

European Security Crisis and U.S. Hegemony: Reversing the Decline?

Alexander D. Neshmashnyi

Alexander D. Neshmashnyi

MGIMO University, Moscow, Russia
Junior Research Fellow

SPIN-RSCI: 5450-8946

ORCID: 0000-0003-4449-6602

Scopus AuthorID: 57223963057

E-mail: a.d.neshmashnyj@my.mgimo.ru

Address: Office 4101, 76 Vernadsky Prospect, Moscow 119454, Russia

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Abstract

The article investigates the impact of the 2022 European security crisis on global hegemony. The author conceptualizes international hegemony as a legitimate rule based on the provision of club and public goods, and on coercion. The more benefits a hegemon's allies get from such international order and the more they fear coercion, the more they are willing to contribute to the hegemonic project. In recent years, the academic literature has increasingly documented the United States' decline as a hegemonic power. In trying to consolidate power and optimize costs, the hegemon has shattered international regimes it helped create, thereby losing much of its international legitimacy. A comparative analysis of the European reaction to the 2014 and 2022 Ukraine crises shows how the perceived "Russian threat" to security has instantly boosted the legitimacy of NATO and the U.S. as the main security provider. As a result, the U.S. no longer faces opposition from its allies to its attempts to dismantle existing international regimes and halt the production of public goods. The threat-

induced consolidation effect is not perpetual, and the current crisis entails some long-term negative consequences for future hegemony. However, the U.S. has acquired a chance to use its preponderant capabilities and loyal allies to safeguard its hegemony over the period of international reordering.

Keywords: international order, legitimacy, hegemonic war, hegemonic bloc, U.S., Ukraine, Russia, international alliances.

Over the past ten years, it has become commonplace among experts and international relations specialists to talk about the decline of American hegemony. Previously this idea was advocated by some Marxists (Du Boff, 2003; Wallerstein, 2003). Still, even among left-wing critics of the American dominance there was a separate cohort of authors, who believed that the United States was not just the most powerful nation in the world, but a full-fledged “empire” (Strange 1988; Hardt and Negri, 2000; Panitch and Gindin 2004). In the 2000s, when the U.S. launched its monumental plans to build prosperous democracies in Iraq and Afghanistan, it seemed inappropriate to discuss its decline other than hypothetically (Fergusson, 2004; Nexon and Wright, 2007). But the Great Recession and the apparent failure of the nation-building projects have seriously undermined the position of the proponents of American hegemony. Although some still insist that the current decline is short-term (Germain, 2020), the prevalent view has changed: most researchers agree that the peak of U.S. dominance in world politics has passed (Tamaki, 2020; Lachmann, 2020; Cooley and Nexon, 2020; Safranchuk, 2016).

This is not the first time the decline of U.S. hegemony is discussed in the mainstream. In the 1980s, several works analysed the previous decade as the beginning of the United States’ decline (Cowhey and Long, 1983; Gill, 1988; Lepgold 1990) due to the 1973 oil crisis and a gradual contraction of the U.S. share in world GDP. According to the most optimistic projections made in these works, the period of the U.S. sole supremacy in the Western world was to be followed by an era of trilateral hegemony (U.S., Japan, Germany) (Gill, 1986), or

a harmonious “After Hegemony” world (Keohane, 1984). There were certain reasons for such expectations: in 1968-1980, the U.S. share in world GDP decreased from 39% to 26%, while the combined economies of Japan and Germany had almost caught up with the United States. The Japanese economic miracle was seen as a particularly obvious threat to the United States. Japanese cars and other manufactured goods supplanted American ones in much the same way Chinese microelectronics has taken over the American market now. In both cases, the U.S. used the same methods to fight its competitors from Asia: just like the Sino-American relations in the second decade of the 21st century, economic cooperation between Japan and the United States was overshadowed by a series of trade wars (Urata, 2020).

