

## **WILL THE NEW WORLD ORDER REMAIN UNIPOLAR OR BECOME MULTIPOLAR?**

When the American columnist and publicist Charles Krauthammer coined the term "unipolar moment" after the end of the Cold War, the USA did indeed have political, military and economic dominance in a unipolar world. Some, like Frances Fukuyama, were even convinced that the end of history had come because the ideas of democracy and a market economy had prevailed worldwide.

In the meantime, however, the world has continued to change. China has become an economic power; Russia under Vladimir Putin has become more self-confident again; and other BRICS states like India or South Africa have every reason to strive for a new world order with a different distribution of power. After all, India was still a British colony when the United Nations Security Council with its five permanent members became the centrepiece of the United Nations, and in Africa there were just five independent states at that time.

Nevertheless, there are strong efforts in Washington to continue to adhere to a unipolar world order. The crucial question is therefore whether there will be a shift of power in the world and under what circumstances?

### **1. The USA wants to stick to the unipolar world**

There are many signs that the USA wants to hold on to its monopoly of power in the world: its own country's policy is geared towards this goal; its allies in Europe and East Asia are mobilised for this purpose; and academia backs up this endeavour with doctrine. With the neoconservatives, a determining force has asserted itself in foreign policy that demands that America must remain the sole determining power in the world. Thus, as early as 1992, with the National Security Strategy, a military doctrine was adopted according to which no other country in the world should even come close to the military power of the USA. In 2002, the right of the USA to wage preventive wars was defined in a new "National Security Strategy". Accordingly, the USA today spends \$800 billion annually on the military, practically as much as the rest of the world combined.

At the same time, the allies in Europe and East Asia were mobilised. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the Balts and Eastern Europeans have determined the policy of NATO and the European Union. Europe is being rearmed, as Washington has wanted for years. In this sense, one could read recently in the New York Times: "NATO is functioning as it should. Europe is dependent on American power. And on favourable terms, since US NATO spending is only 6% of the Pentagon's budget; and Europeans increasingly have to buy American weapons systems"<sup>(1)</sup> .

To counter China's ambitions in the Indo-Pacific region, the AUCUS pact was signed. The United States, Australia and the United Kingdom agreed to work together on defence issues. Experts are also to share their knowledge in the fields of artificial intelligence, quantum technology and cyber issues. India, along with Australia and Japan, has been included in the "Quadrilateral Security Dialogue" with the US; and strong efforts are underway in Japan to further develop its armed forces.

To secure global political dominance, President Biden has proclaimed the "Alliance of Democracies". The whole world should help to keep the "autocrats" in China and Russia, as well as in other parts of the world, in check.

The concept of a unipolar world is also backed up by science, as in the paper by Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth on "The Myth of Multipolarity"<sup>(2)</sup> . Their argument: the USA still has the ability to maintain the structures of a unipolar world. Even if China and Russia in particular question the existing system, the USA can still use its military power worldwide and, supported by allies, exert massive pressure through economic sanctions. The radius of action for the USA is no longer as large as it was immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but a multipolar world still remains a myth.

## **2. The world is changing**

As much as the USA will continue to be the leading world power in the near future due to its political, military and economic strength, the world is changing. At the beginning of the last century, one third of the world's population still lived in Europe and North America. Today, when the USA and its European allies present themselves as the "international community", they no longer represent even 10% of the world's population.

After World War II, the US alone produced 60% of the world economy; China, by contrast, only 2%. Today, the US and China each produce about one-fifth of the world's GDP; with China's share expected to grow strongly in the coming years. In 1948, the US accounted for 22% of global exports, while China's share was only 0.9%. Today, the American share is only 8 %; China's, on the other hand, 15 %. In the meantime, the People's Republic has become the most important trading partner for 120 countries.

