



Valdai
**New
Generation**

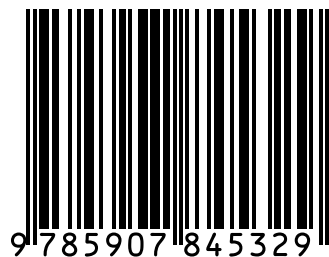
The New Horizons of Multipolarity



Edited by Timofei Bordachev

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ISBN 978-5-907845-32-9



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**Under the general editorship
of Timofei Bordachev**

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Foreword by the academic editor

This paper is the outcome of the experimental project titled “Valdai: New Generation,”¹ which brought together young creative but accomplished researchers from Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Serbia, Kyrgyzstan, Brazil, Italy, and Indonesia. For several months, five working groups involved in the project collaborated on preparing chapters of this group paper covering high-profile stories of contemporary international politics and the global economy. The participants themselves determined each chapter’s subject matter.

Fyodor Lukyanov, Oleg Barabanov, Anton Bespalov, Andrei Sushentsov, and Ivan Timofeev were highly instrumental in helping organise the participating creative groups’ activities. Without their caring attitude and close supervision, the project participants wouldn’t have been able to cope with the tasks at hand so well. The compilers of the paper and the academic director of the project also express gratitude to all staff members of the Club, especially Irina Yakovenko that helped them put their work on the systemic basis.

In their group paper, the participants of the Valdai: New Generation project presented their own vision of the most important trends and processes of global and regional importance that are exerting a direct impact on the modern world and the formation of what is commonly referred to in broad expert circles as the new world order. This order, if it ever emerges from the chaos of the present time, will not resemble any previously existing order that we know from the scientific literature primarily because it will not rely on the exclusive capabilities of a single centre in the form of a single major country or a group of countries laying out rules, institutions and international legal norms for the rest of the world. It will be largely a mosaic.

The authors’ hypotheses, findings and observations have been summarised in five chapters that make up the paper; each chapter carries a narrative of its own, which is in line with our goal of not putting the findings of the writing teams within the framework of a single theoretical scheme. In this sense, the authors act as historians of modern times and relatively objectively describe ongoing developments in international politics and the economy, but do not attempt to set a general trajectory of events. This trajectory forms from individual major phenomena highlighted in each chapter of the paper. The ambitious reader is offered a chance to understand and figure out for themselves how to navigate the diverse space of international life at the end of the first quarter of the 21st century. In a section of the paper its authors note, “the creation and functioning of world order is a dynamic process, not a one-off event.” It appears that the international expert community’s understanding of the new reality will be exactly the same.

¹ See: Valdai – New Generation. URL: <https://valdaiclub.com/projects/newgeneration/>

The approach chosen by the authors of the paper has its own specifics. It precludes any talk about creating a coherent concept of how the “new generation” of Valdai Club experts sees the new international order, and even less so determining which way of organising relations between the states the authors of the paper consider the best from the point of view of the problem of war and peace, which is fundamental to international politics. However, the chosen angle meets the Valdai Club’s basic principle, which is to encourage a broad and free expert discussion that does not seek to impose a particular point of view.

Like their academic adviser, the authors of the paper do not seek to define the strategy of a small group of countries in the changing international environment and to propose on their behalf new rules for the rest of humanity. They advocate a broad joint discussion of the critical issues and problems of our time, assess their content and nature, offer their own interpretations of ongoing developments, but in no way insist on them being the only correct approach out there.

This collective paper relies on the authors’ individual studies that have been posted over the past year on the Valdai Club’s website as individual analytical commentaries. This doesn’t make the paper a mere collection of articles or a collective monograph: even in the deliberate absence of a general theoretical concept, the writing team sees this extensive paper as a pithy overview of key processes and phenomena of the contemporary world.

This paper is an honest attempt to gain insight into what the new international order might look like. Honest, because the paper does not claim to define the main features of the future world order’s structure, or its legal or institutional organisation. These topics are traditionally among the most discussed and tend to be over-theorised, and it turns out that the real content of international politics and the economy is hidden under a thick layer of speculative schemes, and the discussion does not go very far from the way the question has been framed originally.

The writers assume that in the world of the future, countries and their citizens will have to live amid constantly changing conditions with little certainty, and the emergence of a new rigid power structure of the international system is limited by very powerful factors. In such circumstances, states themselves begin to create cooperation mechanisms that partially complement or represent an alternative to the existing ones and, in any case, meet national interests and long-term development goals. This cooperation, as suggested by the authors of one of the chapters of the paper, can be conceptually based on abandoning the conflicting binary logic of interaction and adopting an integration-oriented way of thinking that will allow us to go beyond zero-sum scenarios.

In this world, what is commonly referred to as the international (world, global) order is a process driven by creativity, the results of which always remain uncertain, while events and basic processes remain in complex interaction, are intertwined and often lead to unexpected, but always inconclusive outcomes. States create new pretexts for conflicts and look themselves for ways to overcome negative consequences of realisation of their interests. The outcome of the research conducted by the participants in the Valdai: New Generation project confirms this uncertainty and reveals the unstructured nature of the new way of international life. Many new generations of talented researchers will have to address these intricacies.

