

EUROPEAN SECURITY AFTER THE WAR IN UKRAINE

A symposium organised by LSE IDEAS and
T.wai - Torino World Affairs Institute,
in cooperation with Department of Cultures, Politics
and Society of the University of Turin

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On 3 May 2023, the London School of Economics' think tank LSE IDEAS, the Turin-based think tank T.wai – Torino World Affairs Institute, and the Department of Cultures, Politics and Society of the University of Turin held their third joint international symposium.

Titled '*European Security after the War in Ukraine*', the symposium was organized around three thematic panels:

01 **The New International Order?
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Strategic/Systemic Threats**
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OPENING REMARKS

As pointed out by **Stefano Ruzza** in his opening remarks, the war in Ukraine has sparked lively debates about international relations and the future of the international order. While posing a challenge in itself, the return of war in Europe has also shed light on broader, and perhaps deeper, issues affecting European security.


The primary concern is, of course, the failure of conflict prevention. While in the past Europe has demonstrated its relative capacity to deter conflict, the war in Ukraine has prompted reflections on future prevention strategies. At the same time, the events in Eastern Europe have revealed technical deficiencies within European and Western defence industries, which are not able to manufacture enough ammunitions to sustain conventional confrontations at the scale we have been witnessing with the Russian offensive in Ukraine.

Broadening the perspectives beyond technical aspects, the events in Eastern Europe have brought to the forefront a series of non-traditional security concerns. Among these, energy security and the need to diversify fossil fuel provisions amid a green transition have certainly played a paramount role. At the same time, incidents like those related to the Nord Stream pipelines underscore the interconnectedness of energy security with the protection of critical infrastructure, including undersea cables crucial to the global IT industry. Food security has also become a key issue due to the war's impact on wheat exports, affecting the Global South and potentially leading to increased migratory flows. Economic security is also at stake, as global value chains and trade face challenges in a world of sanctions and diminished trust.

To address this wide array of issues, Europe must deliberate on domestic and international institutional considerations. Domestically, the debate revolves around the effectiveness of different political regimes in providing security. The first panel delved into the relationship between democracies and authoritarian regimes, exploring the relative strengths and shortcomings associated with these governance systems and pondering the possibility of peaceful coexistence. At the international level, institutions such as the EU and NATO are increasingly under scrutiny, especially vis-à-vis the increasingly assertive role of China and Russia in the global arena, as discussed by the speakers of the second and third panels respectively.

THE NEW INTERNATIONAL ORDER? DEMOCRACIES VS AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

For two centuries liberalism has been predicated on Western economic and military power. However, despite its efforts, the West has failed to democratize the world. As **Christopher Coker** poignantly recalls, attempts to foster human rights in Afghanistan and Libya have ended in dismal failure, and ‘the world’s discontented no longer have much faith in the vision of progress under liberal democratic trustees because the record of these liberal democratic trustees has been awful in the last ten or fifteen years’. In 2022, at the second in-person Quad Leaders’ Summit, Joe Biden praised Narendra Modi for his commitment to ‘making sure democracies deliver, because’ – he said – ‘that’s what this is about: democracies versus autocracies’. Yet Coker points out how surprising it is that Modi’s India is portrayed and lauded as a democratic ally against autocratic China and Russia: ‘Modi has turned the invader of Ukraine into India’s largest supplier of oil and military hardware, while Indian state-owned corporations have begun buying shares in Russian firms left behind by Western companies’. Regrettably, Modi himself is not a democratic leader and his India seems to be rapidly becoming a ‘former democracy’ like Erdogan’s Turkey and the many countries that have ceased to be democracies in the last ten years. As Coker remarks, ‘one may say that democracy is on the way out and autocracy is on the way in’.



As a matter of fact, we are entering a post-Western world that may well turn into a post-liberal one. Faced with such a gloomy scenario, some fundamental questions become particularly salient. First of all, we should contemplate whether the concept of human rights still holds weight and, taking up one of the themes discussed at the [2022 symposium](#), we should ask ourselves whether Western values are universal: 'at a time of value pluralism, with more and more countries asserting their values as distinct from or even superior to Western values, we have to pose the question: is it time we stop talking about human rights?'

To tackle the issue, Coker reflects on whether human rights stem from culture or biology. Human beings are not born with a moral grammar wired into their neural circuits through evolution, akin to Noam Chomsky's 'universal grammar' in language. While we are born with the capacity for language and communication, Coker argues, 'there is no universal moral grammar, there never has been, for the principal reason that all our values are inherently normative, so they are entirely cultural'. Throughout history, and still in the present, societies have committed heinous acts, such as murder in the name of God, honour killings, genocide, and slavery. From Coker's perspective, it is crucial to note that these actions are not driven by biological programming; rather, they are driven by real or perceived cultural demands. In essence, even though we share genetic heritage with individuals from diverse backgrounds, we do not share the same cultural DNA. Acknowledging this fact would help us realize that the concept of human rights represents a cultural and historical discourse the West has been engaged with at least since the Enlightenment and the founding document of the French Revolution, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.

The idea of *universal* values is fundamentally at odds with Russian and Chinese perspectives. Both countries are now challenging Western interpretations of history, asserting that Western historical experiences do not align with their own. Russia is becoming 'an outcast from the European world it has been seeking to join for the last 250 years', while China is reframing the international order through the lens of 'harmonious inclusionism' instead of abiding by the precepts of international liberalism.

For both countries the overarching contention is thus that universal values are essentially imperialist, and this claim, Coker argues, 'has enormous resonance in the Global South to the point that 75 per cent of the human population at the moment lives in countries that are either on Russia's side in the Ukraine war or do not want to take sides because they believe it is "a European war between white Europeans"'.

For its part, the sole country capable of upholding the so-called rules-based liberal order, the United States, finds itself in a difficult position due to internal divisions and polarization. Consequently, it lacks the strength, political will and self-confidence to take substantial action.


A second, fundamental challenge to the liberal order comes from within the Western world itself, as there are elements within Western societies that do not embrace the human rights discourse. This poses a dilemma harking back to the Declaration of the Rights of Man *and of the Citizen* (italics added), which introduced the revolutionary idea that human rights exist solely within a political context, i.e. 'the Hegelian idea that we do not inherently possess rights, but we can insist that we do: we can rewrite history, or even biology, and assert that human rights are innate'. However, Coker continues, 'we have these rights because we have been telling this story for more than two centuries, but we have been telling this very story because of the political context – and this political concept is democracy'. However, this perspective becomes complicated for France, a nation that also champions laicity, emphasizing a distinct separation between church and state. This becomes problematic when dealing with minority communities or groups that are averse to the human rights discourse due to its secular nature, which does not accommodate religion easily.