However, at that time rumors of decline were greatly exaggerated: instead of the promised demise, a period of “super-hegemony” came about. On the one hand, the United States managed to largely eliminate competition from Japan by the Plaza Accord of 1985: the revaluation of the yen exposed the vulnerabilities of the Japanese financial system and thereby plunged the Asian tiger into the “Lost Decade” of economic recession. But most importantly, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union breathed new life into the American project. Washington enjoyed the ideological monopoly of the “end of history” (Fukuyama, 1992), when none of its foreign policy initiatives met significant resistance. Peace dividends were substantial: not only was the United States able to reduce military spending, but it also significantly expanded its sphere of influence by bringing countries of the former socialist bloc into the global economy. NATO enlarged, albeit not immediately. Against this background, in 1994, the GATT was reorganized into the WTO, thus strengthening free trade institutions worldwide. As a result, both foundations of the world order created by the Americans had gained in strength.

The current transformation is largely similar to that of the 1970s: the global financial crisis has hit mainly developed countries, as did the 1973 oil crisis; the U.S. is once again withdrawing its troops from an Asian country, abandoning its allies; the U.S. share in global GDP has dropped below peak levels once again. However, the outcome of the

debates of forty years ago suggests that it is too early to spell the death of U.S. hegemony today. The present study seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate, putting at the center of analysis the consequences of the Ukraine-centered European security crisis for U.S. hegemony. To this end, the author will compare the reaction of the American allies to the Ukraine crises of 2014 and 2022. These cases will be analyzed in the overall context of the transformation of American hegemony in the last two decades. This paper's hypothesis is that U.S. hegemony will strengthen in the medium term due to the current crisis, but long-term consequences are not so definite.

WHAT HEGEMONY STANDS ON

Hegemony is understood as legitimate leadership, which, unlike formal empire (Schroeder, n.d.), is carried out in conditions of *de jure* equality of states. Hegemony rests on two pillars. Firstly, it is based on the provision of club and public goods, which is regulated by international regimes. For example, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) played an important role in maintaining the unity of the Soviet bloc. Hegemons also use such regimes to secure their allies' contribution to the achievement of common goals in order to avoid free-riding. Secondly, the hegemon must possess tools of coercion meant to enforce the rules when they satisfy the hegemon or to force others to rewrite the rules if the hegemon deems it necessary. As for the hegemon's legitimacy, it is dependent on two main variables. Firstly, it grows if important decisions are taken with the participation of many stakeholders. Secondly, it can be boosted with successful outcomes, i.e., with larger quantities of public goods produced (Clark, 2011, 51-72).

Coercion and encouragement are tools that refer to the intermediate (social) level of hegemony analysis. Together, they create a system of positive and negative incentives for other members of the system, who decide whether to join the hegemon and which one. Once "joined," they are gradually woven into a network of formal and informal institutions and inter-elitist social relations, which are designed to ensure the loyalty of the hegemon's allies and their willingness to bear costs for the purposes determined by the hegemonic project. At a deeper level,

the hegemon's ability to use these two basic instruments is determined by its material resources and internal institutions. This work draws a distinction between the two levels of analysis, and places emphasis on the social level. Indeed, as the revival of American hegemony in the 1990s shows, the decline in the material basis of hegemony can be offset by successes within the international community.

The United States has provided its allies with access to two main benefits that are better described as club goods (that is, apply only to those who are part of the hegemonic bloc) than public ones: security and economic prosperity. Security is ensured through a network of bilateral (hub-and-spoke system in Asia, compacts of free association) and multilateral alliances (NATO, Rio Pact, ANZUS, AUKUS, and the Five Eyes). Historically, the U.S. has contributed to the economic development of its allies through the Marshall Plan as well as various bilateral programs. The main role in the preservation and accumulation of wealth in the United States and its allies is played by the Washington Consensus and GATT-WTO institutions (Fehl and Freistein, 2020). However, economy and security are just the foundation—in different historical periods the United States contributed to global governance in various functional areas (for example, decolonization, global Internet governance, strategic stability, nuclear non-proliferation, the fight against climate change, etc.), often creating ad hoc coalitions with other members of the international system. During certain periods, Wilsonians (Mead, 2002, 132-173) tried to add one more element to this equation, namely democratization. Although some elements of this strategy have come to fruition (USAID, various foundations, regime change operations), democracy has never become a public good that the United States could take credit for. In fact, the recipes for its distribution have turned out to be too unreliable and disruptive.

