

# Innovations

## Implications of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the American hegemony

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### **Abstract**

Realists like Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer believe that escalating the Ukraine issue will harm US strategic interests since it will drive Russia closer to China's rise. This paper offers a different perspective, arguing that the US must choose to restrict both China and Russia in order to maintain its global dominance, and that the conflict in the Ukraine may help this plan be successful. It takes into account both contemporary geo-economics, which focuses on economic instruments and plays an increasingly important role in redefining the global balance of power, as well as conventional Geo-politics based on military methods. The Ukraine crisis may increase authoritarian and revisionist states' sense of the geopolitical danger and lead to centripetal forces in world politics. Washington's growing influence over its longtime friends throughout the globe might eliminate the biggest obstacle to the US strategic rebalance to Asia and solidify the country's political, economic, and military sway in both Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. The study concluded that the effectiveness of the American dual containment policy partly hinges on how China will respond to the crisis and how the Russian-Ukrainian war would alter Beijing's actions in its vicinity.

**Keywords:** 1.Geo-politics, 2.Russian-Ukrainian war, 3.Geo-economics, 4.China, 5.American hegemony

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### **Introduction**

The most well-known realist scholars of the modern age, Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, believe that the Ukraine issue is detrimental to American strategic interests since it will push Russia closer to China's rise as the next peer rival of the United States. Here is another viewpoint, according to which the US must choose to contain both China and Russia in order to maintain its global dominance, and the conflict in the Ukraine may have helped this approach work. It takes into account both modern geo-economics, which uses economic tools to project power, as well as classic Geo-politics, which is based on military means (Wei, 2022). The emergence of geopolitical or geo-economic power struggle between great countries promotes different dynamics in international politics, making this division analytically significant. Geo-economics results in low or medium threat perceptions, unbalanced behavior, and "centrifugal forces," according to Becker, Fahrion, Peters, Neukirch, Pfister, Popp, Puhl, Sandberg, Verschwele and Zand (2022). Geo-politics, in contrast, produces "centripetal pressures" in the global system by generating high-level threat perceptions, counterbalancing or bandwagoning behavior, and so on.

The Ukraine crisis has once more heightened authoritarian states' views of a geopolitical danger and sparked centripetal pressures in world politics. Under these circumstances, American allies in Europe would probably increase their commitment to counteracting a resurgent Russia and would ask the US for further assistance in this area. The biggest disadvantage of the US strategic pivot to Asia could be eliminated by Washington's growing influence over its European allies (Wigell & Vihma, 2016). Through re-established NATO and bilateral defense connections with European nations, the United States would continue to exercise strategic influence over Europe while counterbalancing China in its neighborhood alongside the United Kingdom and its Asia-Pacific partners. The growing impression of a Russian and Chinese threat may also lead some European nations to support Washington in its confrontations with Moscow and Beijing over several issues, including trade, technology, energy, and the economy. The United States would benefit greatly from this in the growing geo-economic power competition between superpowers, which is increasingly important in determining the future of the global balance of power (Anderson, Burman, Fraley, Klehm, Lapidor & Svoboda, 2022).

The format of this essay is as follows. The Ukraine conflict is examined in the first section from the standpoint of traditional international relations. In addition to the realist approach, it also impacts on the liberal view of the issue because the US containment strategy against both Russia and China is supported on idealist grounds such the necessity to protect the liberal order from escalating authoritarian forces. The argument for US hegemony declining in light of geopolitical and geo-economic trends is covered in the second section. It highlights the US's ongoing comparative advantages in Geo-politics compared to all other major powers, such as its dominant military capabilities and its extensive alliance network that enable American military force projection in various parts of the world. However, it also highlights how readily Russian and Chinese geo-economic power projections might pierce US traditional domains of influence and jeopardize Washington's political, economic, and security interests in those regions. The final portion looks at how Russia's invasion of Ukraine has increased geopolitical threat perceptions that might once more strengthen centripetal forces regarding the US and its long-standing military allies. The consequences of the war in Ukraine for great power politics are elaborated in the fourth section. Those chances would rely on China's response to the ongoing security situation in Europe and how the Russian-Ukrainian War will affect its actions in its area (Chotiner, 2022).