Chapter 1.

New Global Governance: The Role of BRICS and G20

**Rahul Gupta, Ladislav Zemánek,
Milana Živanović, Peng Bo, Sellita**

The emergence of the BRICS group in the international arena was one of the most significant events of the first quarter of the 21st century. Challenging the West as the architect of the existing global world order, BRICS proposed reorganising and improving the order that had run its course. In practice, this means incorporating the interests of the BRICS countries into this order, since the existing one was created with their minimal participation and partly to the detriment of their interests. The goal is to build a truly fair multipolar world to redistribute influence and global wealth from the West to the global non-West and South.

BRICS has already become an important platform for addressing key global economic and energy security challenges. Its political and economic potential is far from being exhausted. By investing in emerging technologies, BRICS can become a major driver of global economic growth. The development of a new global governance model through trade with common currency is expected to accelerate the de-dollarisation process, increase BRICS' global influence, and establish it as a powerful leader.

Positioning itself as an alternative to the Western system, the group does not and will not use the same strategies that the West used to create the existing world order to achieve its goals. In other words, in seeking to build a harmonious world and to ensure prosperity for all, BRICS denies force or violence. Therefore, the group's main tools include specific economic mechanisms that do not require other countries to adhere to a common economic strategy or policy.

BRICS initiatives are not directed against any particular country or the West in general. Nor does the group seek to replace the West; it only advocates overcoming global inequalities. BRICS fights global imbalances; it is not anti-Western, but is rather an alternative pole that unites rather than divides. BRICS unites even those countries whose relations are not of a partnership or alliance nature, which confirms the attractiveness of its basic value platform, activities and goals, as well as the similarity of interests of multiple states and their ability to set aside some differences.

The importance of Bandung Spirit for unifying Global South

In a world of emerging multipolarity, the Bandung Spirit has inspired developing countries to embrace multilateralism when building regional institutions. Building on the idea of independence which received another boost at the 1955 Bandung Conference, developing countries today offer mutually beneficial solutions to common challenges. Established in 1961, the Non-Aligned Movement has also helped raise the voice of the Global South in their common quest for a more just world. BRICS offers new hope for the Global South. The group can strengthen solidarity among developing countries, facilitate the sharing of experiences, and mobilise resources for sustainable development. The Bandung Spirit principles remain integral to BRICS countries as they keep moving forward.

Balance of interests within and beyond BRICS

From focusing on improving the global economic situation and calling for reforming the international financial system, BRICS is moving to a broader agenda that includes an entire range of geopolitical interests. By pursuing

horizontal and vertical institutionalisation, the group is positioning itself as a more democratic global space for dialogue and consensus building within the international system.

The latest round of enlargement has strengthened the role of BRICS as a major global platform. However, for India, Brazil and South Africa, for example, participation in BRICS means balancing between BRICS and Western-led organisations, as well as balancing within BRICS to secure their own interests. These countries, as well as many new participants, may be faced with a choice between global governance institutions supported by the Western and non-Western world. There is a need to revise the BRICS mandate and institutionalise cooperation that takes into account the member countries' views, proposals and concerns. An improved BRICS could address actual governance challenges in a fractured multipolar world by capitalising on its strengths and staying out of ideological or regulatory disputes to avoid division and becoming the voice of the Global South and the collective non-West.

Similarity of views does not mean that BRICS members always act or speak as one. The divergence in opinions and actions is quite notable which is largely due to the fact that two competing philosophical concepts have come to define member countries' views of BRICS, the group's place in a multipolar world, and their own place in it. China and Russia (and now Iran) are in favour of transforming the world order, in part because of Western attempts to cut Russia (and Iran) off from existing international forums and corner China, while India, Brazil and South Africa prefer to remain part of existing Western-led international institutions, but are dissatisfied with these institutions' discriminatory practices and lopsided forms of representation. To mitigate this imbalance, India, Brazil, and South Africa participate in BRICS, which offers alternative economic and political mechanisms and, moreover, a safeguard against the excessive influence of Western platforms. No one wants BRICS to be regarded as an anti-Western grouping, as this could exacerbate the choice between West and non-West.

Finding common ground in BRICS+

To prevent the group from being dragged into a new Cold War, India, Brazil, and South Africa are trying to steer the BRICS agenda towards important issues facing the Global South, such as the developing world's needs and its greater representation at the international level.

This, among other things, strengthens solidarity within BRICS. The founding BRICS countries are increasingly gearing their foreign policies towards the Global South. Many leading developing countries have rejected the West's diktat of unilateral sanctions against its geopolitical rivals, condemned its silence on the war in Gaza, and its failure to rein in Israel. BRICS expansion came as recognition of the importance of the Global South's interests, which had been ignored by the existing institutions of the West.

Today, the Global South countries have a much wider choice. They can switch between Western and non-Western global financial and geopolitical blocs depending on who meets their basic development needs. The New Development Bank and BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement contribute to the diversification of the international financial system.

