systems and standards***

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To neutralise China's advantage, the U.S. is forced to negotiate and draw the DPS to its side, adopting strategies used by its opponent and abandoning previously ineffective ones.

The US is becoming increasingly vulnerable to the dominant political system, and must adapt its behaviour accordingly. Since the environment always influences the actor's behaviour, changes in US foreign policy are inevitable.

The world is witnessing this process in the abrupt restructuring of the US domestic political system, which looks like a sharp U-turn at full speed on an unsuitable surface.<sup>24</sup>

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24 Nord, Marina, Fabio Angiolillo, Martin Lundstedt, Felix Wiebrecht, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2025. «When Autocratization Is Reversed: Episodes of U-Turns since 1900.» *Democratization*, January, 1–24. doi:10.1080/13510347.2024.2448742.\

The US will be compelled to engage in the games of the DPS, which will always place the American PS in a vulnerable position, subject to criticism from the social environment. The DPS rely on a standard set of methods driven by their inherent expansionist tendencies — collusion with digital empires, undermining opponents through diplomacy, technology, proxy wars, influencing social environments to pressure political systems, and engaging in conflict.

Global confrontation and the ongoing ambitions of the DPS will create varying attitudes within the DEs towards the DPS. For instance, while the US avoids direct confrontation with Russia, which is a counterweight to China, it will likely use military force against Iran when feasible. Iran is a crucial regional link in China's expansion strategy, and without it, the Belt and Road Initiative would lose significant momentum.

This is why the US needs to see a ceasefire agreement between Russia and Ukraine signed. Without its clients Syria, the Houthis, and the militants in the MENA region, Iran will lose its power.

Russia without Iran will lose its offensive capability in Ukraine; and the Taliban and Baluchis will be able to concentrate on destroying Chinese B&R facilities.

Additionally, the US's distancing from NATO aligns with its Middle East policy of curtailing Turkey's dominant political system expansion, potentially preventing the establishment of a Kurdish state. Such a state, coupled with a democratised Iran, would stabilise the region, and reduce Turkey's and the GCC countries' growing influence.

The development of information and digital technologies has significantly enhanced the diplomatic capabilities of the DPSs, enabling

them to concentrate resources, form alliances with other DPSs, and strengthen their negotiating positions against the digital empires.

Ukraine holds a significant advantage in geopolitical games. The US has set its price for cooperation with Ukraine — \$350 billion and access to minerals. The US will support Ukraine regardless of the outcome, as a Ukrainian defeat would leave them empty-handed. Ukraine must decide whether it wants to support the American game or develop, together with the EU, a new game to counter Russian expansionism.

A new technological revolution has given rise to digital democracy, with the EU serving as a key model. This development introduces new dynamics in the global relations between PSs and social environments (SE). The EU's effectiveness lies in its ability to engage with both democratically aspiring and authoritarian countries.

Despite its advantages, digital democracy (DD) is highly vulnerable, as the political system is often suppressed by the social environment. This creates significant dependence on the American PS and NATO, as well as on relations with China, which has effectively communicated with both the DPSs and the PSs of regional countries. In contrast, the US applies DPS-style strategies with its DD allies, exerting pressure to limit their SE in trade with China, and to favour US economic interests. However, this pressure's consequences are unpredictable, as DD systems will resist external influence, potentially leading to either the collapse of the EU or an escalation in US-EU tensions.

Ukraine could initiate the formation of a new union comprising European digital democratic countries, each characterised by similar principles, based on their equitable contribution to collective progress and European resistance.

Ukraine's resistance to the overwhelming social forces aiming at its destruction has been made possible by the joint actions of the DEs, which supported their PS, and the DD, which backed Ukraine's SE.

Guarantees for Ukraine's security include their high level of personnel qualification, unity of the population, a robust military-industrial complex, a developed SE, and comprehensive diplomacy, allowing for flexible strategic adjustments through the thresholds of the various ways that have been evolved to address the specific challenges.

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# NAVIGATING NEOREACTION IN GLOBAL POWER COMPETITION

Justin Tomczyk

*A defining feature of the second Trump administration has been its quiet embrace of concepts related to «Neoreaction» — an ideology popular within Silicon Valley that argues against democratic governance and egalitarian thought, pushes for consolidating power, and embraces isolationism. This article will examine what Neoreactionary thought is, and how this concept may influence decision making in US foreign policy in the coming years. But also, how Kyiv must navigate these ideological contours in an era of renewed global power competition. This analysis will include an overview of how Kyiv may potentially reformat its current security partnership with the United States and other allies, in response to the prospect of long-term American withdrawal.*

## What is Neoreaction?

Neoreaction, often abbreviated «NRx», is an anti-egalitarian ideology that emerged in the mid-2000s. Writing under the pen name «Mencius Moldbug», a Silicon Valley-based programmer named Curtis Yarvin created a blog titled «Unqualified Reservations», which would serve as the launchpad for the emergence of Neoreactionary thought. Broadly speaking, Yarvin's writing rejects the notion that liberal democracy is the inevitable end-state of human progress<sup>1</sup>, and argues that current models of democratic governance are corrosive towards long-term social and political stability. This worldview was largely influenced by the works of Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle<sup>2</sup>. Additionally, Yarvin's experience in witnessing the «Eternal September»<sup>3</sup> of the early 1990s (September was the month

that many first-time Internet users gained access to Usenet through their educational institutions; «Eternal September» refers to the mass adoption of the Internet by the general public and a supposed degradation in the quality of online discussion) likely played a part in shaping his anti-egalitarian perspective.

There are two major concepts associated with Yarvin's writing that are crucial to defining Neoreactionary thought. The first is that the ideal model of governance is rule by a single executive figure with uncontested authority. According to the long-form essay «Patchwork: A Political System for the 21st Century», this figure would maintain a monopoly on armed power, be beholden to a council of «shareholders» (who could theoretically remove them from power), and face no meaningful legal challenges

1 «Dark Enlightenment». European Center for Populism Studies.

<https://www.populismstudies.org/Vocabulary/dark-enlightenment/>

2 Yarvin, Curtis. «Moldbug on Carlyle — Chapter 2: Why Carlyle Matters».

<https://www.unqualified-reservations.org/2009/07/why-carlyle-matters/> July 16, 2009

3 Keeperman, Jonathan. «Curtis Yarvin (aka Mencius Moldbug): An Interview».

<https://im1776.com/2021/09/03/curtis-yarvin-interview/> 2021

or resistance within society<sup>4</sup>. Yarvin has referred to this system as «Neocameralism»<sup>5</sup>, although outside perspectives have used the label of «Neomonarchism»<sup>6</sup>. While this all-powerful executive is often referred to in terms associated with start-up culture and modern corporate governance, less charitable perspectives have referred to this model of governance as simply being a dictatorship. In place of liberal democracy, Yarvin argues that small city-states with illiberal, authoritarian governments represent the ideal model of governance. Singapore has been referenced in «Unqualified Reservations» as a real-world example of this system of governance thought in practice<sup>7</sup>.

The second major concept associated with Yarvin's writing is «The Cathedral», referring to the grouping of forces that have traditionally shaped society. The Cathedral is not explicitly tied to an ideology or power structure, but is instead characterised as a hegemonic yet nebulous class of self-serving elites that shape opinion and direct society. In accordance with this concept, many social movements, and patterns of public opinion are considered to be the product of top-down dictation from The Cathedral, rather than organic expressions of thought or collective concern. The easiest definition

provided by Yarvin as to who exactly makes up The Cathedral is «journalism plus academia»<sup>8</sup>. International institutions, government bodies, elements of the private sector<sup>9</sup>, the mass media, and the universities are all considered appendages of (or contain factions aligned with) The Cathedral. While the concept of The Cathedral has yet to enter mainstream political commentary, in recent years, elements of the American<sup>10</sup> and European<sup>11</sup> far-right have referenced an adversarial, hegemonic conglomeration of the media, the government, and academia as «The Regime».

