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## GEOPOLITICAL TRANSFORMATION AND NEW GENERATION WARFARE

Colonel Jambul Zaloshvili<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

The study „Geopolitical Transformation and New-Generation Warfare“ examines the dynamics of the contemporary international system, where multipolarity, shifts in geostrategic axes, resource competition, and geoeconomic rivalry create a complex, multi-layered conflict environment. The research explores the concept of new-generation warfare (NGW), its hybrid forms, cyber and informational strategies, which pose significant challenges to modern states.

The main objective of this research is to analyze how the concepts of security and state sovereignty are being transformed in the 21st century, to understand the dilemmas faced by small and medium-sized states within a multipolar international system, and to examine the influence of geoeconomic instruments and resource competition on contemporary conflicts.

The study employs theoretical analysis, documentary research, comparative methods, and contemporary international practice examples. The findings reveal that NGW forms, multipolarity, and geoeconomic challenges require comprehensive, integrated approaches across military, economic, informational, and legal domains.

The conclusions emphasize the necessity for states to adopt strategic planning and resilient policies to secure sovereignty, maintain security, and ensure sustainable development in the evolving global environment.

**Keywords:** Geopolitical transformation, New-generation warfare, Hybrid warfare, Geoeconomics, Resource competition, Multipolar system, Small and medium-sized states, Security, Cyber and informational strategies.

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<sup>1</sup> Head of State Resource Management Master Program, LEPL David Aghmashenebeli National Defence Academy of Georgia, Doctor of Military Sciences

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## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary warfare has undergone a profound transformation, diverging significantly from the classical conflicts of the past. In recent years, the nature of military engagement has evolved due to rapid technological advancements, the proliferation of hybrid tactics, and shifts in global geopolitical dynamics. Emerging technologies - such as artificial intelligence, unmanned systems, commercial satellite networks, and advanced cybersecurity tools - have redefined the operational landscape, creating a strategic environment where control over information and electronic influence is as critical as conventional military power.

Moreover, both state and non-state actors increasingly employ hybrid strategies that extend beyond traditional battlefield confrontations. These include economic coercion, legal mechanisms, energy dependency, and the dissemination of disinformation. Such methods often prove more effective than direct military action, enabling actors to achieve strategic objectives while operating below the threshold of open conflict.

The global order is also undergoing significant transformation. Centers of power are increasingly multipolar, regional blocs are gaining strength, and international law struggles to keep pace with the rapid tempo of technological change. These developments contribute to a complex strategic environment in which the „nature“ of war - the fundamental essence of political violence - remains constant, while its „character“ - the forms, methods, and instruments through which it is conducted - is undergoing fundamental transformation.

These transformations have been accompanied by the erosion of the international order and a weakening of global stability. Conflicts have increasingly acquired a hybrid nature - wars are no longer fought solely with tanks and artillery but also through cyberattacks, economic sanctions, disinformation campaigns, and psychological pressure.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the concept of the „new generation of war“ has gained prominence in academic and

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<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *The Future of War: A History* (New York: Public Affairs, 2017), 214–220.

strategic discourse, reflecting the changing forms of violence and influence, particularly within the context of great power competition.<sup>3</sup>

The primary aim of this study is to analyze the geopolitical transformation of the twenty-first century and to assess how it reshapes traditional understandings of war, power, and security. The research seeks to demonstrate that the contemporary global system is no longer defined merely by military might but is increasingly shaped by the interplay of geoeconomic, technological, and informational factors.<sup>4</sup>

The study is grounded in three major theoretical approaches to international relations, which together provide a multidimensional analytical lens:

- Realism - emphasizing the balance of power, national interest, and the security dilemma;
- Liberalism - focusing on cooperation, international institutions, and the mechanisms of globalization;
- Constructivism - highlighting the role of identities, cultural narratives, and ideational factors in shaping political behavior.<sup>5</sup>

This triadic framework enables a comprehensive understanding of modern geopolitical competition as a process driven not only by material and economic forces but also by ideological and normative contestation between liberal-democratic and authoritarian models.

The research employs a theoretical–analytical approach, combining the examination of existing academic literature, geopolitical theories, and comparative case studies. It utilizes a comparative method to explore the diversity of strategic models - American, Chinese, and Russian perspectives - and a systemic analysis to identify the structural causes of global transformation.<sup>6</sup>

The study seeks to answer the following core questions:

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, 3th ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 25–28

<sup>4</sup> Parag Khanna, *The Second World: Empires and Influence in the New Global Order* (New York: Random House, 2008), 41–43.