Yet, returning to the question of whether human rights have a biological or cultural basis, this is where religion becomes significant. When people are primed with God-related words such as 'sacred' and 'divine', they tend to exhibit more pro-social and humanitarian behaviours. It is thus impossible to imagine *homo sapiens* without some concept of religion, and 'this is why natural selection insists that we are religious'. Consider the idea of nation-state, once regarded as sacred: throughout history, millions of people were willing to sacrifice

their lives for it. In contemporary Western Europe very few people would make such a sacrifice because the nation-state has been desacralized, becoming an almost entirely secular and utilitarian entity. Nevertheless, neuroimaging reveals that sacred values are processed in the region of the brain dedicated to rule-bound behaviour rather than utilitarian calculation. This means that traditional social science theories, such as rational choice theory, fall short in explaining why people are willing to make extreme sacrifices for their beliefs. Instead, this can be better understood through a biological lens. This insight highlights a significant vulnerability in Western societies when it comes to defending their professed values: 'religion does not deal in the empirical valuation of costs and consequences. Our politics, by contrast, are entirely about costs and consequences and our politicians are entirely utilitarian'.

Reflecting on the future of the antagonism between democracies and autocracies, Coker identifies two scenarios. First, if the West aims to preserve some semblance of liberal values in the global system it has constructed, it could dispense with 'human rights' and shift the focus to 'human wrongs'. Indeed, while consensus on what is right may prove elusive, phenomena such as global warming and slavery are unequivocally wrong and there is not much contention between democracies and autocracies regarding these matters. The second scenario involves the West maintaining its commitment to human rights within its own 'borders': the West would remain steadfast in its beliefs, but it would refrain from intervening in the world, relinquish attempts at regime change or nation-building and give up on its efforts to promote a rules-based liberal order at the global scale. Drawing from the insights of the American philosopher Richard Rorty, Coker poignantly concludes that:

Even if liberalism fails to take root in other parts of the world, this shouldn't lead us to abandon liberalism at home, just as the Western Roman Empire's impending demise did not lead St Augustine to renounce Christianity. While this analogy may not be particularly comforting, it underscores the idea that we should 'live without illusions, without becoming disillusioned', as famously put forth by Gramsci. It is essential not to become disillusioned about the values we hold, but we must also acknowledge that these values may not resonate with those beyond the Western world. Whether our values find traction elsewhere is ultimately a matter for others to decide, not for us to dictate.



Yet according to **Adrian Pabst**, what we are witnessing on the global stage is not just the crumbling of liberal internationalism but in fact the failure of dualistic thinking. Today it may seem that the Cold War opposition between capitalism and communism has been replaced by a confrontation between democratic and authoritarian countries, as in Ukraine, where a developing democracy is defending itself against an authoritarian invader. Yet even though such binary distinctions often appear convincing and almost intuitive, they lack a solid foundation, and substituting one binary – capitalism or communism – for another – democracies or authoritarian regimes – will not address the issue. For Pabst, the world we live in today is not bipolar, nor unipolar, and perhaps not even multipolar. Rather, it is a world of disorder that takes three forms: 1) the rivalry between great powers holding resources and civilizational norms; 2) the absence of clear rules governing geopolitics, with varied and evolving interpretations of norms such as human rights and international law; and 3) an emerging tyranny linked to tech totalitarianism, ‘resembling a global panopticon of permanent surveillance’. In a nutshell, the real threats in the world depicted by Pabst are anarchy and tyranny, and not the opposition between democracy and authoritarianism.


To be sure, there is no political or moral equivalence between democracies and authoritarian regimes, and there are indeed many differences between the two. However, Pabst points out, ‘liberal democracies in the West and beyond are becoming increasingly authoritarian, while China and Russia, supposedly authoritarian regimes, are essentially autocracies with tyrannical characteristics. We should be more precise with our concepts’.

The increase in liberal democracies’ authoritarianism is not a new phenomenon. In fact, democratic politics is inherently unstable, and this instability has been recognized since the times of Plato and Aristotle, who warned us about the messiness of democracy. Democracy always risks sliding into oligarchy, demagoguery, anarchy and tyranny – ‘these are the four “demons” always threatening democracy at any age’, as already argued in 2019 by Pabst himself in his book *The Demons of Liberal Democracy*. The tragedy of contemporary democracy, Pabst continues, lies in equating democratic rule largely with formally free and fair elections even as the

substance of democratic debate and norms is eroding. Consequently, while ballots still appear to offer some choice between different political parties and different policies, the reality is that nowadays elections primarily revolve around personalities, and democratic politics is dominated by spin and public relations. The result is a political landscape devoid of competence and conviction, where 'nothing gets done, no one believes in anything'. What is new today is the lack of belief in democracy and a parallel decline of self-belief in the Western tradition and civilization, particularly among the young. In 2022, the UK-based think tank Onward found that a significant proportion of 18- to 34-year-olds would favour strong leadership that bypasses parliament elections or military rule as a governing method. These authoritarian tendencies are not confined to the young, nor to the UK or illiberal democracies such as Hungary or Poland; the trend is evident in the strength of far-left and radical-right parties and even in the behaviour of liberal leaders such as Emmanuel Macron in France, who regularly uses constitutional provisions to bypass parliament when passing controversial laws and ignores popular unrest, as with the Yellow Vest movement in 2018 and 2019. All the same, authoritarian measures linked to state surveillance and biomedical control are just as easily implemented within political structures that remain formally democratic, as they are in countries such as China. As crises become increasingly normalized, emergency rule and the state of exception become the new norm, in autocracies as well as in democracies.

The 'democracies versus autocracies' binary has been a constant in American imagery and foreign policy dating back to Woodrow Wilson, and it is worth remembering, Pabst says, that when he visited London on Christmas Day in 1918, President Wilson declared to the assembled Court of St James's, to the King and to the whole of the British establishment the end of the world of empires and the rise of the nation-state, clearly signalling America's commitment to leading the new nation-state era against old empires. Except, Pabst points out: 'large nation-states like the US are and always will be great powers with spheres of influence wielding imperial power – and we can see this not only in Iraq and Afghanistan but throughout American history since the Monroe Doctrine'.

Great powers exert imperial influence in at least three ways. First, all great powers strive to stabilize their volatile




neighbourhoods, often referred to as their backyards (e.g. the US in Central and Latin America, China in the East and South China Sea, Russia in the broader Caucasus and Central Asia, and the EU in the Balkans and Libya). Despite the differences, these efforts share common objectives. Economically, great powers aim to secure national resources and market access through international trade or state-driven infrastructure projects, such as Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative, while resource-rich areas like the Arctic or Siberia become sites of great power rivalry. Geoculturally, each great power pursues some form of civilizing mission, spreading specific ideas, institutions, values and historical traditions. This includes Wilsonian idealism promoting democracy, the EU's normative project in the wider European neighbourhood, the 'Russian World' project and China's near-Confucian project of harmonious development. Every nation-state projects its power beyond its borders, which is why Russia and China have dispensed with the idea of nation-state and shifted towards the label of 'civilizational states' – a concept that better reflects the reality that nation-states always project power beyond their borders and thus that the 'democracies versus autocracies' framework does not fully capture the complex dynamics at play.