A non-Western agenda for post-Western global governance

BRICS brings a bold new vision of a non-Western agenda to the post-Western global governance landscape. Despite its mixed make-up, divergent interests, and geopolitical fragmentation, BRICS has demonstrated resilience as it continues to welcome new members and to create a growing network of mechanisms that maintain its appeal as a popular alternative to global governance for countries dissatisfied with the Western-centric world order architecture. By giving voice to rising non-Western powers and empowering them to act, BRICS has the potential to become a leading pole of a multipolar world. Supporting the basic development needs of these countries will be an important way to strengthen the coherence of the group.

Western approaches to global governance

The United States and the EU have to adapt to multipolarity, which they perceive mainly as a source of irritation and threat rather than a positive law-creating process. Regardless of the administration in office, the United States seeks to keep its hegemonic position intact by utilising

a wide range of strategies and tools. The European Union emphasises the central role of the UN, multilateral agreements and a common agenda, recognises the need to reform the global governance system, and does not deny multipolarity. However, reality lags behind the rhetoric, primarily for geopolitical reasons and because of excessive dependence on the United States. Effective EU multilateralism relies on “rules-based order.” Securitisation and risk reduction call into question the EU’s commitment to true multilateralism and free trade. Rather, there is a push to create “strategic autonomy.”

In addition to the EU’s dominant liberal paradigm, a counter-discourse is developing in Europe that shares common features with Trumpism. It promotes cultural conservatism, political democracy (majoritarianism), the welfare state and sovereign internationalism. Interestingly, this non-liberal paradigm can unite right-wing and left-wing players in opposition to liberal hegemony with its globalism and progressivism. The question is whether this approach can be sustained and developed within the framework of Atlanticism (EU and NATO) and whether it will take the lead in Europe in the longer term. Growing sovereignty in the Old World would be very useful not only for developing pragmatic relations with the world majority, but also for building a multipolar world order.

The G20’s role in global governance

The G20 plays a critical role in creating an atmosphere conducive to peace, inclusiveness and shared prosperity. The G20’s mandate goes beyond mere economic coordination and includes promoting values that underpin sustainable global development.

Acting as a bridge between developed and developing countries, the G20 promotes knowledge sharing and technology transfer enabling developing countries to overcome development stages and integrate more smoothly into the global economy. This sharing of best practices not only accelerates economic growth, but also fosters a sense of solidarity and mutual responsibility among countries. In today’s interconnected world, one country’s prosperity or problems can have direct consequences for others. By facilitating the dialogue among different cultures and societies,

the G20 can help mitigate misunderstandings and reduce the likelihood of conflicts occurring. The G20's consensus-based approach addresses systemic governance risks associated with the unilateral actions of a few powerful states. By involving all major economies in deliberative processes, the G20 ensures more balanced global policies and strengthens the global governance architecture.

Conclusion

Neoliberal globalisation is over, and the world is on track to become increasingly fragmented. The struggle to create a new international system is intensifying. The time of asynchronous multipolarity² and democratisation of international relations is here. The possibility of the world majority to come to the fore goes hand in hand with the attempts of the fading hegemon to reverse this trend, which inevitably leads to tensions, conflicts, and crises. Under such circumstances, managed competition, negative coexistence and “sustainable instability” seem to be the best we can expect in the medium term.

To avoid total disintegration and chaos, all parties must adhere to the principles of the UN Charter and a UN-centred international system with international law as the regulatory framework. The world majority should seek to replace liberal internationalism (“rules-based order”) with sovereign internationalism as the main interpretation of the Charter principles and to find like-minded allies in the West. The sovereign internationalism promoted by BRICS, the SCO and most of the Global South countries may be acceptable to a certain extent to the United States under the Trump Administration and even more so to non-liberal players in Europe.

The world majority should expand cooperation within non-Western platforms and develop parallel alternative institutions wherever possible in order to lay the foundations for a new global governance structure and to strengthen its position through diversification. It is not about destroying existing institutions, but about creating objective conditions for expanding freedom of action, manoeuvring and ensuring the sovereignty of all countries, which some Western players may find acceptable. The

² See: Ivan Timofeev. Asynchronous Multipolarity: Control Parameters and Development Vectors // Valdai Discussion Club. 31.05.2025. URL: <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/asynchronous-multipolarity-control-parameters/>

tactics of creative (self-)development will make it possible to oppose unilateral rules, double standards and hegemonic policies on the part of Western players.

The G20 and BRICS should acquire working mechanisms to improve the effectiveness of global governance. The representativeness of these associations in terms of political and economic power gives them the opportunity to be in control of the situation.

The G20 and BRICS countries will need to reach consensus on a number of global issues. The very list of members of these associations that include countries with strained relations that issue joint declarations confirms that this is feasible. In our opinion, this scenario has a chance to materialise in the medium term.

It is possible that, down the road, BRICS will subsequently reorient itself from a reformist association to a provider of some, if not all, global public goods. Thanks to its expanded membership, the group already possesses the necessary physical capabilities to launch positive changes across a number of strategic areas.