Yarvin's writing resonated with Nick Land, an English academic who was a former member of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit at the University of Warwick, and progenitor of modern «Accelerationist» thought – meaning the speeding up of capitalist hegemony. Land saw an overlap between Yarvin's views on democracy and his own Accelerationist perspective on entropy and collapse in democratic societies. The ideological connection between these two figures was cemented through the publication of «The Dark Enlightenment», a series of long-form blog posts by Nick Land, which outlined the ideological framework of Neoreaction. These essays were later recirculated alongside a compilation of

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- 4 Yarvin, Curtis. «Patchwork: A Political System for the 21st Century». <https://www.unqualified-reservations.org/2008/11/patchwork-positive-vision-part-1/> 2008
  - 5 Yarvin, Curtis. «Neocameralism and the escalator of massarchy». <https://www.unqualified-reservations.org/2007/12/neocameralism-and-escalator-of/> 2007
  - 6 Borders, Max. «Curtis Yarvin: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly». <https://quilllette.com/2022/06/11/curtis-yarvin-the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly/> 2022
  - 7 Yarvin, Curtis. «Against political freedom». <https://www.unqualified-reservations.org/2007/08/against-political-freedom/> 2007
  - 8 Yarvin, Curtis. «A brief explanation of the cathedral». <https://graymirror.substack.com/p/a-brief-explanation-of-the-cathedral> 2021
  - 9 Crumplar, Mike. «My Own Dimes Square Fascist Humiliation Ritual». <https://mcrumps.substack.com/p/my-own-dimes-square-fascist-humiliation> 2022
  - 10 Pogue, James. «Inside the New Right, Where Peter Thiel Is Placing His Biggest Bets». [https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2022/04/inside-the-new-right-where-peter-thiel-is-placing-his-biggest-bets?rsId=AfmBOopqTcU3EiMkRtIvZ70jIn\\_7bV6pYADKQRh34tKjEDvD2IZ6SV](https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2022/04/inside-the-new-right-where-peter-thiel-is-placing-his-biggest-bets?rsId=AfmBOopqTcU3EiMkRtIvZ70jIn_7bV6pYADKQRh34tKjEDvD2IZ6SV) 2022
  - 11 Quinn, Ben. «Guess who's back?»: the inside story of Nigel Farage's quest for power». <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/feb/15/reform-uk-inside-story-of-nigel-farage-quest-for-power> 2025



academic works, personal essays, and blog posts from several authors, in an ebook titled «Neoreactionary Canon»<sup>12</sup> that was intended to provide the reader with the full scope of NRx thought. Land's work was crucial in combining Yarvin's critique of democratic systems with an Accelerationist view of the «politics of exit»<sup>13</sup>, referring to the creation of parallel systems of infrastructure and governance, designed to side-step the impending collapse of democratic society.



### ***The Neoreactionary worldview is perhaps best encapsulated by the software project «Urbit»***

The essays «On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries»<sup>14</sup> and «On the Recurrence of Neoreactionaries»<sup>15</sup> by Dr. Yuk Hui of Erasmus University, Rotterdam, provide an insight into the factors that enabled the spread of NRx thought. Dr. Hui argues that Neoreaction is partially a response to a loss of optimism among post-industrial societies during the ongoing process of globalisation. More specifically, Dr. Hui claims that globalisation is now completely detached from the United States — one of its earliest proponents — and is no longer a vehicle for American prosperity and hegemony, but rather a direct threat to American interests. This perspective

would suggest that NRx thought is partially a mobilisation against globalisation by the former beneficiaries and proponents of the same system.

The Neoreactionary worldview is perhaps best encapsulated by the software project «Urbit». Urbit is a start-up founded by Curtis Yarvin which seeks to reconstruct the Internet and personal computing through an operating system that is completely removed from the design philosophy of modern software. Urbit features none of the languages or programming conventions used in modern software<sup>16</sup>. This is intended to provide an immediate barrier to entry for programmers, and to prevent the unintentional incorporation of concepts from mainstream programming in its development<sup>17</sup>. The operating system was built around the concept of hierarchy and scarcity, as users were initially envisioned as being ranked through medieval titles like «Duke»<sup>18</sup> (later changed to astronomical terms like «comet» and «galaxy») and an explicit limit was placed on the number of potential users on Urbit. In place of IP addresses or user accounts, Urbit proponents are identified as «planets» with twelve-character phrases as user names. While Urbit has struggled to build a user-base since its public launch, the project has been instrumental in building the first connections between Neoreactionary thought and political actors.

12 Laliberte, Bryce. «Neoreactionary Canon».

<https://archive.org/details/neoreactionary-canon/page/n7/mode/2up> 2014

13 Smith, Harrison. «Software, Sovereignty and the Post-Neoliberal Politics of Exit». *Theory, Culture, and Society*.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0263276421999439> 2021

14 Hui, Yuk. «On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries». *eFlux Journal*.

<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/81/125815/on-the-unhappy-consciousness-of-neoreactionaries/> 2017

15 Hui, Yuk. «On the Recurrence of Neoreactionaries». *eFlux Journal*.

<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/151/652979/on-the-recurrence-of-neoreactionaries/> 2025

16 «What is Hoon?» Urbit. <https://urbitguide.com/what-is-hoon/>

17 Yarvin, Curtis. «Urbit: A Solid State Interpreter» <https://media.urbit.org/whitepaper.pdf> 2016

18 Tseng, Francis. «Who Owns the Stars: The Trouble with Urbit»

<https://distributedweb.care/posts/who-owns-the-stars/>. 2019



## The Neoreactionary Moment

By the early 2010s, Yarvin's writing had circulated within Silicon Valley's tech and finance spheres, but had not received major exposure to the public; Neoreactionary thought largely existed as an ideological curiosity among a select few. Nonetheless, in the span of just a few years, Neoreaction has grown from a marginalised concept to one of many prominent ideologies within an incoming generation of young policymakers.

Yarvin's first major exposure to the mainstream came through the receipt of start-up funding from Peter Thiel, a prominent venture capitalist who once declared that he no longer saw a compatibility between liberty and democracy<sup>19</sup>. This seed funding provided a sense of legitimacy to Urbit<sup>20</sup>, and served as the first connection between Yarvin and Peter Thiel's circles. One of the first attempts to construct institutional organisation around the growing NRx movement came through a project known as the Hestia Society<sup>21</sup> and its associated blogs like Social Matter<sup>22</sup> in the 2010s. With increased exposure to the public,

members of the tech world began to comb through «Unqualified Reservations», and to highlight Yarvin's endorsement of far-right concepts. In 2015, Yarvin was removed as a speaker from a tech conference after his authorship of «Unqualified Reservations» became common knowledge<sup>23</sup>. This outcry from the general public did little damage to Yarvin's relationship to his core audience. He reportedly viewed the returns of the 2016 election with Peter Thiel, who would later serve as a member of Donald Trump's transition team<sup>24</sup>.

Yarvin was reportedly a major inspiration to White House adviser Steve Bannon<sup>25</sup> and other elements of the fringe-right during the first Trump presidency. By 2021, Yarvin had appeared on Tucker Carlson<sup>26</sup> and had a two-hour discussion with former White House adviser and current Director of Policy Planning Michael Anton on a podcast episode of the publication «The American Mind»<sup>27</sup>, produced by the conservative think-tank The Claremont Institute. A 2022 article cited Yarvin as being a major influence on an incoming cohort of Republicans seeking office, such as Blake

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19 Thiel, Peter. «The Education of a Libertarian».

<https://www.cato-unbound.org/2009/04/13/peter-thiel/education-libertarian/> 2009

20 Stevens, Robert. «Urbit launches new tools for its decentralized internet».

<https://decrypt.co/27331/urbit-launches-new-tools-os1> 2020

21 Gray, Rosie. «Behind the Internet's Anti-Democracy Movement». <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/02/behind-the-internets-dark-anti-democracy-movement/516243/> 2017

22 Cybertrop(h)ic. «Post-liberals & Meta-liberals: Towards an Exit-Oriented Politics».

<https://cybertrophic.wordpress.com/2020/04/13/post-liberals-meta-liberals-towards-an-exit-oriented-politics/>

23 Auerbach, David. «The Curious Case of Mencius Moldbug».

<https://slate.com/technology/2015/06/curtis-yarvin-booted-from-strange-loop-its-a-big-big-problem.html>. 2015

24 Pogue, James. «Inside the New Right, Where Peter Thiel Is Placing His Biggest Bets».

[https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2022/04/inside-the-new-right-where-peter-thiel-is-placing-his-biggest-bets?rsllid=AfmB0opqTcU3EiMkRTivZ70jlln\\_7bV6pYADKRQrh34tKjEDvD2IZ6SV](https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2022/04/inside-the-new-right-where-peter-thiel-is-placing-his-biggest-bets?rsllid=AfmB0opqTcU3EiMkRTivZ70jlln_7bV6pYADKRQrh34tKjEDvD2IZ6SV) 2022

25 Gray, Rosie. «Behind the Internet's Anti-Democracy Movement». <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/02/behind-the-internets-dark-anti-democracy-movement/516243/> 2017

26 Fox News. «Conservative blogger Curtis Yarvin joins 'Tucker Carlson Today'»

<https://www.foxnews.com/video/6271592770001> 2001

27 Claremont Institute. «The Stakes: The American Monarchy?».

<https://americanmind.org/audio/the-stakes-the-american-monarchy/> 2021

Masters<sup>28</sup>. The most prominent individual to cite Curtis Yarvin as an influence is Vice President J.D. Vance. Vance named Yarvin's writing as an ideological inspiration in 2021<sup>29</sup> and repeated his observations on the need for a powerful executive that should either seize the administrative state and turn its apparatuses against his enemies, or dismantle the administrative state and ensure there are no limits to his authority. Vance would also critique the role of «hostile institutions» in supposedly distorting the truth and pushing falsehoods, but limited this critique to just «universities» as opposed to fully naming The Cathedral. Outside of America, Neoreaction has reportedly found an audience among supporters of Hong Kong's independence movement.<sup>30</sup> The terms «Neoreaction» and «Neoreactionary» have been used to describe a collection of disparate European illiberal political concepts, including esoteric Eurasianism and far-right «identitarian» movements<sup>31</sup>.