Nowadays the US and China are possibly the two sole superpowers, and a new bipolarity may indeed be consolidating. Yet, Pabst argues, both countries have their own fragilities, and 'the world is considerably more uncertain and unstable than during most of the Cold War – thus, the analogy of a new bipolarity between the US and China replacing the old communism–capitalism divide is misplaced'. To be sure, the US will remain a great power for some time to come, but even so, its decline is evident, and neither American technology nor military might can reverse this trend. The nation is deeply divided and polarized, making it unlikely that the US can reassert its global influence and hegemony, and construct a new international order that gains the support of others. Rather, it seems that American democracy 'is increasingly paralysed and gets very little done', with the judiciary weaponized for political struggles, the entire political system facing internal scrutiny and 'a legitimacy crisis that appears even more severe than the crisis of democracy because it is the very legitimacy of the American constitution that is now in question'. Moreover, the implosion of American authority at the domestic level has

had international consequences, leading to a retreat from the global stage. China, on the other hand, is becoming more assertive: Beijing, and not the West, is the only actor currently capable of restraining Russia, despite its rather vague proposals for peace in Ukraine largely favouring Moscow. In this sense, a post-Western international system has been in operation for a while. However, the strategies of the US (or of the West more broadly) seem to be 'obsessed and fixated on a world that belongs to the past'. Of course, China has its own vulnerabilities, including weak demography, economic challenges stemming from its zero-COVID policy, and a lack of military combat experience since the Sino-Vietnamese War of 1979 – while the US, for all its limitations and disastrous interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, nevertheless retains formidable military capabilities. Still, the West is unprepared for a potential conflict with China over Taiwan due to the offshoring of much of its industrial base, relying on both China and Taiwan for critical technological supplies. Even if the West were to implement a national industrial strategy, it would take decades to rebalance the situation. From this perspective, the world today is akin to the prelude to the First World War because new technologies, however transformative, have not altered the fundamental rivalry over scarce resources, whether they are metals in Africa or other resources in Siberia and Central Asia. In fact, the Ukraine war can be seen as a proxy conflict where resources are as important as ideology.

In sum, the simple opposition between democracy and autocracy is an inadequate lens to understand what is, in reality, a spectrum of 'democratic states at one end, tyranny at the other, and numerous hybrid regimes in between – the belief in the survival and reassertion of a global liberal, rules-based order is just hubristic'. Our contemporary condition oscillates between anarchy and tyranny, both nationally and internationally. For the past four to five decades, much of Western politics has centred on the role of the state in supporting the free market. This free market fundamentalism – attributed to Thatcher, Reagan and their successors up until recently – constantly shifts between anarchy and the need for increased state control or technological surveillance. We observe social fragmentation, even in countries such as China, where individualism has grown due to the importation of capitalism, alongside a resurgence of ethno-nationalism. This pattern of oscillation between extremes, anarchy and new



forms of tyranny, is evident. Our predicaments are somewhat paradoxical, and addressing our contemporary condition may require a tragic realism, as suggested by Robert Kaplan. Perhaps, Pabst ponders, 'we have to think tragically to avoid tragedy'. This might involve exercising restraint and carefully considering military and economic interventions. However, if the goal is to build an order that aligns with national interests as well as our cultural and civilizational identity, we need more than just realism. Idealism plays a vital role, 'and idealism cannot be the monopoly of liberal ideology alone'. The question is whether the re-emergence of culture and civilization at the heart of geopolitics can lead to new forms of idealism capable of restraining economic and military power and eventually shaping principles and practices for peaceful coexistence. For Pabst, it is unlikely that liberalism, or the Russian or Chinese alternatives to liberalism, will achieve this, but:

Perhaps, over time, something more aligned with national cultures and shared civilizations will emerge. What is evident is that the geopolitical pivot revolves around civilization and the fundamental questions of what makes us as humans and citizens. These fundamental questions about how we coexist within societies, both domestically and internationally, are more critical than the simple binary of democracy versus autocracy.

Adding further historical considerations to the discussion, **Vittorio Emanuele Parsi** argues that what we are witnessing is the third phase of a long-standing contest between democracies and autocracies to transform and shape the world order. The Second World War represented the first turning point, with a small number of democracies, most notably the US and the UK, prevailing over an array of nations pursuing alternative visions for a world order that were fundamentally illiberal. Nowadays, we still live in a world heavily influenced by norms and concepts emerging from the end of the Second World War, and even the scope, set-up and operating methods of contemporary international institutions are all made of liberal fabrics. In this sense, Parsi points out,

the West tends to underestimate its remarkable power to influence and to shape global narratives. In fact, when it comes to understanding what the rules governing the international system are, and what the meaning of those rules is, Western societies typically still hold the reins, 'like ancient priests of a deity long gone, yet the only one we have'.

The second phase of the competition between democracies and autocracies unfolded during the Cold War. The Cold War was not an outright military conflict. Rather, it was a power struggle out of which democracies emerged victorious once again. The end of the Cold War can be described in many ways, Parsi admits, 'but ultimately it represented the opportunity to make the emerging liberal order a truly world order'. Looked at from this perspective, the end of the Cold War paved the way for what we now refer to as 'globalization'. With the triumphs of democracies and the globalization of the liberal world, the West thought the battle was finally over. Yet, this assumption proved incorrect and the West now finds itself countering the resurgence of authoritarianism in a third phase of the 'democracies versus autocracies' contest.

In this third phase, the core objectives remain the same: transforming the world and, for liberal democracies, reinforcing an international order based on rules and institutions. Yet China and Russia do not fit neatly into the categories of past authoritarian states, such as communist or Nazi regimes. They are not just states dominated by an authoritarian mentality: they have a civilizational project for the world – a project that may be viewed as confused, flawed and unsettling, but a project Chinese and Russian elites strongly believe in, whereas 'in the West we no longer seem to hold a strong faith in the democratic system'.

For the first time since the end of the Cold War, democracies and the liberal global order they created face an existential threat. For Europe, the most immediate threat comes from the war in Ukraine and the acts of a state, Russia, which operates without hesitation in employing the prerogatives traditionally associated with states. However, according to Parsi, the more intricate issue pertains to the lack of awareness among large portions of Western societies that the ordinary life most people enjoy is intimately connected with the existence, strength and resilience of democratic institutions.

In fact, for Parsi, the most critical aspect underpinning current debates on whether Europe should continue to support the Ukrainian resistance against the Russian invasion, is people's (un)willingness to act on democratic ideas so that:

The crux of the current situation is that we do not embody a genuine democracy: if we were a true democracy, we would be more egalitarian, rule-based, institutionally grounded, and dedicated to defending freedom and values not only at home but around the world.