<sup>5</sup> John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, *The Globalization of World Politics*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 33–37.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), 88–92.

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- How is the multipolar world order emerging in the twenty-first century, and what are the driving factors behind it?
  - How are geoeconomic competition and technological transformation changing the nature of war?
  - What challenges do small and medium-sized states face within the new global geopolitical environment?

Theoretically, this research contributes to the ongoing debate on the evolution of global power structures by integrating insights from geopolitics, security studies, and contemporary military strategy into a single analytical framework. Practically, it provides policymakers and scholars with a deeper understanding of how states can adapt to the realities of a changing world order. This analysis is particularly relevant for small and regional states, such as Georgia, which must navigate a delicate balance amid growing geopolitical competition.<sup>7</sup>

The research examines the process of forming a multipolar world order, new geostrategic axes, new forms of struggle for resources, manifestations of the crisis of globalization, and the dilemmas facing small and medium-sized states.

## MAIN PART

### I. Geopolitical Transformation in the Contemporary World, New Geostrategic Axes and the Dynamics of the Balance of Power

The end of the Cold War seemed to mark the conclusion of a long era of global confrontation and raised hopes for a new stage of peace and cooperation. During the 1990s, the United States emerged as the dominant power, establishing a unipolar world order shaped by its political, economic, and military influence. However, the twenty-first century revealed that this order was not a guarantee of stability - on the contrary, it produced new forms of tension and conflict.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Kupchan, *No One's World: The West, the Rising Rest, and the Coming Global Turn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 12–15.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 15–18.

Gradually, the balance of power began to shift. China's economic rise in East Asia, Russia's military resurgence in Eurasia, and the growing regional ambitions of India, Turkey, and Iran - along with the European Union's aspirations to become an autonomous geopolitical actor - collectively define what scholars now describe as a „multipolar world order“.<sup>9</sup>

This transformation is not confined to military or political dimensions; it also encompasses economic and technological dynamics. The center of the global economy has been moving from the Atlantic toward the Asia-Pacific region; energy, land, and water resources have gained strategic importance; and information technologies have created entirely new domains of competition.<sup>10</sup>

The main characteristic of the contemporary multipolar system is the existence of several centers of power, each with its own sphere of regional or global influence. The United States, despite its military superiority, is no longer the sole cornerstone upon which the international order is built. China, with its economic power and „Belt and Road“ initiative, is creating an alternative geoeconomic architecture.<sup>11</sup>

Russia, despite its relatively limited economic base, maintains significant influence through control of energy resources, military technologies, and attempts at regional domination. The European Union, as an economic giant, attempts to establish its own strategic autonomy, though it confronts challenges of internal coordination and energy dependencies.

Additionally, regional powers - such as India, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, and others - are increasingly actively participating in global processes and creating their own geopolitical agendas.<sup>12</sup> This creates not only a complex system of balance but also increases the possibility of international conflicts, as spheres of power often overlap.

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Kupchan, *No One's World: The West, the Rising Rest, and the Coming Global Turn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 22–25.

<sup>10</sup> Parag Khanna, *Connectography: Mapping the Future of Global Civilization* (New York: Random House, 2016), 47–51

<sup>11</sup> Bruno Maçães, *Belt and Road: A Chinese World Order* (London: Hurst Publishers, 2018), 23–56.

<sup>12</sup> Kishore Mahbubani, *Has the West Lost It? A Provocation* (London: Penguin Books, 2018), 112–145.

The formation of a multipolar system is also reflected in the crisis of international institutions. The United Nations Organization, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization, and other institutions created for a bipolar or unipolar system often fail to respond to the challenges of multipolar reality.<sup>13</sup> The paralysis of the Security Council, prolonged reform discussions, and the creation of alternative institutions (such as BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organization) indicate that the old institutional order requires significant transformation.

The central geopolitical dynamic of the 21st century is US-China strategic competition, which encompasses economic, technological, military, and ideological dimensions. This competition is not merely a traditional power struggle - it represents a contest between two different models for global governance.<sup>14</sup>

The United States views China as a strategic competitor requiring a strategy of „containment“ and „competition“. Washington is strengthening its alliances in the Indo-Pacific region (AUKUS, QUAD), imposing technological restrictions, and attempting to reduce economic dependence on China.