Contrary to the popular opinion, the modern hegemony theory unequivocally states that hegemony and international order are analytically separable (Ikenberry and Nexon, 2019). The hegemon is capable of both creating an order and dismantling it when norms or regimes contradict its goals (Norrlof and Wohlforth, 2019). This means that the weakening of the order does not necessarily imply the

weakening of the hegemon, and vice versa. On the other hand, not all elements of the order have been created solely by the United States. The core of the modern world order derives from the United Nations consensus.

As for hegemony itself, in the original ancient Greek interpretation, it was understood as leadership within the framework of a military alliance (Anderson, 2017, p. 3). The hegemon acts as a kind of broker for its interests and those of its allies, being the main center for coordinating collective action. There can be several hegemons in the international system, as was the case during the bipolar period, each with its own bloc.

The hegemon proposes a project (what needs to be done now, and the future order) and requires its allies to make an effort to promote it. Allies are willing to bear appropriate costs if they support the project and/or fear coercion. ***Therefore, the more hegemony is needed, the stronger it is: one can ensure a greater effort to achieve the goals of a project by making less effort to force the allies.*** At the same time, the utility of club goods is different for different members of the hegemonic bloc. For example, developing countries that specialize in exporting low value-added products and/or diseconomies of scale benefit less from free trade than developed countries. On the other hand, numerous international development assistance programs and IMF credit instruments are of greater interest to developing countries. What some governments may see as a boon (such as fighting communist ideology), others will perceive as evil.

In terms of security, Stephen Walt argued that balancing behavior is not triggered directly by the power of others, but rather by a perceived threat (Walt, 1985, p. 8-9). A threat from a far-away country is usually considered less important than a threat from a neighbor. The more expansionist and aggressive neighbors are believed to be, the more a country feels the need for protection. It is in a situation like this that joining the hegemonic project is considered imperative, and an aspiring country is ready to bear significant costs in order to get external protection, especially when it is not able to defend itself. In other words, the perceived benefit of club security, which the hegemon

provides to its allies, appears bigger for a state that sees an immediate threat in the actions of another actor. For those who are already allies of the hegemon, demonstrating their loyalty becomes a way to somehow increase the chances that the hegemon will fulfill its obligations if they come under attack (Snyder, 1984).

AMERICAN HEGEMONY AND THE DISMANTLING OF THE WORLD ORDER

It would be wrong to say that the United States avoided dismantling certain elements of the world order. After the end of the bipolar confrontation, the U.S. did not need the support of the Third World anymore and, in 1996, withdrew from UNIDO, an organization that focuses on industrial development rather than “Welfare Colonialism.” Guided by national interests, U.S. Republicans did not support the Rome Statute and the International Criminal Court, effectively blocking the activities of supranational institutions in the field of criminal justice. These examples alone reflect one of the main elements of the U.S. strategy of the last thirty years: the U.S. prefers to create club benefits for itself and its allies, rather than public goods for the whole world. However, what is important is not what happens to emerging regimes but how the structure of global governance changes around key functions: ensuring security and conditions for economic development (Nesmashnyi et al., 2022).

In global trade, the United States has stopped sponsoring free cross-border movement of goods and become one of its most active opponents. At first (after 2001, the so-called Doha Round impasse), the United States failed to get a draft WTO reform plan approved by other countries. Then in 2016, the United States used a technical vetoing procedure to block the appointment of new members (judges) of the Appellate Body of the WTO Dispute Settlement Body (Kalachigin, 2021). As a result, by 2019, when the term of the incumbent arbitrators had come to an end, the WTO’s highest judicial body simply stopped functioning, which means that any trade disputes within the WTO can wait for consideration indefinitely, which allows the U.S. to wage trade wars with impunity. The United States has undermined one of the two

key regimes of the world order it has created. What is more, a bipartisan consensus has emerged in Washington on this issue. Unlike the rapid steps to return into the Paris Agreement, Joe Biden is in no hurry to change his predecessor's policy with regard to the WTO Appellate Body. This means that the amount of benefits provided by the American hegemonic project has decreased. Other developed and large developing countries have been affected by this process more than others. However, the degradation of global economic governance has not yet reached the terminal stage, and many global financial and economic regimes continue to function, with the U.S. playing a key role.

