



The Future of Translateral World Order: Rethinking Global Partnerships in the Era of Deepening Uncertainty

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Introduction

In the recent article published by *Russia in Global Affairs*, Marlene Laruelle rightly points out that contemporary political commentaries too often employ outdated binaries with little heuristic value,¹ including the alleged confrontation between “democratic” powers and “autocratic” challengers. Binarism forcefully reduces diverse actors to crude caricatures while simultaneously promulgating inward amity and outward hostility fashioned in a bellicose narrative of “us against them.” Over time, actors entrapped in binary thinking come to uncritically celebrate internal purity, uniformity, and homogeneity as an ultimate source of strength. Indeed, there are prevalent presumptions that a stable world order requires ideological unity – the more normatively united we are, the more stable the world order. This is probably why many International Relations (IR) scholars and pundits are quick to dismiss the role of rising powers in reshaping the world order. The common criticism goes that the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) group is unlikely to play a meaningful role in the transformation of global politics because they lack a unified vision. In the words of Joseph Nye, “BRICS countries remain too politically and economically diverse to act in a unified manner.”²

The primary purpose of this report is to challenge this conventional view. By proposing a new analytical concept of “translateralism,” I argue that unity is neither necessary nor desirable in advancing the reformation of the world order in an era of deepening global uncertainty. Quite the contrary, what we need most is informal partnerships among and between *unlike-minded* actors that transcend conventional binary thinking and hence offer greater potential for boosting the spirit of experimental creativity and mutual learning.

Historically, coalitions of unlike-minded actors prevailed over unions of like-minded actors at numerous occasions.³ For example, consider the remaking

¹Laruelle, M. (2020). Accusing Russia of fascism. *Russia in Global Affairs* 18 (4): 100-123. See also her latest book Laruelle, M. (2021). *Is Russia Fascist? Unraveling Propaganda East and West*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

²Joseph Nye, Jr. (2013). BRICS without Mortar. *Project Syndicate*, 3 April 2013.

³Kobayashi, K. (2020). Is normative power cosmopolitan? Rethinking European unity, norm diffusion, and international political theory. *Cooperation and Conflict* 56(2): 181–203. See also Deutsch, K. W. (1944). Medieval unity and the economic conditions for an international civilization. *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 10(1): 18-35.

of the European world order in the Medieval Age. Since the late fourteenth century, the continent suffered from the global plague pandemic (the Black Death), which was believed to have originated in China/Mongolia, before being diffused through Arabia and the Ottoman Empire to finally devastate much of Europe. The mid-fifteenth century then witnessed the rise of new technologies (such as Gutenberg's printing press) which radically reshaped the landscape of information dissemination. Following these multiple and intertwined socio-political disruptions, protestant Reformation movements emerged in the sixteenth century Europe to challenge the singular moral authority of the Vatican.⁴ Initially, medieval Catholic leaders dismissed the viability of the Protestant challenge. Unlike the Vatican (which represented a "value-based community" of Catholic normative unity with well-developed institutional structures),⁵ the Protestant movements included numerous intra-confessional divisions and lacked a coherent grand vision for an alternative post-Reformation world order. In light of this, many medieval Catholic leaders questioned whether a mere marriage of convenience among disparate movements with no common vision could ever challenge the single community united under Catholicism's common values, rules, and institutions.

At the end of the day, it turned out that the absence of normative unity among Protestant movements in fact *enabled* them to effectively challenge the established Catholic order. Rather than clinging to a bloc mentality, assorted Protestant challengers skillfully harnessed workable compromises, cross-cutting alliances, and flexible partnerships with unlike-minded actors.⁶ In the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), for

⁴See Phillips, A. (2010). *War, Religion and Empire: The Transformation of International Orders*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Chapters 3-5.

⁵Bellomo, M. (1995). *The Common Legal Past of Europe, 1000-1800*. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press.

⁶On the ideological clash between Catholicism and Protestantism, see Owen, J. M. (2010). *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, Chapter 4.

instance, Protestant challengers ultimately prevailed over their Catholic opponents by soliciting support from France (a major Catholic power at the time) and even from the Ottoman Empire.

Though detailed historical investigations go beyond the scope of this report, a key macro-historical pattern appears to be that transcendence of a bloc mentality is essential to success in a world of exceptional uncertainty. In her book *Team of Rivals*, Pulitzer Prize-winning American historian Doris Kearns Goodwin described Abraham Lincoln's ability to transcend conventional political cleavages and to assemble a team of diverse values and visions (including his fiercest critics), which enabled him to come at better decisions and to ultimately emerge victorious in the American Civil War.⁷ In this report, I call such practice "translateralism" and argue that, in a similar vein, actors with translateral mindsets are likely to play an increasingly important role in reshaping the international order because the practice of translateralism enables them to get out of their comfort-zones and build inclusive partnerships with actors of diverse values and identities.

This report advances such an argument in four parts. Following this short introduction, the second section articulates the principles of translateral diplomacy, which consciously seeks to transcend debilitating bloc politics, build inclusive global partnerships with unlike-minded actors, and maximize opportunities for innovative mutual learning. Forging such coalitions of the unlike-minded is crucial in amplifying the spirit of experimental creativity needed to effectively navigate through the world of compounded crises. The third section provides examples of translateral diplomacy with a focus on China, India, Japan, and Russia. The final section concludes that those nations willing to forgo a compulsive desire for international unity and instead learn to build partnerships of the unlike-minded will emerge most prepared to lead the reformation of the world order.

⁷ Goodwin, D. K. (2005). *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

The Principles of Translateralism

In contemporary world politics, the term “multilateralism” is commonly understood as international cooperation involving more than three states.⁸ This definition, however, deviates from the term’s original Latin meaning.