China, for its part, is implementing a „dual circulation“ economic strategy, building alternative infrastructure through the „Belt and Road Initiative“, and actively seeking to increase influence in developing countries. Beijing is also developing its own military capabilities, particularly its naval fleet and in cyberspace, to protect its interests and expand its sphere of influence.<sup>15</sup>

Russia's geostrategic position is based on several key factors: control of energy resources, military power, and attempts to maintain influence in the post-Soviet space. Moscow believes that Western expansion (NATO and EU) represents an existential threat to its security and therefore attempts to create „spheres of influence“ around itself.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Stewart Patrick, *The Unruly World: The Case for Good Enough Global Governance*, Foreign Affairs, Vol. 93, No. 1 (January/February 2014): 58-73.

<sup>14</sup> Graham Allison, *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 89-134.

<sup>15</sup> Rush Doshi, *The Long Game: China's Grand Strategy to Displace American Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 178-223.

<sup>16</sup> Angela Stent, *Putin's World: Russia Against the West and with the Rest* (New York: Twelve, 2019), 45-78.

The 2022 invasion of Ukraine represents the culmination of this strategy, which radically changed the European security architecture. Russia's actions provoked an unprecedented package of Western sanctions, NATO expansion in Scandinavia, and a rethinking of Europe's energy dependence. However, Russia has also deepened cooperation with China, India, and Global South countries, demonstrating the reconfiguration of geopolitical coalitions.

The European Union, largely dependent on American security guarantees throughout the second half of the 20th century, now attempts to develop its own strategic autonomy. This includes increasing defense capabilities, achieving energy diversification, and developing technological sovereignty.

However, Europe faces difficult dilemmas: how to maintain the transatlantic connection while developing autonomy; how to balance economic interests with China and security needs; how to achieve consensus among 27 member countries on foreign and security policy. These challenges were further exacerbated by the energy crisis and the Russia-Ukraine war.

Beyond global power competition, we see the formation of regional axes. In the Middle East, the Iran-Saudi Arabia rivalry, Turkey's regional ambitions, and Israel's security dilemmas are increasingly relevant. In South Asia, India attempts to balance its relationships with both the West and with Russia and China.

In Africa and Latin America, competition among external powers for influence, resources, and geopolitical position is increasingly visible. These regional dynamics not only reflect global competition but create their own local geopolitical reality, which is often more complex than global confrontation.

## **II. The Role of Geoeconomic Competition and the Struggle for Resources: New Dimensions**

Energy resources have historically represented a central element of geopolitical competition, and this situation remains relevant in the 21st century, albeit with new

dimensions. The geopolitics of oil and gas is supplemented by issues of renewable energy technologies, energy transition, and the geography of new energy resources.<sup>17</sup>

Russia's cessation of gas supplies to Europe in 2022 demonstrated the risks of energy dependence and accelerated Europe's energy diversification. Meanwhile, the globalization of the liquefied natural gas (LNG) market created new geopolitical dynamics, where the US, Qatar, and Australia play significant roles.

The Middle East remains a center of energy geopolitics, though its relative importance is gradually declining due to the growth of renewable energy and the emergence of new suppliers. Were it not for the coordinated actions of Saudi Arabia, Russia, and other OPEC+ member countries, influence on the oil market would be even weaker.

The energy transition and development of digital technologies create a new type of resource geopolitics - the geopolitics of critical minerals and rare earth elements. Lithium, cobalt, rare earth elements, graphite, and other minerals are essential for electric vehicle batteries, solar panels, wind turbines, and modern electronics.

China controls most of the supply chain for these critical minerals - from extraction (particularly in Africa and Latin America) to processing and manufacturing. This creates a new type of strategic dependence that may be more significant for the second half of the 21st century than oil dependence was for the 20th century.

Western countries and their allies attempt to create alternative supply chains, develop their own extraction capabilities, and reduce dependence on China. According to them, this is not only an economic but a national security issue.

Climate change and population growth make water resource geopolitics increasingly relevant. Control of transboundary rivers (such as the Nile, Indus, Mekong, Tigris and Euphrates) creates tension between different countries.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Daniel Yergin, *The New Map: Energy, Climate, and the Clash of Nations* (New York: Penguin Press, 2020), 234-267.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Gleick, "Water, Drought, Climate Change, and Conflict in Syria," *Weather, Climate, and Society*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (2014): 331-340.