The U.S. uses coercive tools more and more often not only against competitors, but also against some of its allies, albeit to a limited extent (sanctions against Turkey, trade restrictions on the EU). Trade wars and politically motivated sanctions do increase the motivation to seek alternatives to the American economic project, thus causing the unified system to disintegrate into techno-economic blocs (Likhacheva, 2019). However, the pace of these processes should not be exaggerated. The material basis of global financial regulation is the dominant role of the dollar in international trade. The transition to transactions in national currencies and barter trade has its limits and carries significant economic risks that are difficult to hedge without linking transactions to world currencies. Although the share of the U.S. dollar consistently decreases in the structure of world foreign exchange reserves, this happens very slowly: from a peak of 72.7% in 2001 to 58.8% in the fourth quarter of 2021. For reference, the share of the main non-Western currency, the Chinese yuan, is less than 3%. Contrary to expectations, the freezing of Russia's dollar assets at the beginning of the year did not prompt other countries to immediately abandon the dollar, and in the second quarter of 2022, its share in reserves increased by 0.7%. The previous global currency—the pound sterling—retained its status until 1954 (Avaro, 2022), that is, for decades after the loss by Britain of its military and economic dominance. In other words, the U.S. dollar will continue to be the leading global currency until a new hegemon starts consistently building new institutions and increasing the attractiveness of the new currency.

Although “complex hegemony” requires the establishment of order in different functional areas at the same time (Safranchuk et al., 2021), limited hegemony can be maintained through a combination of just a few modes. In the new realities of great-power competition (Safranchuk and Lukyanov, 2021), the security regime built around the U.S. military alliances begins to play an even more decisive role in determining the state of hegemony (Istomin and Baikov, 2020). After the end of the bipolar confrontation, NATO lost its purpose and faced an identity crisis: it was not clear why the organization was needed if there was no threat from the Soviet Union. Cooperation institutions could have been reoriented to other tasks (Wallander, 2000). Such tasks came around almost right away: the wars in Yugoslavia required the alliance to develop formats for limited intervention in local conflicts (Joffe, 1995). The concepts of “responsibility to protect,” “human security,” and “humanitarian intervention” turned out to be quite convenient for justifying these actions. While at the initial stage (1993-1995) the United States limited itself to establishing a no-fly zone with the UN approval, Operation Deliberate Force (1995), also authorized by the UN Security Council, and unauthorized bombing of Serbia (1999) were a completely new level of intervention. NATO forces subsequently got involved in Afghanistan and Libya.

However, the U.S.’s NATO allies perceived the threat from local conflicts less vividly than the threat from the USSR before. Europe had built a security community and post-modern society, where the security dilemma was largely solved. As a result, NATO faced the problem (this is exactly how it was framed by the Americans and NATO bureaucrats) of maintaining military spending at a target level of 2% of GDP. For example, in the 2000s and 2010s, Germany spent only 1.1-1.3% of its GDP on defense. Even France, which conducts a large number of independent military operations in Africa, does not meet the 2% requirement for annual defense spending. Military expenditures within the alliance are its member states’ contribution to maintaining the overall defense capability of the bloc. In addition, the American military-industrial complex receives significant benefits from defense

contracts with American allies—this is one of the mechanisms to compensate for the U.S. expenses on hegemony.

At the same time, American military bases in Europe, NATO activities and increased defense spending did not help solve the threats that Europe faced and that were perceived as more important (climate change, refugees). The U.S. has been spending about 4% of its GDP on defense over the past twenty years. Only a small part of these costs can be explained by protection against North Korea and, above all, Iran. For the most part, the cost of maintaining a military presence abroad does not bring immediate benefits, especially as the War on Terror has eventually wound down. However, it helps maintain the infrastructure of hegemony in “peacetime” by trading the relative loyalty of the members of the hegemonic bloc for protection against potential threats (Istomin and Baikov, 2020).