## Neoreaction and Ukraine

Through a series of blogs, Substack articles, and long-form discussions with former Atlantic Council fellow Vladislav Davidzon, Curtis Yarvin outlined a vision of Neoreactionary international relations theory, and how a Neoreactionary administration would approach Ukraine and Eastern Europe. To begin with, Yarvin

views international conflict as the result of the imbalances of power between two peers<sup>32</sup>. In this framework, conflict is caused by either a revisionist power seeking to overthrow a hegemon, or a smaller, weaker state being goaded into war by outside intervention. At the time of publication in 2008, Yarvin describes the Middle East as being an example of «great natural stability» due to the inherent understanding of the balance of power between the countries of the region<sup>33</sup>. Additionally, Yarvin reflects on what he sees as the patterns of reactionary governance in the world. Post-Soviet Russia and China are seen as states governed in close approximations to Neoreactionary thought,<sup>34</sup> and reactionary countries across the world are broadly described as those having a trade surplus. Comparisons are made between the development pattern of Dubai, a prosperous monarchy in the desert, and that of Kuwait, a less-developed democratic state with abundant oil supplies.

Yarvin's vision for Ukraine, Russia, and Europe as a whole was first outlined in a Substack post titled «A New Foreign Policy for Europe,» written during the build-up of the Russian military along the Eastern Border of Ukraine<sup>35</sup>. According to this post, Russia should be given a «free hand» across the continent, and allowed to use Europe as a «laboratory of reaction». This would be achieved by fully removing American

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- 28 Pogue, James. «Inside the New Right, Where Peter Thiel Is Placing His Biggest Bets». [https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2022/04/inside-the-new-right-where-peter-thiel-is-placing-his-biggest-bets?rsltid=AfmBOopqTcU3EiMkRTivZ70jlln\\_7bV6pYADKRQrh34tKjEDvD2IZ6SV](https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2022/04/inside-the-new-right-where-peter-thiel-is-placing-his-biggest-bets?rsltid=AfmBOopqTcU3EiMkRTivZ70jlln_7bV6pYADKRQrh34tKjEDvD2IZ6SV) 2022
- 29 Donnelly, Claire. «JD Vance and the rise of the 'New Right'» <https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2024/08/01/vance-trump-new-right-republican-election> 2024
- 30 Hui, Yuk. «On the Unhappy Consciousness of Neoreactionaries». eFlux Journal. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/81/125815/on-the-unhappy-consciousness-of-neoreactionaries/> 2017
- 31 Rohac, Dalibor. «Europe's Neoreaction is Scarier than You Think». Cato Institute. <https://www.cato.org/commentary/europes-neoreaction-scarier-you-think#> 2014
- 32 Yarvin, Curtis. «A Letter to Open Minded Progressives — Chapter 5: The Shortest Way to World Peace». <https://www.unqualified-reservations.org/2008/05/ol5-shortest-way-to-world-peace/>. 2008
- 33 *ibid.*
- 34 *ibid.*
- 35 Yarvin, Curtis. «A New Foreign Policy for Europe». <https://graymirror.substack.com/p/a-new-foreign-policy-for-europe> 2022

influence from the continent, by closing virtually all American embassies and military bases. Part of the justification given for this proposition was that diplomatic posts no longer serve as points of communication between Washington and individual European capitals and instead function as «client-server supervision of satellite governments». A second post published before the invasion titled «A Clarification on 'Ukraine'» argues that modern Ukraine is the artificial assembly of two historic states<sup>36</sup>. The first is «Malorossiya», referring to Kyiv, Odessa, and Ukraine's eastern oblasts. The second is «Ruthenia», referring to Lviv and the western territories of Ukraine. In a stream hosted in summer 2023, Yarvin would elaborate on this perspective by reframing the War in Ukraine as not an interstate conflict or a clash between Russia and Europe, but rather a civil war between two historic centres of Russian power<sup>37</sup>. In both of these Substack pieces, Yarvin frames modern Ukraine as being an artificial construct assembled by the United States.

Yarvin released two additional Substack pieces in the wake of the 2022 invasion. The first, published in June 2022 and titled «Gory to Ukraine», argues that the war is the result of the United States essentially goading the Ukrainian military into fighting the Russians<sup>38</sup>. This includes framing the continued supply of American weapons to Ukraine as being an act of cruelty, as it prolongs a war that would not have started without outside intervention. Additionally, Yarvin provides a reflection on

how Hungarian nationalism and Ukrainian nationalism are viewed by outside observers. Yarvin asks why displays of Ukrainian nationalism are applauded and supported by western media, while displays of Hungarian nationalism are viewed negatively. A final piece on the topic of Ukraine was published in early 2023 titled «Ukraine, the Tomb of Liberal Nationalism»<sup>39</sup>. This piece includes a reflection on the idea of Ukrainian «eastspaining» as a counterpart to American and European «westspaining» (referring to the tendency for Western academics to oversimplify Ukrainian issues<sup>40</sup>). Similar sentiments would be echoed by Secretary of State Marco Rubio in reference to «Ukraine-splaining» during the Oval Office meeting between Zelenskyy and Trump<sup>41</sup>.

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 **Curtis Yarvin outlined a vision of Neoreactionary international relations theory, and how a Neoreactionary administration would approach Ukraine and Eastern Europe**

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There are several recurring themes in Yarvin's writing that illustrate the Neoreactionary perspective on the ongoing war in Ukraine. The first is the notion that the war in Ukraine is the result of outside agitation and intervention by the United States. The second is the broad rejection of Ukrainian self-determination and sovereignty — or more specifically, an

36 Yarvin, Curtis. «A Clarification on Ukraine». <https://graymirror.substack.com/p/a-clarification-on-ukraine> 2022

37 «Curtis Yarvin & Vlad Davidzon | Should US help Ukraine?» <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D12SY4K6OB8> 2023

38 Yarvin, Curtis. «Gory to Ukraine». <https://graymirror.substack.com/p/gory-to-ukraine> 2022

39 Yarvin, Curtis. «Ukraine, the Tomb of Liberal Nationalism». <https://graymirror.substack.com/p/ukraine-the-tomb-of-liberal-nationalism>. 2023

40 Labuda, Patryk. «On Eastern Europe, 'Whataboutism' and 'West(s)plaining': Some Thoughts on International Lawyers' Responses to Ukraine» <https://www.ejiltalk.org/on-eastern-europe-whataboutism-and-westspaining-some-thoughts-on-international-lawyers-responses-to-ukraine/> 2022

41 Bowden, John. «Marco Rubio bashes Zelensky for trying to 'Ukraine-splain' to Donald Trump». <https://www.the-independent.com/news/world/americas/us-politics/rubio-zelensky-trump-white-house-b2707566.html> 2025

intentional disregard for Ukraine's present state of being, in favour of appealing to Russia's past. The third is the notion that any military assistance to Ukraine only serves to prolong the conflict. Finally, there is the proposition that Russia should hold dominion over Ukraine, and serve as a pole of power in Europe. When combined, these concepts form the foundation of a Neoreactionary foreign policy agenda that would not only end the United States' current military support for Ukraine, but also entail a complete abandonment of Washington's European political and security partnerships.

### **Navigating Neoreaction in Global Power Competition**

For over 30 years, the Ukrainian government has navigated a world where foreign policy was largely grounded in the concepts of realism and liberal internationalism. Compared to these two established schools of thought, Neoreaction is unique in that its application in foreign policy serves as a means of punishing domestic political opposition, rather than advancing the interests of the state. In practice, using NRx thought as a guiding principle will lead to an extreme interpretation of isolationism that is coupled with the active disassembly of the institutions and tools that have served as vehicles for enacting foreign policy. The potential influence of Neoreactionary thought in American foreign policy will present a major challenge to Kyiv in the near future.

First and foremost, policy-makers and observers should recognise that the cohort of Neoreactionary ideologues active in the American government are set on dismantling the institutions and ideas associated with the so-called «Cathedral» (specifically the political establishment, academia, and the media). Given the arguments presented in Curtis Yarvin's writing, it should be

understood that Neoreactionaries view Ukrainian statehood as a cause advanced by The Cathedral, and will actively work against any efforts to secure Ukrainian sovereignty and independence. This can come in the form of subtle sabotage of recovery efforts, such as permanently shuttering government agencies like USAID that finance development projects, as well as overt abandonment of American support for Ukraine, as seen in J.D. Vance's dismissal of the war in Ukraine being one of many «ethnic rivalries»<sup>42</sup> that the United States was dragged into. The political subjugation of Ukraine by Russia would be seen by Neoreactionaries not as the defeat of an American ally but rather as a victory against the so-called «Cathedral» and its constituent parts. Ukrainian decision-makers and allies of Kyiv should recognise the fact that Neoreactionaries are inherently adversarial towards the concept of Ukrainian statehood.

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***For over 30 years, the Ukrainian government has navigated a world where foreign policy was largely grounded in the concepts of realism and liberal internationalism***

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Without major changes in the United States' domestic political trends, Neoreactionary thought is likely to have considerable influence on American politics for the foreseeable future. The most prominent individual to cite Curtis Yarvin as an influence, Vice President J.D. Vance, is both a millennial and the youngest person to serve as Vice-President. Neoreaction is not a fringe concept that will age out of contemporary politics, but rather an ideology that is associated with the rising members of

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42 Glebova, Diana. «JD Vance tells immigrants to abandon previous loyalties and embrace American interests: 'Part of the bargain'». <https://nypost.com/2025/02/25/us-news/jd-vance-tells-immigrants-to-abandon-previous-loyalties-embrace-us-interests/> 2025

the American conservative movement<sup>43</sup>. Hesitancy to extend security aid, and a removed approach towards peacekeeping, may be a fixture of American foreign policy for the foreseeable future.