The adjective *-lateral* has no association with states or nations; it is derived from the Latin word *latus*, translated as “side” or “front.” This original Latin meaning is still prevalent in medical science. For example, ophthalmologists distinguish unilateral myopia (one-sided myopia, either in the right or left eye) from bilateral myopia (two-sided myopia). In this light, multilateralism is more accurately conceived as “multi-side-ism,” where actors representing different blocs (“sides”) come together to seek cooperation based on workable compromises.

Though multilateralism forms a basis of global cooperation, it still raises a divisive impression of each actor being rigidly situated within a fixed side. In contrast, translateralism is a foreign policy approach explicitly aimed at *transcending* a perilous bloc mentality by instituting inclusive, flexible, and open-ended partnerships that cut across existing international cleavages. In this vein, the essence of translateralism lies in the *transcendence* of binary thinking. Binaries are cognitive schemes that allow policymakers to reduce complex political realities into simplistic dichotomies. Binaries serve as a powerful manipulative tool to arouse a sense of hostile unity (“us vs them”) and mobilize political support for particular foreign policy actions. In the above-mentioned case of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), the binary of Catholicism/Protestantism was mobilized by both sides to construct an imaginary theatre of “Religious War”,

⁸Ruggie, J. G. (1992). Multilateralism: The anatomy of an institution. *International Organization* 46(3): 561-598.

where Catholics and Protestants were supposedly “destined” to clash with each other in the epic struggle for a universal world order.⁹

In our time, the prevalent discourse of democracy/autocracy similarly constructs a haunting specter of a Regime War where autocracies are “destined” to clash with democracies across the world.¹⁰ Yet, like the myth of Religious War, the binary narrative of Regime War is largely a political fiction that constrains our ability to examine facts with an open mind-set. Though dominant narratives tend to portray the United States as the leader of the “democratic” world bravely standing up against “autocratic” challengers such as China and Russia, such crude simplification does not withstand scholarly analysis. Data show that, in reality, the American government is seen by world citizens as the largest threat to democratic governance. A 2021 opinion poll commissioned by the Alliance of Democracies Foundation found that “nearly half (44%) of respondents in the 53 countries surveyed are concerned that the US threatens democracy in their country; fear of Chinese influence is by contrast 38%, and fear of Russian influence is lowest at 28%.”¹¹ The prevalent binary narratives of America’s inescapable “democratic” confrontation with “autocratic” China and Russia not only neglects the opinions of citizens across the world, but also deflects attention from complex global political realities.

⁹ See Cavanaugh, W. T. (2009). *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Cavanaugh argues that, though there were certainly prolonged confrontations between different confessional groups, most of these “religious” conflicts had secular ramifications. Moreover, he notes that the “Religious War” discourse is also a retrospective invention deeply rooted in modern Western binary thinking. In his famous Tokyo lectures, French philosopher Michel Foucault also argued that binaries are a/constitute a particularly Western logic of political thinking that is deeply rooted in its history and intellectual culture. See Foucault, M., and Watanabe, M. (2007). *Theatrum Philosophicum*. Tokyo: Asahi Press.

¹⁰ For example, Frederick Kempe asserts that “the global competition of democratic and authoritarian systems” is acutely destabilizing for the world order. Kempe, F. (2020). Biden has a plan to rally the world’s democracies and tackle threats together. *CNBC*, 13 September 2020.

¹¹ See Guardian. (2021). US seen as bigger threat to democracy than Russia or China, global poll finds. *The Guardian*, 5 May 2021. Even within the United States, democratic trust in the federal government suffered a total collapse from its zeneith in 1964 (77%) to its nadir in 2011 (15%). On the collapse of public trust in the American government, see Pew Research Center. (2019). Public Trust in Government: 1958-2019. Data accessible at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2019/04/11/public-trust-in-government-1958-2019>.

The purpose of translateralism is to transcend the limits of such single-minded (and often factually inaccurate) binary thinking by recognizing that all international actors have multiple values and complex identities that are irreducible to binary simplifications. Even though we may acknowledge the existence of certain binary identities (Catholic/Protestant, democratic/autocratic, and so on), translateralists consciously refuse to exploit this difference as a means to further manipulative aims. In terms of concrete policy practice, translateralism aims at fostering inclusive partnerships that bring together actors of different values and worldviews. Such partnerships of the unlike-minded expose participating actors to the messy realities of global politics, compel them to get out of their diplomatic comfort-zones, and thus serve to minimize the risk of inertial group-think. My argument is consistent with the diversity theory in decision-making: “[a]cross sectors, research has shown that diverse teams make better and more innovative decisions.”¹²

As discussed above, global history is filled with examples where flexible partnerships among unlike-minded actors decisively prevailed over value-based unions of like-minded actors. In the Second World War, the Grand Alliance of the Soviet Union, Britain, France, and the United States lacked shared ideological values, common security policy, or a rigid institutional union, but ultimately prevailed over the totalitarian Axis. Then, the Western liberal international order survived and thrived through the Cold War precisely because it was anchored in multiple and cross-cutting partnerships.¹³ In

¹² Koppell, C., Brigety, R.E., and Bigio, J. (2021). Transforming international affairs education to address diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. *CFR Discussion Paper*, 21 March 2021.