In Europe, the number of countries dissatisfied with such a deal kept growing (Aggestam and Hyde-Price, 2019), especially as the United States, starting from Barack Obama’s second term, refused to actively support certain international regimes beneficial to European countries, increasingly resorted to coercive measures against EU members, and dictated to Europeans what kind of policy they should pursue vis-a-vis China. Increased coercion and reduced production of public goods harmed the legitimacy of the American project. Clearly, there were reasons for the changes in the U.S. strategy. The United States faced a real threat to its hegemony—China, which is stepping up international cooperation and, together with other great and middle powers, is building alternative institutions, primarily financial and economic ones. Unlike Japan, China is more difficult to come to terms with, because it is more powerful economically and because it has never been in the American sphere of influence—it does not depend on the United States militarily, its values differ from Western ones, and its elite are not so tightly integrated into the global elite. Under the new conditions, the United States has readjusted its project to confront China. This is why the U.S. has started dismantling the trade and economic regime that spurred China’s rise, and has also increased pressure on its allies in order to contain China.

But Europe has not supported American claims against the WTO and has not started trade wars with China. For geopolitical reasons, China and the EU have fewer disagreements. Europe's efforts to gain sovereign strategic thinking got an additional boost when Britain, which traditionally maintains a closer relationship with the United States, left the EU (Prikhodko, 2022). In recent years, discussions on this issue have centered around the notion of strategic autonomy (Howorth, 2018; Fiott, 2018; Tocci, 2021; Shcherbak, 2021; Arbatova, 2019). The supporters of this policy are unhappy that European countries are vulnerable to external pressure and are, in fact, unable to achieve foreign policy goals dictated by geopolitics without external assistance (Leonard and Shapiro, 2019). Actually, this is hardly a fundamentally new policy as the very concept is attributed to Charles de Gaulle (Asmolov and Soloviev, 2021, 51). However, it was the U.S.-European disagreements during Trump's presidency that intensified this debate.

Politicians (Macron, 2021) and European experts (Howorth, 2018; Thompson, 2019) alike constantly emphasize that the desire for strategic autonomy does not undermine NATO and European-American cooperation. However, if one shoves scholasticism aside and pays attention to the fact that in reality the preferences of the EU countries and the United States often collide, there is an alternative explanation: European countries are trying to send a signal to the United States that they pose no threat and thus avoid American opposition at a time when they are unable to counter such pressure. In reality, the EU countries built, albeit quite sluggishly, a military-political basis for pursuing a sovereign policy, accompanied by Eastern European countries' grumbling that the EU was not taking enough measures to contain Russia.

European security efforts are often looked down upon. However, after the establishment of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy in 1999, the European Union Force conducted six ground military operations in Macedonia, the DRC, Bosnia, Chad, and the CAR, three naval operations, and a number of police and training missions abroad. This is more or less comparable, in number (albeit

not in scale), with Russian military activities abroad during the same period. At the same time, among Russian operations, only the recent peacekeeping mission in Kazakhstan was truly multilateral. The EU has created institutions of collective military action that allow, but do not require, U.S. participation. This is quite manifest in the current crisis, when the EU is organizing its own training mission for Ukraine outside of NATO's framework.

So the U.S.'s European allies no longer needed American hegemony as much as before, and they sought greater autonomy. It is noteworthy that a withdrawal of about ten thousand American troops from Germany, announced by Trump but never implemented, caused a controversial reaction (Kirchick, 2020), instead of "punishing" Germany for not increasing its military spending. Europe has made the greatest strides in promoting the green agenda (Zhornist et al., 2022) that is not so beneficial for the United States, which is less energy dependent. However, Europe's sovereignty should not be overestimated, since European countries and the United States often have identical preferences due to their ideological commonness, the cohesion of their elites, and similar levels of economic development.

But outside the EU, American disregard for the preferences of its allies in recent decades has already pushed many of them out of the hegemonic bloc, thus actually reversing its expansion. Naturally, each such case should be considered separately, but it is difficult to deny the growing problems between the United States and its "obstinate" allies, including the Philippines, Thailand, Turkey, and a number of Latin American countries. Weak legitimacy, problems in relations with allies—the Biden administration has inherited these problems along with the reins of American hegemony. At first, the U.S. seemed to have succeeded in assuring its allies that "America is back," but the chaotic withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan without proper coordination with the allies seriously damaged the hegemon's reputation. Given this, multilateralism rhetoric and largely symbolic actions could hardly restore the legitimacy of U.S. hegemony. This was the state of affairs in the U.S. before 2022.