The first approach to take when grappling with Neoreactionary perspectives in an era of renewed global competition is to minimise reliance on international institutions serving as a potential counterweight to evil actors like Russia. Neoreactionaries have a vested interest in the failure of international institutions and the erosion of normative powers like the European Union, as these institutions are considered to be manifestations of the so-called «Cathedral», and present a direct economic threat to Neoreactionary enterprises through their ability to regulate on a supranational scale. While a realist thinker would view the UN as a powerless organisation and an isolationist would limit interactions with the body out of principle, a Neoreactionary would take an adversarial approach towards international institutions, and aim to agitate any dysfunctions within them. The failure of an international body to uphold the conditions of a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine would not be seen as an unintended failure, but rather an intentional outcome. Additionally, the Neoreactionary vision of international security does not make any considerations for whether or not a party is compliant with a negotiations process. A policy-maker that adheres to NRx thought will likely see no need to intervene in response to Russia breaking a ceasefire or diplomatic settlement with Ukraine, as the subsequent conflict would simply be an imbalance of power resolving itself. A Neoreactionary would likely see no reason to either punish deviation from a peace agreement or to reward compliance with a diplomatic process.

Kyiv must also recognise that the long-term alignment between American and Ukrainian defence policies can no longer be guaranteed. This means that the United States' provision of tangible material support, such as munitions and vehicles, as well as intangible support, such as intelligence and information sharing, may not be a lasting feature of American-Ukrainian bilateral relations. While the slow-walking and delay of deliveries was not uncommon in 2023 and 2024, the Biden administration was at least consistent in orienting the United States' military-industrial complex towards supplying Ukraine with security aid, and deepening defence cooperation between both countries. Kyiv will now need to reassess what internal resources and tools are immediately available, and what domestic defence production capabilities can be reactivated. Considering that Kyiv has already had great success in scaling up its wartime UAV development and production capabilities, it is possible that atrophied military manufacturing centres may be reactivated, and legacy Soviet-designed vehicles be modernised on a large scale, to compensate for the loss of American hardware.



***The failure of an international body to uphold the conditions of a peace agreement between Russia and Ukraine would not be seen as an unintended failure, but rather an intentional outcome***

Ukraine will likely have to assemble a coalition of liberal democracies that are willing to provide meaningful guarantees against Russian aggression. While this would be smaller in size and scope compared to an alliance like NATO, forming

43 Pogue, James. «Inside the New Right, Where Peter Thiel Is Placing His Biggest Bets». [https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2022/04/inside-the-new-right-where-peter-thiel-is-placing-his-biggest-bets?srsltid=AfmBOopqTcU3EiMkRTivZ70jlln\\_7bV6pYADKRQrh34tKjEDvD2IZ6SV2022](https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2022/04/inside-the-new-right-where-peter-thiel-is-placing-his-biggest-bets?srsltid=AfmBOopqTcU3EiMkRTivZ70jlln_7bV6pYADKRQrh34tKjEDvD2IZ6SV2022)

a multilateral network of states willing to defend Ukrainian sovereignty and extend tangible defence guarantees may be enough to provide a degree of collective security to Kyiv. The purpose of this coalition would be to ensure that Ukraine maintains relative parity against the Russian military, both in the near future and during an upcoming period of post-war reconstruction. While mutual defence pacts have traditionally been the defining aspect of alliances, this multilateral format of cooperation can include provisions for expanding technical assistance and coordinating cyber defence policies between members of the coalition.

As highlighted by former Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine Valerii Zaluzhnyi<sup>44</sup>, the post-war structure for peace and security in Europe has come to an end. It is crucial that Ukraine not only maintains currently existing alliances and partnerships, but also seeks out new ideological concepts to act as the foundation for a new foreign policy.

«Neo-Idealism» is a concept tied to Dr. Benjamin Tallis<sup>45</sup> and Dr. Alexander Vindman<sup>46</sup> that advocates for a foreign policy that prioritises the advancement of shared values over transactional diplomacy and its short-term gains. In place of the risk adverse, zero-sum approach utilised by much of the American foreign policy establishment over the past 30 years, Neo-Idealism argues that the tools available to the United States, European Union, and other

liberal democracies should be actively used to uphold and advance democratic thought. Through the Neo-Idealist framework, values are the foundation of policy-making and not a peripheral consideration.

In the wake of the second Trump presidency, it is possible that Neo-Idealist concepts will become a viable alternative guiding principle for US foreign policy over the NRx-aligned interpretations of isolationism seen today. While the post-war network of American-led alliances and international institutions may have been badly damaged by the self-induced destruction brought about by Neoreactionary thought, future alignment with states that pursue a Neo-Idealist agenda may be the most viable path to securing lasting security partnerships for Ukraine.

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44 Zaluzhnyi, Valerii. «The old world order has been destroyed. A new European security architecture is impossible without Ukraine». <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/columns/2025/03/6/7501570/> 2025

45 Tallis, Benjamin. «Neo-idealism: Grand strategy for the future of the transatlantic community». <https://macdonaldlaurier.ca/neo-idealism-grand-strategy-for-the-future-of-the-transatlantic-community/>. 2024

46 Rourke, Brad. «Alexander Vindman on Authoritarianism vs. Democracy». <https://kettering.org/alexander-vindman-on-authoritarianism-vs-democracy/>. 2025

# NAVIGATING IN-BETWEEN GREAT POWER RIVALRY: HOW CAN UKRAINE SURVIVE AND THRIVE IN THE NEW GLOBAL ORDER?

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*The global order, as we have known it since the aftermath of World War II, is coming to an end. Trump's second term as US President and his 'America First' policy; the emboldenment of revisionist powers such as China, Russia, Iran, and to a certain extent India, ly increasingly willing to challenge the US hegemonic role in global politics over the last couple of decades; Europe's insecure posture; the rapidly changing political landscape; and the right-wing trends returning into the global politics — all these developments will radically change the face of world politics. This will require Ukraine to adapt to the new reality, wherein relationships between states are transactional, and power politics is the central principle in international affairs. This paper will outline the strategies that Ukraine could adopt, not only to survive but also to ensure its security in the long term.*

The first month of Trump's second presidency brought a lot of turbulence to the world. Apart from shocking statements, it will be actions that ultimately matter. One thing is clear now: new geopolitical shifts, mainly the US's turn to isolationism, while still disturbing, can potentially bring about positive implications for Ukraine. Europe, which failed to wake up during the three years of Russia's full-scale war to the challenges the continent is facing, will have to mobilise. So far, we have heard a large number of statements from European leaders, but have not seen many actions. One of the very few signs that the EU is finally taking the situation seriously was Ursula von der Leyen's proposal to invest 800

billion euros in joint procurement to bolster EU defence<sup>1</sup>. Much more has to be done on the EU's side to truly signify its readiness to take responsibility for its security and its future. Taking responsibility means taking action, first of all, and initiating rearmament. The US's isolationist policy may bring about a reality check to Europe and show that now it needs Ukraine as much as Ukraine needs Europe to survive in a new hostile world. Ukraine's experienced army and the spirit and adaptability it has shown in times of crisis are what Europe lacks at the moment. Whether it will realise that Ukraine might be one of the leading elements of a new strong Europe, as a competitive global player, is an open question.

1 Raf Casert, «EU ponders 800 billion euro plan to beef up defenses to counter possible US disengagement,» AP News, March 4, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/europe-defense-ukraine-united-states-trump-c1f12e685afc3e2ca94c9a15ea28d8bb>



This paper, though, will focus on Ukraine rather than Europe or the West in general. In view of the suggestion that we might see some sort of a ceasefire in the Russo-Ukrainian war in 2025, Ukraine will still be operating in a highly dangerous environment, as the prospects of NATO membership look increasingly unlikely, while even the idea of the presence of European peacekeepers in Ukraine is very distant at the moment. Essentially, that leaves it up to Ukraine to seek more sophisticated approaches to ensuring its own security.

### **Only Count on Yourself**

The strength of one's own military capabilities is the best security guarantee. The Armed Forces of Ukraine constitute the cornerstone of Ukraine's security. Constant enhancements to them must be a priority for the state. The development of non-nuclear strategic weapons such as long-range ballistic and cruise missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles and missile defence systems can significantly improve Ukraine's deterrence posture. Furthermore, the Russo-Ukrainian war has uncovered the crucial role of electronic warfare (EW) in modern conflicts. Since that will remain a fundamental pillar of 21st-century warfare, the development of EW will be one of Ukraine's core tasks. A big emphasis must be placed on the training of personnel, especially officer-level servicemen, whose skills play a key role in modern combat operations. Ukraine has to develop its own types of weapons, such as artillery, MLRS, drones, missiles, and combat vehicles, to decrease dependence on foreign military equipment across the whole spectrum of weapons systems, keeping in mind the vitally important possession of a secure supply chain of critical components.