Chapter 2. Artificial Intelligence in Global Politics: Challenges and Prospects

**Vitor de Moura, Javairyah Aatif,
Anna Sytnik, and Alexander Ulanov**

Artificial intelligence has become a transformative force in global politics and the economy. It shapes international influence entities, security paradigms, and economic competitiveness. As AI continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace, its influence will extend to virtually all areas of global governance and create both opportunities and significant risks.

AI and international security

AI is increasingly becoming part of national security as it reshapes military strategy, intelligence operations, and cyber warfare. From 2025 to 2040, AI-based military applications will change the way warfare is conducted, shifting the focus from human-controlled operations to autonomy. By 2028, AI-based command and control (C2) systems will become widespread, simplifying tactical coordination and strategic planning. By 2040, fully autonomous combat units are likely to become operational, giving rise to critical ethical and legal questions regarding accountability and control systems during hostilities. This transformation will challenge existing military doctrines, including deterrence strategies and the principle of proportionality in military conflicts.

The emergence of AI-based warfare technologies is not only transforming military capabilities, but is also impacting the global arms race and strategic stability. As AI technologies become integrated into defence systems, new risks will emerge, including the possibility of AI-driven conflict escalation and automated military decision-making without human control.

AI will play an increasingly significant role in national security in cyberspace. By 2027, the United States and China are expected to deploy AI-enabled cyber defence systems capable of real-time threat detection and automated response. By 2035, advances in quantum AI may enable the decryption of modern encryption protocols. Risks associated with advances in quantum AI include the potential for cyberattacks that could disrupt global financial systems, power grids, and defence systems.

AI espionage is also emerging as a key issue as states apply AI-based algorithms to intercept communications, manipulate data, and predict enemy moves. This raises ethical questions about privacy rights, human freedoms, and the potential for overreach in intelligence operations.

AI in military conflicts

One of the most prominent examples of the use of AI in warfare is the use of AI in Israel's recent military operations in Gaza. The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) deployed AI-powered platforms – *Alchemist*, *Depth of Wisdom*, and *Gospel* – to enhance battlefield intelligence, targeting accuracy, and strategic planning. While AI has improved the effectiveness of operations,

its use in armed conflicts has raised ethical and legal concerns about civilian casualties, misinformation, and compliance with international humanitarian law.

Cyberwarfare is another key area of AI's impact on combat operations and global security. AI-generated deep fakes and propaganda bots are used to spread disinformation, influence democratic processes, and manipulate public opinion. AI's ability to create highly realistic fake content poses fact-checking challenges and undermines public trust in the media. The impact of these technologies goes beyond military conflicts and can destroy the political stability of entire countries.

New mechanisms of liability distribution are needed to ensure that autonomous systems comply with international law. Discussing the rules of engagement for AI warfare, preparing arms control agreements and creating oversight mechanisms are essential to prevent escalation and unintended conflicts caused by AI.

AI and global technological inequality

The race for AI superiority has increased the asymmetry in access to technology between developed and developing countries, exacerbating global inequality as countries with advanced AI capabilities dominate industry, economy and security.

China's Digital Silk Road Initiative is attempting to bridge this gap by exporting AI-powered infrastructure and surveillance systems to developing countries, particularly in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. However, this raises the issue of digital sovereignty, as countries relying on Chinese AI technology are concerned about becoming dependent on Beijing's governance model. The United States and its allies are seeking to counter China's influence by encouraging AI partnerships with democratic institutions and private sector-driven innovations.

The competition between AI ecosystems, one led by the United States and its allies and the other by China, will shape the future of digital regulation. Developing countries face a choice of AI regulatory models that will affect their economic development, security systems and geopolitical balance of power in the coming decades.

AI and the future of labour

Automation through artificial intelligence is reshaping labour markets, replacing jobs in traditional industries and creating new opportunities in high-tech sectors. By 2040, AI is expected to play a dominant role in economic productivity, with automated systems addressing issues in manufacturing, logistics, healthcare, and finance. While this transformation will lead to economic growth, it will also present challenges for workforce adaptation and social stability. Governments will need to implement policies that facilitate workforce transitions, including investments in education, retraining programmes, and social safety nets. The economic shifts brought about by AI will require new labour regulations, tax policies, and public-private cooperation to ensure that technological advances benefit society as a whole rather than exacerbate economic inequality.

Regulatory challenges and the ethics of AI

The rapid development of AI is outpacing the establishment of regulatory frameworks to ensure its responsible use. Ethical issues related to AI bias, algorithm transparency, and liability remain unresolved, raising questions about ways to regulate AI globally. The international community must develop binding agreements to regulate the use of AI in warfare, cybersecurity, and economic activities. The UN, the EU, and other international organisations have proposed guidelines for AI governance, but enforcement mechanisms remain weak. Without clear regulatory standards, AI development risks becoming a tool for geopolitical manipulation that lacks ethical oversight.