¹³ In this report, I use the “West” as a colloquial shorthand to refer to dominant Anglophone global elites, though the idea of the West itself suffers from the limits of binarism. On a scholarly inquiry into the concept of the West, see Henrich, J. (2020). *The WEIRDest People in the World: How the West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; Stuenkel, O. (2011). Identity and the concept of the West: The case of Brazil and India. *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* 54(1): 178-195.

the 1950s, NATO emerged as a hybrid alliance embracing a diverse array of unlike-minded states; it included liberal democracies (e.g. Canada), Christian democracies (e.g. West Germany), imperial powers subjugating overseas colonies and subjects (e.g. UK, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands), and military dictatorships (e.g. Portugal and Greece), while being heavily reliant on the military supremacy of segregationist America.¹⁴ From the beginning, the hybrid Atlantic alliance was marred with perpetual internal clashes. In the wake of 1956 Suez crisis, the United States stood with Egypt against Britain and France and even threatened to sanction the imperial European powers. In 1966, de Gaulle's France abruptly withdrew from NATO's military organization and NATO headquarters were forcibly relocated from Paris to Brussels. In the meantime, France advanced an explicit anti-hegemonic foreign policy, going so far as providing military assistance to Nicaragua's Sandinistas.¹⁵ In 1974, NATO allies Greece and Turkey militarily clashed with each other, resulting in the estimated death of nearly 10,000 citizens and soldiers.

In light of NATO's perpetual internal conflicts, Soviet officials frequently ridiculed the Atlantic alliance as a mere marriage of convenience among disparate actors lacking a common vision; in contrast, the Warsaw Pact was portrayed as a "value-based" alliance united by common communist principles, institutions, and political regimes. From the viewpoint of Atlantic leaders, however, lack of unity was not seen as a liability but rather as a core strength of the liberal order, in which diverse partners could freely and openly disagree with each other in search of workable compromises to immediate policy challenges. In the midst of the Cuban Missile Crisis, for instance, US

¹⁴See, for example, Hellmann, G., Herborth, B., Schlag, G., & Weber, C. (2017). The West: A securitising community?. *Journal of International Relations and Development* 20(2): 301-330.

¹⁵Boniface, P. (2021). Why the Legacy of de Gaulle and Mitterand Still Matters for the French Public Opinion. *Valdai Expert Opinions*, 15 March 2021. URL: <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/what-is-france-s-position/>

Ambassador to the UN Adlai Stevenson remarked in the emergency UNSC meeting that:

Against the idea of diversity, Communism asserts the idea of uniformity; against freedom, inevitability; against choice, compulsion; against democracy, dogma; against independence, ideology; against tolerance, conformity. Its faith is that the iron laws of history will require every nation to traverse the same predestined path to the same predestined conclusion. Given this faith in a monolithic world, the very existence of diversity is a threat to the Communist future. I do not assert that Communism must always remain a messianic faith. Like other fanaticisms of the past, it may in time lose its sense of infallibility and accept the diversity of human destiny.¹⁶

At the end of the day, NATO's hybrid alliance prevailed over the "value-based" Warsaw Pact in part because the Soviet obsession with compulsive ideological unity resulted in debilitating group-think which deadly hindered policy innovations.

Though this report cannot further explore this claim due to space limitations, my interpretation is consistent with evidence from sociological, psychological, and medical research that homogenous groups comprised of like-minded actors tend to become trapped in inertia and struggle to excel in a fast-changing world.¹⁷ Conversely, open-minded actors able to harness the widest possible networks of diverse partners are more likely to succeed in navigating a turbulent world and adapting to changing circumstances. To probe the plausibility of my argument, the remainder of this report provides illustrative examples of translateral foreign policy and discusses how the practice of translateralism is reshaping global politics.

¹⁶ Quoted in Jones, J. F. (1972). *A Rhetorical Analysis of Ambassador Adlai E. Stevenson's United Nations Address of October 23, 1962, During the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Master's Thesis No.3923. Charleston: Eastern Illinois University, 85.

¹⁷ For a summary, see Fernandez, C. P. (2007). Creating thought diversity: The antidote to group think. *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice* 13(6): 670-671.

Practices of Translateral Diplomacy

China's Translateralism

In popular discourse, China is colloquially framed as a leader of the “autocratic” world who allegedly menaces its neighboring democracies.¹⁸ Like many parochial binary narratives, this discourse is neither historically accurate nor factually compelling.¹⁹ In many ways, what has enabled China to rise to the position of a potential global superpower today is not the consolidation of ideological purity, but instead the principled advancement of translateral diplomacy with a spirit of mutual learning and open experimentation.

Though China is often portrayed as an archetypical “anti-Western” power, the normative basis of the Chinese one-party system is the Western political philosophy of communism. Indeed, China is one of the few Asian states in which white Western political theorists (such as Karl Marx) are bestowed the honor of being officially recognized as a national public intellectual. As a political system, China's resilience and dynamism originates not from internal ideological homogeneity, but instead from translateral eclecticism. The contemporary Chinese state creatively combines many different (and even mutually contradictory) normative discourses, including European communism, American commercialism, Asian developmentalism, Confucian moralism, and Chinese nationalism, to name but a few. In the 1960s, Soviet ideologues professed that “impure” Chinese communism plagued by “nationalist deviation” would not be able to persist over time since it

¹⁸Myers, S. L. (2021). An alliance of autocracies? China wants to lead a new world order. *New York Times*, 29 March 2021.