Parsi describes this issue as the emergence of a 'YouDemocracy', an idealized version of democracy that cuts out the challenges of real democracy much like YouPorn cuts out the messiness and unidealized aspects of sexual encounters. This idealization of democracy is leading us to a sort of 'Wilsonian suicide' whereby the memories of the first two phases of the 'democracies versus autocracies' battle are fading and the success in promoting the idea of democracy has pushed some people in the West to question whether they are indeed living in a democracy and wonder why they should sacrifice their rights, their well-being or even their lives for it.

Underpinning this attitude is an inherent tension between the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the fact that to enjoy those rights individuals must become active citizens. As Parsi explains:

Over the past 250 years, liberalism has transformed needs into rights and sought to protect them through a democratic exercise of power. If we consider democracy as a gentler method for exercising power over people, we can grasp the link between laws and institutions, their shortcomings and our daily lives. Sometimes, we place too much faith in the universal rights of humanity and neglect the necessity of being active citizens to define, defend and uphold those rights.


Hence, from Parsi's standpoint, what is at stake now is our ability to fulfil our duties and responsibilities and 'this, in a liberal world, is a free choice'.

NATO AND THE EU AS SECURITY PROVIDERS

As mentioned in the opening remarks, the events in Eastern Europe have put international organizations under the spotlight. NATO, in particular, has recently seen a revitalization after the turbulence engendered by the Trump presidency and after being dubbed 'brain-dead' by President Macron in 2019. 'Crises provoked by a rising external threat tend to reinvigorate alliances', argues **Mats Berdal**, 'and NATO has demonstrated a robust commitment and a unified response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, even though, beneath the surface, military and political challenges remain'.

From a military perspective, the reorientation of NATO from crisis management to deterrence and collective defence began in 2014, at the Wales Summit, and gained significant momentum after the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Since then, NATO has created four new battle groups and deployed them along Russia's border, scaling up to brigade level. The concept of NATO operations has shifted from 'deterrence by retaliation' to 'deterrence by denial' geared towards defending every inch of territory. At the same time, military adaptation has prompted a re-evaluation of neglected areas such as air defence and ammunition stockpiles, which has led to a shift away from a 'just-in-time' supply approach. Even more significant is NATO's expanding membership, with Finland and Sweden eager to seek formal security guarantees by joining the Alliance, thus altering the so-called 'Nordic balance' that has been in place since the 1950s.

In light of these developments, the reinvigorated alliance has temporarily reduced capacity for Russia's offensive action, but



the real concerns now revolve around challenges to crisis stability and the dangers of inadvertent escalation. In fact, as Berdal explains, threats to crisis stability have been exacerbated by three factors, all brought into sharper relief by the war in Ukraine: first, the rapid advancements in long-range precision-guided munitions and delivery systems, including ballistic and hypersonic missiles systems, and unmanned vehicles, which have reduced strategic depth and warning times, thereby increasing the vulnerability of fixed and mobile targets; second, the weakening and near-collapse of arms control regimes, including confidence-building mechanisms; and third, environmental and resource-related pressures, which interact with the wider great power balance to create new arenas of rivalry and strategic competition (e.g. the melting of polar ice opening new commercial opportunities and sea routes in the geo-strategically sensitive High North).


From a political point of view, the picture is possibly even more complex. Despite NATO's condemnation of Russia and its substantial support to Ukraine, diverse attitudes coexist within the Alliance. Delving deeper into geopolitical considerations on the future of European security, the US's primary concern is to prevent escalation, particularly to a full-scale, nuclear conflict with Russia. As Berdal notes, 'behind the scenes, significant communication has occurred between Russia and Western powers, emphasizing the critical importance of avoiding such escalation'. This helps explain why the support provided to Ukraine has been more measured than the Ukrainians would have preferred: the fear of potential escalation to full-scale conflict between NATO and Russia and, worse still, nuclear confrontation, has weighed on US policies and led the administration to hold back on the delivery of certain weapon systems. Beyond the US, the Baltic and Eastern European states, except Hungary, stress the need to reassess relations with Russia, which they perceive as an inherently expansionist and untrustworthy power, at all levels. On the other hand, other NATO members, particularly in Southern and Western Europe, wish to keep the lines of communication open, not wishing to sever all avenues for political dialogue with Russia. While these divisions within NATO have been successfully managed until now, they are likely to become more pronounced when discussing the endgame in Ukraine. Wars have historically ended when one side secures a decisive victory on the battlefield, when a political settlement is reached between

adversaries or when, in the absence of victory by one side or a settlement, a ceasefire is agreed; as Berdal argues:

In this case, a complete victory or immediate political settlement seems unlikely. A 'frozen' conflict or de facto armistice might be the eventual outcome and, if so, key issues such as the status of Crimea will need to be addressed. Deep-seated differences within the Alliance regarding Crimea's status will require careful consideration and resolution.

Differences in attitudes towards China are even more pronounced. While the US perceives Russia as a declining power, Washington views Beijing as a long-term 'strategic peer competitor'. Both Trump and Biden have sought to decouple China from certain aspects of globalization, notably by imposing export control regimes aimed at restricting Chinese access to advanced technology (including high-grade computer chips vital in the battle for artificial intelligence dominance). The UK, too, has emphasized the importance of securing access to technology and strategic materials, and, more generally, reducing the vulnerability of global supply chains. In its most recent update of national security policy, the UK government sees China as nothing less than an 'epoch-defining and systemic challenge ... across almost every aspect of national life and government policy'.

Likewise, NATO's 2022 strategic concept acknowledges China's intent to control critical sectors, including infrastructures, raw materials and supply chains. Yet, within the Alliance, views are more varied. Some Western leaders have been much less openly critical of China: Macron's balanced approach towards Beijing, for instance, has raised concerns among Central and Eastern European countries. The EU's engagement with China further highlights the diversity of perspectives. In sum, Berdal concludes, 'while Russia currently commands focus due to immediate concerns on the military front, in the long term, relations and policies towards China present an arguably more complex set of alliance-management challenges'.



Continuing the discussion on the implications of the war in Ukraine and its aftermath for the governance of European security, **Alessandra Russo** draws attention to the partial amnesia that seems to have characterized the public debates so far:

In the past year we have been so immersed in a discursive trope around the alleged return of conventional warfare and geopolitics that we seem to have forgotten that the war in Ukraine started well before the events of 24 February 2022.

In fact, until very recently the conflict in Ukraine had been largely overlooked in favour of other, arguably more pressing, issues: concerns over the potential security repercussions of the Arab Springs, the migration crisis and the related focus on the Mediterranean dislocated EU strategic thinking and confined Ukraine, and Eastern Europe at large, to a second-order priority. As a result, the EU hardly engaged in a comprehensive debate on the intimate relation between its security and that of its eastern neighbours, thereby ‘forgetting’ all the societal insecurities, protracted conflicts and separatisms that punctuate the region.