Politically, the new situation became apparent when many countries in the Global South refused to unconditionally condemn Russia over the war in Ukraine or to join the sanctions against Russia. These states had their own experiences with "Western values", with discrimination and oppression. If the USA at the time spoke out massively against the establishment of the International Criminal Court, but today demands that the Russian president be brought before this very tribunal, this ambiguity cannot go unnoticed by other countries.

The motto of the last few years has largely been "China is outpacing the rest of the world economy - no country will grow faster by 2040"<sup>(3)</sup> . According to this, measured by their share of global economic output, today's developing and emerging countries will have caught up with the western industrialised countries in 20 years. China in particular, according to the forecast, is running ahead of everyone . The Middle Kingdom is expected to account for 31% of global growth by 2040.

For the longest time, many in the West saw China as a market where good business could be done, but in Beijing, with economic strength came a growing awareness of power. A strong industry became the basis for a strong defence; science and research were increasingly integrated into the military sector<sup>(4)</sup> . The civilian and military sectors increasingly formed a single unit; the "People's Liberation Army" was

very strongly modernised. The aim of the Chinese strategy is obviously to contain American domination in the border areas and in the Indo-Pacific region.

Chinese President Xi Jinping makes no secret of the fact that he wants to change the post-1945 international order and give China a significant place in the new order. In March 2023, he announced the "Global Civilisation Initiative", which aims to that governments should not impose their own values and political institutions on other countries in order to stir up ideological strife. The West's efforts to impose its human rights on others is seen as a new kind of colonialism.

The "Global Security Initiative" was presented at the Munich Security Conference 2023. According to it, a bloc formation like in the Cold War is to be overcome and the coexistence of countries without sanctions and without war is to be made possible. And a "Global Development Initiative" promotes development according to the Chinese model without imposing any conditions on others. <sup>(5)</sup>

Unlike China, India is courted by the West. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was invited to address both houses of Congress in Washington. The basic tenor was that "the two largest democracies in the world" must defend their common interests. Shortly afterwards, Modi was the guest of honour at the grand parade on the Champs-Élysées on France's National Day.

Since the Bandung Conference in 1955, India has attached importance to an independent foreign policy and was a leading member of the "Non-Aligned Movement". While the aim at the time was to contain American influence in the region, New Delhi's policy today is strongly determined by competition with China. Alliances are sought that help to strengthen India's position. For example, most weapons are bought in Russia and Moscow also benefits from the increased oil exports to India. On the other hand, the USA is the most important ally in the Indo-Pacific region.

But India is also a member of the "Shanghai Cooperation Organisation" based in Beijing. The programme of this organisation is security cooperation between the member states, cooperation in economic and trade matters, and stability in the region. This organisation represents 40% of the world's population and also has observer status at the United Nations. Above all, it is also an essential goal to

achieve a new distribution of power in the world. In this sense, efforts are also being made to reduce the supremacy of the dollar.

Prime Minister Modi sees India's chairmanship of the UN Security Council in December 2022 and its chairmanship of the G20 as an expression of India's new status in the world and the trust that the world has in his country. India has thus become the "Vishwa Guru", the world's teacher, which the world must finally recognise. The Prime Minister did not spare big words when he chose the motto "One Earth, One Family, One Future" for the world under India's leadership. In this sense, the global challenges should be mastered through cooperation, not through war and confrontation.

While India is being courted by the West, Russia embodies the enemy par excellence for Western elites and a large part of the media; evil that must be fought by good. Since it has become clear that Vladimir Putin is not, like his predecessor Boris Yeltsin, the willing accomplice for the USA, he has been discredited and defamed.

But already Yevgueni Maximovich Primakov, born in Kiev in 1929, member of the Presidential Council under Michel Gorbachev, later Foreign Minister and Prime Minister, dealt with the question of how the division of power in the world affects war and peace. He came to the conclusion that a unipolar world dominated by the United States alone is unacceptable for the other countries, especially Russia. According to the "Primakov Doctrine", a world with a single hegemonic power is extremely unstable, whereas in a multipolar world the use of force is contained by mutual control. Thus, the sovereign states determine the rules of the world order.