### **US Hegemony: Geopolitical and Economic Aspects**

A critique of Walt and Mearsheimer's views, as outlined above, necessitates a reexamination of the geopolitical and geo-economic hegemony of the United States. In fact, there has been no change in the military balance of power between the great countries that would support the current talks on the erosion of US hegemony. Nevertheless, the United States maintains the strongest army with the largest capacity for force projection, which is backed by a massive military budget that is significantly larger than those of China and Russia put together. Additionally, the United States has the most extensive and well-established network of military alliances, dating back to the Cold War, that spans from Europe to the Asia-Pacific area (Casert, 2022). This alliance system continues to further Washington's strategic objectives because it controls its adversaries by thwarting threats of territorial expansion and giving justification for American military force projection in far-off areas. The biggest reason for doubting US hegemony is that Washington has been losing influence over its traditional allies, who have been more willing to work with American strategic adversaries like China and Russia, particularly in the fields of energy, transportation, technology, and the economy. The US has failed to persuade its European friends sufficiently over the past ten years that both authoritarian countries pose a serious threat to global stability and the liberal world order. The emergence of geo-economic power rivalry, which depends on economic tools rather than traditional Geo-politics, which relies on military methods, is strongly tied to this predicament (Anderson et al., 2022). Realists have yet to acknowledge the enormous dynamics of international power politics that geo-economics has influenced in the modern world. Traditional Geo-politics, according to (Becker et al., 2022), generates high-level threat perceptions, counterbalancing or bandwagoning behavior, and consequently centripetal pressures in the global system. In contrast, geo-economics causes under-balancing behavior, low or medium threat perceptions, and centrifugal forces in global politics.

Geo-economics is a form of realism power politics that uses financial aid, commodities and energy policies, trade and investment policy, and other economic tools. China's announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013 was a key role in changing the nature of the struggle for regional and global dominance from a military conflict to an economic one. This project helps China achieve its geostrategic objectives, which include securing control over the energy and commercial routes that link Europe and Asia, enhancing its comparative advantages in trade, and hastening the country's ascent to great power status (Beeson, 2018). China steers clear of geopolitical conflict while achieving these goals. Beijing appeals to the selective accommodation of the economic interests of various nations, including the US military allies, in accordance with the operational logic of geo-economics. These states are deterred from fully committing to the anti-China alliance led by the United States due to the promotion of economic interdependence and the manipulation of economic ties (Friedman, 2022a). On the other hand, Russia helps Beijing's wedge tactics against the European Union and NATO. The Russian geo-economic strategy toward Europe has been heavily influenced by energy pricing policy, pipeline politics, and trade restrictions. Moscow has also turned to more overt measures including financing anti-EU political parties in various EU member states. All of those actions are intended to increase Russian influence in Europe and keep the EU weak and divided so that it cannot effectively counter Russia. A split Europe that was unable to thwart even Russia's geopolitical and geo-economic aspirations would be considerably less inclined to aid the United States in its efforts to form a global coalition to counteract China's rise (Wei, 2022).

These European trends are the main obstacle to the US's sought-after strategic rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region since the Obama administration. However, the US could not simply leave the "back door" open for Chinese and Russian geo-economic activities attempting to drive a wedge both in NATO and the European Union. The US should shift its geopolitical focus to the region to deal with the emerging China. Realists believe that eliminating NATO's "open-door" policy will lessen Moscow's perception of a danger and increase its willingness to work with the West to counteract China's influence as it spreads to its near abroad. Even though Brussels has stated that it would not expand further east, it is still possible that Russia will continue trying to dismantle a less dangerous NATO and the European Union. Economic, energy, diplomatic, and security interests of Russia all favor working with individual European nations and exploiting their interdependencies. Russia will therefore probably continue to back anti-EU and anti-NATO forces and to take into account the interests of various European nations that want greater strategic autonomy (Friedman, 2022b). Additionally, by weakening NATO and the EU through such Russian actions, Europe would become much more open to Chinese wedge tactics and geo-economic power projections. The EU as a whole currently has the second-largest economy in the world, but it is still ahead of China in terms of GDP. In the long run, the growing interdependence between Europe and Washington's main strategic adversaries, such as a resurgent Russia and a rising China, may threaten American hegemony and the US power preponderance.