Climate change also opens new geopolitical opportunities - melting Arctic ice creates new trade routes and resource extraction possibilities, making Arctic geopolitics relevant. We are dealing with a new space where international order is still unformed and over whose control Russia, the US, Canada, Norway, Denmark, and other players compete.

The vulnerability of global food supply chains became particularly evident during the Russia-Ukraine war, when Black Sea grain exports were restricted. This affects not only regional but global food security, particularly in the Middle East and Africa.

Food production depends on water, fertilizers (which in turn depend on natural gas and phosphates), energy, and stable climatic conditions. Climate change, resource scarcity, and geopolitical tension collectively threaten global food security, which may become a source of new conflicts and a driver of migration crises.

The hyperglobalization of the 1990s and 2000s, characterized by the removal of economic borders, global optimization of supply chains, and exponential growth of international trade, entered a crisis phase.<sup>19</sup> The reasons are diverse: the 2008 financial crisis, the rise of populist forces in the West, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the intensification of geopolitical confrontations.

The global optimization of supply chains, focused solely on cost reduction, proved vulnerable to shocks. The pandemic showed how production stoppage in one region could block global supply chains. The Russia-Ukraine war demonstrated how geopolitical conflict could use economic dependence as a weapon.

As a result, the process of economic fragmentation began - the partial separation of national economies considering geopolitical considerations. The term „decoupling“, originally used in the context of US-China economic relations, now describes a broader trend - reducing economic connections between geopolitically competing blocs.<sup>20</sup>

The US and its allies are implementing a „de-risking“ strategy, which includes reducing dependence on China in critical sectors, particularly semiconductors, pharmaceutical

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<sup>19</sup> Anthea Roberts, *Is International Law International?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 156-189.

<sup>20</sup> Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman, „*Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion*“, *International Security*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (Summer 2019): 42-79.

products, and critical technologies. China, for its part, attempts to develop a „dual circulation“ model, where the domestic market and Asian region will become the main engine of economic growth.

This process is not perfect separation - deep economic integration hinders rapid decoupling and both sides recognize that complete economic separation would be very expensive. However, the trend is toward selective reduction of economic connections in strategically important sectors.

Instead of hyperglobalization, we see the growth of regionalization - the concentration of economic activities at the regional level and the strengthening of connections between geographically or geopolitically close countries. American companies are increasing investments in Mexico, Central America, and Canada („nearshoring“), while Europeans focus on Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean region.<sup>21</sup>

In parallel, the concept of „friend-shoring“ is developing - transferring supply chains to geopolitically friendly or neutral countries. This means that economic decisions increasingly take geopolitical assessments, which increases economic costs but theoretically reduces strategic risks.

Goeconomic fragmentation facilitates the formation of new blocs and coalitions. BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) expanded in 2024 with the inclusion of new members and attempts to present an alternative to Western-dominated institutions. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) continues to expand in Central and South Asia.<sup>22</sup>

The Western world, for its part, attempts to strengthen its own alliances - G7, NATO, EU, and new formats such as AUKUS and QUAD in the Indo-Pacific region. Meanwhile, many countries attempt not to fall into a specific bloc and maintain „strategic autonomy“, creating a complex geopolitical mosaic.

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<sup>21</sup> Shannon K. O'Neil, *The Globalization Myth: Why Regions Matter* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022), 67-98.

<sup>22</sup> Oliver Stuenkel, *The BRICS and the Future of Global Order* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020), 123-156.

These new blocs differ from Cold War period blocs - they are not rigidly ideological and are mostly focused on economic and security interests. However, the deeper the geopolitical confrontation becomes, the more bloc logic influences.

Goeconomics describes the use of economic instruments to achieve geopolitical goals. In the contemporary international system, where direct military conflict between nuclear powers is very risky, goeconomic instruments become the primary means of power projection.<sup>23</sup>

Goeconomic tools include: economic sanctions, trade restrictions, investment policies, currency manipulation, infrastructure projects (such as the Belt and Road), development assistance, and control of technology transfer. These instruments can be both positive (incentive mechanisms) and negative (punishment mechanisms).