Accordingly, Russia should work for a multipolar world to counter the sole supremacy of the USA. In this endeavour, Moscow should seek the support of other great powers; the West must no longer speak alone for the international community. Moreover, Russia must assert its supremacy in the space of the former Soviet Union and in any case oppose an expansion of NATO<sup>(6)</sup>. Sergei Lavrov, as foreign minister, then repeatedly committed himself to the guideline set out in the "Primakov Doctrine".

Alexei Arbatov, Vice-President of the Duma's Defence Committee, has supplemented these foreign policy ideas with a military concept entitled "The Transformation of Russian Military Doctrine: Lessons learned from Kosovo and Chechnya". For Arbatov, the war waged by NATO against Serbia in 1999 meant a humiliation of

Russia and the end of a relationship of trust with the West. In Russia's new defence concept, therefore, the armed forces, including nuclear weapons, were to form the basis of deterrence. If NATO was able to attack a sovereign state like Serbia without UN approval, then a similar strike could be made against Russia. A partnership between Russia and the West was thus no longer possible; NATO became an enemy image for large sections of the Russian public.

This is mainly because the war against Serbia, in which 1260 aircraft were used, turned NATO from a defensive alliance, as in the times of the Cold War, into an offensive alliance. In this war, NATO destroyed 100% of Serbia's oil refineries, 70% of the arms industry, 60% of the oil depots, 100% of the electricity transformers and 40% of the television and radio stations. All in all, the war against Serbia in 1999 led to a war with NATO becoming a possibility for Russia and to Russia rearming. This development coincided with the beginning of Vladimir Putin's presidency.

Since then, despite the strong preponderance of the USA, Moscow has also tried to play its own role internationally in a non-bipolar world. Thus, at a summit meeting in December 2021, Presidents Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping declared that they oppose those forces that want to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries "under the cloak of democratic values and human rights". At the opening of the Olympic Games in Beijing, both presidents proclaimed a new world order for the 21st century. This should differ from that of the West in that every country should have the right to choose its "own form of democracy". Even if there are still different interests between Moscow and Beijing, they agree that the world should have several centres of power and be multipolar in the future.

Other states also act in this sense: Turkey, although a member of NATO, pursues its own foreign policy in essential areas. Saudi Arabia, an old ally of the USA, is showing emancipatory tendencies; and African countries consider an international order that predates their independence to be out of date.

Until 100 years ago, the Ottomans ruled over large parts of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. Under the presidency of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, head of the Islamic-religious "Justice and Development Party" (AKP), a certain national awakening is taking place: Turkey is establishing itself as a regional power; is a member of NATO; at the same time has a basis for talks with Moscow; supplies drones to Ukraine and plays a role in the Syrian civil war. The fact that maps of a

"Greater Turkey" are now appearing, depicting the country at its past size, fits into this picture and into Ankara's efforts to portray a new centre of power.

Saudi Arabia, a traditional ally of the USA, has also remembered its own interests when it came to implementing the sanctions imposed by the West against Russia. Moreover, there are indications that Saudi Arabia, which invented the petro-dollar in its time, will also conduct business in Chinese currency in the future. Thus, the sanctions would not further isolate Russia but, on the contrary, strengthen its move away from the dollar. After all, China gets 25% of its oil imports from Saudi Arabia. Here, too, it is a strong personality, Mohammed bin Salman, who is striving to achieve a higher status for his country in the international community.

Many in the West see the world order of the last decades as a "rules-based order" that would have served everyone equally. Many African countries obviously do not feel this way, as shown by their attitude to the war in Ukraine and the sanctions imposed by the West on Russia. On the one hand, the influence previously exerted by the great powers has been maintained; moreover, the illegal invasions, such as in Iraq and Syria, have destabilised entire regions. The NATO operation in Libya has led to the spread of terrorist groups throughout the Sahel and has also strengthened religious extremists in several countries.