These realities make the United States' decision to adopt a dual containment strategy toward China and Russia inevitable. Due to geography and low-level attitudes among Europeans, NATO was unable to mobilize against China in recent years. Therefore, in order to rebalance towards China's neighborhood, the US must work with its regional allies in the Asia-Pacific and the United Kingdom, a steadfast strategic ally. By enlisting NATO and European nations in the fight against the Russian menace, Russia's invasion of Ukraine may also eliminate the biggest disadvantage of the US rebalancing policy. High-level geopolitical threat perceptions have already risen, strengthening "centripetal pressures" in Europe that are reminiscent of the Cold War era (Gertz & Evers, 2020).

### **The Ukraine Crisis: From the Liberal to Realist Standpoints**

There is a compelling case to be made that the NATO enlargement debate played a significant role in the emergence of the Ukraine crisis. According to the liberal perspective on NATO enlargement, an important tool for advancing liberal and democratic principles in Eastern Europe and extending the zone of stability, peace, and prosperity to this region. This argument contends that NATO poses no threat to Russia and that the Kremlin's opposition to enlargement is unjustified (Bella, 2018). The issue is that Russia's autocratic government has expansionist and revisionist intentions for its surrounding countries. While democratic governments do not engage in conflict with one another, they must maintain their ability to discourage such authoritarian powers in order to maintain world peace and stability as well as the independence of smaller liberal nations. Making compromises in response to

threats from authoritarian countries would be counterproductive because it would just fuel their violence. Realists like Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer have always opposed NATO's enlargement along the Russian border (Friedman, 2022a). They have taken into account the possibility that doing so may make Russia feel more threatened and lead it to act more aggressively and critically toward China's rise. The Ukraine conflict is seen by Walt and Mearsheimer as a typical illustration of a security conundrum between two nuclear-armed superpowers, the United States and Russia. Geopolitically, Russia is likely to oppose this prospect with all of its might and not allow Ukraine to turn into a Western military stronghold on its borders (Richburg, 2022).

Despite the unambiguous stance taken by Moscow since the NATO Bucharest Summit of 2008 declaring Ukraine and Georgia's future membership, the liberal illusions in the United States have prevented the decision-makers from comprehending this reality. Walt and Mearsheimer disagree with arming Kiev to combat Russian military and Donbas separatists. They promoted Ukraine's "neutrality" as the best way to resolve the issue, which the West rejected at the final round of peace talks prior to the Russian invasion. The fresh conflict in Ukraine, according to Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, would shift Washington's primary attention away from the Asia-Pacific region and toward Eastern Europe. Washington's approach to the Ukraine problem would have unfavorable effects for the future of American dominance in the international system, given that growing China is the US's next peer challenger (Friedman, 2022b).

### **Russia's Conflict with Ukraine and the Resurgent Geo-politics**

Realists have a tendency to sympathize with Russia's senses of threat, which have risen since the 2000s as a result of US military activities in Eurasia from offshore bases and NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe and the Baltic States. They perceive Russia as a weakening great power that just strives to maintain the status quo and military balance in its immediate area and does not pose a significant danger to the security of Europe. Leading European nations like France and Germany gave some indications that they were not entirely removed from such a viewpoint during the deepening of the Ukraine issue. However, that perspective was called into question after Putin adopted a revisionist historical narrative in his televised speech on Ukraine, which he used in part to justify Russia's recognition of the self-declared republics (Casert, 2022). It was widely believed that Putin disputes the legitimacy of Ukraine's sovereignty because he sees it as a "artificial" nation created by the Soviet Union's founders, which was once ruled by the Russian empire. In addition, unlike Russia's 2008 intervention in Georgia, the Russian military forces entered Ukrainian territory outside of the breakaway republics with the intention of overthrowing Kyiv's government and neutralizing the nation by demilitarizing it. Unexpectedly fierce opposition from the Ukrainian side in response might convert the Russian invasion into a protracted interstate conflict inside of Europe, resulting in significant civilian losses and substantial security implications for the continent (Zagorcheva, 2012).

