

Executive Summary

22 April 2024



Strange new multipolarity: How does it impact Europe's stability and security?

Panel discussion in cooperation with the Ministry of Defence.

Opening:

Wolfgang Petritsch

President oiip

Discussants:

Stephanie Fenkart

Director of the International Institute for Peace (IIP)

Misha Glenny

Rector of the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM)

Jagannath Panda

Head of the Stockholm Center for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs (SCSA-IPA) at the Institute for Security & Development Policy (ISDP)

Moderation:

Thomas Eder

Post-Doc Researcher, oiip

Loïc Simonet

Post-Doc Researcher, oiip

Summary report authors: Fabian Fischer, Thomas Eder, Loïc Simonet and Vedran Džihčić.

Date: April 22, 2024, at the oiip

Keywords: Multipolarity, EU, International Order, Middle Powers, China, Russia

Key takeaways

- The international order has shifted from a unipolar moment after the end of the Cold War towards a pluralistic global order, making a shift of foreign policy and security strategies necessary, especially for the European Union
- Countries in the “Global South” and new middle powers are in key strategic positions, politically, economically, and geographically. Amidst geopolitical competition, they employ a hedging strategy and engage in issue-based alignment, rather than value-based ones. Europe ought to adopt a coherent and credible cooperation-based strategy towards rising economies, recognising their strategic importance.
- The world is greatly impacted by new conflicts, especially the Russia-Ukraine War as well as the Israel-Gaza War. For Europe to gain international support for its strategy to isolate Russia and support Israel, it must strike a balance between supporting the right to self-defence and condemning violations of international humanitarian law to maintain credibility in defending a rules-based international order.
- Emerging actors such as Russia, and China adopted a more assertive foreign policy, prioritising (to varying degrees) posturing and confrontation, which may be symptomatic for strongman autocracies trying to undermine the alleged Western-led global order.
- Amidst economic competition, the EU cannot solely rely on the US as their interests may not always align with European interests. It must engage in partnerships with countries of the “Global South” and adopt policies to avoid being outmanoeuvred by its economic competitors.
- Europe should adopt a coherent strategy to regain credibility as a defender of the rules-based order, based on its values outlined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union. It also needs to address questions such as enlargement, unanimity, and the future of its security policy to be able to address the global changes.

Main takeaways – Deutsch

- Die internationale Ordnung hat sich von einem unipolaren Moment nach dem Ende des Kalten Krieges hin zu einer pluralistischen globalen Ordnung verschoben, was eine Neuausrichtung der Außenpolitik und der Sicherheitsstrategien, insbesondere für die Europäische Union, erforderlich macht.
- Länder des „Globalen Südens“ und Mittelmächte befinden sich politisch, wirtschaftlich und geografisch in strategischen Schlüsselpositionen. Inmitten des geopolitischen Wettbewerbs verfolgen sie eine Absicherungsstrategie und orientieren sich eher an Interessen als an Werten. Europa sollte gegenüber den aufstrebenden Volkswirtschaften eine kohärente und glaubwürdige Strategie der Zusammenarbeit verfolgen und deren strategische Bedeutung anerkennen.
- Die Welt wird von neuen Konflikten, insbesondere dem Russland-Ukraine-Krieg und dem Israel-Gaza Krieg, stark beeinflusst. Damit Europa internationale Unterstützung für seine Strategie zur Isolierung Russlands und zur Unterstützung Israels erhält, muss es ein Gleichgewicht zwischen der Unterstützung des Rechts auf Selbstverteidigung und der Verurteilung von Verstößen gegen das humanitäre Völkerrecht finden, um seine Glaubwürdigkeit bei der Verteidigung einer auf Regeln basierenden internationalen Ordnung zu wahren.
- Aufstrebende Akteure wie Russland und China verfolgen eine selbstbewusstere Außenpolitik und setzen dabei (in unterschiedlichem Maße) auf Konfrontation, was für „strongman autocracies“, die versuchen, die vermeintlich vom Westen geführte Weltordnung zu untergraben, symptomatisch sein kann.
- Im wirtschaftlichen Wettbewerb kann sich die EU nicht allein auf die USA verlassen, da deren Interessen nicht immer mit den europäischen Interessen übereinstimmen. Sie muss Partnerschaften mit Ländern des "Globalen Südens" eingehen und Maßnahmen ergreifen, um nicht von ihren wirtschaftlichen Konkurrenten ausmanövriert zu werden.
- Europa sollte eine kohärente Strategie verfolgen, um seine Glaubwürdigkeit als Verfechter einer regelbasierten Ordnung wiederzuerlangen, die auf den in Artikel 2 des EU-Vertrags dargelegten Werten beruht. Es muss sich auch mit Fragen wie einer EU-Erweiterung, der Einstimmigkeit und der Zukunft seiner Sicherheitspolitik befassen, um den globalen Veränderungen begegnen zu können.