¹⁹See also Suzuki, S. (2009). Chinese soft power, insecurity studies, myopia and fantasy. *Third World Quarterly* 30(4): 779-793.

lacked normative consistency; the reality, however, turned out to be opposite: China's communist system survived and thrived throughout and beyond the Cold War not despite its lack of purity, *but because of it*. The inner coexistence of multiple value systems within the Chinese state has allowed its central government to garner support from the widest possible array of societal constituencies and enhance its political resilience over time.²⁰

It is equally important to note here that China's successful rise is deeply rooted in the transcendence of unilateral (one-sided) solidarity. During the Cold War, China refused to advance value-based unity with the communist Soviet Union, instead opting for translateral diplomacy by seeking a wide network of international engagements. In transcending the communist/capitalist binary, China struck an historic diplomatic deal with the United States in 1971 and successfully took the permanent seat at the UN Security Council from Taiwan in the same year. Since the late 1970s, China also initiated hybrid market reforms and proactively learned the best practices of the Western business world. Since the early 2000s, Beijing furthered its translateral diplomacy by leading and supporting new global partnerships. Rather than staying trapped in the parochial binary of democracy/autocracy, Beijing has expanded its partnerships with all states, *regardless of* race, religion, civilization, and regime type. Contrary to the popular narrative of China's solidarity with autocratic regimes, research shows that Beijing developed constructive partnerships with almost all Latin American democracies.²¹ In Africa, South Africa emerged as China's major diplomatic partner within and beyond the BRICS community.

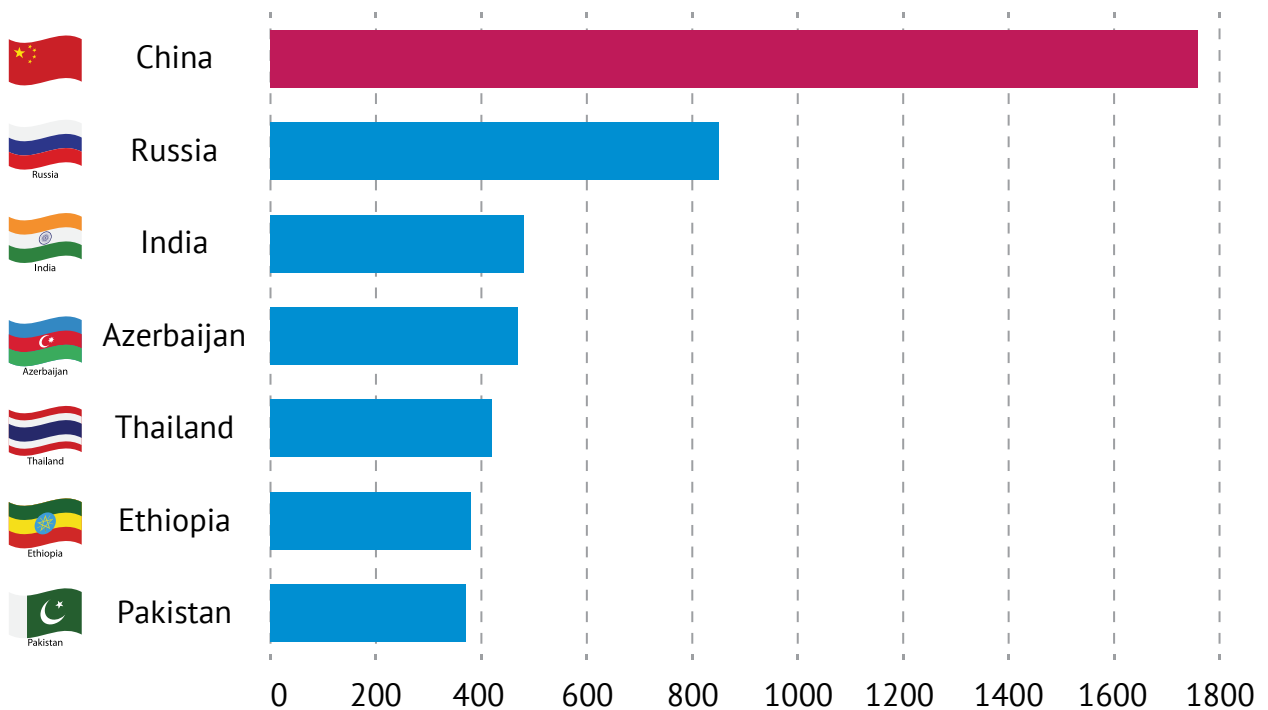
Over the last decade, China has also strengthened its footprint in Europe. In 2012, China launched the 17+1 cooperation forum and deepened its partnerships with European democracies and democratizing states. Perhaps Ukraine is the most interesting case

²⁰This is indeed consistent with insights from the portfolio theory that the integration of multiple contradictory elements enhances systems stability. On the portfolio theory and diversification, see, for example, Carroll, D. A., & Stater, K. J. (2009). Revenue diversification in nonprofit organizations: Does it lead to financial stability?. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 19(4): 947-966.

²¹Dreher, A., & Fuchs, A. (2015). Rogue aid? An empirical analysis of China's aid allocation. *Canadian Journal of Economics* 48(3): 988-1023.

in this regard. Contrary to the conventional binary narrative of China allegedly seeking to undermine democracies across the world, Ukraine’s (partial) democratization since 2014 has provided China with growing opportunities for engagement. In 2019, China surpassed Russia and Poland to become Ukraine’s single largest bilateral trading partner, with forthcoming plans to invest in Ukraine’s basic infrastructure, seaports, agriculture, IT sector, and transport.²² Ukraine inaugurated the Belt and Road Trade and Investment Promotion Center in Kiev and even officially designated the year 2019 as the “Year of China.” Ukraine also emerged as a major arms exporter to China: between 2000 and 2018, China was Ukraine’s single most important destination for arms exports (see Figure 1 below).²³

Figure 1. MAJOR BUYERS OF UKRAINIAN ARMS, 2000–2018 (in millions USD)



Source: Nikkei Asian Review, Original Data from SIPRI

²²Weir, F. (2019). Ukraine in play: How Chinese investments change the game. *Christian Science Monitor*, 21 November 2019.

²³Nikkei Asian Review. (2019). Ukraine is new battleground in US-China fight for influence. *Nikkei Asian Review*, 3 September 2019.

Though a systematic comparative analysis of China's translateral diplomatic practices goes beyond the scope of this report, the illustrative examples presented above demonstrate that China's rise is accelerated by its extraordinary ability to think beyond binaries and to grow as a proactive global transformer committed to learning best practices from anybody, anywhere. As discussed in the previous section, such a transcendent mind-set is crucial in uncertain times when our ability to experiment, adapt, and evolve is being constantly tested.

India's Translateralism

As the world's largest democracy founded upon the principle of respect for civilizational diversity, India has played a leading role in initiating inclusive global partnerships. In 2021, India is poised to host the 13th summit of the BRICS community with the purpose of stimulating open dialogue on innovative solutions to global governance challenges, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In stark contrast to exclusive clubs of white Europeans such as the European Union, the BRICS group embodies the spirit of translateral pluralism by encompassing diverse races, religions, civilizations, and political systems in states across Latin America, Central Eurasia, South Asia, East Asia, and Africa.

Within and beyond the BRICS group, India has also developed resilient military and economic partnerships with Russia over the last decades. In the words of Anuradha Chenoy, "Indo-Russian bilateral relations are embedded in a history of trust, mutual compatibility and interest that have few parallels."²⁴ Gulshan Sachdeva, Jean Monnet Chair and Director of the Europe Area Studies Programs at Jawaharlal Nehru University, also emphasizes that "at the broadest level, the Indian elite believes that a strong Russia is important for maintaining a desired international equilibrium, both supporting the

²⁴ Chenoy, A. M. (2008). India and Russia: Allies in the international political system. *South Asian Survey* 15(1): 49-62, 49.

idea of multi-polarity and a rule-based international system, within which India can continue its rise.”²⁵ India’s constructive partnership with Russia is much appreciated by the Russian side, as Alexei Kupriyanov and Alexander Korolev maintain that “Russia and India are unique in that no other pair of countries of comparable weight can boast such strong historical and political ties and a total lack of conflicts in the past and foreseeable future.”²⁶ Since 2014, India has further strengthened its ties with Russia and it has become the largest buyer of Russian military hardware.²⁷

India’s practice of translateralism is deeply rooted in its historical experience. From an Indian point of view, the Western narrative of “democratic solidarity” against autocracies appears to be a political fantasy. In the first place, India’s struggle for democracy began as a fight against a major “democratic” world power – the United Kingdom. In the wake of the 1971 Indian-Pakistan War, the supposedly democratic United States refused to pursue “democratic solidarity” with India; instead, Washington deployed its 7th Fleet warships in the Bay of Bengal to support Pakistan’s military regime and threatened India’s democratic government with a naked display of force.²⁸ Living through these agonizing experiences, many Indian scholars and policymakers came to perceive Western hegemony to be the main challenge to India’s postcolonial democratic governance.

Though Western leaders have attempted to portray the emerging Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad) among India, Japan, Australia, and the United States as a “democratic” coalition against “autocratic” powers in the Indo-Pacific, New Delhi has consistently criticized this binary thinking as an obstacle to the pursuit of an inclusive global

²⁵ Sachdeva, G. (2011). India’s relations with Russia. In Scott, D. (ed.). (2011). *Handbook of India’s International Relations*. 1st Edition. London/New York: Routledge, 221.

²⁶ Kupriyanov, A., and Korolev, A. (2019). The Eurasian Chord and the Oceanic Ring: Russia and India as the Third Force in a New World Order. *Valdai Discussion Club Report* September 2019. Moscow: Valdai Discussion Club, 11. URL: <https://valdaiclub.com/a/reports/the-eurasian-chord-and-the-oceanic-ring/>

²⁷ Moscow Times. (2019). India’s Russian Arms Purchases Hit “Breakthrough” \$14.5Bln, Official Says. *Moscow Times*, 5 September 2019.

²⁸ Bass, G. J. (2015). The Indian way of humanitarian intervention. *Yale Journal of International Law* 40: 227-294.

order.²⁹ For instance, the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations hosted a policy dialogue between Frank Wisner (a former U.S. Ambassador to India) and Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar in September 2019. In that event, Alyssa Ayres (a former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia under the Obama Administration) asked: “How does that democracy piece play in the way India is thinking about its foreign policy?” Jaishankar’s impromptu response was truly illuminating. Though the Indian Foreign Minister acknowledged the strategic challenge posed by China’s rise, he also stressed that “a lot of our difficult history comes from the fact that the U.S. had an image of being consistently supportive of Pakistani military dictatorships.” Foreign Minister Jaishankar then concluded his remarks by emphasizing that, “first of all, it’s unrealistic in the world to only sort of do business with people who think similar to you. That doesn’t work in the marketplace, it doesn’t work on the street, it doesn’t work in global affairs.”³⁰

Rather than remaining trapped in divisive binary thinking, India seeks to reform the global order by instituting cross-cutting partnerships that transcend conventional dividing lines. Though India is engaged in the protracted border conflict with China, New Delhi has pursued closer interactions with Beijing through translateral platforms, such as the BRICS group, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Rather than demanding Russia pick a side in the Indian-Chinese conflict, New Delhi has skillfully leveraged its close relationship with Russia as a channel of communication with Beijing.³¹ Despite challenges, such practices of translateralism form a basis for the meteoric rise of India, which is on its path to becoming the world’s most populous country and the third global economic power.

²⁹Jiji Tsushin. (2021). “Chuugoku houimou” ni ondosa: Nichibeigouin, anposhoku usuku [Diverging positions on the “containment” of China: Cooperation among Japan, America, Australia, and India entails limited security aspects]. *Jiji Tsushin*, 13 March 2021.

³⁰CFR. (2019). A conversation with Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar of India. CFR Event, 25 September 2019, Accessible at <https://www.cfr.org/event/conversation-foreign-minister-subrahmanyam-jaishankar-india-0>.

³¹Roy, S. (2020). Why Russia has emerged a key player amid India, China tensions. *India Express*, 23 June 2020.

Japan's Translateralism

The case of contemporary Japanese foreign policy demonstrates that translateral diplomacy is not wholly incompatible with alliance arrangements. Though Japan's foreign relations remain anchored in Japanese-American bilateral security cooperation, Tokyo has also developed constructive relationships with a diverse array of states, including with those of "anti-Western" inclinations such as Myanmar, Iran, and Sudan. In 2014, Japan reluctantly joined anti-Russian sanctions to demonstrate its conformity with Atlantic powers, but Tokyo has also taken a number of concrete steps to further its relationship with Russia. In 2016, the Abe administration launched an exceptional cooperation package to bolster Russia's status as a "*seikatsukankyō taikoku*" (a great power of high-quality life) through mutually-beneficial cooperation.³² Under this plan, nearly four hundred agreements have been signed and more than two hundred concrete projects developed.³³ As Anton Beshpalov notes, "amid the growing confrontation between Russia and the West, Japan was one of the few Western-world countries maintaining a benevolent, or at least neutral, disposition towards Moscow."³⁴

For a long time, Japanese policymakers have adhered to the principle of "*seikei bunri*" (the separation of economics from politics) and refused to mobilize economic agreements as an instrument of political expediency. In November 2019, the former NATO Secretary-General Anders Rasmussen proclaimed that the Japan-EU Economic Partnership Agreement (signed in 2018) constituted a cornerstone

³² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2019). 8 kōumoku no kyōryoku puran: Rosia no seikatsukankyō taikoku, sangyō, keizai kaikaku no tameno kyōryoku puran [The 8-point cooperation plan: The cooperation plan to make Russia a great power of high quality life and to assist its economic reforms], Accessible at <https://www.ru.emb-japan.go.jp/economy/ja/index.html>.

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. (2019). 8 kōumoku no "kyōryoku puran" no shinchōku [Recent developments in the implementation of the 8-point cooperation plan], Accessible at <https://www.ru.emb-japan.go.jp/economy/common/file/8-point-plan-jp.pdf>.

³⁴ Beshpalov, A. (2021). Russia and Japan in Search of Strategic Empathy. *Valdai Expert Opinions*, 16 April 2021. URL: <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/russia-and-japan-in-search-of-strategic-empathy/>

of “a Euro-Japanese Alliance of Hope” and “democracies should stand together in the fight against autocracy.”³⁵ Merely a year after Rasmussen’s proclamation, in November 2020, Japan joined the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership led by China, demonstrating that divisive binary logic of “democracy vs autocracy” finds no resonance in Japanese foreign policy. As the largest ODA provider to the Chinese government since the 1970s, Japan in fact played a key role in China’s rise, while China also learned much from Japan’s best practices of mercantilism, state capitalism, and developmentalism.³⁶ Contemporary Western observers maintain that Chinese “autocracy” is seeking to undermine the viability of the “democratic” world order by advancing unfair economic practices, checkbook diplomacy indebting poor nations, unconditional aid with little human rights concerns, predatory mass infrastructure projects with destructive socio-ecological consequences, and expansionist maritime claims through the fortification of pacific islands.³⁷ What usually goes unnoticed is the fact that these are replications of Western criticism against Japanese “revisionism” in the 1980s and 1990s.³⁸ As Yale economist Stephen Roach emphasizes: “Back in the 1980s, Japan was portrayed as the greatest economic threat to the United States, and allegations of intellectual property theft were only part of Americans’ vilification. Thirty years later, Americans have made China the villain, when, just like three decades ago, they should be looking squarely in the mirror.”³⁹

³⁵ Rasmussen, A. (2019). Building a Euro-Japanese Alliance of Hope. *Project Syndicate*, 19 November 2019.

³⁶ See also Harris, T. (2021). The Surprising Strength of Chinese-Japanese Ties. *Foreign Affairs*, 4 May 2021.

³⁷ See, for example, Naim, M. (2009). Rogue aid. *Foreign Policy*, 15 October 2009.

³⁸ For instance, since the late 1980s, Japan fortified Parece Vela (*Okinotorishima*) – a small Pacific islet which constitutes the Southern limit of Japanese maritime territory. By building artificial fortifications around Parece Vela, Japan advanced expansionist claims over its Exclusive Economic Zones in the Philippine Sea and drew criticism from Chinese, Taiwanese, and South Korean policymakers. In 2016, Japan even forcefully detained Taiwanese fishery boats operating around Parece Vela. *Nikkei Shinbun*. (2016). Taiwan, okinotorishima de gyomin hogo he, junshisen ga shukkou [Taiwan to deploy patrol ships around okinotorishima]. *Nikkei Shinbun*, 1 May 2016.

³⁹ Roach, S. S. (2019). Japan then, China now. *Project Syndicate*, 27 May 2019. On Japan’s “economic Cold War” with the United States, see Huntington, S. P. (1993). Why international primacy matters. *International Security* 17(4): 68-83.