THE UKRAINE CRISES AND HEGEMONIC CONSOLIDATION

The 2014 crisis in Ukraine has already prompted NATO to return to its original mission of containing Russia. There is a long history of the U.S. trying to make its NATO allies ramp up their defense spending. However, it was against the backdrop of the Ukraine crisis that the summit in Wales in September 2014 formalized obligations to “halt any decline in defense expenditure” and “aim to move towards the 2% [of GDP] guideline within a decade” (NATO, 2014). In 2014, European allies of the United States showed their readiness to incur significant costs associated with sanctions and counter-sanctions. The willingness to bear such costs confirms the cohesion of the hegemonic bloc. But this process was not complete or irreversible (Istomin et al., 2020). At that time, the European members of NATO (except Poland and the Baltic countries) did not perceive Russia’s actions as a threat to national security. For example, Germany kept its defense expenditure (as a percentage of GDP) in 2014–2018 at the lowest level in modern history.

The difference between European countries in how they perceive Russia’s actions depends, at least partially, on geography. In 2014, a threat from Russia was mainly felt by the Baltic states and Poland, whose political elites seem to have never stopped talking about the “Russian threat” since the breakup of the Warsaw Pact. For some time, Sweden hunted for a Russian submarine allegedly violating its territorial waters and a “Russian commando,” but found only a local fisherman and a sunken WWI-era Russian submarine. After the migration crisis that began in 2015, a series of terrorist attacks in European countries, and the securitization of climate change, the Russian threat faded into the background (Pezard et al., 2017). According to opinion polls, Russia was only sixth on the list of top priority threats, while some EU countries considered the power of the United States and China a more pressing problem (Stokes et al., 2016). When comparing Vladimir Putin’s and Donald Trump’s approaches to world order issues, the majority preferred the former (Huang, 2020).

At the same time, in the United States, on the contrary, susceptibility to the Russian threat had grown amid suspicions of interference in the 2016 presidential election. The difference in

perception between the United States and a number of EU countries led to the divergence of preferences and, at some point, even policies. Europeans were no longer so enthusiastic about American attempts to make containing Russia part of the hegemonic project: despite the lack of full-format interaction, the period of 2016-2020 saw the start of the Nord Stream-2 project and contacts between the EU and the EAEU, which had previously been avoided for political reasons. The gap between the EU and the United States is well demonstrated by the sanctions imposed after the poisoning of the Skripals in 2018: the United States imposed serious financial restrictions on the Russian public debt, while the European Union went no further than a modest expansion of the “black lists” and the expulsion of a small number of diplomats (no more than four from each country). So unlike the problems between the EU and Russia, which were never overcome, the consolidating effect of 2014 in the West did not last too long.

Despite obvious analogies with the 2014 crisis, a new round of escalation in 2022 produced consequences of a fundamentally different magnitude. The overwhelming majority of EU residents consider events in Ukraine a threat to the national security of their countries (Standard Eurobarometer, 2022). The perception of Russia as a threat has dramatically boosted interest in cooperation with the United States and NATO, which pursue a consistent policy of deterrence with regard to Russia. With the exception of Greece, public in all key EU countries approve of NATO’s activities (Wike, 2022). In Sweden and Finland, the number of supporters of NATO membership has exceeded half of the population, and as a result, the two Scandinavian countries have abandoned the policy of neutrality completely. The perceived usefulness of club security within NATO has increased in 2022. Therefore the legitimacy of hegemony is getting restored, even though it remains limited to the Western community.

The severity of European fears and their strategic nature is borne out by growing defense spending, which distinguishes the current crisis from the situation of eight years ago. Germany has created a special fund of €100 billion to modernize its armed forces. According to German experts, Europe has all the necessary production capacities to

create modern weapons systems, but it is EU particularism that hinders efforts to enhance defense capability and interoperability (Röhl et al., 2022). There are no guarantees, and experts warn of great difficulties in remilitarizing Europe, but today's circumstances provide the best possible incentives for adopting appropriate decisions.