The development of weapons systems does not signify an inability to cooperate with others. Building trust with states with shared interests, such as the Baltic states, the Nordic countries, the UK, and others, through mutual agreements in the defence industry and joint defence projects could open another way to bolster Ukraine's military capabilities, and foster closer ties with other states in the military field. One of the most prominent examples of such cooperation is a preliminary agreement between Ukraine and Sweden on the joint production and localisation of CV90 infantry fighting vehicles, which proved to be one of the most efficient tactics in its category in the course of the Russo-Ukrainian war<sup>2</sup>.

### **The Art of the Possible**

Referring to the words of Otto von Bismarck that «politics is the art of the possible, the attainable — the art of the next best», Ukraine has to pursue goals that are both achievable and realistic. While it is necessary to keep pressing on the points of Ukraine's acceptance to NATO and the provision of European peacekeeping troops on the ground in Ukraine as primary security guarantees, it is worth exploring less mainstream ways which might face less opposition from other nations. One of them is Ukraine's accession to the EU. While it still remains a prospect that is a few years away at the very least, EU membership can bring a substantial boost to Ukraine's security aspirations. While the EU has always been perceived as an economic powerhouse, there are existing security elements enshrined within the Treaty on the European Union that have often been overlooked. Article 42.7 on mutual defence offers relatively bold wording, which is arguably more resolute than the famous Article 5 of the North Atlantic treaty:

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2 «Ukraine and Sweden agree on joint production of CV90 infantry fighting vehicles», *Militarnyi*, August 19, 2023, <https://mil.in.ua/en/news/ukraine-and-sweden-agree-on-joint-production-of-cv90-infantry-fighting-vehicles/>.



**Article 42.7:**

*If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with article 51 of the United Nations charter. This shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States. Commitments and cooperation in this area shall be consistent with commitments under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation...*

**Article 5:**

*The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force....*

Article 42.7 might not have as much political weight, given NATO's central role in addressing security and defence challenges on the continent, but it might, nevertheless, allow Ukraine to have leverage with such wording, and push the partners to go beyond certain limits in the security field. As the EU will be reinvigorating itself, the meaning and interpretation of Article 42.7 can change drastically to constitute a serious mutual defence mechanism.

The Common Security and Defence Policy is another security pillar of the EU. With

its elements such as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defence Fund, Ukraine can significantly increase its military capabilities and interoperability with the member states. The joint training missions and defence R&D projects within these programmes could further strengthen Ukraine's war-fighting potential and combat readiness.

## **A Chance to Build a New Security Architecture in Europe?**

Back in 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron proposed the bold idea of creating a «true European army»<sup>3</sup>. Nowadays, this idea is back on the table, given the US's hostile position towards the EU, and the frequent paralysis of the EU decision-making, due to the highly bureaucratic procedures often exploited by countries such as Hungary and Slovakia for their own interests. While other EU states may also use bureaucratic loopholes to pursue their interests, they do it in a way that does not totally contradict/undermine EU foreign policy and its stance on the war, and the very definition of allies and enemies – which would seem to be opposite to the actions of Budapest and Bratislava. The newly-elected German Chancellor, Friedrich Merz, unambiguously commented that Europe needs its own defence bloc. Asked about a NATO summit scheduled for June, Merz said he was curious to see «whether we will still be talking about NATO in its current form then or whether we will have to establish an independent European defence capability much more quickly»<sup>4</sup>.

A consensus about the need to take responsibility for its own security is slowly becoming accepted by all European nations.

3 BBC News, «France's Macron pushes for 'true European army',» BBC Home — Breaking News, World News, US News, Sports, Business, Innovation, Climate, Culture, Travel, Video & Audio, November 6, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46108633>.

4 «Likely next German chancellor Merz questions NATO's future in 'current form',» Reuters, February 24, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germanys-merz-questions-longevity-natos-current-form-2025-02-23/>.

In a new geopolitical age, global powers such as the US, China, India, and Russia will behave a lot more aggressively in pursuit of their interests. Hence, if it wants to remain a major player in international affairs, Europe needs to step up. Ukraine, in this regard, is essential to Europe. From the military and security perspective, Russia and its military constitute the most immediate threat to European security, while Ukraine has built up the most experience in fighting the Russians. If a European army project is ever to be successful, it will be only with Ukrainians as part of it. Ultimately, with Ukraine's extensive modern combat experience and knowledge, combined with European financial and industrial resources and nuclear weapons potential, it will be possible to deter any state posing a threat to Europe. The question remains as to whether Europeans see Ukraine as part of a new security architecture on the continent, or else would Ukraine be left out of this entity to maintain the status quo? The possibility of a prolonged Russo-Ukrainian war further puts Ukraine at risk of missing out on joining the new European defence entity, as Europe would not be prepared to take in a country at war.

The other option worth exploring is the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF). The JEF is a UK-led ten-member defence framework established in 2014, which has made a substantial leap in developing its capabilities over the past ten years<sup>5</sup>. Its high level of inter-operability, the

presence of a unified military command, and, on top of that, flexible and swift decision-making processes create the potential for a fully-fledged military alliance for the new age, which would be able to respond to future challenges arising in a rapid and decisive manner. The UK, as a nuclear-armed state, adds ultimate capacity to the alliance. Ukraine joining the JEF would constitute a significant boost to alliance capabilities, with the UK finding its own role and leading a new European defence coalition. The invitation of Poland to create a land bridge between all of the members would be a necessary step, without which the operational cohesion of Ukraine with the other members would be seriously constrained.

The bottom line is that the storm we are witnessing now in the West's security architecture can create a window of opportunity for Ukraine to join a new defence alliance in Europe, and embed itself into the new security architecture on the continent. However, it will require a pragmatic foreign policy and diplomatic manoeuvres in the face of the constant Russian threat and tectonic security shifts in Europe.

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5 Ed Arnold, «The Joint Expeditionary Force and its Contribution to European Security,» *RUSI*, 2024, <https://static.rusi.org/the-joint-expeditionary-force-and-its-contribution-to-european-security.pdf>.

# THE FUTURE OF UKRAINE IN THE ERA OF RISING GLOBAL POWERS: STRATEGIES FOR SURVIVAL AND SUCCESS

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*As new global powers emerge and traditional powers recalibrate, Ukraine's position on the world stage is increasingly complex. How are the shifting global power structures influencing Ukraine's strategic options? What role can Ukraine play in the evolving global order, and how can it leverage its strengths to safeguard its sovereignty and economic development? This paper examines the impact of global power competition, particularly between the United States, China, and Russia, and considers the EU's evolving role as a global actor. The paper proposes strategies for Ukraine to navigate these changing dynamics, focusing on fostering stronger alliances, enhancing economic resilience, and maintaining national security.*

## Introduction

Russia's perspective on Ukraine is deeply influenced by its historical narratives and security concerns.<sup>1</sup> Its leaders argue that Ukraine's drift towards Western alliances threatens Russia's security and its long-held sphere of influence. Beyond these ideological and cultural claims, Russia is motivated by economic interests — most notably, its control over critical natural resources and energy infrastructure.<sup>2</sup> The conflict has highlighted Russia's strategy of using energy supplies as a political weapon, as seen in the disputes over gas transit to Europe. By leveraging its vast oil and gas reserves, Russia sought not only to fuel its

economy but also to project power and influence across the region, simultaneously shaping Western decisions on support for Ukraine, which were driven more by their own strategic considerations than by direct pressure from Russia. Ukraine is richly endowed with natural resources, including fertile agricultural lands and critical minerals such as lithium, titanium, and graphite.<sup>3</sup> These resources are fundamental to Ukraine's economic potential, and are highly coveted by Russia. Control over these assets would not only strengthen Russia's economic base but also provide strategic leverage in geopolitical negotiations. Meanwhile, for Europe, securing alternative sources of energy and raw materials is

- 1 Jonathan Masters, «Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia,» Council on Foreign Relations, February 14, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/ukraine-conflict-crossroads-europe-and-russia>
- 2 Niklas H. Rossbach, «The Geopolitics of Russian Energy: Gas, Oil and the Energy Security of Tomorrow,» FOI-R-4623--SE, November 2018, <https://www.foi.se/rest-api/report/FOI-R-4623--SE>
- 3 Adam M. Mycyk, «Ukraine's Critical Minerals: A Strategic Asset for Global Supply Chains,» Dentons, August 20, 2024, <https://www.dentons.com/en/insights/articles/2024/august/20/ukraine-critical-minerals>

imperative — not just to counterbalance Russian influence, but also to support its own economic resilience and transition towards renewable energy sources. Ultimately, the conflict over Ukraine is a contest between two divergent models of international order:



***The global landscape is undergoing profound transformation, as new powers assert their influence and longstanding global players reassess their roles. In this context, Ukraine holds a pivotal position***

**Western Vision:** Upholding the principles of national sovereignty, democratic governance, and a rules-based order that supports closer ties with European institutions, though integration with transatlantic institutions may face challenges, particularly in light of shifting U.S. policies.

**Russian Vision:** Reasserting «historical» claims and regional dominance by using both military force and economic tools — especially control over energy and natural resources — to maintain influence over the former Soviet territories.