Conclusion

AI is not only a powerful tool in the economic and military spheres, but also a transformative force shaping the dynamics of global influence. Without effective regulation, AI has the potential to exacerbate global inequality, fuel cyber conflicts, and negatively impact democratic

processes. As AI becomes an integral part of strategic decision-making, the countries that can balance technological advancement with regulatory oversight will determine the future of global governance. The coming decades will determine whether AI becomes a tool for international cooperation or a catalyst for geopolitical tensions. It is the responsibility of world leaders, policymakers and international institutions to ensure that AI development is ethical and contributes to promoting global stability rather than fuelling conflicts.

Chapter 3. Political Economy and the Sustainable Development Goals: External Challenges for the Global South

**Joko Susilo, Emanuel Pietrobon,
Matvei Kiselyov, Mikhail Shatrov**

The multipolar world has arrived, but overcoming the negative legacy of unipolarity and shaping fairer models of international political and economic interaction is an extremely protracted process. It is likely to take years, if not decades, and will require specific, purpose-oriented efforts from the entire international community. The issue of sustainable development of the Global South countries is where these efforts seem to be most urgently needed. Although this concept is universal, its implementation and associated challenges vary across different regions of the world. Let us examine the main challenges stemming from the policies of developed countries, drawing on the example of various Global South associations that unite its countries.

The negative influence of the international environment

As a starting point, we will outline the main threats created by developed countries that hinder the sustainable development of the majority of world population.

The global great power rivalry. The countries of the Global South are often caught in the crossfire, forced to manoeuvre as great powers compete for geopolitical influence, economic domination and control over resources. Poorer countries frequently bear a disproportionately heavy burden of consequences created by the global struggle for power.

Unilateral economic restrictions. The use of sanctions by developed countries as a tool of political pressure results primarily in the disruption of global value-added chains. As a rule, it is usually the Global South countries that face the consequences.

Non-market competition tools. Advanced countries make an active use of these tools against emerging Global South economies to limit their economic presence in the world market. An indicative case in point is the green protectionism extensively used by the US and EU countries to shield their domestic markets from cheaper products from the Global South countries.

Ineffectiveness of a number of existing global governance institutions. The inadequate allocation of votes in key international financial organisations, such as the IMF and the World Bank – where the Global Majority and Global South countries have far fewer opportunities to present their perspectives compared to the US and the EU – exemplifies the need to reform these institutions in such a way as to bring them in line with contemporary realities and challenges.

ASEAN: Between the hammer and the anvil

Born in 1967 and composed of ten countries of the region, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) accounts for 7.2 percent of global GDP and 8.3 percent of the world population. It is also one of the

most successful international organisations in the Global South. Between 2010 and 2023, the growth rates of its combined GDP averaged 4.5 percent per year. In 2023, it accounted for 8.62 percent of global commodity exports, leading to expectations that ASEAN will emerge as the world's fourth biggest economy by 2030.

The escalation of rivalry between the United States and China is the most significant challenge and threat to ASEAN's sustainable development, arising from the international environment and policies pursued by advanced countries.

Given that both the US and China seek to expand their influence in the Indo-Pacific Region, the ASEAN countries are often caught in the crossfire and face diplomatic and economic pressures. The US-China rivalry has led to an increased militarisation of the South China Sea, where territorial claims have heightened the risk of conflict. The trade war and technological division between the US and China have disrupted the global supply chains that many ASEAN countries depend on. Competition for investment in infrastructure, exemplified by the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the US Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), has created a dilemma for ASEAN countries, as they must weigh the benefits of foreign investment against the risks of falling into debt bondage or a geopolitical trap. The rise of military tensions in the region has led to the emergence of new and smaller cooperation formats, such as the Quad and AUKUS, in which ASEAN countries are not represented. This absence diminishes their role in the Indo-Pacific and introduces additional economic and political complications.

CELAC: Facing protectionism, sanctions and under-representation

Founded in 2010, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) was created as a platform enabling Global South countries to expand cooperation and integration in Latin America while curtailing US political and economic influence in the region. However, CELAC has failed to become a powerful regional integration group, remaining a weakly institutionalised forum with unclear prospects. The challenges faced by this regional group reflect broader issues affecting Global South countries in matters related to sustainable development.

One of these challenges is the green protectionism policy adopted by advanced countries that seek to close their agricultural markets to more competitive Latin American products. A case in point is the refusal by several EU countries to ratify the 2019 EU-MERCOSUR trade agreement, which would eliminate the majority of tariffs between the two integration associations.

Another challenge for the CELAC countries is the unilateral economic restrictions (sanctions) imposed by advanced countries to exert political pressure on their foreign policy adversaries. This point is best illustrated by US policies towards Venezuela and Cuba.

Latin America's overall under-representation in the existing institutions of global governance, specifically the UN Security Council (as Russia has repeatedly emphasised) is yet another impediment to the sustainable development of CELAC countries.