The 21st century is characterized by unprecedented use of sanctions as a foreign policy instrument. The West imposed extensive sanctions against Russia in 2014 following the annexation of Crimea, which significantly expanded in 2022 after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. These sanctions cover the financial sector, energy, technologies, and individuals.<sup>24</sup>

The US also actively uses sanctions against Iran, North Korea, Venezuela, and other countries. Meanwhile, China is beginning to use its own goeconomic tools - for example, restricting exports of rare earth elements during geopolitical disputes.

The effectiveness of sanctions is a subject of debate. Although sanctions cause significant economic damage, they often fail to achieve desired political changes. Moreover, sanctions facilitate the development of alternative economic systems and the formation of a „sanctions economy“ that attempts to avoid the Western financial system.

The dominant role of the US dollar in the global financial system represents a significant goeconomic instrument for the US. The international payment system based on the SWIFT network and the dollar gives Washington unique opportunities to exert influence.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Robert D. Blackwill and Jennifer M. Harris, *War by Other Means: Goeconomics and Statecraft* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 34-67.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Nephew, *The Art of Sanctions: A View from the Field* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 178-203.

<sup>25</sup> Eswar Prasad, *The Future of Money: How the Digital Revolution Is Transforming Currencies and Finance*

However, financial sanctions used against Russia, particularly the freezing of Central Bank assets, strengthened interest in alternative financial systems. BRICS countries are actively discussing expanding the use of national currencies in trade, creating alternative payment systems, and potentially implementing a common BRICS currency.

The internationalization of the Chinese yuan is a long process that is gradually progressing. The development of the digital yuan (e-CNY) may in the future create an alternative payment system less dependent on Western financial infrastructure. However, a real challenge to dollar hegemony requires not only economic power but also deep and liquid capital markets, institutional credibility, and global network effects.

Infrastructure projects have become an important arena of geoeconomic competition. China's „Belt and Road Initiative“ (BRI), which includes trillions of dollars in infrastructure investment in over 150 countries, represents the most ambitious geoeconomic initiative.<sup>26</sup>

BRI aims not only to strengthen economic connections but also to expand geopolitical influence, create new markets for Chinese products, and establish an alternative global infrastructure network. However, the project faces criticism for „debt-trap diplomacy“ and use as an instrument of geopolitical influence.

The West responded with its own infrastructure initiatives - the G7's „Build Back Better World“ and subsequently "Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment" (PGII), which offers an alternative to BRI, emphasizing sustainability, transparency, and quality. The European Union has the "Global Gateway" initiative. This competition shows that infrastructure has become a significant dimension of geopolitical competition.

### **III. Technological Transformations and the New Generation of Warfare**

Technological leadership in the 21st century represents a critical element of geopolitical power. US-China competition in the technological sphere includes artificial intelligence, 5G networks, quantum computing, semiconductors, biotechnology, and space technologies.<sup>27</sup>

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(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021), 234-267.

<sup>26</sup> Bruno Maçães, *Belt and Road: A Chinese World Order* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 145-189.

<sup>27</sup> Kai-Fu Lee, *AI Superpowers: China, Silicon Valley, and the New World Order* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin

The US imposed significant restrictions on exports of advanced semiconductor manufacturing technologies to China, particularly EUV (extreme ultraviolet) lithography systems. China, for its part, is making massive investments in R&D and attempting to achieve „technological self-sufficiency“ in critical sectors.

The European Union attempts to develop „technological sovereignty“, which includes developing its own semiconductor industry (European Chips Act), establishing digital regulations (Digital Markets Act, Digital Services Act), and protecting critical technologies from foreign acquisitions.

Cyberspace has become a new domain of geopolitical competition, where countries engage in both defensive and offensive operations. Cyber attacks are used for espionage, destabilizing critical infrastructure, spreading disinformation, and economic sabotage.<sup>28</sup>

Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea have developed cyber capabilities and actively use them as foreign policy instruments. Western countries, for their part, develop both defensive and offensive cyber capabilities and attempt to create international norms for behavior in cyberspace.

Cyberspace also reflects the trend of fragmentation - China's „Great Firewall“ represents a model of a national version of the internet that is protected and controlled by the state. Russia also attempts to develop a „sovereign internet“. This creates the risk of global internet fragmentation and the formation of a „splinternet“.