Though it was only *after* 2022 that the EU began prioritizing the security dimension of its strategic vision for the Eastern Partnership (as epitomized by the Joint Declaration on EU–NATO Cooperation released in January 2023), the EU has been undertaking a series of crisis management actions in Ukraine since 2014. These actions, according to Russo, have shaped the way in which the EU currently thinks about Ukraine and its eastern neighbourhood. Most notably, the Ukrainian crisis in 2014 marked a significant shift in EU security discourse and institutional practice: it served as a testing ground for innovative institutional changes in crisis management procedures. Specifically, a new instrument was introduced to guide the EU’s approach to European security crises: the Political Framework for Crisis Approach (PFCA).

The PFCA outlines crisis parameters, motives for collective action and response options, urging the EU to define an official narrative for any given crisis before intervening. The European External Action Service (EEAS) described the PFCA

as setting the political context of a crisis; articulating its nature and the rationale for EU action based on interests, objectives and values; and identifying suitable instruments for action.

The PFCA was first applied to Ukraine in June 2014; however, it failed to provide strategic planning for EU crisis management interventions. Released to the political and security community in May 2014, and later accessible to the public, the PFCA was based on empirical data collected during a preparatory mission to Ukraine in the spring and summer of 2014. Unfortunately, many insights and recommendations from this mission were not effectively integrated into the PFCA, due to the attempt to reconcile them with member states' national interests. Most notably, the final document provided an ambiguous and ambivalent definition of the events in Ukraine. As Russo explains, 'the events were not defined as "war" nor as "conflict", but rather as a "humanitarian crisis", a "security crisis" and a "human rights crisis"'. Only a few weeks later, another EU document that was meant to lay the groundwork for the deployment of the security sector reform mission in Ukraine even refrained from defining the 'crisis' as such. Instead, it framed the ongoing events in Ukraine as a political or security 'situation', attributing Russia's continued interference to a deeply dysfunctional and corrupt domestic governance structure in Ukraine. As Russo points out, this definitional ambiguity could not provide a sound basis for the strategic thinking and planning that goes into the EU's crisis management interventions. Even more importantly, Russo continues, 'it weakened the EU's ability to re-order and reshape its security architecture in the wake of a conflict at its borders'.

Despite these issues, these documents were important for two main reasons. First, they defined the EU response to the crisis in Ukraine in terms of EU interests. Transcending norms and values, they emphasized the fact that having well-governed countries on the EU's borders was in the interests of the EU. Second, and relatedly, the EU framed its threat as coming from *within* its neighbours. According to Russo, 'this shift in framing was crucial in definitional terms, influencing how EU security has been practised in subsequent years'. Drawing from her research in Ukraine between 2016 and 2019, Russo recalls how at the time her interlocutors expressed their disappointment with the European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM), which from their standpoint did not meet Ukrainian expectations. Indeed,



Ukrainian leaders anticipated a mission akin to the one deployed in Georgia in 2008, involving monitoring and patrolling units near the front line. Within the EU, however, the design of the mission in Ukraine was influenced by negotiations and compromises among member states: some sought a transformative presence in Ukraine to implement security sector reform in the country; other EU member states, such as Italy, were concerned that such an endeavour would have diverted resources from the EU's southern neighbourhood. Much like the PFCA and related documents, the EUAM was haunted by a definitional problem: the EU's definition of 'security sector reform' excluded military actors, whereas in Ukraine's definition, military and defence were integral to the 'security sector'.

Moreover, all the key informants interviewed by Russo complained about the EU's lack of understanding of the nature of the conflict in Ukraine and lamented the EU's inability to define it as such. In sum, the EU's ambiguous and ambivalent definition, coupled with its discursive framing of the conflict in Ukraine, had a tangible and disappointing impact on how the EU decided to intervene. Moving forward, discourses continued to shape practices even as the EU's narrative on its security vis-à-vis Ukraine and the eastern neighbourhood underwent a redefinition. Since 2014, the discourse on European security has increasingly centred on concepts of 'hybrid traps', 'hybrid warfare' and 'hybrid war'. As Russo argues, 'these "hybrid" adjectives helped the EU grapple with the inconceivability of war, institutionalised "the taboo of war", and paved the way for a security strategy founded on uncertainty, regarding war's nature, dangers and threats'.


In essence, the development of EU strategies and priorities since 2014 proceeded more 'by stealth' than 'by design', as Ursula Schroeder wrote in 2009. Security strategies should typically specify security interests, encapsulate a deep understanding of security, identify the main recipients of security policies and articulate the nexus between security objectives and security instruments. However, EU security strategies lacked such a detailed articulation from 2014 until 2022, and now, Russo continues, 'the question is whether the more recent events in Ukraine truly served as a wake-up call for the EU to start thinking strategically and finally articulate its objectives and instruments concerning European security'. A few developments seem to lean in this direction:

the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, published in March 2022, emphasizes the necessity of defending the European security order and reinvigorating discussions on the meaning of security in terms of strategy development. A year later, the inaugural Schuman Security and Defence Forum took place in Brussels, offering a potential site for strategy development, while the new Civilian CSDP [Common Security and Defence Policy] Compact underscores the centrality of EU civilian missions in assisting neighbours and bolstering the EU's reputation, credibility and legitimacy as a security actor.

Another change underway pertains to the repoliticization of European security, which was previously viewed as a technical matter. This shift has been fuelled by extensive debates on the use of the European Peace Facility in the context of the war in Ukraine, bilateral discussions on weapon transfers, and military training for Ukrainian military forces in the EU's territory. Lastly, the EU's increased security considerations about the eastern neighbourhood have led to heightened engagement concerning the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh and the decision to launch a new CSDP civilian mission in Moldova. Concurrently, the EU has resumed its security and defence dialogues with Ukraine but also with Georgia and Moldova.

All in all, the recent events in Ukraine seem to have spurred the EU on to adopt a more comprehensive approach towards its eastern neighbourhood, as also underscored by the Joint Declaration on EU–NATO Cooperation released in 2023. More broadly, the war in Ukraine has exposed some of the shortcomings of European security, which has led to sustained discussions and some positive steps towards strategy development, or at least towards a re-evaluation of key concepts and definitions.