Putin declared on February 28 that he has placed Russia's nuclear forces on "high alert," apparently to prevent a Western military intervention in support of Kyiv. However, given that the situation was developing in a way that the Kremlin had not anticipated, it is possible that this development may lead people to believe that Putin ceased to act rationally. NATO, which had been labeled as "obsolete" by Donald Trump and a "brain-dead" alliance by Emmanuel Macron in recent years, managed to unite to a level unmatched since the Cold War years in response to the perceived threat of Russian aggression and expansionism. Germany, which has previously been under fire for falling short of the NATO goal of allocating 2% of GDP to defense, declared that it would put 100 billion euros toward a dedicated military fund. Following Berlin, Denmark, Romania, Latvia, and Poland all vowed to increase their defense spending above 2% of their GDP (Friedman, 2022b). Along with the US, Germany lifted its restriction on arming Ukraine and joined them in supplying surface-to-air missiles and anti-tank weapons to defend against Russian soldiers. The conflict in Ukraine highlighted NATO's importance for European security, which figuratively draws the line for any future Russian attack against the west. The NATO emergency meetings were attended by Sweden and Finland, two historically neutral nations in Europe that have expressed an interest in deepening their ties to the Alliance. The Russian Foreign Ministry responded by threatening that if those two countries decide to join NATO, Moscow will be forced to take punitive action (Richburg, 2022).

As the only big power with a real nuclear deterrent capability against Russia, the reappearance of geopolitical threats and conflicts would necessarily raise the strategic significance of the United States for the security of Europe. This

could give Washington tremendous sway over its NATO allies on a range of problems, including geo-economic ones. According to Edward Luttwak, economic and commercial disputes between the US and its lesser allies, such European nations and Japan, were lessened by the geopolitical challenges of the Cold War era. Since the project's beginning, Washington has made diplomatic measures to obstruct it, notably through the enactment of sanctions laws by the US Congress such the "Countering Russian Influence in Europe and Eurasia Act of 2017 (Friedman, 2022a). Germany officially suspended the project on February 22 in reaction to Putin's announcement that he recognized the breakaway republics in the Donbas, after defying US pressure for several years. In response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the US and the EU swiftly imposed coordinated sanctions on Russia in the fields of energy, technology, transport, trade, and banking. These severe sanctions, which would make Russia the most-sanctioned country ever, would probably not put an end to Russia's aggression right away but they might isolate it from Europe in the near future. It would deal a significant setback to Russia's efforts to undermine transatlantic cooperation and the EU. However, it remains to be seen whether US expanding influence over EU nations could persuade Europeans to support Washington also in its escalating commercial issues with China in the future (Richburg, 2022).

### **The Future Prospects: Will the Dual Containment of China and Russia be Successful?**

Since the Wilsonian era, US efforts to restructure the international order have consistently been supported on idealist grounds, despite the fact that these plans have also been motivated by realist goals, in addition to ensuring American dominance (Blackwill & Harris, 2016). The liberal presumption that those authoritarian countries inevitably threaten the liberal world order, which could only ensure the continuation of peace and stability, is the foundation for the US's twin containment of Russia and China. This reasoning underlies all of President Joe Biden's diplomatic initiatives, such as the Summit for Democracy in 2021, to create a global alliance of democracies (Wei, 2022). For proponents of this theory, Russia's aggressiveness serves as a persuasive illustration of how a strong, reckless leader in an autocratic big power could easily decide to attack one of its weaker neighbors in order to further their geopolitical expansionist goals. The fact that Australia, South Korea, and Japan backed the sanctions imposed by the West against Russia demonstrates that those nations do not simply see the conflict in Ukraine as "a fire burning on the other shore," but rather as a crisis that necessitates a strong stand from US allies from around the globe against such aggressive actions taken by an authoritarian and revisionist power. In light of this, the emergence of such geopolitical dangers may prompt Washington, which is dedicated to defending the liberal world order, to mobilize American friends from Europe to the Asia Pacific (Da-Silva, Tian & Marksteiner, 2021).