Data in the 21st century is often referred to as „the new oil“. Control, processing, and use of data represents both an economic and strategic asset. Therefore, countries are increasingly actively regulating data storage, transfer, and processing.<sup>29</sup>

The EU's GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) represents the most comprehensive data protection regulation, affecting not only Europe but globally. China's

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Harcourt, 2018), 89-134.

<sup>28</sup> David E. Sanger, *The Perfect Weapon: War, Sabotage, and Fear in the Cyber Age* (New York: Crown, 2018), 156-187.

<sup>29</sup> Anu Bradford, *The Brussels Effect: How the European Union Rules the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 234-267.

data protection legislation requires that critical data be stored within the country and subject to state control.

The US approach is more fragmented, but increases data localization requirements, particularly regarding Chinese applications (such as TikTok). These different approaches create the concept of „data nationality“ and complicate the global digital economy.

New Generation Warfare (NGW) represents the transformation of war in the 21st century: conflicts are no longer limited to conventional military operations but are multi-dimensional, interconnected, and often covert, aiming not only at the physical defeat of an adversary but also at the degradation of societal trust, economic stability, and political will.<sup>30</sup>

This concept responds to technological revolutions, globalization shifts, and a multipolar international system – factors that profoundly influence the nature, methods, and strategies of modern conflicts.<sup>31</sup>

Contemporary conflicts increasingly less resemble the traditional war model, where two states openly declare war and conduct military operations. Instead, we see the spread of „hybrid warfare“ – a combination of military and non-military means, often conducted in the „gray zone“ between war and peace.<sup>32</sup>

Hybrid warfare includes: conventional military operations on a limited scale, cyber attacks, disinformation campaigns, use of proxy forces, economic pressure, energy blackmail, and political interference. Russia's actions in Crimea in 2014 („little green men“), hybrid operations in eastern Ukraine, and cyber attacks in various countries represent examples of hybrid warfare.

New technologies are radically changing the nature of war. Unmanned combat vehicles (drones) have become a central element of conflicts, as clearly seen in the Russia-Ukraine

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<sup>30</sup> Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 25–29.

<sup>31</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *The Future of War: A History* (New York: Public Affairs, 2017), 210–218.

<sup>32</sup> Frank G. Hoffman, *Hybrid Warfare and Challenges*, Joint Force Quarterly, No. 52 (1st Quarter 2009): 34–39.

war and the Karabakh conflict. The use of artificial intelligence in intelligence, target identification, and autonomous systems creates new combat capabilities.<sup>33</sup>

Cyber warfare capabilities are growing - cyber attacks can paralyze critical infrastructure, disorganize military communications, and influence public opinion. Space technologies are also becoming an important element of conflicts - satellite intelligence, communications, and navigation are critically important for modern combat operations.

Hypersonic weapons, laser systems, electromagnetic weapons, and autonomous war robots represent future combat technologies that may further change the balance of power and the nature of war.

Information warfare is becoming an integral part of contemporary conflicts. Social media, digital platforms, and global information networks create new means for shaping public opinion, spreading disinformation, and influencing political processes.<sup>34</sup>

Disinformation campaigns, „deepfake“ technologies, coordinated bot networks, and strategic narrative formation represent information warfare instruments. These operations aim not only to spread specific information but to exert broad cognitive influence - weakening trust in institutions, strengthening societal polarization, and undermining the concept of „truth“.

Russia's information operations in Western democracies, China's „soft power“ campaigns, and Iranian or North Korean disinformation represent examples of this trend. Western countries attempt to develop counter-strategies and strengthen „cognitive security“, though this requires a difficult balance between freedom of expression and combating disinformation.

Economic warfare - trade wars, sanctions, investment restrictions, technological blockades - is becoming a central component of contemporary conflicts. The unprecedented package of Western sanctions against Russia, the US-China trade war, and

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<sup>33</sup> Paul Scharre, *Army of None: Autonomous Weapons and the Future of War* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2018), 145-189

<sup>34</sup> P.W. Singer and Emerson T. Brooking, *Like War: The Weaponization of Social Media* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018), 234-267.

technological decoupling show how economic instruments are used in the context of geopolitical conflicts.<sup>35</sup>

Contemporary forms of economic warfare are more sophisticated and targeted. „Smart sanctions“ target specific individuals, organizations, or sectors. Export controls are used to limit the spread of strategic technologies. Credit rating agencies, international payment systems, and global financial centers become arenas of geoeconomic conflict.