Taking the lead from Russo's emphasis on the role of discourses in shaping practices, **Marco Clementi** outlines three ideas that are often implied in the way the war in Ukraine is represented and discussed. First, the war in Ukraine is often portrayed as a critical turning point for international relations in Europe and, possibly, in the global system at large, such that 'the war in Ukraine is to international politics what Brexit was to European integration'. Looked at from this perspective, the war in Ukraine challenges the assumption that Europe has transcended violence, thereby questioning the success of the pacification of Europe led by Western politics after the Cold War and undermining the belief that warfare between stable,



developed European states had ceased or become impossible. Second, many debates on the war in Ukraine tend to share the idea that the war represents a unique opportunity for European and transatlantic multilateral security frameworks. On the Atlantic side, it is often stressed how the war in Ukraine has revitalized NATO, demonstrating its efficiency, readiness and credibility as a security provider and military instrument. On their part, Europeans often claim that the war has strengthened the role of the EU. The third implicit idea feeding current debates underscores the fact that the war in Ukraine has, to a large extent, been a throwback, evoking a 'back to the future' scenario akin to the Cold War era. One may agree with these ideas in whole or in part. Nevertheless, Clementi argues, if unchecked, these assumptions could hinder our understanding of more complex dynamics and processes.

First of all, it is important to acknowledge how different the current situation is from the Cold War era. Most notably, the relationship between the eastern front of European security and NATO's perimeter has fundamentally shifted over the past three decades. During the Cold War, Europe's southern flank was relatively secure, and NATO's military function almost exclusively served the East. Today, the renewed centrality of the eastern front coincides with the strategic significance of the precarious South. At the same time, the heightened concerns on the East have led to NATO's enlargement, which certainly enhances the capacity of the Alliance to guard the eastern front, but it also opens up a new front – the Arctic. Finally, the global ramifications of the war in Ukraine have dragged China into European affairs, thereby increasing the salience of yet another front of the Alliance – the non-European one, which appears more and more 'the true pivot of Western security', as already mentioned by Berdal and underscored by the 2022 Strategic Concept approved by NATO in Madrid.


In summary, Clementi argues, while the eastern front has indeed become a priority, the security of Europe and NATO depends on the interactions between fronts. This strategic interdependence is evident when considering some of the main impacts that events on the eastern front have had elsewhere. The war in Ukraine has severely affected many countries along Europe's southern flank in terms of both economic and food security. At the same time, the war has

made Europe dependent on its southern neighbours' energy supplies. For its part, Russia has demonstrated its capacity to contribute to political instability in the region. Looking northwards, tensions are also increasing on the Arctic front: Finland's entry into NATO lengthened the border between the Alliance and Russia, and the global competition for Arctic resources is increasing. Moreover, as pointed out by Clementi:

The Arctic, once a barrier during the Cold War, has become a bridge linking the European and Pacific theatres, with China identifying itself as a quasi-Arctic power. This signifies a global rather than regional competition and, in the long run, heightened tensions in the North are likely to affect geopolitical dynamics in the South as the former may reduce the benefits of north-eastern global communication routes, thereby reinforcing the importance of the Suez Canal and, by extension, the strategic significance of the southern front.

Lastly, by elevating China's role as a global competitor, the war in Ukraine has intensified the contest for hegemony in the Indo-Pacific, which in the future may divert US investment away from NATO's southern and possibly eastern fronts.

To be sure, Clementi concludes, the war in Ukraine has placed continental Europe under the spotlight and restored political cohesion, solidarity and military commitment among NATO members. At the same time, however, it has brought about further insecurities on all the other fronts, and this could alter EU and NATO members' perceptions of their individual strategic priorities in various regions. Further complicating the matter is the fact that different fronts demand different security provisions, and not all the Allies possess equal capabilities or willingness to perform all security functions. This raises concerns and makes discussions about capabilities and burden-sharing particularly sensitive. In line with NATO's 2014 Framework Nations Concept (FNC), the war in Ukraine may have encouraged more regional and functional specialization in security provision.




Yet, implementing such an approach needs political and military leadership, especially on the southern front, where the EU plays an important role. Furthermore, NATO aims to 'Europeanize' defence and deterrence on the eastern front, but doing so requires substantial investments, raising questions about the sustainability of this endeavour. Looking at the interdependencies between NATO's various fronts reveals that managing these interactions demands more resources than focusing on one front at a time according to urgency. Ultimately, while overcoming resource constraints is crucial, 'political guarantees are equally, if not more, vital'. According to Clementi, the case of the traditionally neutral countries of Finland and Sweden joining NATO shows that:

A lasting impact of the war in Ukraine may be the realization that the political guarantees provided by EU and NATO memberships serve as the most effective deterrent. Perhaps the war in Ukraine has shown that EU and NATO memberships are the best, if not the only, form of protection available.

CHINA AND RUSSIA AS STRATEGIC/SYSTEMIC THREATS

An assessment of the future of European security after the war in Ukraine would be at best incomplete without taking into consideration the role of China and Russia in the global landscape. According to **Iver Neumann**, both countries represent significant challenges for the international order. Yet, the challenges posed by China and Russia differ significantly. China has some revisionist agendas, but its main objective is to secure a prominent position in the existing international order. In fact, China seems to dabble in what Alexander Cooley and Daniel Nexon call 'goods substitution': instead of the World Bank, China promoted the Asian Development Bank; instead of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, China seeks an alternative set-up. China wants a better seat at the table and as such China does represent a challenge to the West and to US hegemony, but it is a challenge that emanates from *within* the system.

In contrast, Russia holds a deep disdain for the Western order – or for what Putin calls the 'collective West' – and, despite its long-standing pursuit of multipolarity since the 1990s, Russia's aspirations remain partially unclear: Russia wants to be recognized as a great power, but, as Neumann points out, 'when Russia craves recognition as a "great power", it does not seem to mean quite what the rest of us mean'. In other words, the rub lies in a conceptual divergence.



Conceptual historians such as Reinhart Koselleck have long emphasized that concepts change meaning in transition and take on different hues in context so that ‘when you take a concept born in one country and you use it about another country, you always lose something’. In the case of ‘great power’, Anatoly Reshetnikov’s research on Russian conceptual history reveals that Russia associates greatness with ‘being in the grace of God’. From this it follows that ‘when Russians say that Russia is a great power, they mean that Russia is great in the eyes of God’ or, during communism, ‘great in the eyes of history’. The crux of the matter is that for most of the world being a great power means being part of club, where one’s membership is recognized in relational terms by both in-group and out-group members. In this sense, and as George Herbert Mead suggested, *identity* as a ‘great power’ has two facets: our self-perception (the ‘I’) and how others perceive us (the ‘me’). For Neumann, Russia is grappling with a disconnect between the two, insisting on its greatness regardless of external validation.

For Russia and for most Russians, including Russian liberals, being a great power is therefore an unquestionable fact deeply ingrained in their psyche, so much so that ‘for them, not being a great power poses an existential threat’. This predicament is problematic at a fundamental level because it means that Russia cannot attain the recognition it so eagerly desires. It means that the ‘I’ and the ‘me’ cannot be reconciled. Neumann explains that this is so because Russia’s soft power – which is crucial to great power status – is limited: today Russia does not have the support the Soviet Union received from the great communist parties in other countries, and while there are still people in the West who believe that the future is coming from the East, these enthusiasts of an *ex oriente lux* are few and far between. Russia may be well armed with ‘weapons of the weak’ such as hacking and propaganda, but it offers little in terms of ideology or world view to warrant great power status. Even Russian military performance is dismal, as noted in the previous panel, and may not meet the standards required for recognition as a great power.