However, the effectiveness of the American policy also rests on how China will behave in its vicinity in the wake of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and how Beijing would respond to Russia in light of its activities towards Ukraine. China may take action in Taiwan as a result of the US turning its attention to the turmoil in Eastern Europe and its unwillingness to get involved militarily lest it risk a direct confrontation with Russia. Such a provocative action in the wake of Russia would confirm China's status as an authoritarian state, which might also be willing to risk nuclear war in pursuit of its own national objectives and geopolitical ambitions in the Asia-Pacific (Wei, 2022). Nevertheless, China accepts the Russian account of the crisis based on Moscow's security worries and holds the West responsible for the war's escalation. The effectiveness of those measures is thought to have been undermined by China's refusal to ratify the international sanctions against Russia and its ongoing energy cooperation with Moscow, leaving Europeans facing a more potent Russian threat (Chotiner, 2022).

Some claim that China's blatant disregard for US sanctions would jeopardize Beijing's ability to participate in the US dollar-denominated global financial system. Therefore, Beijing's unwavering backing for Russia might undermine its peaceful rise based on the logic of economic interdependence with its neighbors and European nations while also raising the danger perceptions of American friends toward China. Another option is that China will learn from the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and decide to exercise restraint. Beijing used more threatening language toward Taiwan immediately after Russia launched its attack, but it soon softened its tone in reaction to the coordinated Western response, which was supported by unprecedented penalties. Since then, China has started to turn away from its prior pro-Russian attitude, perhaps to avoid the risk of creating a lot more enemies in order to help Putin. Despite

Beijing's declaration that it opposes the sanctions put in place by the West on Russia, China has taken steps to abide by certain of them, such as restricting Chinese funding of specific transactions with Russia (Wei, 2022).

Some Western observers believe that only China, who has joined the economic boycott and is calling for Russia to leave Ukraine, can stop Russia's assault against Ukraine. China might potentially negotiate a swift resolution to the European problem by exerting tremendous economic pressure on a globally isolated Russia. The possibility of such a diplomatic imitation was raised when Chinese President Xi Jinping, German Chancellor Scholz, and French President Macron participated in a video conference on March 8, 2022. Some people even assert that China becoming actively involved in the crisis resolution would "solidify its great power position" and transform it into "a true global leader." Therefore, China could also decide to take a tolerant posture toward the Ukraine situation and start to sever ties with Russia. The US dual containment strategy, which is predicated on the contrast between the authoritarian and democratic countries, may be made more difficult in this case by Beijing's continued contacts with Europe and its rising influence over Russia (Wei, 2022).

### **Conclusion**

The two prospects mentioned above go counter to the realism presumption that stronger ties between Russia and China will be bad for American strategic interests. Following such a serious security crisis, a closer alignment between Moscow and Beijing would heighten geopolitical threat perceptions and strengthen centripetal forces in world politics, uniting the US's traditional allies in Europe and the Asia Pacific under Washington's leadership. In comparison to Beijing's geo-economic power projections towards Europe, a reconsolidated NATO would be considerably more effective. China may alienate European nations if it offers Russia significant economic and perhaps military backing. These nations would be more likely to side with Washington in its rivalry with Beijing on the geopolitical and economic fronts on the grounds that they believe a China that is stronger than the US might seriously threaten global peace and stability.

On the other hand, Beijing might cut ties with Russia, support global initiatives to promote peace, and refrain from military provocations in its neighborhood. Such a different course chosen by China may reduce the perception of threat from Beijing among European and Asia-Pacific nations, making many of them more likely to cooperate with China despite US resistance. Although their relationship with Russia and China are important in various economic areas, European countries would not be prepared to face the expenses of restricting their economic cooperation with China while still dealing with the negative effects of the sanctions imposed on Russia. Beijing might therefore continue to transfer geo-economic influence from Asia to Europe, which results in under-balancing conduct and centrifugal tendencies in world politics. This would raise more concerns about American hegemony and the long-term viability of US dominance of the world order.

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