The African Union: Combating the vestiges of colonialism

The 55-nation African Union (AU) is a body that represents the entire continent. One of its aims is to promote peace, security and stability in Africa. The AU has put forward a number of economic initiatives, including the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). In recent years, the AU has sought foreign investment by establishing partnerships with multilateral organisations, such as the Arab League and the EU, as well as with individual countries, notably China, India, Turkey, and the US, and by implementing projects that support the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Western neocolonialism is the most prominent external challenge facing AU countries. Inequitable trade agreements, predatory exploitation of resources, and imposed restructuring programmes are tactics that often enable Western powers and transnational corporations to prioritise profits over the long-term development needs of African countries. For example, it is estimated that Africa loses \$50 billion per year due to illegal financial flows, including tax evasion and the repatriation of profits

by transnational corporations. Natural resources are often extracted with disregard for environmental stability and indigenous population rights, resulting in deforestation, environmental pollution and biodiversity loss. Moreover, although Africa accounts for almost 65 percent of the world's arable land, it remains a net importer of food, with over 20 percent of its population suffering from hunger. Additionally, Western financial domination and foreign debt pressure limit African governments' ability to invest in crucial areas such as education, healthcare and renewable energy sources.

Conclusion

To address these challenges, the Global South can develop closer cooperation with various associations of developing nations. In turn, these associations can continue their institutionalisation to create effective alternatives to existing institutions of global governance. The most promising platform in this regard is the BRICS Group, which supports the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Chapter 4. Conflicts and Integration

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The ongoing transformation of the system of international relations, as in all eras, is accompanied by the emergence of conflicts in critical zones of global contention. The positive development lies in the fact that integration processes are being reinterpreted: while the West continues to frame its discourse around the logic of blocs and poles of power, the nations of the Global Majority now adhere to principles of equidistance, thereby laying the foundations for future polyphony in international relations.

But does a solution exist to mitigate the accumulated potential for conflict, which risks escalating into large-scale confrontation? Beyond the obvious, purely moral and ethical principles (known to many but respected by few), we argue that such a solution may emerge through an integration-oriented approach.

Conflict as a catalyst for rapprochement

The term “conflict” derives from the Latin *confligere*, meaning “collision” or “struggle.” Over time, its meaning has broadened to encompass disagreements and disputes between individuals or states. However, in international relations, the original sense of conflict as “collision” or “struggle” has remained central. The famous dictum of Carl von Clausewitz – that war is the continuation of politics by other means – retains its relevance two centuries later. International politics has long been shaped by a reductionist tendency that simplifies conflict to its most primitive form of confrontation. This obscures the complex structure of any conflict, undermining our ability to devise universal approaches to its resolution.

Conflicts are, undoubtedly, an inherent feature of international relations, which are by nature competitive. Traditional perceptions of conflict focus solely on divergences in the interests of international actors, based on the assumption that these differences mask some form of fundamental antagonism. However, history demonstrates that conflicts do not always stem from antagonistic interests: they often arise from disagreements that persist even amid consensus on other issues. The subject of a conflict may involve divergent visions of how the global system should be structured in ethical, ideological, cultural, technological, or financial terms.

In this context, it is vital to move beyond simplistic notions that conflicts are driven solely by hostility and must inevitably culminate in armed clashes. Negotiations and debates often foster deeper understanding, enabling dialogue and resolution of disagreements without recourse to weapons – to paraphrase Clausewitz, “with the involvement of other means.” Even when conflict is unavoidable, it inherently contains the potential for rapprochement.

Conflict between major powers often signals that the time has come to reform governance systems to align with evolving capabilities and demands. This compels the international community to reassess entrenched structures of rights and responsibilities. Thus, conflict imparts a positive impetus to international relations.

The end of the Cold War was marked by a series of agreements between the Soviet Union and the United States, establishing strategic parity and a balance of power in Europe. However, these commitments were gradually abandoned unilaterally by the United States. This, alongside the systematic disregard for the strategic interests of other players, has fostered an atmosphere of global uncertainty.

Today, the primary driving force behind international conflicts lies in developing nations' awareness of their growing influence on the global stage – a reality the United States refuses to acknowledge as it clings to its absolute dominance. A schism has emerged in international politics between the West and the rest of the world, the Global Majority, whose interests cannot be fully met within the framework of Western-led international agreements and institutions. As the redistribution of power and resources continues – moving towards a new equilibrium (if such a state is even attainable) – the nations of the Global Majority increasingly advocate for integration.

Integration: a rising trend in the shadow of conflicts

The term “integration” derives from the Latin *integratio* (“restoration” or “revival”), signifying the unification of distinct parts into a cohesive whole. In political science and international relations, this definition is often narrowed to specific integration blocs or regional groups. However, in our view, what matters is not the institutional form of integration but its underlying principles and driving forces. We will therefore examine integration as a means to overcome conflictual behaviour, avoiding reference to well-known, conventionally categorised integration frameworks.

Historical analysis reveals that the genesis of conflicts escalating into armed confrontation lies in the aforementioned binary logic of clashing perspectives, values, and interests. To mitigate confrontation, traditional

foreign policy tools – negotiations, positional debates, compromises, or even “peace through strength” – may be attempted. Yet solutions forged through such diplomatic means often merely lay the groundwork for new conflicts, as exemplified by the harsh conditions imposed on the Weimar Republic via the Treaty of Versailles. To break this vicious circle of confrontation, it is necessary to transcend binary thinking.

