

Chapter 3

Implications for Global and Regional Security

Mykola Kapitonenko

Institute of International Relations, Taras Shevchenko National University, Ukraine

ABSTRACT

The chapter assesses consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, both global and regional. It examines how the war shaped and reinforced the shifts in the balance of power; it also focuses on transformations of regional security architecture. A global competition of China and the US is examined as a context of the war; implications of the security strategy of such actors as NATO, the EU, and Germany are also examined. It concludes with considerations about whether wars are back in a realist-driven international politics.

IMPLICATIONS FOR GLOBAL AND REGIONAL SECURITY

Russian invasion of Ukraine has launched a conventional interstate war in Europe, the scale of which has surpassed that of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990-ies and made it the largest war on the continent since World War II.

Due to that fact alone, one might expect considerable impact of the war on international security at several levels. It has a potential to shift the global balance of power; it tests and undermines international institutions; it changes usual patterns of expectations among states, including those linked to the direct use of military force. It also shows the profile of a modern war by introducing new technologies and forms of warfare, and broadens our understanding of contemporary security, for instance, in cyber, environmental or commodities realms.

In addition, the war resonates with the crisis of international order. The West is once again united in an attempt to protect and restore a rule-based world. Revisionist states, first of all Russia, but not only, are aiming at changing the rules and rebuild the structure of the international system in a way that would provide them with more advantages and better perspectives. Outcomes of the war are to be felt for years to come and will shape the contours of regional security arrangements in Europe.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-8521-7.ch003

Global Level: Balance and Transition of Power

The broader context of this war is about challenging existing international order. Thus, it is about checking the balance of power between challengers and status quo powers. The outcome of war will show whether what is often referred to as ‘norms based international order’ is protected and reinstalled or, if the challenge is successful, the next international order will be based on a different set of norms.

Major wars not only affect global balance of power but also reveal it. One of the problems with international security mechanisms constructed on the basis of the balance of power principle is that it is often difficult to measure that balance. Wars between states are exceptionally rare; while wars between great powers are absent since the times of World War II. Under such conditions balance of power becomes too speculative and vague to be a solid foundation of an international order.

Uncertainty about relative power potentials of the states can in itself be a factor of (in)stability. More risk-taking (for whatever reasons) governments may be tempted to test things on the ground. Challengers may overestimate their power while underestimating that of reigning hegemony. There are possibly other ways how lack of information about distribution of power in the international system can affect the likelihood of a major war. In case of Russia, speculations about the balance have become a pretext of aggression: Russian rhetoric was systemically referring to the shifts of the balance of power in West’s favor taking place after the end of the Cold War, which arguably caused all the problems in the realm of international security (Путин, 2012). But what was the real balance or imbalance?

A war makes existing distribution of power more explicit. Russia’s war in Ukraine, in particular, has so far demonstrated the limits of the West’s capabilities; measures of European soft and normative power; calculations of the ‘West against the Rest’ standoff; and, especially, Russia’s weakness. Thus, a real balance of power, both global and regional, has been revealed. It has become clear that the Western hegemony, even if still present, is not overwhelming. China, on the other hand, is not ready to align fully with Russia’s aggressive revisionism, even if Moscow’s and Beijing’s strategic goals linked to the change of international order are the same. Although incapable of preventing a large war, global interdependence, however, is strong enough to keep escalation under control and avoid another repetition of the World War I scenario.

The war is revealing that the world today carries elements of bipolarity, reflected in concepts and perception like those of Global North vs. Global South or democracies vs. autocracies. These elements are reinforced also by distribution of material capabilities, with the US and China being the only two states to bypass a 15% share of world GDP mark. Bipolarity, however, is only partial: there are well more than two poles in the modern world. References to a multipolar moment are also well-grounded: probably, most leaders of great powers would say they live in a world of political diversity, dispersion of power and competition of several centers of gravity (Scholz, 2022/2023). Moreover, power in today’s world is not so heavily concentrated in the hands of states, with non-state actors acquiring more influence, resources and agenda-setting capabilities. Under such conditions, the future stance of the EU, as well as positions taken by countries like India, Saudi Arabia or Brazil, may also significantly impact the coming architecture of international security.

Polarity is defined by distribution of material capabilities; but also by readiness and ability of states to project military power and transform those capabilities into changed behavior of others. Both readiness and ability to do so are also being tested by the war. Results, which are to be revealed, will be of great importance in constructing the future system of international security. The ongoing war is also a battle for international leadership, vision and coalitions.

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