In many ways, Japan’s miraculous rise after 1945 was driven by its ability to synthesize multiple (and often contradictory) values and identities with an open-mindset.⁴⁰ Indeed, Japan’s ruling Liberal Democratic Party is itself a translateral coalition encompassing globalists, mercantilists, conservatives, progressives, nationalists, liberals, secularists, and religionists, among others. As such, Japan is simultaneously modern and traditional, democratic and authoritarian, Western and non-Western, Asian and non-Asian, and much more. Such a repertoire of non-binary state identities has enabled Japanese policymakers to interact with a diverse array of international partners and to learn from different innovative practices. Since 2020, such broad-ranging networks have helped Japan learn from the best practices of different partners (including China), devise effective responses to the global pandemic, and emerge as one of the least pandemic-affected nations in the world.

Russia’s Translateralism

Sensational narratives seek to frame Russia an “autocratic” world power relentlessly eyeing an attack its neighboring democracies. In the words of Larry Diamond, “Vladimir Putin is making the world safe for autocracy” and hence “Democracy is his enemy.”⁴¹ Yet such claims lack a sound scientific basis.⁴² As Marlene Laruelle enlightens:

One has to point out the irony that the portrayal of Russia as a totalitarian enemy of the West is being driven in part by the governments of Poland and the Baltic states, which are far more ethno-nationalist than Putin’s regime. Moreover, the U.S. has been supporting far more authoritarian

⁴⁰ See also Hagström, L. (2015). The “abnormal” state: Identity, norm/exception and Japan. *European Journal of International Relations* 21(1): 122-145.

⁴¹ Diamond, L. (2019). Democracy demotion: How the freedom agenda fell apart. *Foreign Affairs* 98 (4): 17-25.

⁴² See Way, L. A. (2015). The limits of autocracy promotion: The case of Russia in the “near abroad.” *European Journal of Political Research* 54(4): 691-706.

*regimes than Russia – Saudi Arabia or Sisi’s Egypt, for instance – without casting them in essentialist terms as foes of the West.*⁴³

More importantly, what is neglected here is the fact that Russia’s growing global influence in Eurasia and beyond is deeply amplified by its translateral partnerships with major “democratic” powers across the world, including those sharing borders with Russia.

Perhaps those who allege that Russia is assaulting “democracies” in its neighborhood have never been to the region, or surely, they have never interacted with democrats in New Delhi, Tokyo, and Seoul. Since 2014, India, Japan, and South Korea – the most populous and economically powerful democracies in Russia’s neighborhood – have continuously deepened their ties with Moscow and helped Russian citizens withstand the pressure of Western sanctions. As discussed above, India strengthened its military and economic partnership with Russia over the last years, while Japan launched the eight-point cooperation plan to make Russia “a great power of high-quality life.” In the meantime, South Korea established a visa-free regime with Russia in 2014, refused to join the anti-Russian sanctions, and launched the New Northern Policy in 2017 to further upgrade its bilateral relationship with Russia.

In the global arena, major “democratic” powers such as Brazil, India, and South Africa consistently stood with Russia to oppose Western interventionism. In the wake of the Ukrainian crisis, Brazilian IR scholar Oliver Stunkel noted:

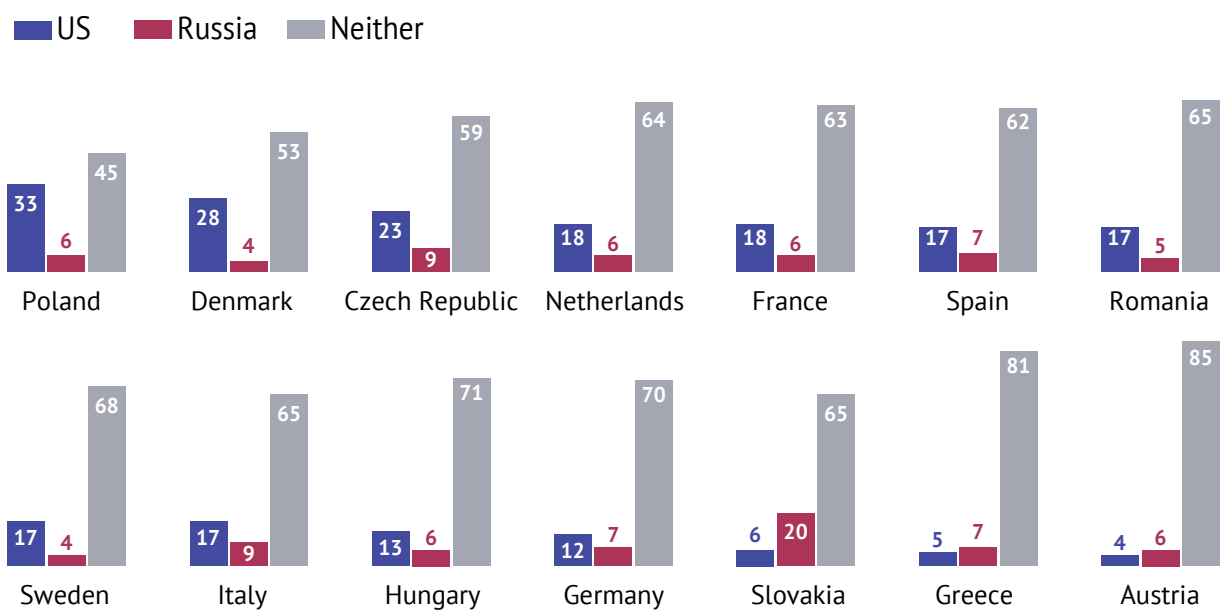
...the West’s alarm over Crimea is merely proof that established powers still consider themselves to be the ultimate arbiters of international norms, unaware of their own hypocrisy. If asked which country was the greatest threat to international stability, most Brazilian foreign policymakers and observers would not name Russia, Iran and North Korea, but the U.S.⁴⁴

⁴³ Laruelle, *Accusing Russia of Fascism*, 115.

⁴⁴ Stuenkel, O. (2014). *Why Brazil has not criticized Russia over Crimea. NOREF Policy Brief* May 2014. Oslo: Norwegian Centre for Conflict Resolution.

In the Libyan and Syrian crises, India, Brazil, and South Africa supported in principle the Russian position at the UNSC and criticized Western attempts to turn humanitarian tragedies into a hegemonic power game.⁴⁵ In Europe, the Putin administration has maintained cordial relationships with Greece (a NATO member) and Austria (an EU member) even after 2014. Most recently, Latin American democracies emerged as the main supporter of Russia’s Sputnik V vaccine. Though certain Atlantic elites opportunistically advance the binary narrative of Russia’s “autocratic” threat to the US-led “democratic” international order, this type of crude binary thinking is not embraced by the peoples of Europe, who are usually more open-minded than their elite counterparts. When a 2019 ECFR survey asked “Whose side should your country take in a conflict between the United States and Russia?”, the overwhelming majority of the surveyed European citizens answered “neither” (see Figure 2 below).⁴⁶

Figure 2. WHOSE SIDE SHOULD YOUR COUNTRY TAKE IN A CONFLICT BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND RUSSIA?



Source: European Council on Foreign Relations, ecf.eu

⁴⁵ See Abdenur, A. E. (2016). Rising powers and international security: The BRICS and the Syrian conflict. *Rising Powers Quarterly* 1(1): 109-133.

⁴⁶ Dennison, S. (2019). “Give the people what they want: Popular demand for a strong European foreign policy.” *ECFR Policy Brief* No. 10 September 2019, Data accessible at https://ecfr.eu/publication/popular_demand_for_strong_european_foreign_policy_what_people_want.

In many ways, Russia's lack of a rigidly uniform ideology has enabled it to develop cross-cutting partnerships with diverse actors across the world. Moscow deepened its relationship with communist one-party states such as China and Vietnam, but it also successfully solicited support from more liberal-minded states such as South Africa, Brazil, and other Latin American democracies. The Putin administration champions Orthodox Christian values, but it has also designated Islam and other religions as native faiths of the Russian nation, allowed Muslim minorities to practice Islamic/customary laws,⁴⁷ and retained its position as the only major European power participating in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Practicing the spirit of translateralism, Russia does not discriminate against its partners based on race, religion, civilization, regime type, or any other political labeling. From a binary viewpoint, this may appear to be a lack of "consistency" or pure strategic opportunism. But translateralism has certainly enhanced the overall resilience of Russian foreign policy by bringing together its unlike-minded partners and widening the horizon of its diplomatic actions across the world.

Conclusion

This report developed a new analytical concept of translateralism and argued that translateral diplomacy is essential to surviving and thriving in a turbulent world. Under an emerging translateral world order, the practice of global ordering primarily takes place via informal arrangements based on flexible and cross-cutting networks. The organizing purpose of the translateral world order is not to seek more control over global affairs, but instead to promote experimentation

⁴⁷ Lazarev, E. (2019). Laws in conflict: Legacies of war, gender, and legal pluralism in Chechnya. *World Politics* 71(4): 667-709.

and mutual learning in order to maximize collective creativity.⁴⁸ As shown above, translateralism is already a global norm practiced by major powers of diverse normative orientations that will likely become ever more important in the coming years.

The rise of the translateral world order entails crucial implications for Russian foreign policy. As discussed above, Russia has already developed extensive translateral partnerships with states of different races, religions, civilizations, and political systems. Despite this, many Russian policymakers still tend to exhibit reflexive opposition to the discourse of democratization, largely due to the negative memory of the “color revolutions.” If Russia seeks to emerge stronger from the ongoing pandemic crisis, Moscow needs to go beyond conventional binaries and rethink creatively about how the advancement of global democratization can benefit Russia’s national interests. In the past, democratization of Latin America has strengthened Russia’s relationships with Latin American democracies by breaking down pro-American military dictatorships. In Latvia, democratization helped the rise of pro-Russian Harmony party and in Montenegro, democratization empowered a coalition of pro-Russian parties to defeat pro-Western incumbents in the 2020 parliamentary elections.

Radical democratic reforms in other countries may pose short-term foreign policy challenges to Russia, particularly when advanced through revolutionary upheavals and regime change interventions. In the long run, however, global democratization can in fact act as an enabler of Russia’s foreign policy actions. As discussed above, China’s successful rise is driven by its ability to foster translateral

⁴⁸ Richard Haass and Charles Kupchan similarly emphasize the critical importance of inclusivity and informality. Haass, R. N., and Kupchan, C.A. (2021). The new concert of powers: How to prevent catastrophe and promote stability in a multipolar world. *Foreign Affairs*, 23 March 2021.

partnerships that go beyond conventional dividing lines; be it post-2012 Egypt or post-2014 Ukraine, Beijing has skillfully exploited the openness in democratizing societies as an entry-point for new partnership-building. In this light, further research is needed to determine how and under what conditions global democratization can empower Russia's foreign policy actions. In sum, the analytical concept of translateralism enables us to look at global affairs from a new angle, unconstrained by the conventional binaries that arbitrarily limit our imaginations. Such a fundamental perspective-shift is much needed in an era of deepening global uncertainty, where the reigning obsession with binarism is a liability in forging an open and prosperous future.

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