Against this backdrop, Neumann turns to Pierre Bourdieu in describing the situation as a sort of hysteresis or lag effect in which ‘Russia seems to be out of its time. It seems to be fighting fights that do not actually qualify in the great power

game that others are playing'. Symbolic gestures such as making the G7 into the G8 or opening the Council of Europe, designed to accommodate Russia's self-perception and acknowledge it as a great power, have made little difference, and Russia has remained unyielding in its demands. Russia is now presenting itself as a Eurasian power. For Neumann this shift is not only an expression of Russia's current anti-European stance but also an attempt to turn towards China. However, Neumann argues that 'the notion that Russia will be able to get China's embrace and gain China's recognition as a great power is mistaken'. Instead, China appears to be increasingly encroaching into Central Asia and thus actively undermining one of Russia's defining traits of great-powerhood, namely its sphere of influence. From Neumann's perspective, all this means is that Russia is experiencing treatment from China that is similar to its treatment from the West. Putin seems to be out of sync with the times, and the likely result is that Russia will remain revanchist and increasingly isolated, 'running itself into the ground' in a sort of *déjà vu* of the paradoxes that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union, as recounted in Alexei Yurchak's book *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*.

The idea of rectifying matters through war echoes the idea of expanding externally when internal progress falls short – a recurrent theme in modern history, and one of which Russia seems to still abide by. Indeed, Neumann points out:

It is difficult to comprehend what Putin is doing now without considering the expectations placed upon tsars: they were expected to gather Russian lands, and particularly lands that have been lost. And this is what Putin is trying to do as well.

The war in Ukraine thus aligns with Russian history and it is likely to follow the same paths as many frozen conflicts, where 'neither party will get its full will, and both will be dissatisfied'. Yet Moscow may find this favourable as it allows Russia to manipulate the intensity of conflicts along its borders and distinguish itself from the rest of the world. However, this scenario is detrimental to European security as it creates a sharp divide between Russia, Belarus and the rest of the world, inviting possibilities of misunderstanding and misinterpretation – and this, Neumann concludes, 'is not in our best interest'.



Looking further east and following through from Neumann's very first point, **Giuseppe Gabusi** argues that China is not a systemic *threat* even though it is often perceived as such. Rather, he claims, China represents a systemic *rival*.

To be sure, we may debate the Chinese interpretation of multilateralism. But qualifying China's behaviour on the international scene as 'revisionist' – whether that revisionism is 'soft' or 'hard', 'from the inside' or 'from the outside' – does us an analytical disservice, for none of these terms distinguish between 1) actors undermining the international system through the violation of its basic rules, and 2) those attempting to reshape and rearticulate the system. 'China', Gabusi clarifies, 'is a reformist country, not a revisionist one'. In fact, there is a stark difference between invading foreign territories and establishing platforms as alternatives to the hierarchies of the US-led international order. Initiatives such as the Global Development Initiative and the Global Security Initiative certainly align more closely with China's national interests and position the country as an organizational hub, around which everyone else's interests revolve.

Yet, as Anna Caffarena and Simone Dossi also point out in a [recent article](#), these global initiatives are designed to be inclusive and multilateral, based on UN principles. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), for example, has collaborated effectively with the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Similarly, the Belt and Road Initiative has advanced mostly through a diplomatic approach that, though plagued with significant power asymmetries and tensions, has little to do with military invasions. The US, for its part, has not even contemplated excluding China from the SWIFT payment system as it did with Russia. According to Gabusi, if Washington saw Beijing as a systemic threat, such an option would be on the table, but: 'the US know that this option, akin to a 'nuclear option', would inflict serious damage to the global financial system, the overall global economy, and the West itself. The financial interconnection between the US and China is simply too strong to envision decoupling without incurring immense costs'.

China is not a systemic threat, particularly in the context of globalization. In fact, 'Beijing stands as a defender of globalization as it has significantly strengthened itself and gained international status through its embrace of globalization, *pace* Susan Strange's assertion that

globalization would weaken states'. Rather than threatening the liberal order itself, China aims to reshape the rules, standards and narratives deemed incompatible with its national interests. For example, China's White Paper on International Finance for Development aligns for the most part with international standards and, as China is a newcomer in the donor system, emphasizes a 'learning-by-doing' approach. Yet when it comes to the role and involvement of civil society in developing countries, the Chinese stance deviates from international norms and this, according to Gabusi, illustrates Beijing's 'pick-and-choose' strategy and its overall selective approach towards global governance. The Belt and Road Initiative itself is an order-shaping exercise. In the Balkans, for instance, China and the EU were competing on the basis of different ideas of 'regionalism'. For China, promoting regionalism in the Balkans meant 'doing things together', while the EU emphasized adherence to common rules. In light of similar concerns, many EU member states, including Italy, joined the AIIB with the aim of ensuring that the bank would align with global, rather than 'selective', standards. European states largely succeeded in shaping the AIIB according to international standards, and when Russia invaded Ukraine, the AIIB suspended all its operations with Moscow, despite China's majority stake in the bank.

While all this clearly demonstrates the existence of competitive and often tense political dynamics, 'it falls short of qualifying China as a systemic threat'. Rather, in the eyes and in the official documents of the EU, China has held three different roles: a negotiating partner, an economic competitor and a systemic rival promoting alternative modes of governance models. Thus, for Europeans the critical question is how to reconcile these three roles when dealing with China: 'is it possible to trade and partner with a country you do not fully trust because you see it also as a rival?'. Hence, Gabusi explains, 'while dilemmas, challenges and disagreement persist, defining China as a systemic threat oversimplifies the complex dynamics at play in international relations and does not accurately capture the nuanced interactions between China and other global actors'.

Nevertheless, China is often perceived as a systemic threat and Gabusi identifies two main factors contributing to this perception. First, there seems to be a discrepancy between



China's rhetoric and its actions. Paradoxically, the more China talks about 'win-win' solutions, the more people and countries perceive that they are losing something while China is 'winning twice'. According to Gabusi, China's win-win rhetoric has backfired in various instances, raising concerns about unsustainable projects, 'debt traps' and contradictions, as in the case of China's refusal to condone part of Pakistan's debt, despite its supposed strong alliance with the country, which de facto hindered the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in providing aid to Pakistan. Similarly, the narrative of a 'community of destiny of mankind' championed by Xi Jinping raises questions as to whether China's dream is someone else's nightmare. A more recent, and perhaps obvious, example underscoring this rhetoric-reality gap is China's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As Gabusi explains: 'Xi Jinping's choice to side with Russia was a political decision motivated by the fact that Beijing and Moscow face similar pressures from the US; yet this alignment contradicts China's own foreign policy pillars dating back to 1955, rooted in principles like respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference'. For Gabusi, China missed an opportunity to show up as a responsible stakeholder, demonstrating consistency with and actual commitment to its own as well as internationally sanctioned principles, beyond mere rhetoric.