New generation warfare is multi-domain - it occurs simultaneously in different spheres: land, sea, air, space, and cyber domains, as well as in informational and cognitive space. Military doctrines increasingly emphasize coordination and synergy among these different domains.<sup>36</sup>

Contemporary conflicts also include the „gray zone“ - actions that do not reach the threshold of open war but are clearly aggressive or hostile. This may be cyber attacks that do not cause casualties, economic pressure that is not formal sanctions, or military activities that are formally „exercises“ or „patrols“ but are actually intimidation.

#### **IV. The Dilemmas of Small and Medium-Sized States**

Small and medium-sized states find themselves in a particularly difficult situation in the contemporary geopolitical environment. They must decide whether to follow a global power (and often fall into excessive dependence) or try to maintain strategic autonomy and hedge between different powers.<sup>37</sup>

This choice is determined by several factors: geographical location, economic dependencies, security threats, and domestic political dynamics. For example, small European countries near Russia actively seek NATO and EU protection. Meanwhile, Southeast Asian countries often attempt to balance relationships with both the US and China.

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<sup>35</sup> Nicholas Mulder, *The Economic Weapon: The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022), 312-345.

<sup>36</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* (Washington DC: Department of Defense, 2018).

<sup>37</sup> Evelyn Goh, *"Southeast Asian Strategies toward the Great Powers: Still Hedging after All These Years?"*, The ASAN Forum, February 2016, <http://www.theasanforum.org>.



Small economies are particularly vulnerable to global economic shocks, geopolitical tensions, and economic pressure from great powers. Disruptions in supply chains, rising energy prices, or financial crises may have more severe consequences in small countries because they have limited resources to absorb shocks.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, small countries are often dependent on a limited number of markets or partners. If these partners are involved in geopolitical conflicts, small countries automatically feel the consequences. For example, African and Asian countries dependent on Ukrainian and Russian grain imports severely experienced a food security crisis.

Achieving technological sovereignty is nearly impossible for small countries that lack resources for R&D and technology industry development. This means they remain dependent on foreign technologies, which can become a source of strategic vulnerability.<sup>39</sup>

Development assistance and infrastructure investments often come with geopolitical strings. Loans under China's BRI, American development assistance, or Russian energy investments may include political expectations, limiting the foreign policy autonomy of small countries.

Despite challenges, small and medium-sized states have certain strategic options. Some countries manage to gain maximum benefits from competing powers through effective diplomatic maneuvering (such as Vietnam or Singapore). Others use regional organizations as a platform for strengthening collective voice (such as ASEAN).<sup>40</sup>

Some countries manage to use their geographical location, resources, or strategic position to increase their importance (such as small oil-rich states or strategically important transit countries). However, these strategies require great diplomatic skill and are often risky, as balancing the interests of great powers is difficult and unstable.

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<sup>38</sup> Dani Rodrik, *Straight Talk on Trade: Ideas for a Sane World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 112-145.

<sup>39</sup> Chris Miller, *Chip War: The Fight for the World's Most Critical Technology* (New York: Scribner, 2022), 267-298.

<sup>40</sup> Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order* (London: Routledge, 2014), 178-212.

In a multipolar system, the collective voice of „Global South“ or „non-Western“ countries is becoming increasingly important. Organizations such as G77, the Non-Aligned Movement, the expanded BRICS format, and other platforms attempt to present an alternative perspective on the international order.<sup>41</sup>

These countries demand more equal representation in international institutions, reform of global financial architecture, and a fairer approach to climate change, debt, and development issues. However, this group of countries often lacks cohesion and unified vision, limiting the effectiveness of their collective action.

### CONCLUSION

The contemporary international system is undergoing a fundamental transformation whose final form is still in the process of formation. The end of the unipolar moment is clear, but the specific contours of the new multipolar order remain unclear. During this transitional period, the system is particularly unstable and unpredictable, as old rules and norms are undermined while new ones are not yet consolidated.

Geopolitical competition between the US and China, Russia's revisionist politics, Europe's search for strategic autonomy, increased activity of regional powers, and collective mobilization of Global South countries create a complex and dynamic geopolitical landscape where multiple scenarios are possible.

Globalization is not ending, but it is transforming. The hyperglobalization model that dominated 1990-2010 is being replaced by a more segmented and politicized global economy. Economic integration will continue, but it will be increasingly filtered through geopolitical, security, and values considerations.