In 1945, when the United Nations was founded, almost all African countries were still colonies. Even today, no African country has a permanent seat on the Security Council. Yet half of the Security Council's meetings, around 70% of its resolutions, concern what happens in Africa<sup>(7)</sup>. African countries are therefore demanding better representation in a new world order and in decision-making that affects their affairs. In any case, they want a move away from an order in which a single power makes all the essential decisions.

All in all, one can say that the attitude towards the war in Ukraine has made clear a development that has already become apparent in recent years. Countries that have been strengthened economically by globalisation or that have regained self-confidence by reflecting on their historical role are no longer as willing as before to follow a leading power unconditionally. Also, the billions of dollars granted to Ukraine are compared with development aid and seen as a double standard on the part of the West. This is also shown by opinion polls: while in the West 75% of the population have a negative opinion of China and even 87% of Russia, the 6 billion people of the

Global South have an opposite view. The West obviously sees the world differently from the rest<sup>(8)</sup>. This is also consistent with the fact that 48% of Indians and 51% of Turks think that the future world order will be multipolar, which only 37% of Americans, 31% of people in the EU and only 29% of the British believe. Montesquieu already noted in his "Lettres persanes" that Europeans often find it difficult to understand other cultures.

### **3. Lawfare-The Law as a Weapon**

The American armed forces are by far the strongest military power in the world, with a budget of \$800 billion in 2023 and 800 military bases scattered around the world. Officially, this vast force is for "security". But what "security"?

For the United States, with friendly neighbours to the north and south, two oceans to the east and west, a strengthened coast guard would probably be able to ensure the country's security. So, they say, it's about protecting the security of others, such as Europeans. The latter are then called "free riders" if their military spending does not correspond to American ideas. In reality, however, the huge military expenditures do not serve security, but the maintenance of American dominance in a unipolar world. This is quite legitimate, the ancient Romans did it, but it must also be allowed to be said.

Now it is repeatedly said that without NATO's support Ukraine would have lost the war against Russia long ago. That is undoubtedly true. But without NATO's eastward expansion, the war in Ukraine would probably never have happened. This raises the question of whether the order built on military domination serves peace? In fact, the principle that has been in force since the Peace of Utrecht in 1713, "The balance of powers ensures peace", has been replaced by the motto, "Benevolent American hegemony means peace". But just as there were continuous wars in the 18th century to maintain the "balance for peace", there has been continuous war for a generation to prop up American hegemony.

This development has also led to an increase in global defence spending to 2000 billion dollars in 2022, according to the Stockholm Institute for Peace Research<sup>(9)</sup>. And, they say, it is safe to assume that this trend will continue.

Now, the US is still the world's strongest economy, with a GDP of \$23.3 trillion in 2021. In the same period, China achieved an economic output of \$17.7 trillion.



However, there are projections that China's GDP will be larger than that of the US as early as 2030, and the ratio will be \$50 trillion to \$34 trillion in China's favour by 2050<sup>(10)</sup>. Today, 48% of all international business worldwide is conducted via the USA, 20% via China. But imports from China are blamed for 44% of lost jobs in American industry for the period 1990-2007 alone.

With the declared aim of saving American jobs or creating new ones, Donald Trump has imposed tariffs worth billions of dollars on goods imported from China and declared an economic war. Beijing has also been accused of manipulating its currency to promote exports.

Under President Biden, this conflict was further intensified. Tariffs remained in place and Biden took new measures against Chinese products and corporations. The justification was that these endangered American security interests. Thus, Chinese companies' access to critical technologies and American investments in China were restricted. It is true that Treasury Secretary Janet L. Yellen went to Beijing in July 2023, where she declared that the world had room for both economies. At the same time, however, the American president declared on CNN that China wanted to displace the USA as the leading economic power and would be resisted by all means.