Introduction

A new global order is emerging as the moment of unipolarity has come to an end and is being replaced by a pluralistic one that necessitates a new foreign and security strategy, especially for European states. The return of large-scale warfare to the European continent in 2022 has initiated an epochal change or *Zeitenwende* as states like the Russian Federation increasingly ignore the UN Charter's prohibition of the use of force and democracy has been in retreat globally for years. Authoritarian states in the "Global South" have emerged and continue to challenge the liberal international order. New multilateral groupings like BRICS+ pose a direct challenge to established liberal intergovernmental forums such as the Group of Seven (G7) showcasing a newfound confidence of countries such as China, Russia, Brazil, and India.

Europe finds itself in precarious times. Its position as a global actor is decreasing while it is preoccupied with armed warfare in its neighbourhood. The ongoing war in Ukraine is paralysing for Europe which is trying to counter Russian aggression as well as trying to resist domestic pro-Russian actors from becoming too powerful. The Israel-Gaza War and Europe's support for Israel is alienating for a lot of countries in the "Global South" that call out a supposed Western hypocrisy in dealing with both armed conflicts. For the European Union to regain the status of a credible actor that defends the rule-based order, it needs to adopt a coherent approach to global conflicts, address questions concerning unanimity, the future of its security policy, further EU enlargement, and its role as a normative actor based on the values codified in Article 2.

To deal with the tough questions that the new pluralistic order brings as well as address how the new actors and global governance impact Europe's stability and security, the Austrian Institute for International Affairs (oiip), in cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Defence (bmlv) hosted a panel discussion on April 22, entitled "Strange new multipolarity: How does it impact Europe's stability and security?".

New armed conflicts are impacting the security of Europe

The return of large-scale warfare to the European continent in 2022 showcases this new, strange, and multilayered order according to Wolfgang Petritsch. Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014 was the first sign that the moment of unipolarity had ended, and countries were able to pursue their

revisionist agenda by using force. While Europe did impose sanctions on Russia as a response to the unprovoked violation of Ukraine's sovereignty, the EU failed to recognise the geopolitical shift. In a transitional period up to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russian armed forces, Europe was not ready to accept that a new type of Realpolitik had emerged. Strongman autocracies have exposed Europe's weaknesses, which failed to adequately halt Russia's advance in the first weeks of the invasion.

Misha Glenny noted that the invasion also saw the start of an information war. Ukraine managed to win over European support within a week, with Russia being viewed as a security threat by the rest of Europe, especially Moldova, the Baltics, and Poland. Non-aligned European countries such as Finland and Sweden joined NATO as a result, and countries such as Germany and Poland announced to rearm their militaries to be the backbone of defence for Europe. Meanwhile, Russia has proven successful in its attempt to win the information war in the "Global South". Glenny argued that long-standing relationships between leaders such as former South African President Jacob Zuma with Moscow, and a shared scepticism against the West resulted in the lack of support for both Ukraine and Europe's call for the imposition of wide-ranging sanctions against Russia. Countries in the "Global South" perceive the Russian-Ukrainian War as a regional conflict, rather than a global one. According to Stephanie Fenkart, the EU should rethink its role in the war. Even though it has acted as a significant actor in the past, it still does not consider itself a full participant, despite Vladimir Putin calling the War in Ukraine an "existential war against the West".

Following the terrorist attack of Hamas on October 7, 2023, Israel's invasion of the Gaza Strip unfolded a humanitarian catastrophe. Europe's historic alignment with Israel, has resulted in perceptions of hypocrisy in the "Global South". The International Court of Justice called for an immediate halt to the invasion and concluded that it is "plausible" that Israel might commit genocide in Gaza, followed by the International Criminal Court Prosecutor's application for arrest warrants against Hamas leaders, as well as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Minister of Defence Yoav Gallant. Under these circumstances, Europe's call for the adherence to international law, does not resonate with countries of the "Global South". The EU's failure to address the humanitarian catastrophe damages its relationship with developing countries and may accelerate the fragmentation of the international order.

As countries such as Russia and China are trying to position themselves for the Palestinian Cause, the West ought to strike a balance between supporting the right of self-defence and the condemnation of

violations of international humanitarian law. A streamlined approach to such issues will give Europe the credibility to defend a rules-based international order.

New emerging actors on the world stage

Emerging from this new pluralistic order are middle powers whose role is increasingly gaining importance vis-à-vis the traditional great powers. According to Jagannath Panda, amidst multipolarisation, the prominence of minilateral alignments that are based on shared interests rather than ideology has risen. Such groupings like the quadrilateral formats US-Japan-Australia-India and China-Russia-Iran-North Korea should be taken seriously, as they continue to shape global security. New formats such as BRICS do not define themselves through a common political ideology, but rather their opposition to the liberal rules-based order that they perceive to be dominated by the West and as having been pushed on them. While its establishment is perceived as a challenge to the US and Europe, Asian countries saw BRICS' formation in 2008 as positive for regional stability and security amid conflicts in the Himalayas or the South China Sea.