Regionalization, friend-shoring, and selective decoupling will create a complex global economic architecture where different economic spheres and systems coexist in parallel. This will not be bipolar separation as during the Cold War, but a more complex and porous structure where countries and companies navigate between multiple overlapping networks and rules.

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<sup>41</sup> Kishore Mahbubani, *Has the West Lost It?*, (Hardcover: Allen Lane, 2018), 178-214.

Traditional security concepts focused on military threats and territorial integrity are expanding to include economic security, technological security, energy security, cybersecurity, food security, and climate security. The threats facing contemporary states are multidimensional and interconnected.

Accordingly, security strategies must be comprehensive and integrated. Successful states will be those that can effectively balance and coordinate different dimensions of security policy - maintaining military capabilities, developing economic resilience, achieving technological sovereignty, and climate adaptation.

The future development of contemporary geopolitical transformation includes several possible scenarios:

- **Stabilized Multipolarity:** In this scenario, global powers reach a new *modus vivendi* - mutual recognition of spheres of influence, a system of negotiated rules, and a framework for stable competition. International institutions are reformed to better reflect the new distribution of power.
- **Intense Conflict:** In this more pessimistic scenario, geopolitical confrontation deepens and transitions to open confrontation in one or more regions (Taiwan, the Baltics, the Middle East). This causes significant destabilization of the international system and a deep economic crisis.
- **Regional Hegemonies:** In this scenario, global governance weakens and more power transfers to regional forces. The world is effectively divided into regional spheres where local hegemons have dominant influence.
- **Technological Bifurcation:** In this scenario, the global economy and technological systems divide into two or more parallel spheres with different standards, technologies, and governance models. A „digital silk curtain“ divides the world into technological blocs.
- **Climate Catastrophe:** In this scenario, accelerating climate change and insufficient global response cause cascading crises that fundamentally change geopolitical priorities and power distribution.

In reality, development will likely be a combination of these scenarios in different regions and sectors. Geopolitical transformation will not be a linear process and will include both stabilization and crisis moments.

A multipolar system may provide more space for small and medium-sized states for diplomatic maneuvering and coalition building than a unipolar or bipolar system. However, this also means more uncertainty and security challenges. Successful countries will be those that can:

- Effectively diplomatically balance between major powers
- Build regional coalitions
- Economic diversification and increased resilience
- Technological adaptation and innovation
- Ensure internal political stability and effective governance

In these conditions, the strategic autonomy of small countries will depend not only on external factors but on internal resilience and adaptive capacity.

Effective global governance requires reform of international institutions to better reflect the new distribution of power and respond to 21st-century challenges. However, the reform process is slow and difficult because it requires consensus among powers with different interests.

In parallel, the development of alternative institutions - such as BRICS, SCO, AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank) - creates a pluralistic institutional landscape. This can be both positive (more choice and competition) and negative (coordination difficulties and fragmentation).

Ideally, old and new institutions would find ways to coexist and cooperate to provide global public goods - combating climate change, pandemic prevention, economic stability, conflict prevention. However, this requires political will and ability to compromise, which is not guaranteed under conditions of high geopolitical tension.

The technological and conceptual evolution of warfare will continue. The development of artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, quantum computers, and biotechnologies

may further change the nature of warfare. The role of information and cyber warfare is also growing.

Meanwhile, the development of international rules and norms for new combat technologies is becoming increasingly relevant. How should autonomous lethal systems be regulated? What are the „recognized rules“ in cyber warfare? How do we limit the militarization of space? These questions require international dialogue and possibly new international treaties, though achieving consensus is difficult under conditions of high confrontation.

Geopolitical transformation and new generation warfare represent interconnected processes that define the 21st-century international order. This transformation is not merely a change in the balance of power but a fundamental change in how power is exercised, how the global economy functions, and how international cooperation is managed.

Successful navigation in this complex environment requires strategic foresight, adaptive capacity, and development of a long-term vision for the future. Countries - large or small - must find ways to protect their interests while cooperating on global challenges.

The contemporary geopolitical landscape is unstable and uncertain, but it is also full of opportunities for creating new alliances, institutions, and forms of cooperation. How countries and societies use these opportunities will determine the security, well-being, and prosperity of future generations.

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