Existing theories and practices of international relations do not equate anarchy with the inevitability of inter-state (armed) conflict. The international community possesses numerous mechanisms to establish and maintain world order, and it is vital to adapt these tools to mitigate risks amid shifting circumstances. Moreover, the creation and functioning of world order is a dynamic process, not a one-off event. During periods of relative stability, participants may develop freely within established international norms while bearing corresponding obligations. However, their developmental trajectories and rates of influence growth diverge, leading to a mismatch between their *de facto* rights and the obligations they are expected to fulfil. When actors within the international order perceive an imbalance between their contributions and the privileges they receive, discontent can escalate into conflict.

To achieve enduring peace among nations, an alternative path may be pursued – one absent from conventional foreign policy doctrines but rooted in a more complex strategy reliant on unconventional and uneven (hereafter – *odd&uneven*) foundations. The essence of this approach lies in transcending binary logic by introducing a third dimension to the interaction model, transforming it from a flat structure into a multidimensional framework.

In international relations, these *odd&uneven* foundations find natural expression in integration-oriented approaches. The concept of integration invariably introduces a new, transcendent tier – for example, universal values, supranational institutions, or regional civilisations – which itself constitutes a dimension capable of reshaping rigid interaction models, including binary ones.

Integration fosters an alternative logic of engagement. The more deeply parties commit to deliberating, communicating, and acting on shared agendas, the more profound the transformation in their respective

attitudes and intentions. Cultivating such integration-oriented thinking is a protracted endeavour, yet it bears fruit by incentivising states to genuinely move beyond zero-sum scenarios towards mutually beneficial outcomes.

The BRICS new chapter: a harmonious path to integration

The natural response to Western resistance against the sovereign economic, cultural-civilisational, and political development of the Global Majority has been the creation of alternative frameworks that challenge unilateral and binary worldviews. The uniqueness of BRICS+ integration lies in its fundamentally distinct approach to international cooperation. Unlike traditional Western integration models, which impose standardised requirements and reforms, BRICS+ prioritises flexibility and respect for diverse developmental paths.

For instance, the BRICS New Development Bank sets itself apart from Western institutions by offering financial support without stringent political conditionalities. Initiatives advanced at the 2024 Kazan BRICS Summit aim to resolve long-standing institutional contradictions with a declining hegemon, forging not new rules or norms but an order in which hegemony itself becomes untenable.

BRICS is not merely a high-level discussion club but a laboratory for testing models of future international relations. Two aspects are pivotal: first, BRICS unites most of the world's regional civilisations (Chinese, Russian, Indian, Islamic, African, and Ibero-American); second, the nature of interaction within BRICS embodies a novel form of international conduct. The synergy of these factors enables the exploration and implementation of foundational principles for the emerging global architecture – its spiritual, ethical, and intellectual tenets, which will shape future civilisational standards of behaviour under the primacy of sovereignty.

The concept of the Global Majority has gained traction as nations seek development models that honour their autonomy. This coalition's strength stems not only from economic collaboration but also from its capacity to acknowledge the legitimacy of diverse political systems and

developmental approaches without infringing on members' sovereignty. The revival of bloc-based thinking in an interdependent, globalised world is virtually impossible, as it would jeopardise the interests of numerous states pursuing multifaceted policies. Non-Western nations must chart their course under new conditions, focusing not on confrontation but on constructive engagement, not on reactive policies but on proactive strategies.

The solution lies in fostering integration processes. BRICS+, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and the Eurasian Economic Union could serve as platforms for broad, low-commitment cooperation among a vast array of states. For narrower objectives, bilateral comprehensive strategic partnerships or networked structures addressing specific issues – such as military-technical cooperation, energy projects, or climate action – may be established. In Eurasia, small-scale groupings of three to five states could prove advantageous. Sustained collaboration across multilateral and mini-lateral formats will help BRICS+ nations converge on a shared vision for the future international order.

Conclusion

The integration concept adopted by the Global Majority, grounded in *odd&uneven* principles, presents an opportunity to prevail without conflict. The more actors engage in jointly shaping new platforms around higher-order priorities (such as those driving now the BRICS agenda), the more profound the qualitative transformations within each participant – and thus, the greater the likelihood of peacefully resolving their contradictions.

A fitting metaphor illustrates this principle: imagine white and black pawns facing each other on a vast chessboard, only to realise that above them loom the hands of players endowed with reason and empathy. These players lock eyes, recognising at last that the rules have changed: victory now lies in preserving as many pieces on the board as possible.

Chapter 5. A World of Regions

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Traditional concepts suggest that states should strengthen their regional hegemony before projecting their influence globally. However, modern geopolitical realities challenge this notion, as states adopt various approaches to regionalism based on their strategic priorities.

Is global power status achievable without regional hegemony?

Regional powers often regard integration as a way to ensure their dominance in the region and attain a higher status on the global stage. A pertinent example is Russia's approach to integration within the Eurasian Economic Union, which is driven by both economic and geopolitical interests. An example of a different approach is India's regional policy in South Asia, where New Delhi doesn't seek to promote a common agenda.

India regards South Asia as an "elusive sphere of influence," a term coined by prominent Indian scholar C. Raja Mohan. Although India is the only dominant player in the region both economically and militarily, it has a limited ability to maintain its leadership or form its own entourage. The majority of regional players are using their ties with the most powerful external player, China, to counter India's domination. Another obstacle is India's longstanding conflict with Pakistan. Economically, South Asia is the least integrated region in the world. That is why India does not see

much sense in regional integration, working instead to gain a status and recognition on the global stage and access to foreign resources, investment and technology for implementing its ambitious plan of becoming a developed nation by 2047, a century after gaining independence. But regional countries cannot accommodate this aspiration.

Despite its strategic significance for security, South Asia is a region of secondary importance for India's global power ambitions. Therefore, India is not investing many resources in the region or trying to become the leader of regional integration.

Can strategic autonomy go together with integration?

A pressing concern for all regions around the world is how to balance a process of integration, which offers clear economic benefits, with the strategic autonomy of the countries involved in this process. West Europe looked for an answer to this question after the Second World War, when it brought together six countries with similar economies and values. Over the subsequent 80 years, European integration has grown in terms of both quantity and quality, but the initial concept remained unchanged. In accordance with it, European countries must remain united to survive in the changing world and maintain a relatively influential centre of power compared to the United States, Russia or China.

The developments of the past few years have shown that the situation is moving in the opposite direction. The role of the leading EU countries in global politics has declined with the expansion and deepening of integration. By ceding their influence to Brussels, they have forfeited their own views on global processes and their independent role within them. The EU has survived several crises but has not become a prominent military-political player. The discussion of defence projects has largely centred on the recognition of NATO's priority by nearly all EU countries and their inability to move away from the US umbrella. The European elites only addressed the issue of gaining a real strategic autonomy at the turn of the 2010s-2020s, but it was too late and approached with reluctance.

Europe's example shows that integration that is combined with the loss of sovereignty and with reliance on an external ally does not

align well with strategic autonomy. Unlike the European project, other cooperation models where the sovereignty of all member states is an indisputable value (the Eurasian Economic Union, BRICS or ASEAN) and which bring together the developing countries of the global majority have a clear chance of success.

Balance between regional cooperation and external pressure

Another regional example is the development of Central Asia, where five states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – gained independence after the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991. They not only share a common past but also face current external challenges that they must address. There are several challenges.

The change of government in Syria: The participation of militants from Central Asia in the opposition movement Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), which has been designated a terrorist organisation in Russia and several other countries, as well as in Afghanistan, is creating risks that could be mitigated in the long term through closer cooperation within the CSTO, the CIS, the SCO and other international associations.

Changing foreign policy priorities of the United States, one of the largest regional players: This prompts the question of whether the United States, acting jointly with Western countries, will continue to strengthen its influence in the region, or will it adopt new secondary restrictions in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict?

Potential growth of Turkey's influence in the region: Turkey can act through the Organisation of Turkic States and try to strengthen its involvement in tackling regional security matters.

The positive aspects include the regional countries' interaction with China and the planned construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway line. This will strengthen the transport and logistics role of Central Asia and, therefore, its involvement in global economic processes. In addition, the delimitation and demarcation of borders between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, along with the expansion of regional water-electricity cooperation, are expected to lower the Central Asia's conflict potential.

The Arctic: A new area of regionalism or global rivalry?

Unlike other regional associations, the Arctic which is acquiring strategic significance, does not have a single institutional structure regulating security and economic cooperation. The functions of the Arctic Council are limited to environmental and scientific cooperation. As a result, the Arctic remains an economic region of growing interdependence without a comprehensive security system, which is aggravating geopolitical rivalry rather than promoting structured regional integration.

A multipolar governance system is needed for the Arctic to become a structured regional entity rather than a zone of global conflict. This can include strengthening cooperation between BRICS and the Arctic as a counterbalance to NATO's growing influence. Developing an official Arctic security dialogue between Russia, the United States, China and other key players would have a beneficial effect on preventing unintended military confrontation. It is also necessary to promote economic cooperation through multilateral agreements that will integrate the Northern Sea Route into broader global trade networks, including BRICS and the Global South. The Arctic is at the crossroads: it can either evolve into a multipolar economic region with effective cooperation mechanisms or become another theatre of great powers confrontation.

Conclusion

This chapter challenges the general view that regional hegemony is an obligatory condition for global influence. It shows that states are using regionalism in a variety of ways, depending on their strategic requirements. Regional involvement is not necessarily a road to power but rather a strategic choice based on economic imperatives, security issues and geopolitical realities.

Success in a multipolar world does not hinge on strict regional domination; instead, it relies on the ability to adapt, balance and interact simultaneously with both regional and global dynamics.

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