There is no clear definition of "Middle Power", but countries such as India, Indonesia, Brazil, Turkey, as well as Japan, South Korea, and Australia are frequently mentioned in that context. Their foreign policy differs, yet their strength allows them to use a hedging strategy amidst the great power competition between the United States, China, and since 2022 Russia. Middle powers hold a special role when it comes to addressing global challenges such as the COVID-19-pandemic, the rise of Artificial Intelligence, the Climate Crisis, as well as regional and global stability said Stephanie Fenkart. To tackle those challenges, the European Union should take note of the middle powers and rising economies as they are often positioned in strategic geographical and geopolitical positions. According to Dr. Panda, a more serious form of engagement, and the forging of new cooperative relationships, are very much required. The elevation to a new level of EU-India relations in recent years, despite differing views on geopolitical challenges such as the Russia-Ukraine War, may be a showcase of smart statecraft. Further developing ways to cooperate with middle powers and the "Global South" such as the Global Gateway Initiative may signal that Europe can navigate this new international order and be a meaningful actor in it.

Changing global landscape

As the countries of the “Global South” have emerged as vital actors within the international order, frameworks outside the Western-led system such as the SCO and BRICS expanded. Many countries are becoming reluctant to rely on the US as a partner due to its domestic situation; though Trump’s foreign policy and rhetoric may actually be more honest than those of other US presidents. Regional organisations like the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) may crumble as democracy has been in retreat globally for years. Strongman autocrats have reintroduced a type of diplomacy that speaks through strength and co-optation rather than dialogue. Since the onset of the Russia-Ukraine War, Russian diplomats have adopted a significantly more assertive and confrontational style, prioritising aggressive posturing and spectacle instead of traditional diplomacy. This can also be observed in diplomats from China whose style got coined “wolf-warrior diplomacy”, but also in North Korea and Iran. This is symptomatic of a broader shift in geopolitics that included renouncing traditional diplomacy in favour of competitive and assertive styles; a “Gramscian moment”, where the old order is dying, a new one struggles to be born, and we live in an age of monsters.

One aspect of the new order still struggling, is the tension between China and India within BRICS. India is not only a member of BRICS, but also a member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (“the Quad”) with Australia, Japan, and the US, complicating the Indian positioning. Generally, the scope of cooperation among the BRICS powers remains limited and fuzzy. Member countries don’t have a common political ideology, and their common feature of opposition to a Western-led order is pierced by India’s membership in the Quad.

The economic competition between China, Europe, and the US is increasing amid this shift in geopolitics. The US-China Strategic Competition has reached Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, the Indo-Pacific as well as Europe itself. Both actors adopted new industrial and protectionist policies and became more assertive in their foreign policy. These include the Biden administration’s “Inflation Reduction Act”, adopted on 16 August 2022, which subsidises US carmakers and may violate WTO rules. It is evident that US interests do not always fully align with Europe’s; something that should be kept in mind, as a fully-fledged trade war between China and Europe may be imminent.

The bilateral relationship between the US and China is the most significant at the moment due to their strategic competition involving technological supremacy. US allies in the Pacific such as Japan and South Korea, but also Taiwan are key nations when it comes to high-tech research and development e.g. regarding semiconductors. The US is keen to avoid a Chinese invasion of Taiwan in part due to the

vital importance of Taiwan's semiconductor industry. In fact, the Taiwan issue may be even more serious for India than it is for the US, because if China were to occupy Taiwan, it could then turn its focus to the Himalayas and its territorial disputes with India. The Russia-Ukraine War prevented a full shift of US foreign policy towards the Indo-Pacific, but that trend still continues and the risk of a future armed conflict in the region remains significant.

Existing institutions and approaches ought to change with ongoing shifts in the geopolitical landscape. New emerging powers ought to be taken seriously by Europe, and engagement with countries of the "Global South" needs to be increased. The EU must offer a credible mode of cooperation to address global challenges such as climate change and the growing dissatisfaction with an alleged Western-dominated international order by countries of the "Global South". Europe's own transition towards a low-carbon economy requires such cooperation, which needs to be prioritised in foreign policy making to not be outmanoeuvred by the EU's economic competitors China and the United States. The EU should help improve the credibility of multilateral institutions to address key conflicts. The UN model should not be dismissed, but reforms are needed to address the new geopolitical landscape. The usefulness of the UN Security Council may be disputed, as resentment is growing amongst countries like India and Brazil, for being excluded from permanent membership and veto power.