For Ukraine, the challenge is to harness its strategic location and resource potential to secure economic development and political autonomy.<sup>4</sup> For the West, the priority is to deter Russian aggression and support

Ukraine's aspirations, thereby ensuring stability in a region that is critical to the broader international order. Meanwhile, Russia is determined to re-establish its influence, and prevent what it perceives as Western encroachment into its historical backyard.<sup>5</sup>

The global landscape is undergoing profound transformation, as new powers assert their influence and longstanding global players reassess their roles. In this context, Ukraine holds a pivotal position, not only as a nation emerging from decades of post-Soviet challenges but also as a strategic fulcrum amid intensifying geopolitical competition. Ukraine's destiny is now closely intertwined with the dynamics of the major global powers such as the United States, China, and Russia, as well as the evolving influence of the European Union and NATO.<sup>6</sup>

Historically, Ukraine's geostrategic location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia has made it a subject of interest for empires and global actors alike.<sup>7</sup> Today, this historical reality is compounded by the contemporary security dilemmas, and economic vulnerabilities, and the rapid evolution of international norms. This study seeks to delve into the ways in which these emerging power dynamics are reshaping Ukraine's strategic options, and it outlines a set of policies aimed at not only safeguarding Ukraine's sovereignty but also actuating its economic and political development. In addressing these challenges, it is essential to recognise that Ukraine is navigating its way through a world where

4 Heidi Crebo-Rediker, «The Art of a Good Deal: Ukraine's Strategic Economic Opportunity for the United States», Council on Foreign Relations, January 24, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/article/art-good-deal-ukraines-strategic-economic-opportunity-united-states>

5 Robert E. Berls Jr., PhD, «The Roots of Russian Conduct», Nuclear Threat Initiative, July 13, 2021, <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/special-report-the-roots-of-russian-conduct/>

6 Vidya Nadkarni, Paul D'Anieri, Sydney Kerr; Gulnaz Sharafutdinova, Xiaoyu Pu, Deepa M Ollapally, Paulo Velasco Junior, Candice Moore, Abdolrasool Divsallar, Forum: The Russia–Ukraine War and Reactions from the Global South, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Volume 17, Issue 4, 2024, Pp. 449–489, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poae021>

7 Andriy Bryn, «The Geopolitical Interests of Ukraine in the Modern System of International Relations», Master's thesis, Charles University in Prague, Faculty of Social Sciences, International Economic and Political Studies, 2010/2011, [https://dspace.cuni.cz/bitstream/handle/20.500.11956/34333/DPTX\\_2010\\_2\\_0\\_296816\\_0\\_106006.pdf](https://dspace.cuni.cz/bitstream/handle/20.500.11956/34333/DPTX_2010_2_0_296816_0_106006.pdf)

power is increasingly distributed across multiple centres. This multipolar reality offers both opportunities and risks. On one hand, a diversified international environment could allow Ukraine to secure new alliances and partnerships. On the other hand, the intensifying competition among global players could expose Ukraine to external pressures and security dilemmas that complicate its internal reform processes. The research questions guiding this analysis are:

- How are the shifting global power structures influencing Ukraine's strategic options?
- What role can Ukraine play in the evolving global order, and how can it leverage its strengths to secure its sovereignty and promote economic development?



***A diversified international environment could allow Ukraine to secure new alliances and partnerships***

By integrating insights from international relations theory with contemporary geopolitical analysis, this paper lays out a framework that Ukrainian policymakers can use to navigate in this turbulent environment. The discussion is not purely academic; rather, it is oriented towards actionable strategies that address real-world challenges, offering concrete policy recommendations designed to reinforce Ukraine's national security, economic resilience, and diplomatic standing in a rapidly changing world.

## **Global Power Dynamics and Their Impact on Ukraine**

### ***The Multipolar World Order***

The current global environment is characterised by a distinct shift from a unipolar or bipolar order to a multipolar system, where several major powers share influence.<sup>8</sup> This transformation has significant implications for nations such as Ukraine, as a multipolar world could provide new diplomatic opportunities and challenges, distinct from the rigid alignments seen in a bipolar order. In a multipolar world, the relative autonomy of nation-states increases, yet so does the complexity of international relations. For Ukraine, this means that their traditional reliance on a single bloc or alliance may no longer guarantee stability or security. The United States, long viewed as the guarantor of European security, is recalibrating its commitments amid domestic pressures, and evolving its strategic interests.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, China's economic ascendancy is transforming global trade networks and investment flows, creating both competition and potential partnership opportunities for countries seeking to modernise their economies. Russia, Ukraine's immediate neighbour and historical adversary, remains a central actor, with a legacy of exerting influence over Ukraine's internal and external policies. Finally, the European Union's transformation from a primarily economic union into an increasingly cohesive political and security actor offers Ukraine a model for integration with Western institutions. This diversification of power necessitates a recalibration of Ukraine's

8 Andrea Edoardo Varisco, «Towards a Multi-Polar International System: Which Prospects for Global Peace?», *E-International Relations*, June 3, 2013, <https://www.e-ir.info/2013/06/03/towards-a-multi-polar-international-system-which-prospects-for-global-peace/>

9 Max Bergmann, «The United States Now Wants European Strategic Autonomy», Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 8, 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/united-states-now-wants-european-strategic-autonomy>

foreign policy.<sup>10</sup> No longer can Ukraine rely solely on a binary alignment; instead, it must engage in a nuanced strategy that leverages its strategic location, natural resources, and human capital. As global power shifts, Ukraine faces the challenge of balancing its relationships with competing powers, while safeguarding its national interests.

### ***The Strategic Dilemma: Between East and West***

At the heart of Ukraine's predicament is its location at the intersection of the East and West. Historically, Ukraine has been caught between the expansionist ambitions of Russia and the integrationist aspirations of Western institutions.<sup>11</sup> This duality is further complicated by the rising influence of China, which brings a new dimension to the geopolitical calculus. While China's approach is primarily economic and soft power oriented, its growing assertiveness in international affairs cannot be overlooked. Ukraine's recent experiences — from the Maidan Revolution to the conflicts in the eastern regions — reflect its deep-seated internal and external struggles over identity, sovereignty, and geopolitical alignment.<sup>12</sup>

The challenge is to strike a balance that protects its national interests, without alienating potential allies. This requires a recalibrated foreign policy that acknowledges the realities of a multipolar world, and seeks pragmatic engagement with all the major powers. A core aspect

of this strategic dilemma involves energy security and economic resilience. Russia's historical use of energy supplies as a geopolitical lever has highlighted Ukraine's vulnerability.<sup>13</sup> Diversifying energy sources and modernising infrastructure is not merely an economic necessity but a cornerstone of its national security. Equally critical is the need to develop robust trade relationships beyond traditional partners. Enhanced economic integration with both European and Asian markets could provide Ukraine with a buffer against external shocks and political coercion.

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***China's economic ascendancy is transforming global trade networks and investment flows, creating both competition and potential partnership opportunities for countries seeking to modernise their economies***

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### ***Global Economic Shifts and the Ukrainian Economy***

The global economic landscape is undergoing a seismic shift, driven by technological innovation, changing trade patterns, and the reconfiguration of supply chains.<sup>14</sup> For Ukraine, economic resilience in the face of these changes is vital. On one hand, Ukraine's rich agricultural lands, industrial base, and emerging tech sector

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10 Maryna Karlevits, «Perfect Storm for Ukrainian Foreign Strategy,» *Ukraine Analytica*, Issue 1 (36), 2025, <https://ukraine-analytica.org/wp-content/uploads/karlevits2.pdf>

11 Tsygankov, A. P. (2024). Russia, Ukraine, and the West: from Mistrust to Conflict. *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 37(3–4), 287–309. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2024.2418231>

12 Dodds, K., Taylor, Z., Akbari, A., Broto, V. C., Detterbeck, K., Inverardi-Ferri, C., ... Woon, C. Y. (2023). The Russian invasion of Ukraine: implications for politics, territory and governance. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 11(8), 1519–1536. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21622671.2023.2256119>

13 Paravee Maneejukk, Nuttaphong Kaewthathip, and Woraphon Yamaka, «The Influence of the Ukraine-Russia Conflict on Renewable and Fossil Energy Price Cycles,» *Energy Economics*, Vol. 129, 2024, Article 107218, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eneco.2023.107218>

14 Abdulhasanova, Rahiba. (2024). Shifting Landscape In The World Economy: Technology, Trade, And Accelerated Development. *The Way of Science*. 121. 37. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379257013\\_shifting\\_landscape\\_in\\_the\\_world\\_economy\\_technology\\_trade\\_and\\_accelerated\\_development](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379257013_shifting_landscape_in_the_world_economy_technology_trade_and_accelerated_development)

open up significant opportunities. On the other hand, the country must contend with structural challenges such as corruption, underinvestment, and the legacy of Soviet-era inefficiencies. Strategically, Ukraine can leverage its natural resources and strategic location as a gateway between East and West. Initiatives to modernise the economy, invest in digital infrastructure, and foster innovation will be key to harnessing these opportunities. At the same time, policies aimed at reducing corruption, reforming the public administration, and enhancing the rule of law are critical to building investor confidence and integrating with the global markets. The rise of China as an economic powerhouse introduces both opportunities and challenges. While Chinese investment in infrastructure projects under initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) could help modernise Ukraine's transport and energy networks, there is also a risk of dependency on a single external economic model. Thus, Ukraine must pursue a diversified economic strategy that does not rely solely on any specific external partner.<sup>15</sup>

### ***The Role of International Institutions***

International institutions are often considered influential in shaping the global order, though their impact remains open to debate. Organisations such as NATO<sup>16</sup>, the European Union, and even the United Nations have a significant impact on the policies of individual states, including Ukraine. The ongoing evolution of these institutions presents both opportunities for integration

and challenges of aligning domestic policies with changing international standards.

