

More to Come: of Imperial Power Politics

A local resident walks past an apartment building damaged in the course of Russia-Ukraine conflict, in Mariupol, Russian-controlled Ukraine, November 16, 2022.
ALEXANDER ERMOCHENKO/REUTERS



tance held up; NATO, encouraged by this resistance and Russian weakness, intervened to uphold 'Rules-Based Order'. Russia fell into the RAND trap, 2019: Goad an increasingly more assertive Russia to fight the US/NATO on terms more advantageous to the latter than the former. Ukraine is perfect for this game of great power chess. Except for all those lives to be lost. And the possibility of nuclear war. Too bad.^[17]

Putin is no dupe. He can read. But maybe Russia had its own inexorable logics—a new NATO member on its doorstep, another launchpad for military action.^[18] The US didn't want Soviet missiles in Cuba. Would it like Chinese military bases in Mexico or Canada? This is the Great Game of Death that the powerful play and the weak suffer. Arms firms' stocks and shares tell the story of this war's victors.^{[19][20]} They are in the game; it has its own momentum. Ukraine cannot now stop; dogged Russia won't or cannot stop, or be stopped; the US and NATO are fully committed to weakening Russia strategy a la Rand, 2019. Zero sum game – I win, you lose. Continuation of the dynamics of NATO strategy since 1991 and Russian pushback and desire for security and probably Great Power restoration. Ordinary people's lives don't matter very much in such calculations.

It's not a world war but the consequences are global: A very messy multipolarity? What has been the global effect? It seems quite simple. The West is relatively isolated; the rest of the world outside, or semi-detached from, 'the Church of the Rules-Based Order', disagree. As

a recent European CFR survey of global opinion, including Turkey, India, China, and Russia, shows, "People in those [strategic Global South] countries see themselves very differently: As emerging great powers that may side with the West on some issues but not on others. In contrast to the days of the Cold War, today one's major trade partners are not usually one's security partners. Even when the emerging powers agree with the West, they will often maintain good relations with Russia and China. This is also what Brazil is currently doing: President Lula speaks in favour of preserving his country's neutrality vis-à-vis Ukraine and Russia, to avoid 'any participation, even indirect', even as he accepts that Russia 'was wrong' to invade its neighbour."^[21]

The peoples of the Global South are mostly inhabitants of the bloody killing fields where the West fought for freedom for which millions of Koreans, Algerians, Kenyans, Vietnamese, Iraqis, Afghans, and so many other children of a lesser God gave their last breath of life. They don't think the Ukraine war has anything to do with them. They remember centuries of death, famine, opium wars, and humiliation. They remember Iraq and Libya. They always did, but now they have economic power, and the West isn't the only game in town. There are other great powers to trade with, invest in, side with, balance with. The balance of forces has shifted to the East and South. Sanctions? They Just Said No. Russia and China have moved closer in all sorts of ways. China's post-pandemic economy is boosted by increased exports to

Russia; it's getting Russian energy more cheaply than before.

New international payments methods and currencies are in a dance of death with the Mighty Dollar. Alternative currencies are developing – BRICS, and the Five Rs, that is, Rupee, Rouble, Renminbi, Real, Rand.^[22] Brazil and Argentina are discussing new common currency arrangements to reduce dollar-reliance that would later include other regional economies.^[23] Russian oil sales no longer rely on the dollar, but the rouble pegged to the price of gold. Iran is looking to do the same, offering discounted oil prices to willing customers like India.^[24] Follow the money. Make no mistake, the Dollar is still the global reserve currency, its store of value. But the barbarians are at the gates. They have forgotten their place.

There's a shifting and transitional global energy order. The US is a net exporter of energy. It was before the Ukraine war, even more so now. But it is not supreme. Messy multipolarity reigns in this domain too.

A new Russian Gas Union is emerging that may include Pakistan and India, alongside Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.^[25]

A Russian pipeline through Turkey and into southern Europe may be on the cards. China's Belt and Road Initiative marches on, drawing closer to Russia's Eurasian Economic Union.^[26] Russia is part of OPEC+. Saudis won't play ball with President Biden's request for increased oil supplies.^[27]

As former Indian diplomat, MK Bhadrakumar argues, "The U.S. will be uneasy about a 'gas union' betwixt Russia, Pakistan and India. But India has vital interests in safeguarding its energy security.

The western hegemony in the world order is ending. Russia's 'gas union' in Central Asia signals that the time has come for regional states in South Asia to respond with a unity of purpose."^[28]

What's next? Too hard to call

Most observers suggest that nothing much is likely to change in 2023. All sides are entrenched in a long war, none willing to give any quarter at this stage. There is no serious discussion of a ceasefire let alone peace talks.

Russian presidential elections are scheduled for spring 2024. Putin is hardly likely to miss that opportunity to regale Russia with his war to liberate and de-nazify Ukraine. President Biden is readying himself and American public opinion to run for a second term in November, 2024. Wave the flag for freedom. His 'historic' visit to Kyiv last week signals US 'resolve' to continue the war to the end. Biden stated that: "As the world prepares to mark the one-year anniversary of Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine, I am in Kyiv today to meet with President Zelenskyy and reaffirm our unwavering and unflagging commitment to Ukraine's democracy, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. When Putin launched his invasion nearly one year ago, he thought Ukraine was weak and the west was divided. He thought he could outlast us. But he was dead wrong."^[29]

The talk is all about spring offensives by Russia, further NATO reinforcements, the possibility of transfer of F-16 fighter jets, yet greater escalation of military violence. In addition, there is a war of words, and the lessons

of Ukraine for Taiwan are being brandished. The Nord Stream pipelines' destruction reminds us of the dangers of further provocations, perhaps in the Taiwan Strait? Meanwhile, secretary of state Anthony Blinken, at the annual Munich Security Conference, warns China not to send arms to Russia, with no hint of irony.^[30]

Gramsci's return – in Munich

Our era is one of deep, prolonged, organic crisis, as Gramsci noted long ago, and as a Munich Security Conference quoted in 2019. Under the subtitle "Managing the New Interregnum," the 2019 Report argued: "In his Prison Notebooks, the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci wrote: 'The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.' In a way, this is an apt description of world order today."^[31]

But a crisis, for Gramsci, is not only characterised by decline and fall but also powerful elites' attempts to repurpose and reconstruct the order, to lay the foundations of recovery and expansion. No great empire ever gave up its powers willingly – they go down fighting to the end, and therein lies the greatest danger.

Western unity of mass and elites over Ukraine is likely to be short-lived; it is founded on a vast propaganda effort, increases in military spending in the middle of broader and deeper crises of legitimacy, economic hardship and inequality, contradictions of class and power. Wars have ever been used to deflect from actual crises, popular resistance and

movements for radical change.^[32] We are back in those times. The struggle of polarised opposites is intense and likely to intensify. Nothing lasts forever. Look at worldwide strike waves, demonstrations for economic rights, against war, and for an end to police violence.^[33]

Elites' legitimacy and authority, right in the heart of the Rules-Based Order, is shot to pieces. In the United States, one of its two main political parties does not even have a commitment to democracy or fair elections. Serious scholars are asking if the US is on the verge of civil war.^[34]

In this context, we should be clear. The "Ukraine must win" mantra is a call for the continuation of a deadly war and danger of its spreading and escalating to nuclear proportions. As Irish MEP Clare Daly noted in a speech to the European parliament a few days ago, "Shout 'glory' all you want; there is no glory in the grave... It is time for the silent majority to take to the streets and demand peace."^[35]

That global majority is silent no more.

For the references, check out the original piece on *The Wire* website:

