


The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Global Economy and the Emerging World Order Amid the Ukraine-Russia Crisis

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Abstract

Uncertainty, insecurity, and complexity are some of the terms defining, now and in the future, the development process of the human species on planet Earth. There is a plethora of evidence to substantiate this view. However, each epidemic has its own defining features, magnitude, and discernible impact. Societies are affected differently. The "corona crisis," resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, directly impacts the sphere of global economic (pandemics) and political contradictions, including security issues. It is noted that the pandemic factor provoked an acceleration of confrontation between global players and strengthened the role of the institution of the nation-state. In the context of deglobalization at the transregional level, under the slogans of "strategic vulnerability" and "economic sovereignty," nationalism and "protectionism 2.0" continue to grow, and multilateral international institutions continue to weaken. Against this background, the European Union seeks to achieve competitive advantages through the de-offshoring of production, industrial policy, and the Green Deal. The article notes the deterioration of the state of affairs between Russia, China, the US, and the EU. The article reveals further trends in the strategic decoupling of the United States and its European allies and draws attention to the incentives to implement the principle of "strategic autonomy" in Brussels.

Keywords: Coronavirus, International Relations, Ukraine-Russia crisis, World Power Balance, Ukraine-Russia conflict.

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Introduction

By historical standards, very little time has passed since the COVID-19 coronavirus spread across the planet. But the past few years have become perhaps the most intense period in many years. Most of these trends are of a crisis nature, so the term "corona crisis," which has become widely used, is quite appropriate as the personification of the crisis state of affairs in the world through the prism of a purely medical problem. It can already be said with certainty that the reaction of the world community to the pandemic did not lead to the result that, from the point of view of common sense, could be expected. Such a phenomenon as a mass disease, especially a pandemic, is a challenge that does not stem from any socio-economic or political differences and therefore, in accordance with all the laws of life, determines the manifestation of solidarity, empathy, and the consolidation of efforts.

The new disease has quickly gone beyond the coronavirus problem, turning into an allegorical coronacrisis that has little to do with the struggle for the health of millions of people. One of its facets was the geopolitical dimension of the pandemic. In this case, we use the concept of "geopolitical" not so much in its original sense of the time of the classics of world geopolitics but as the ubiquitous designation in our time of a sharp increase in rivalry between centers of power, paying tribute to modern terminology describing the state of affairs in the world.

Today, there is not only a mass of events that, like a snowball, stuck around the fact that took place in the not-so-close December 2019 and is interesting primarily for virologists (registration of the first outbreak of an unknown virus in the Chinese city of Wuhan), but also a wave of domestic literature and expert opinions who assess the consequences of the pandemic from the point of view of the big economy and politics, international relations, global processes, not to mention country studies (Громько, 2020).

The same can be said about the interest abroad in this topic, which began to take on a life of its own, being not only a reason for discussion but often an occasion designed to substantiate points of view on processes that took place long before COVID-19. In this article, among the many aspects of the crisis in the system of international relations, many of which received additional impetus as a result of the pandemic, attention is focused on the phenomenon of pandenomics and further corrosion in the field of hard security.

1. Advent of Pandemic

The fierce competition in the international arena is based primarily on economic reasons. The law of "the rise and fall of great powers" continues to operate in the 21st century. The pandemic dealt a severe blow to globalization, value chains, and world trade, sharply increasing protectionist sentiments and uneven development between countries and regions. It has become fashionable to talk about "economic sovereignty." COVID-19 (more precisely, the political reaction to it) only exacerbated these processes and did not cause them. The neoliberal model of globalization, whose functioning had already been clearly called into question by the Great Recession of 2008 and subsequent years, was further discredited.

The decline in global GDP in 2020, according to the summer economic forecast of the European Commission, will reach 4% of global GDP, with the EU GDP shrinking by 8.3% and the GDP of the euro area countries by 8.7% (Громыко 2020). The IMF data is even more discouraging: global GDP is projected to contract by 4.9%, euro area GDP by 10.2%, the United States by 8%, and Russia by 6.6%. At the same time, the Chinese economy will show growth of 1% this year, with a sharp acceleration next year (Богачева, Ибрагимов et al., 2020). According to World Bank experts, the situation is even worse: the fall in global GDP in 2020 will be 5.2% (Громыко, 2020). But this is not the most pessimistic forecast either: the OECD foresees a decline in the global economy by almost 6%, and then if there is no second wave of the pandemic (Громыко, 2020).

In recent years and decades, politics and economics have become inextricably linked. The principles of the free market, the "free hand of market forces," the "night watchman state," economic equilibrium, and non-intervention of the state in economic processes are far in the past. Despite this, in Western political economy, conceptual shifts lag behind reality even more than in the field of conceptualizing international relations. The same can be said about the Western theory of international relations, which on the whole remains American-centric, or at best Western-centric, although this problem is attracting more and more attention in Russia and abroad (Byvalov; Konyshv et al., 2020, Gromyko, 2022).

The neoliberal model of globalization, born in the crucible of Reaganomics and Thatcherism and based on the ideology of the "new right," clings to its positions with all its might. In the recent past, attempts have already been made at the level of theoretical and

empirical studies to show its impasse. In defiance of it, the concepts of the "third way," stakeholderism, communitarianism, etc. were put forward. In this regard, on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, there are the names of A. Etzioni, J. Galbraith, R. Putnam, D. Marquand, W. Hutton, J. Plender, and others. However, neoliberal dominance continued in world economic thought, as did the strengthening of the positions of the world financial oligarchy. In parallel with this, indicators of social inequality were growing everywhere; there was a stratification and washing out of the middle class, which later led to the phenomenon of "new populism." One of the many striking examples: if in the 1960s, CEOs of the largest US companies were paid on average 20 times the salary of their employees, today it is 300 times.

2. The Impact of COVID-19 on International Relations

History reminds us that pandemics have had political connotations that have affected international relations in different ways. For example, the Spanish Flu (1918–1920) mentioned above did not start in Spain, as the name suggests, but in America. The first case was reported at a military base in Kansas in March 1918 (Vaughan, 1921). For political reasons, this pandemic was credited to Spain so that America could look innocent. The flu broke out during the course of WWI. As such, no country reported its cases in order to protect its political image. Since Spain was not active in the war, it was transparent in its reporting and thus reported many cases. This resulted in the disease being accredited to Spain, thus being named the Spanish Flu (Erkoreka, 2009). Other countries that were associated with this disease were China, Britain, and France. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected international relations and invoked the blame game. The game has been played before. There is no doubt that the coronavirus has both sustained and reconfigured international relations, depending on the country that is being subjected to a cogent analysis. Within this context, while some of the relations have been good and have actually been consolidated by the outbreak of this pandemic, others have worsened in instances where countries had pre-existing political differences. For ease of reference, it would be ideal to discuss these different impacts separately.

2-1. Positive Impact

It is an irrefutable fact that the coronavirus has left many countries devastated, with some even struggling to respond to it appropriately.

But it is equally true that other countries have used this tragedy to wittingly and unwittingly consolidate their international relations. Cuba, for example, has a long history of assisting other countries with medical support. This is what is referred to in the realm of international relations as medical internationalism (Hammett, 2007). Drawing from this experience, Cuba has sent out doctors to over 22 countries across the globe to lend a helping hand. One of them is South Africa, where more than 200 doctors who specialize in different areas have landed on the shores of the country. It should be noted that the plane that was dispatched by the South African government to bring the Cuban doctors into South Africa was filled with medical supplies, which the South African government gave to Cuba despite having shortages internally. In that sense, the COVID-19 pandemic has sustained relations between South Africa and Cuba.

Bilateral relations between Cuba and South Africa have deep roots. Following the decision by the African National Congress (ANC) to officially launch the armed struggle by establishing its military wing, Umkhonto Wesizwe [Spear of the Nation], on December 16, 1961, the ANC and the Communist/Socialist world came closer. This also included strong relations with Cuba, which was one of the proponents of the socialist order. In the 1980s, effective and ineffective sanctions were imposed on apartheid South Africa (Lipton 1989; Jones and Muller, 1992; Levy, 1999). Among the countries that the ANC relied on to achieve this goal was Cuba. Before assuming power in a post-apartheid state, the ANC, which was still in exile, strengthened its relations with the late Cuban President Fidel Castro. Some of the liberation fighters obtained their military training in Cuba. These relations continued until the ANC came to power in 1994. President Castro was one of the dignitaries that graced the historic inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the first President of a liberated South Africa. The warm reception he received on his arrival served as confirmation of these strong ties. During the same year (1994), Cuba opened its Embassy in Pretoria. In the following year (1995), South Africa returned the favor by opening its Embassy in Havana, Cuba. Over the years since then, the post-apartheid South African government has pursued a number of cooperation agreements with Cuba. Among the areas covered by these agreements are trade, health, and sports (Mamoepa, 2001).

Since 1994, successive presidents in South Africa have maintained good ties with Cuba. As mentioned above, one area of cooperation has been in the medical field. In fact, in 1993, two Cuban doctors established a primary health care system in

Botshabelo in Bloemfontein, which is part of the Free State Province (Hammett 2007). This gesture showed early signs that Cuba would forge strong relations with post-apartheid South Africa in the medical sphere. Indeed, in November 1995, “the first official health care cooperation agreement was signed between Cuba and South Africa by the then Health Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma” (Hammett 2007: 66). The agreement was renewed and expanded in 1997 and 2001, respectively (Department of Foreign Affairs², 2002). Many South African students have since been trained in Cuba as doctors. Previously, Cuban doctors have also come to lend a hand in South Africa. Former President Jacob Zuma traveled to Cuba for medical purposes. This was another demonstration of South Africa's embrace of Cuba's medical internationalism policy. The arrival of over 200 Cuban doctors in South Africa following the outbreak of COVID-19 demonstrates continued relations between the two countries.

While it is true that Cuba and South Africa have strong relations that date back many years and transcend the health sector, Cuba has used its strength in the medical profession to forge and strengthen relations with other countries. Venezuela is one of those countries. Under President Hugo Chavez, Venezuela had strong ties with President Castro's government. The current global pandemic has afforded Cuba the opportunity to take its medical internationalism project to more than twenty other countries across the globe. Among them are Qatar and Italy.

Other countries have also used COVID-19 to strengthen their diplomatic ties. Following its announcement that it has an effective remedy for COVID-19, Madagascar experienced good reception in other African countries such as Tanzania, Guinea-Bissau, and Congo-Brazzaville. South Africa, on the other hand, offered to assist with the medical testing of this remedy. These are some of the instances where COVID-19 has created a space for countries to interact more closely. Various countries have been sharing information, material, and financial resources, as well as expertise. For example, the US government donated 1000 ventilators to South Africa (Mngomezulu 2020). These are commendable efforts that improve and sustain international relations. But while it is true that the COVID-19 pandemic has positively affected international relations, there are instances where these relations have been negatively affected. Some examples are discussed below to buttress this assertion.

2-2. Negative Impact

Some examples show that COVID-19 has negatively affected international relations. It is, however, important to hurriedly state that some of these relationships were poor anyway, even before the pandemic outbreak. But what has happened is that they have worsened during COVID-19. For example, Cuba's good gesture or medical internationalism has not been welcomed by all countries. If anything, it has actually contributed to the further deterioration of relations between Cuba and some of the other countries. As South Africa and Qatar celebrated the arrival of Cuban doctors on their shores and gave accolades to the Cuban government (with some medical professionals and politicians disapproving of this move), America sang a different tune. President Trump's administration was critical of those countries that accepted Cuban doctors. Mike Pompeo, US Secretary of State, was quoted as making a scathing attack on South Africa and Qatar for accepting medical doctors from Cuba. He accused Cuba of "profiting from the pandemic" and appealed to other countries to refuse to accept these Cuban doctors. Pompeo complained that "we have noticed how the regime in Havana has taken advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to continue its exploitation of Cuban medical workers" (Bulled and Singer, 2020). While this accusation was coined as a demonstration of solidarity with the Cuban workforce, the reality is that the American government was simply pushing its old political agenda, which strives for the ostracization of Cuba. Since President Trump assumed office after the 2016 American election, he has reversed all the gains made by former President Barack Obama in mending the wall with Cuba. So, his actions are not new.

Another diplomatic concern is the accusation leveled by President Trump's administration against both China and Russia, accusing them of "stepping up cooperation to spread false narratives over the coronavirus pandemic." Lea Gabrielle, who is the coordinator of the state department's global engagement center mandated to track global propaganda, claimed that "even before the COVID-19 crisis, we assessed a certain level of coordination between Russia and the PRC [People's Republic of China] in the realm of propaganda." She continued to state, "But with this pandemic, cooperation has accelerated rapidly." (Mngomezulu, 2020). This was in response to a propaganda message attributed to the two countries (China and Russia), which claimed that the source of the coronavirus was a US lab located in China. According to this claim, Washington had resorted to this strategy with the aim of

killing China from within.

While this claim could not be authenticated, it was given currency by President Trump's counterclaim, which he repeated on different media platforms. He claimed that his intelligence sources told him that the virus originated from a Chinese lab. When asked by a journalist on Aljazeera if he had information to this effect, he answered the question in the affirmative. The question was: "Have you seen anything at this point that gives you a high degree of confidence that the Wuhan Institute of Virology was the origin of this virus?" His response was emphatic: "Yes, I have. Yes, I have" (Islam; Sarkar et al., 2020). When asked for more detail in this regard, President Trump argued that he was not allowed to divulge such detail.

The truthfulness of these claims is not as significant as their impact on international relations between Washington on the one hand and Beijing and the Kremlin on the other. Given the debilitating nature of the coronavirus, one would have expected global leaders to put their political differences aside and work together towards finding a cure while keeping the infection rate to a bare minimum. The war of words or the mudslinging is unfortunate and not helpful. Flowing from the above, there were reports indicating that thousands of Americans are signing a class action lawsuit against the Chinese government. China was being accused of covering up COVID-19 during its early stages in 2019. Therefore, Beijing was expected to pay out billions of dollars to compensate Americans for things such as personal injuries, wrongful deaths, property damage, and many other things linked to the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is concerning is that other countries have also, individually and collectively, contemplated suing China for large amounts of money in damages. The Jackson Society [the Conservative British Think- Tank] reported that G7 countries could sue China for no less than 3.2 trillion pounds (\$6.3 trillion) in damages. Australia alone was said to be planning a \$58 billion claim. The German tabloid Bild newspaper published what it called "an invoice" for China. Contained therein was a figure of 24 billion euros (\$41 billion) said to be for the loss of tourism revenue in March and April 2020 alone. The bill for small businesses stood at 50 billion euros (\$86 billion). In the event that Germany's GDP fell by 4.2 percent in 2020 (which is what projections said), China would be expected to compensate Germany by giving the country no less than 149 billion euros (\$255 billion) (Bild Newspaper, 20 April 2020). An open letter addressed

to President Xi Jinping of China read thus:

Your government and your scientists had to know long ago that the coronavirus is highly infectious, but you left the world in the dark about it.

Your top experts didn't respond when Western researchers asked to know what was going on in Wuhan (Genuan, 2021).

Such developments did not augur well for diplomatic ties. While it is a known fact that there is a power struggle between America, China, and Russia, one would not have expected leaders to use a deadly pandemic like COVID-19 to fight their battles for political expediency. There was another timed bomb, which was set by a study carried out by University College London (UCL). According to this study, black, Asian, and ethnic minority groups are more likely to die from COVID-19 compared to their white counterparts (Godin, 2020). The identification of Africans, Bangladeshis, and Black Caribbeans as the most susceptible groups to the pandemic could affect Britain's international relations. In fact, this study, together with the reported high numbers of deaths among African-Americans in the US compared to their white counterparts, could trigger a different debate. For example, are these groups really susceptible to COVID-19, or is it their socio-economic situation that renders them vulnerable to the virus? If the latter is the case, what is the British government (and the US government) doing to address this social inequality? These are some of the questions that bear resonance with the discussion below with regard to socio-economic inequalities in Africa.

3. International Security - Moving Back to a "World Without Rules"

The state of affairs in the world continued to deteriorate in the sphere of not only global threats to human health but also "hard" security. And this is a long-term process that can be traced with small interruptions throughout the time after the bipolarity of the Cold War era has passed into the past. The level of military violence in the world has fundamentally changed. So, in 2015–2018, there were more than 50 conflicts involving states in the world, which was even more than 30 years before. Cases of internationalization of civil wars in weak states became more frequent, and the military role of non-state actors grew [Stepanova, 2020: 24–39]. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the number of victims of international terrorism has increased manifold. As noted above, almost all the canons developed in the 1960s and 1990s have been called into question. in the fields of arms control and confidence-building

measures.

The pandemic has had a deterrent effect on military activity around the world, which cannot be said about military planning. A number of military exercises, including those in Europe, have been canceled or scaled down. There was an exchange of medical equipment between Russia and the United States; a joint statement on the "spirit of the Elbe" (Громыко, 2020) was adopted (also in July 2020, an agreement was signed between the Russian Academy of Sciences and the US National Academy of Sciences on cooperation in various areas of research related to COVID-19). Russia sent assistance in the fight against the coronavirus to several countries, including NATO members. However, mutual perception, or more precisely, rejection, and the level of distrust are such that the pandemic has only temporarily stopped the growth of confrontation between Russia and the North Atlantic Alliance.

The geopolitical dimension of the pandemic appears to be a pronounced phenomenon. Most of this is happening as a result of man-made activities and deliberate steps taken primarily by Washington. "The risk from our adversaries has not only not gone away; it has only been exacerbated by the circumstances of the pandemic," says K. Cooper, US Assistant Secretary of State for Political and Military Affairs. He was echoed by S. Fry, Deputy Secretary General of the European External Action Service: "We believe that COVID-19 has become a powerful accelerator of trends that existed before. This has heightened geopolitical tensions, especially between the US and China." (Громыко, 2020) EU representatives still continue to talk about the importance of moving towards "strategic autonomy," but at the same time, they constantly give in to Washington's pressure on China and Russia. So, in June 2020, at a meeting of EU foreign ministers and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, the Europeans went halfway to the White House, agreeing to launch a "bilateral dialogue" on China. Long before that, in March 2019, the EU declared China to be its "systemic adversary." (Cheng, 2019) The Western media are using methods against Beijing that have discredited themselves on the field of anti-Russian campaigns but nevertheless are still in demand. So, in July 2020, the British media reported that the former British intelligence agent K. Steele, who had prepared a scandalous "dossier" on Donald Trump, wrote a report now about China's "interference" in the internal affairs of the United Kingdom.

Brussels continues to sit on two chairs: on the one hand, promoting the agenda of the Global Strategy (June, 2016) and the

“defense pact,” and on the other hand, doing everything possible not to cause unnecessary irritation to Americans with its claims to independence in the political and military spheres. As for Russia, a number of EU countries are direct lobbyists for Washington to torpedo the Nord Stream 2 project. In the new national security strategy of Poland, approved in May 2020, Russia is named as the main security threat. The military doctrine of Romania, adopted in June, is drawn up in a similar vein. In the year of the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II, the European Parliament took an openly anti-Russian position on the role of our country in the liberation of Europe. A new wave of anti-Russian sentiment was raised in the EU in connection with the events in Belarus. A purely non-constructive pose was taken by the German authorities in relation to the situation around A.A. Navalny and relevant requests from Moscow.

At the same time, the pandemic has further complicated relations between the US and the EU. It was extremely painful for the White House to close the borders in March 2020 without coordination with Brussels. The interception and repurchase by Americans in different parts of the world of medical masks and equipment intended for the EU was regarded as egregious, as, for example, the US attempted in an aggressive manner to acquire the German pharmaceutical company CureVac, which was working on the invention and production of a vaccine against COVID-19.

It can be predicted that the progressive elements of deglobalization and various forms of strategic decoupling by the US and its allies will stimulate and facilitate the integration of the military-industrial complexes of the EU member states. So, if the export of French arms in 2019 as a whole decreased by 8%, then to European countries it increased to 45% of the total. Moreover, these results were achieved in fierce competition with the United States [French Arms Exports 2020]. Work continues on the implementation of the Franco-German project to create a new generation of battle tanks. In May 2020, a consortium of defense companies from the two countries began to work in this direction. It is assumed that the replacement of the German tank "Leopard-2" and the French "Leclerc" with a new model will begin in 2035.

Noting these facts, it must be emphasized that the further development of the “strategic autonomy” of the European Union is not only a political obstacle but no less a financial one, only exacerbated by the pandemic. The preliminary parameters for the new 7-year EU budget, agreed at the organization's record-breaking

summit on July 17–21, 2020, do not bode well for its Common and Security Policy. Compared to the proposals of the European Commission on the layout of the budget, the financing of foreign policy and defense programs for 2021–2027 was cut (only in terms of foreign policy programs) by 15 billion euros.

Taking into account the great variety of opinions and interpretations about the impact and consequences of the pandemic, expressed recently by specialists in Russia, Europe as a whole, and the United States, we will try to highlight the key aspects of the Corona crisis from the point of view of international relations.

First, the competition between the leading centers of power in the world is accelerating and becoming more and more fierce. Political, economic, ideological, military, and informational tools of persuasion and coercion are used, not to mention propaganda techniques and the activities of special services. Even the issue of creating vaccines against COVID-19 increases discord between states, exposing "national selfishness." The creation of a cure for this virus is turning into a topic for spy mania. In July 2020, Britain, the United States, and Canada accused Russia, this time of trying to steal information about the development of a coronavirus vaccine (Громько, 2020).

Second, one of the bearing axes of this competition is clearly the contradictions between the United States and China, with the former being the side fueling the confrontation. At the same time, the reality is that China not only successfully and quickly coped with the epidemic in general but also economically continues to significantly outpace the pace of development of the US economy and most competitors. The conflict between Washington and Beijing is not a one-dimensional phenomenon. If the political and technological disconnect between them was in full swing, then, for example, the financial ties between the two countries continued to strengthen (Dykin; Telegina et al., 2021: 8).

Third. A debate has arisen regarding these contradictions, where two conflicting opinions prevail: one suggesting that the US-China confrontation is driving towards a new global bipolarity, and the other arguing that the rivalry between the two major economies is inherently bilateral and cannot lead to a new bipolarity akin to the Cold War era for several objective reasons. Of course, it is possible to proclaim it, but it will not be a reflection of reality.

Fourth, the world economy is being pulled into the deepest recession since World War II or even the Great Depression. As this happens, indicators of social inequality are growing both at the

global and regional levels, as well as at the domestic level. The global economic downturn is a source of formidable risks but also opportunities, especially in the fields of the green economy, biotechnology, robotics, etc.

Fifth. The strategic undocking of the United States and its allies, primarily European ones, continues. A few years ago, such a thesis was a curiosity, but now it has become commonplace in the arguments of leading European politicians and think tanks on both sides of the Atlantic. “Rebalancing” (pivot to Asia) towards Asia was announced not by D. Trump but by his predecessor B. Obama, and before him, J. Bush Jr. openly disregarded the opinion of key European allies. Regardless of the outcome of the US presidential election, Europe will remain a secondary priority for Washington compared to Asia. Almost all of Washington's strategic documents, both political and military, already consider China the number one rival, which is natural given its economic power and rapid military buildup. In July 2020, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo delivered a keynote speech that effectively proclaimed a new cold war against China and claimed to be Fulton 2.0 (Pompeo, 2020).

Not only is America's former intensity of interest in Europe (as well as in the Middle East) declining, but this process is reciprocal. Only 45% of Italians, 41% of British, 40% of Spaniards, 31% of French, and 26% of Germans express a favorable opinion of the United States. Moreover, such figures are only partially correlated in Europe with Donald Trump's negative image. If this were not the case, then, for example, 52% of Germans would not oppose the presence of American troops in their country.

Sixth. Uncertainties and risks in the development of the European Union are increasing; the pandemic exacerbated its internal problems, led to a surge of eurosceptic sentiments, and sharp disagreements between member countries on a number of issues both along the north-south and west-east lines. At the same time, the Brexit drama has led to some consolidation within the bloc; the danger of a domino effect on the withdrawal of other member states from the EU is off the agenda today. This does not mean that the threat to the integrity of several states has decreased due to separatist sentiments, which are caused not by a pandemic but by much deeper reasons. For example, this applies to Belgium, where there has been no permanent government since May 2019, Spain (Catalan separatism), and, already outside the EU, Britain (separatism in Scotland and among Catholic republicans in Northern Ireland).

Seventh. Two processes are going on in parallel: the further

rapprochement between Russia and China, mainly in the political-military sphere, and the growth of confrontation in relations between Russia, on the one hand, and the United States and the European Union, on the other. In the EU, opinions on policy towards Russia traditionally differ, but the most anti-Russian countries-Poland and the Baltic states-set the tone. There is also the possibility of Germany moving into the camp of tough opponents of Russia, which was demonstrated by the events around A.A. Navalny, as well as the near prospects for the conquest of power in Germany by politicians who are opposed to any strategic cooperation with Moscow.

Eighth. The international mechanisms for coordinating interests are functioning worse and worse against the background of the desire to rely on regional integration projects, regional cooperation, state industrial policy, the principles of localization, and the deoffshoring of not only economic but also political factors. As noted above, not only is there a strategic disconnect between the United States and its European allies, but Washington is seeking to achieve an economic disconnect with China (especially in terms of trade and technology), i.e., with the world's first economy in terms of purchasing power parity.

In this situation, the institution of the nation-state, with renewed vigor, appears to be the backbone for solving both internal problems and maintaining international cooperation. The desire to renationalize foreign and domestic policies contributes to this process. The renaissance of the institution of the nation-state is led by numerous manifestations of de-globalization, which, however, have their limits. At the same time, the strengthening of the role of this institution is accompanied by an urgent need for interstate cooperation to solve trans-regional and global problems, including the collapse of the arms control system, the widespread growth of social inequality, global warming, etc. Multilateral institutions are either in a state of stagnation or are in crisis. First of all, we are talking about the WTO, WHO, OPCW, UNESCO, and the UN as a whole. This internationally recognized and universal organization is experiencing all the negative controversies among its members, especially in the Security Council.

4. Contemporary Global Risks

Risks and disasters are capable of causing enormous suffering and economic loss (Zuo and Wei, 2018). For several years, countless publications, reports, and studies have been calling our attention to

scenarios filled with risks and uncertainties. Among the most recent reports, stand out the Global Risks Report, Lloyd's City Risk Index 2015–2025, Global Catastrophic Risks, Cambridge Global Risk Outlook, Emerging Risks in the 21st Century, Natural Disaster Hotspots: A Global Risk Analysis, Global Challenges: Twelve Risks That Threaten Human Civilization, and others.

According to the Global Risks Report (Franco, Kuritzky et al. 2020), mankind is exposed to risks divided into five categories: economic, environmental, social, geopolitical, and technological. Among the thirty global risks, the "rapid and massive spread of infectious diseases" emerges. This risk includes bacteria, viruses, parasites, or fungi, and the uncontrolled spread of infectious diseases (for instance, as a result of resistance to antibiotics, antivirals, and other treatments), leading to widespread fatalities and economic disruption. Although this risk has not been permanently present within the five global risks with a higher probability of occurring and a greater impact in the last 14 reports (except the report rankings published in 2007 and 2008), the risk is still widely discussed by the experts addressed in the report.

The report has repeatedly alerted, during recent years, to the risks of epidemics and catastrophes on a global scale. In the introduction of the 2020 edition, the report signals, in the topic "health systems under new pressures," new vulnerabilities as a result of changes in social, demographic, environmental, and technological patterns, posing additional risks to the operations of health services and systems. Besides, the report underlines: "Progress against pandemics is also being undermined by vaccine hesitancy and drug resistance, making it increasingly difficult to land the final blow against some of humanity's biggest killers." The end of the section concludes: "As existing health risks resurge and new ones emerge, humanity's past successes in overcoming health challenges are no guarantee of future results."

The sensation of surprise and unpreparedness before the challenges imposed by the new pandemic seems to generate discomfort in the scientific community and among experts, who have been alerting for a long time to the possible outcome of these events.

Released by Mair (2020), a Research Fellow in Ecological Economics at the University of Surrey, he suggests, in his article entitled "How will coronavirus change the world?" that we all should question which emerging social forms come from an ethic that values care, life, and democracy. After pointing out the failures and challenges imposed on the modern economy, Mair believes in

the necessity of a new kind of economy that is completely different and capable of building a socially just and ecologically solid future.

Corlett Primack et al. published, in April 2020, a study entitled "Impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on biodiversity conservation" in the journal *Biological Conservation*, showing his preoccupation about the effects of the pandemic on world biodiversity and on our ability to protect it. Besides directing questions open to the readers, the authors of the article reached some preliminary conclusions: i) in some locations, biodiversity is benefiting from the reduction of human activities; ii) the pandemic interrupted many research projects around the world, raising concerns about the formation and training of young scientists; iii) regardless of the impacts on ecosystems and biodiversity, the pandemic has already caused an elevated number of fatalities and suffering to people all over the world, a tragedy that will eventually lead us to rethink the existing connections between health, resilient ecosystems, and human wellbeing.

Dickon Pinner, Matt Rogers, and Hamid Samandari (2020) published an article entitled "Addressing climate change in a post-pandemic world" relating pandemics to climate risk. Here, the authors indicate: i) both represent physical shocks (different from financial shocks, mainly conducted by human feeling and generally originate from within the financial system); ii) both are systemic (since their direct and indirect effects display rapidly in an interconnected world; iii) they are nonstationary (the probabilities and distribution of occurrences are changing quickly, proving to be inadequate or insufficient for future projections); iv) they are nonlinear (as their social economic impacts grow disproportionately and often catastrophically); v) are risk multipliers (exacerbating vulnerabilities not tested until then, inherent to finance and health systems and to real economy); vi) regressive (affect disproportionately the world's most vulnerable persons); vii) can't be considered a "black swan", as many experts have been consistently alerting about both. After establishing the similarities between climate risk and pandemics, the authors say: "individuals, companies, governments, and civil society should use this moment to raise awareness of the impact of a climate crisis, which could ultimately create disruptions of great magnitude and duration".

Henry A. Kissinger (2020) published the article "The Coronavirus Pandemic Will Forever Alter the World Order," reopening the debate focused on international relations, foreseeing a possible alteration of the world order and in the balance of power of the international system. Kissinger states that the leaders of the

world are engaged in an enormous crisis within their national borders, but they must understand that the disrupting effects of the pandemic know no borders. Consequently, the author understands the urgent need for global cooperation, while no country has the capacity to overcome the virus through a purely national effort.

5. Post-Ukraine-Crisis World Order

The conflict in Ukraine has led to an international economic crisis and an international political crisis-in short, to a crisis in the international political economy. Employing international political economy as the theory, the political conflict in the Ukraine armed hostilities has led to a global economic crisis (Kammer, Azour et al., 2022). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) stresses that armed hostilities in Ukraine have resulted in a major blow to the global economy, which negatively affects economic growth and leads to inflation and (Kammer, Azour et al., 2022) increased prices of consumer commodities. The toll is great in Ukraine, and unprecedented sanctions on Russia cripple financial transactions and trade, leading to a deep recession (Kammer, Azour et al., 2022). The thinktank Rand Corporation emphasizes that the conflict in Ukraine leads to slowed economic growth and a slowed recovery from the pandemic (Jenkins, 2023). As a result of the Ukraine crisis, the world is facing a deepening economic crisis. Major powers are taking sides in these armed hostilities. Emerging powers are likewise raising their voices of discontent with the status quo. Countries in the Global South are starting to air out their grievances. In short, we are in for loads of disgruntlement in the world order as we know it

6. Exploring Alternative Futures

The world is now walking on eggshells, attempting to wiggling out of the Ukraine quagmire. We are now witnessing the alignment and re-alignment of forces among global actors in response to the Ukraine crisis. Four possible alternative futures are emerging. As ideal models, they are not mutually exclusive and can coexist with varying degrees of importance at different points in time and on specific issues, all of which have implications for inclusive growth in the global economy. The four possible world futures are the following: 1) the continuance of the rule-based unipolar hegemonic stability order; 2) a return to the early post-Cold War harmony; 3) a China-Russia-led world order; and 4) the re-emergence and re-strengthening of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) (see Figure 1

below).



Figure (1): Four Alternative Futures Following the Ukraine Crisis

7. Hegemonic Unipolar International Political-Economic World System

The first alternative future points to the maintenance, strengthening, and consolidation of rule-based unipolar hegemonic stability. These rules are mostly western in origin but internationalized or globalized, including those of the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Bank, World Trade Organization, and others. The rhetoric of democracy, human rights, and individual freedom is elemental. In an anarchic world order, power-hungry countries vie to crown themselves as the global hegemon (Mearsheimer, 2001). The world has been under the helm of a global hegemon since the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1991 to the present. This model will remain predominant if a single hegemon continues to hold sway not only transatlantically but also globally. The lone superpower will be able to remain the sole authoritative economic, political, diplomatic, and military power in the world as a result of the confluence of superiority in technology, ideology, and access to resources (McCormick, 1990). A hegemon could also enforce its will to survive as the lone global leader through the imposition of international rules in a rules-based world order (Keohane, 1984). In this world order, we will see the continuation of the important roles that the United Nations (UN), corporate globalization, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO) will play. Economic rules in this system include liberalization, deregulation, and privatization. Economic, social, and political life as we know it will continue as it is.

8. Harmonious Global System

The second alternative future points to the return of the brief period

right after the demise of the Cold War in 1991, during which almost all the countries, more or less, were engaged in friendly competition in international trade without the threat of or use of armed conflict. This nostalgia for global harmony gives room for major powers on both sides of the Atlantic, China and Russia, to engage in capitalist expansion and free trade without fear of military conflict (Ty, 2023). This alternative is unlikely to happen, as the animosity between NATO and its enemies is intensifying.

9. Eastphalian BRICS+ Global Economic and Political System

No power is forever. Empires rise. Empires fall. With the Enlightenment, France reigned supreme during the eighteenth century. Due to the Industrial Revolution, the sun never set on the British Empire. Macron asked if this is the termination of the western hegemony to which we are accustomed. This third alternative future points to the rise of China and its economic partners as an alternative center of global economic, political, and military power around which the world will have to navigate. The original BRICS countries include Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (Ty, 2023). They account for not only about 40% of the global population but also about 25% of the gross domestic product (GDP) of the world (Iqbal, 2022). It is a platform to establish multilateral relations among countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the purpose of which includes peace and security; economic, political, and cultural cooperation; and people-to-people exchanges. In short, it promotes a harmonious, prosperous, and peaceful world (Ty, 2023). As an alternative to the western hegemonic world order, BRICS provides its members with the ability to absorb the shockwaves and pressures of the corporate globalization of the Global North (Ty, 2023). New members from Asia, Africa, and Latin America are continually joining or asking to join. In this case, an economic transition is happening right under our watch. Applicants include Algeria, Argentina, Egypt, Iran, and Saudi Arabia (Pavicevic, 2022). This is the “Eastphalian” turn, which calls for the rejection of humanitarian intervention and for the return of the respect of principles of international law, including self-determination, national sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference in the domestic affairs of states, and international cooperation and goodwill. BRICS countries are working for an international economic and political order that the Global South leads, as an alternative to the present international order in which the Global North reigns supreme. Eastphalian Peace is a play with

words, specifically in reference to the 1648 Westphalian Peace Treaties, which promoted the respect of internal sovereignty and non-interference in the domestic affairs of other countries. However, the Global North, especially NATO, does not respect state sovereignty and noninterference in the domestic affairs of the countries of the Global South. Eastphalian Peace merely reminds and calls for the respect of Westphalian Peace, which the West does not practice vis-à-vis the Global South. Thus, Eastphalian Peace is not a novel but a renewed call to return to the basic and general principles of international law since the 1600s.

10. Non-Aligned World Economic and Political System

The fourth alternative future points to the re-emergence and restrengthening of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), composed of countries in the Global South, all of which seek not to align themselves with one or another global center of power. Many grassroots organizations in both the Global North and the Global South see the BRICS+ world system as not any better than the unipolar hegemonic world system. The unipolar hegemonic camp under NATO and the multipolar camp under BRICS+ are engaged in inter-capitalist rivalry, though some countries, such as China, are under Communist Party rule. Grassroots organizations see BRICS+ as not their preferred leaders in the emerging world order in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis, as many BRICS+ countries are under authoritarian rule. Grassroots organizations and adherents of the non-aligned world system struggle for a green, just, and peaceful world.

Conclusion

Diverse interpretations regarding the root causes of the Ukraine crisis abound within scholarly discourse. Mainstream Western media, represented notably by NATO, characterizes Russia as the unprovoked aggressor responsible for the invasion of Ukraine. Conversely, alternative perspectives articulated by academics, politicians, military officials, and non-mainstream journalists assert NATO's culpability, positing that the alliance provoked Russia's military intervention through its hostile eastward expansion, which Russia perceives as an existential threat to its security. Additionally, peace scholars, journalists, and activists contend that none of the actors involved in the Ukraine crisis are without fault.

Various potential global orders could materialize following the culmination of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine crisis.

Firstly, the hegemonic stability of a unipolar world may persist. Alternatively, a negotiated resolution involving all major international stakeholders could bring about an end to the armed conflict, thereby enhancing global security and fostering mutual benefit, prosperity, and enduring peace. Thirdly, the BRICS+ economies, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, might establish an alternative world order utilizing alternative currencies for foreign exchange both internally and externally. Fourthly, the dormant Non-Aligned Movement may experience a resurgence, asserting itself robustly and consolidating its position in the global economy to promote a just world order based on equitable trade practices. Each of these envisioned scenarios offers distinct pathways for inclusive growth and development in the global economy. It is important to acknowledge, however, that the actual unfolding of events is likely to be significantly more intricate. Coexistence of multiple world orders concurrently is a plausible reality.

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