In fact, the US is also pressuring allies not to buy Chinese products such as chips and semiconductors for "security reasons", even if they are cheaper and better than those of the competition. China is also to be prevented from developing those areas of artificial intelligence that can be used militarily. The government of the Netherlands has already responded to this call, which in turn has led the Chinese government to ban the export of germanium and gallium, metals needed to make chips. Companies that are active in these areas and receive support from the US government are not allowed to invest in China.

In addition, companies with links to China such as TikTok, apps like Temu or the fashion chain Shein are closely monitored in the United States. Since the surplus in the Chinese trade balance already accounts for 10% of total GDP, the US is again demanding that the Chinese currency be revalued. The Chinese side, however, argues that higher interest rates in the USA are responsible for this development.

The USA is thus using its economic power quite massively against China and, under the motto "de-risking", also wants to involve its European allies. These, already cut off from cheap Russian energy supplies, are now also affected by the protectionism of American industrial policy. Can this policy be called anything other than "America first?"

Armament costs a lot of money, and an economic war can also cause great damage to one's own economy. The use of lawfare is much more cost-effective. One uses the "law" that one has established oneself as a weapon to achieve one's political goals. The development of international law has always been linked to a power-political component. When Hugo Grotius proclaimed the "freedom of the seas" as a legal principle, the Dutch fleet was already strong enough to enforce this principle against the monopoly previously programmed by the Pope.

According to various sources, the term lawfare was already used in 1975 by the authors John Carlson and Neville Yeomans and then found its way into the ideas of "total war"<sup>(11)</sup>. In fact, the USA has developed its own legal system, on the one hand to justify its wars of intervention, but also to be able to pursue its claims worldwide in the sense of extraterritorial jurisdiction. In this sense, the USA imposes sanctions against political and economic competitors worldwide to support its foreign policy. Exponents of lawfare, such as US General Charles Dunlap, deliberately wanted to develop this type of warfare in order to circumvent general international law. According to Dunlap, international law and international organisations would increasingly restrict the radius of action of the US military. To counteract this, one has extended one's own national sovereignty to the whole world. This allows them to circumvent international jurisdiction and assert their own claims.

Citizens of other states are arbitrarily subjected to American jurisdiction, for example by claiming that they have carried out transactions in dollars or that their products contain American products. Under the pretext of fighting corruption or standing up for human rights, American justice can interfere anywhere in the world.

In this way, other states can be brought to their knees, as can competitors in the economy or disagreeable individuals. One of many examples is the "Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act", which also prohibited corporations from other countries from trading with Cuba. It has not helped that the United Nations has spoken out against this unilateral American measure in numerous resolutions. In the

past, Swiss and French banks had to pay fines of billions of dollars to the USA. And at the beginning of the Ukraine war, many believed that Russia could be brought to its knees with economic sanctions alone.

The question of whether the future world order will be unilateral or multilateral therefore depends on the outcome of the wars fought on the battlefield and in the economic and judicial spheres. At present, one has the impression that the Europeans have completely submitted to the Americans and abandoned all their own interests. This could tempt Washington to want to cling unconditionally to unipolar hegemony. At the same time, it would probably be better to give emerging countries at least some say in shaping the future of the world, although the USA could well retain dominance.

### Notes

- (1) "Why NATO is not what it says it is"; NYT July 12th 2023
- (2) "The Myth of Multipolarity"; Foreign Affairs May/ June 2023
- (3) "China is racing ahead of the rest of the world"; FAZ 18 August 2021
- (4) Alain Bauer; "Au commencement était la Guerre " ; Fayard 2023
- (5) "The World according to Xi"; The Economist March 25th 2023
- (6) Alain Bauer; ob.zit.
- (7) "Order of Oppression"; Foreign Affairs May/June 2023
- (8) "The new non-aligned"; The Economist April 15th 2023
- (9) "The cost of the global arms race"; The Economist May 27th 2023
- (10) Bruno Umersbach; 2022
- (11) Alain Bauer; ob. Cit

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