NATO's security architecture, for instance, offers Ukraine a framework for military modernisation and collective defence, yet full membership remains elusive, given the geopolitical sensitivities in the region. While NATO provides multilateral coherence, it coexists with various other security arrangements that also address security and defence policy. Ukraine is deeply familiar with these evolving dynamics that are redefining the European security landscape. Regardless of its status with regards to NATO, Ukraine must actively cultivate defence and foreign policy, to further integrate itself into the Euro-Atlantic security community.<sup>17</sup>



***Strategically, Ukraine can leverage its natural resources and strategic location as a gateway between East and West***

Similarly, the EU's deepening integration processes provide a model for political and economic reform, although accession remains a long-term goal that requires substantial domestic transformation.<sup>18</sup> These institutions are not merely external actors but partners that can help Ukraine enhance its security and prosperity if the necessary reforms are implemented. In a

15 Joseph E. Stiglitz and Andrew Kosenko, «The Way Forward for Ukraine's Economy,» Project Syndicate, July 12, 2024, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/onpoint/ukraine-economy-roadmap-must-avoid-neoliberalism-pursue-market-government-balance-by-joseph-e-stiglitz-and-andrew-kosenko-2024-07>

16 NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization,» NATO, <https://www.nato.int/>

17 Dr. Alexander Lanoszka, «Nodal Defence and Ukraine's NATO Aspirations,» *Ukraine-Analytica*, Issue 1 (36), 2025, University of Waterloo and College of Europe (Natolin), <https://ukraine-analytica.org/wp-content/uploads/Lanoszka.pdf>

18 2023 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy,» Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM(2023) 690 final, Brussels, November 8, 2023, [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/COM\\_2023\\_690%20Communication%20on%20EU%20Enlargement%20Policy\\_and\\_Annex.pdf](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/COM_2023_690%20Communication%20on%20EU%20Enlargement%20Policy_and_Annex.pdf)



multipolar world<sup>19</sup>, the interplay between national interests and international institutional frameworks becomes ever more complex. Ukraine's challenge is to maintain its strategic autonomy while actively engaging with these institutions. This balancing act requires pragmatic diplomacy — aligning with the West on values such as democracy and the market economy, while also navigating relations with non-Western powers that offer alternative models of governance and development.

## Strategies for Ukraine's Survival and Success

### *Strengthening Diplomatic Alliances*

To navigate the challenges of an increasingly multipolar world, Ukraine must prioritise the reinforcement of its diplomatic network.<sup>20</sup> While the nation's historical ties to Russia present ongoing challenges, the necessity of diversifying its alliances cannot be overstated. Ukraine's future security and economic prosperity depend on forging robust relationships with a range of global actors.<sup>21</sup>

#### *1. Enhancing Ties with the European Union and NATO*

Closer integration with the EU can offer Ukraine a pathway to political and economic modernisation. Adopting EU standards and reforms can improve institutional effectiveness, attract foreign investment, and promote sustainable growth. While full EU membership is a long-term goal, even

incremental steps towards alignment can yield significant benefits. Similarly, a deeper partnership with NATO — through joint training exercises, intelligence sharing, and military modernisation programmes — can enhance Ukraine's security posture of seeking to minimise tensions with Russia while advancing its strategic objectives.



***Closer integration with the EU can offer Ukraine a pathway to political and economic modernisation***

#### *2. Diversifying International Partnerships*

Beyond its traditional Western alliances, Ukraine should pursue strategic partnerships with emerging powers.<sup>22</sup> Engagement with nations such as India, Japan, and with the economies of South-east Asian countries could open up new economic corridors and technological collaborations. Moreover, carefully calibrated engagement with China might enable Ukraine to attract investment in critical infrastructure, without compromising its sovereignty or strategic autonomy.

#### *3. Regional Cooperation in Eastern Europe and Central Asia*

Strengthening its ties with regional neighbours and institutions, such as the Eastern Partnership and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

19 Yes, the World Is Multipolar; And that isn't bad news for the United States,» *Foreign Policy*, October 5, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/10/05/usa-china-multipolar-bipolar-unipolar/>

20 Ukraine must find diplomatic solutions to retake occupied territory, Zelenskyy tells Kyodo news,» *Reuters*, December 2, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-must-find-diplomatic-solutions-retake-occupied-territory-zelenskyy-tells-2024-12-02/>

21 Dr. Volodymyr Solovian and Matt Wickham, «The New Face of Deception: AI's Role in the Kremlin's Information Warfare,» Hybrid Warfare Analytical Group, UCMC, *Ukraine Analytica*, Issue 35, 2024, [https://ukraine-analytica.org/wp-content/uploads/UA\\_Analytica\\_35\\_2024.pdf](https://ukraine-analytica.org/wp-content/uploads/UA_Analytica_35_2024.pdf)

22 «Ukraine and Beyond: Shaping Europe's Security Future,» Report 272, Europe & Central Asia, International Crisis Group, February 1, 2025, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/eastern-europe/ukraine-russia-internal-united-states/272-ukraine-and-beyond-shaping>



(OSCE)<sup>23</sup>, can create a limited safeguard against external coercion. Regional cooperation offers a platform for collective security arrangements, and economic initiatives that can help Ukraine resist undue pressure from any single dominant power.

### ***Enhancing Economic Resilience***

Economic resilience is the foundation of national security.<sup>24</sup> Ukraine's strategy must encompass both immediate reforms and long-term investments, aimed at modernising the economy and reducing its vulnerabilities.

#### ***1. Diversification of Energy Sources***

Historically, energy dependency on Russia has been a major vulnerability for Ukraine. Accelerating efforts to diversify energy sources — including investments in renewable energy, liquefied natural gas (LNG) infrastructure, and energy efficiency programmes — is critical. By reducing its dependency on any single supplier, Ukraine can shield its economy from external manipulation, and ensure a stable supply for industrial and domestic needs.

#### ***2. Modernising Infrastructure and Industry***

A comprehensive economic strategy should include the modernisation of key industries and infrastructure. This involves not only upgrading transportation and logistics networks, to integrate more effectively with European and Asian supply chains, but also investing in advanced manufacturing and digital technologies. Enhancing productivity across sectors can boost economic growth, reduce unemployment, and foster an environment conducive to innovation.

#### ***3. Improving the Business Environment***

Structural reforms to reduce corruption, enhance transparency, and streamline bureaucratic processes are essential. Creating a business-friendly environment will not only attract domestic and foreign investments but also pave the way for sustainable economic development.<sup>25</sup> Initiatives such as the simplification of licensing procedures, strengthening property rights, and modernising the legal framework can significantly improve investor confidence and spur economic dynamism.



***Continued investment in modernising the armed forces is critical. This includes upgrading technology, enhancing training programmes, and ensuring inter-operability with Western military standards***

#### ***4. Leveraging Agricultural and Technological Strengths***

Ukraine's agricultural sector remains one of its most valuable assets. Modernising agriculture through technological innovation — such as precision farming and improved supply chain management — can transform this traditional sector into a competitive export engine. Furthermore, investment in the tech sector, including start-ups, and research and development initiatives, could create high-value jobs, and diversify the economic base.

23 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE),» <https://www.osce.org/>

24 Stephane Hallegatte, «Economic Resilience: Definition and Measurement,» Policy Research Working Paper 6852, The World Bank, Climate Change Group, May 2014, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/zh/350411468149663792/pdf/WPS6852.pdf>

25 Romina Bandura, Ilya Timtchenko, and Austin Hardman, «Supporting Ukraine's Private Sector during Wartime,» Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 27, 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/supporting-ukraines-private-sector-during-wartime>

## ***Reinforcing National Security***

In an era marked by fluid alliances and rapid power shifts, national security remains a paramount concern for Ukraine. Security in this context is multifaceted, encompassing military preparedness, cyber defence, and internal stability.

### ***1. Military Modernisation and Defence Reform***

Continued investment in modernising the armed forces is critical. This includes upgrading technology, enhancing training programmes, and ensuring inter-operability with Western military standards. Strategic defence initiatives should also focus on developing rapid-response capabilities to counter hybrid threats and irregular warfare tactics. As Ukraine navigates a challenging geopolitical environment, a modern, agile military is indispensable for both deterrence and defence.

### ***2. Cybersecurity and Information Warfare***

As digital technology becomes increasingly central to national security, Ukraine must invest in robust cybersecurity measures. The threat of cyber-attacks — from state-sponsored actors or non-state groups — poses risks to critical infrastructure, financial systems, and public confidence.<sup>26</sup> Developing a comprehensive national cybersecurity strategy that includes public-private partnerships, international cooperation, and continuous innovation, is essential for safeguarding the nation's digital frontier.