The second factor contributing to the perception of China as a systemic threat is the infiltration of politics into society: Xi Jinping claims that loving the motherland equates to loving the state, which in turns means loving the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The blurring of lines between the interests of China and the interests of the Party is, according to Gabusi, 'what makes us suspicious of China's presence in our societies, with many assuming the hidden hand of the Party is always involved'. This scepticism often surfaces when Chinese companies invest in Europe, and Europeans have perceived them as threats to national security. Likewise, Chinese ethno-nationalism and the 'united front' contribute to the perception of China as a threat. The 'united front' is a political strategy aimed at ensuring that Chinese citizens abroad align with the Party's ideology and promote China's narrative. This interconnectedness between party and state has led China to become increasingly embroiled in domestic political debates worldwide. Often framed as 'democracies versus authoritarianism', these debates

typically revolve around the idea of China fostering a kind of state–society relationship that is fundamentally at odds with democracy, which raises concerns about the behaviour of authoritarian states on the global stage. As a result, China’s actions – as seen in its alliance with Russia and its assertiveness regarding Taiwan – reinforce its image as a threat not only to the democratic fabric of individual states but also to the international system at large.

Against this backdrop, however, it is worth noticing that for countries such as the UK, policy towards China comprises two currents: engagement with China and an ‘unflinchingly realistic’ approach to its authoritarianism. This perspective aligns with the European Commission’s stance, which similarly emphasizes engagement while acknowledging the need to address China’s authoritarianism. To be sure, China’s interactions with Russia will significantly influence EU–China relations; but the European Commission is not advocating for decoupling from China. In fact, as Ursula von der Leyen clearly stated in March 2023, doing so would be neither viable nor in Europe’s interests. At the same time, von der Leyen emphasized that ‘the Chinese Communist Party’s clear goal is a systematic change of the international order with China at its centre’. Consistent with Gabusi’s line of thought, von der Leyen’s words underscore the perceptions just discussed – indeed, she focuses explicitly on the goal of the Party – and emphasize the internal character of the change sought. She also stated that ‘our response must start by working to strengthen the international system itself’, implying a commitment to bolstering the system’s basic rules and framework: within this context, Gabusi argues, ‘certain red lines exist – and Russia crossed them – but room for debates remains. The challenge lies in safeguarding European interests against a growing and increasingly assertive China’. The solution proffered by von der Leyen is focusing on ‘de-risking’ through diplomacy and a new economic strategy. However, while one might envision de-risking without de-coupling, the ongoing tech war between China and the US raises doubts about the feasibility of such a strategy. In essence, Gabusi concludes:

The central question is whether trade without trust is possible. Or are we portraying China as a systemic threat primarily because we are hesitant to engage with it? These are inherently political issues because, as Imelda Marcos states at the end of the documentary *The Kingmaker*, ‘perception is real, the truth is not’, and if we perceive China as a threat (while Beijing does not make any efforts to change this perception), we run the risk of making that threat real.

CLOSING REMARKS

The first panel explored in fine detail the relationship between democracies and authoritarian regimes, exposing some of the assumptions we hold when reflecting on whether there actually exists a fundamental opposition between the two and what such antagonism may yield in the near future. In thinking about the future of the liberal order, perhaps it does not matter whether we consider ourselves optimists or pessimists, as **Stefano Ruzza** argues in his concluding thoughts. Perhaps the key question has more to do with time: 'if liberalism is going to give ground, when is this going to happen? Maybe it is not yet the time for that'.

In fact, the insights from the second panel underscore how the responses of NATO and the EU to the war in Ukraine have managed to imbue liberal institutions and practices with new energy, demonstrating their capacity to deliver despite all the challenges and shortcomings. Yet this does not mean that liberalism is going to last forever.

At the same time, as pointed out in the third panel, neither Russia nor China seems to be able to offer a viable substitute to the liberal order, no matter how 'zombified' it might appear at present. This may lead us to a stalemate, and the key question would thus become 'how is this stalemate going to break, if it is going to break at some point?'.

In fact, as noted by **Ambassador Dan Mihalache** in his final remarks, the world is changing rapidly and this means we may have to rethink our paradigms and analytical frameworks:

Perhaps the old patterns have to be reshuffled, reinterpreted and redesigned for new realities that may not adhere to traditional power politics and that we may not have fully comprehended yet. This, in turn, makes it all the more important that discussions such as the one we held here today happen often, and repeatedly, in order to keep pace with the speed of change.

EUROPEAN SECURITY AFTER THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Opening remarks

Stefano Ruzza, Associate Professor of Political Science and Peace and Conflict Studies, Università degli Studi di Torino; Head of Research, T.wai – Torino World Affairs Institute.

01

The New International Order? Democracies vs Authoritarian Regimes

PANEL 1

Chair:

Anna Caffarena, Professor of International Relations, Università degli Studi di Torino; President, T.wai – Torino World Affairs Institute.

Speakers:

Christopher Coker, Director of LSE IDEAS; former Professor of International Relations, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE).

Adrian Pabst, Professor of Politics, University of Kent; Deputy Director at National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR).

Vittorio Emanuele Parsi, Professor of International Relations, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore.

02

NATO and the EU as Security Providers

PANEL 2

Chair:

Stefano Ruzza, Associate Professor of Political Science and Peace and Conflict Studies, Università degli Studi di Torino; Head of Research, T.wai – Torino World Affairs Institute.

Speakers:

Mats Berdal, Professor of Security and Development and Director of the Conflict, Security and Development Research Group, King's College London.

Marco Clementi, Associate Professor of International Relations, Università degli Studi di Pavia.

Alessandra Russo, Associate Professor of International Relations, Università di Trento.

03

China and Russia as Strategic/Systemic Threats

PANEL 3

Chair:

Vlad Zigarov, Programme Manager for the IDEAS Europe Programme, LSE IDEAS.

Speakers:

Giuseppe Gabusi, Assistant Professor of International Political Economy, Università degli Studi di Torino; Head of Research, T.wai – Torino World Affairs Institute

Iver Neumann, Director, The Fridtjof Nansen Institute; former Professor of International Relations, LSE

Closing remarks

Stefano Ruzza, Associate Professor of Political Science and Peace and Conflict Studies, Università degli Studi di Torino; Head of Research, T.wai – Torino World Affairs Institute.

Dan Mihalache, Ambassador of Romania to Cyprus and former Member of the European Parliament.



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