Geography is becoming an increasingly crucial factor. Until 2022, Finland held a special place among Russia's neighbors as the "Russian threat" did not bear down on its population and elites so much. Unlike people in other EU countries, at the beginning of the current year, the majority of Finns believed that Russia would not directly intervene in the Ukraine conflict (Henley, 2022). After the February shock, Finland abruptly joined the camp of the most ardent supporters of anti-Russian sanctions, visa bans and arms supplies to Kiev (Standard Eurobarometer, 2022). On the whole, one cannot help but notice previously unseen unanimity on the sanctions front: restrictive measures are approved at such dialogue forums as the G7, and Western countries have even openly given up the most favored nation principle, one of the two fundamental norms of the WTO international trade regime.

Outside of Europe, it is noteworthy that the sanctions were joined by Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea, which had tried to avoid worsening relations with Russia in 2014. But they look at the world through a different lens: it is the Chinese threat that is the main source of their increased loyalty to the American project. Their example suggests that as long as Europe perceives Russia's actions as an acute threat, the EU countries may have trouble formulating a sovereign policy towards China.

It is true that Turkey keeps pursuing an independent policy, but in general, hegemony has increased substantially in 2022: the United States has practically not faced any resistance from its allies in implementing its initiatives. The crisis strengthens allied ties, allows countries to test economic war tools and scrap those elements of the old order that no longer suit the United States. Europe's chief diplomat Josep Borrell openly insists that it is necessary to "stop theological discussions about strategic autonomy" (Borrel, 2022). As a result,

the United States is entering a period of a new world order in the making with extremely loyal allies, who are ready not only to support it verbally, but also bear associated costs. ***We are witnessing the decline of the world order, at the origins of which was the United States, but no one can guarantee that the next world order will not be American again.*** None of the other contenders seeking to have a say on the future rules of the world order has such a massive allied resource.

At the same time, there is no reason to say that the current strengthening will continue in the long term. The Russian threat does not strengthen the material basis of American hegemony and does not help formulate a more attractive project. The conflict in Ukraine and the energy crisis are distracting the United States from China as the main contender for hegemony. At the moment, the strengthening of the EU's military power certainly benefits the United States, for this is exactly what Washington has been seeking for so long. However, if the crisis is resolved or at least effectively frozen (which now seems incredible, but is ultimately inevitable), and Europe stops fearing Russia, having managed to set its defense industry in motion by that time, its heated-up military-industrial complex will turn into Chekhov's gun, which will need a new use. This will make U.S. military support unnecessary, and given its high "price tag," even harmful. As a result, both carrots of the American project—economic development and security—will no longer work in Europe, and coercion alone will not be enough to maintain hegemony. However, a complete breakup between Europe and the United States is unlikely as it will require them to overcome the huge bureaucratic, inter-elite and commercial resistance generated by decades of transatlantic relations. And even if this rather unlikely scenario comes true, there is no guarantee that Russia will benefit from it.

Many think that the destruction of the world order will lead to the decline of the United States, but this is not necessarily so. The one who is strong rules a crumbling world, and the amount of military and economic resources possessed by the United States and its allies remains unsurpassed. The degradation of international institutions opens up opportunities for rewriting the rules. Over the past years, the

United States has consistently opposed free trade with preferences for developing countries, because this regime has allowed China to become a new superpower. Russia's military operation makes it possible to turn the basic principles of world trade into a selective instrument, rather than a universal good. While earlier American efforts to undermine the WTO regime met Europe's opposition, now they will face no obstacles, at least in relation to Russia.

On the other hand, the United States can hardly benefit from the erosion of a deeper layer of the international order embodied in the UN Charter. Indeed, previously, the U.S. was the only country that ignored the ban on the use of force to resolve international disputes. After Iranian missile strikes, the Azerbaijani offensive in Karabakh, Turkish interventions, and the Russian operation in Ukraine, the United States has lost its monopoly on violating international law, which it did not use wisely enough anyway.

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