### ***3. Strengthening Internal Resilience and Governance***

National security is not solely about

external threats; internal stability is equally crucial. Ukraine must work to strengthen its democratic institutions, enhance civic participation, and build a resilient civil society.<sup>27</sup> Addressing regional disparities, promoting social cohesion, and ensuring that governmental institutions operate transparently, will reduce the risk of internal fragmentation, and create a unified front in the face of external challenges.

### ***4. Intelligence and Strategic Communication***

Effective intelligence gathering and strategic communication are vital for anticipating threats and countering disinformation. Ukraine should enhance its intelligence capabilities, and invest in strategic communication programmes that promote national unity, counter hostile narratives, and foster informed public debate.<sup>28</sup> In today's information-saturated environment, controlling the narrative is as important as military might.

## **Policy Recommendations for Ukraine's Strategic Future**

In light of the analysis above, this section outlines specific policy recommendations that the Ukrainian leadership might consider, to navigate the era of rising global powers effectively.

### **1. Pursue a Dual-Track Foreign Policy:**

Ukraine should adopt a dual-track foreign policy that actively engages with both Western institutions and emerging global players. This means:

- Deepening ties with the EU and NATO: Continue reforms that align Ukraine with

26 Lana Ramer, «Defending Ukraine's Critical Infrastructure from Cyber Threats,» DAI Global Developments, 2024, <https://dai-global-developments.com/articles/defending-ukraines-critical-infrastructure-from-cyber-threats/>

27 Lauren Baillie, Ena Dion, Philippe Leroux-Martin, Ian Platz, William B. Taylor, and Calin Trenkov-Wermuth, «The Future of the Security Sector in Ukraine,» United States Institute of Peace, October 2024, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2024-10/future-security-sector-ukraine.pdf>

28 Navumau, Vasil, Nizhnikau, Ryhor and Kolesnykov, Oleksii, Decentralisation of Strategic Communication in Times of War: Ukraine's Public Campaigns in 2022-2024. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4973753> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4973753>

Western political, economic, and security standards. Seek closer integration, even if full membership remains a long-term goal.

- Constructive engagement with emerging economies: Explore mutually beneficial partnerships with nations such as China, India, and Japan, ensuring that such relationships are balanced and do not compromise Ukraine's strategic autonomy.

**2. Strengthen Economic Diversification and Modernisation:** To build economic resilience, Ukraine must implement a comprehensive modernisation programme:

- Invest in critical infrastructure: Prioritise the diversification of energy sources and the modernisation of transportation, communication, and digital infrastructure.
- Reform domestic institutions: Implement anti-corruption measures, streamline the bureaucracy, and improve the legal framework to foster a business-friendly environment.
- Promote innovation: Encourage public-private partnerships in high-tech sectors and agriculture, leveraging Ukraine's traditional strengths, while fostering new areas of growth.

**3. Enhance National Security Measures:** National security must be addressed on multiple fronts:

- Modernise the military: Allocate resources to upgrade technology and ensure inter-operability with Western forces.
- Develop a comprehensive cybersecurity strategy: Invest in technology and training, to protect critical infrastructure and counter cyber threats.
- Strengthen domestic governance: Enhance intelligence capabilities and promote strategic communication, to

counter disinformation and maintain public trust.

**4. Foster Regional and International Institutional Engagement:** Ukraine should play an active role in regional and international institutions:

- Engage with regional initiatives: Leverage frameworks like the Eastern Partnership and OSCE which have faced challenges in achieving their objectives and delivering expected outcomes to bolster collective security and economic cooperation.
- Contribute to international security dialogues: Actively participate in global forums and strategic dialogues, to influence policy discussions and advocate for multipolarity that respects Ukrainian sovereignty.

**5. Prioritise Long-Term Strategic Planning:** The challenges facing Ukraine are long-term and require a forward-looking approach:

- Develop a national strategy for the multipolar era: This strategy should integrate diplomatic, economic, and security dimensions, through outlining clear short-, medium-, and long-term objectives.
- Invest in human capital: Prioritise education, vocational training, and research and development, to build a workforce capable of supporting a modern, diversified economy.
- Encourage decentralisation and local governance: Empower local governments to implement reforms that are tailored to regional needs, thereby strengthening the overall resilience of the state.

## Challenges and Considerations

While the recommendations outlined above offer a roadmap for Ukraine's future, several challenges must be acknowledged.

### ***Political and Institutional Constraints***

Implementing wide-ranging reforms in a country with entrenched bureaucratic practices and past governance challenges will not be without its difficulties. Institutional inertia and political resistance can slow the pace of the necessary changes. Therefore, creating transparent mechanisms for accountability and incremental reform is essential for sustaining long-term progress.



***Ukraine's participation in international institutions can amplify its influence, helping to shape its global security and economic policies***

### ***Geopolitical Risks and External Pressures***

Ukraine's strategic location makes it vulnerable to external pressures, particularly from Russia, which has historically viewed Ukrainian alignment with Western institutions as a direct threat to its sphere of influence.<sup>29</sup> Navigating this geopolitical labyrinth will require both diplomatic finesse and a robust defence posture. Ukraine must be prepared for both conventional and hybrid forms of conflict, including cyber warfare and information manipulation.

### ***Economic Vulnerabilities and Transition Costs***

Modernising Ukraine's economy will require substantial investment, and the transition from a post-Soviet economic model to a diversified, modern economy is fraught with

short-term problems.<sup>30</sup> Structural reforms may initially disrupt established industries and create social dislocations. To mitigate these effects, the government should design social safety nets and retraining programmes, to help workers adapt to a rapidly changing economic environment.

### ***The Role of Public Opinion and National Identity***

Ukraine's domestic policies and international posture are also shaped by the views and values of its citizens. Maintaining a unified national identity in a diverse society is a complex challenge, particularly as the country balances historical legacies with modern aspirations. Fostering national unity and cultivating a shared sense of purpose are essential for sustaining the reforms necessary for long-term success.

### ***Conclusion***

Ukraine faces a pivotal moment in its history, shaped by geopolitical rivalries, economic dependencies, and security challenges. The conflict is not merely a territorial dispute but a broader struggle between democratic and authoritarian models, integration and hegemony, and the strategic use of resources, and this development underscores the broader security and socio-economic challenges discussed in Butt (2024)<sup>31</sup>, highlighting the intricate link between conflict-driven displacement and illegal immigration trends. As global power dynamics shift towards a multipolar world, Ukraine's survival and ultimate success will depend on a pragmatic strategy encompassing diplomacy, economic resilience, and security modernisation.

29 Jonathan Masters, «Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia,» Council on Foreign Relations, last updated February 14, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/ukraine-conflict-crossroads-europe-and-russia>

30 Robert S. Kravchuk, *Ukrainian Political Economy: The First Ten Years*, Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 1st ed., 2003, <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230107243>

31 Butt, J. (2024). The Shadow Side of Migration — Relation Between Crime and Illegal Immigration in the Nordic Countries. *Acta Universitatis Danubius. Relationes Internationales*, 17(1), 47–79. Published 01-08-2024 <https://dj.univ-danubius.ro/index.php/AUDRI/article/view/2778>

This paper has highlighted the importance of a dual-track foreign policy — strengthening ties with Western institutions like the EU and NATO, while strategically engaging with emerging global powers. Economic diversification and institutional reforms, particularly in the energy, agriculture, and technology sectors, will be critical. Additionally, military modernisation and cybersecurity investments will bolster national security. Ukraine's participation in international institutions can amplify its influence, helping to shape its global security and economic policies.

However, navigating this complex landscape requires sustained commitment from both the leadership and the citizens. Ukraine's future hinges<sup>32</sup> on its ability to balance strategic alliances while upholding democratic values, simultaneously focusing on economic modernisation, and national security. The lessons learned from its journey can serve as a model for other nations navigating the challenges of global power shifts.<sup>33</sup>

Ukraine's future in the era of rising global powers depends on its ability to adapt to a world marked by fluid alliances and shifting geopolitical priorities. With a clear-eyed focus on diplomatic engagement, economic modernisation, and robust national security,

the nation can transform challenges into opportunities. The recommendations provided in this paper are not mere theoretical propositions; they are a call to action for Ukrainian policymakers and stakeholders. By adopting a comprehensive strategy that integrates diplomatic, economic, and security dimensions, Ukraine can secure its sovereignty, foster sustainable development, and assert itself as a key player in the multipolar world of the 21st century.

As Ukraine embarks on this transformative journey, the international community must remain supportive, while holding all parties accountable to the principles of democracy, transparency, and the rule of law. In doing so, Ukraine's experience may well become a beacon for other nations striving to balance internal reform with external pressures, in a rapidly changing global order.

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32 «Ukraine and Beyond: Shaping Europe's Security Future,» Report 272, Europe & Central Asia, International Crisis Group, February 1, 2025, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/eastern-europe/ukraine-russia-internal-united-states/272-ukraine-and-beyond-shaping>

33 «Think Tank Reports on the Invasion of Ukraine 2022 — February 2024,» Consilium, February 14, 2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/library/library-blog/posts/think-tank-reports-on-the-invasion-of-ukraine-2022-february-2024/>









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