

GEOSTRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE RUSSIAN- UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

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Abstract: *In the history of international relations, there are evident processes in which certain events in them culminate in such a way that they are characterized as - nothing will be like before. Such a process in recent history is the Cold War, and the event is the demolition of the Berlin Wall in 1989. In combination with the tectonic disturbances created by the fall of the Berlin Wall and in the conditions in which the USA tried to establish a unipolar world order, there was a war between Russia and Ukraine in 2022, which expanded into a conflict between the collective West and Russia. It is heard again - nothing will be the same again.*

This paper is an attempt to predict the geostrategic implications of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The general hypothesis from which it was started is as follows: International relations are primarily state-centric, and the creation of a new world order determined by world powers is turning into a cluster arrangement of the world.. In confirming the hypothesis, well-known scientific methods were used, primarily comparative, content analysis, analogy and case studies. The general conclusion can be: The war between Russia and Ukraine, which has expanded into a conflict between the collective West and Russia, will result in a geostrategic realignment of states in the creation of a new cluster-type world order, and the possibility of the outbreak of the Third World War should not be ruled out.

Key words: *: Russian-Ukrainian conflict new world order, geostrategic implications, cluster arrangement of the world*

(introductory lecture of the forum - work by invitation)

1. INTRODUCTION

The period after the Second World War until the last decade of the last century is called the Cold War, i.e. the bipolar world order. Bipolar world order, because only two world powers - the USA and the USSR - had the greatest influence on international relations. The Cold War, because there was no direct armed conflict between the aforementioned world powers.

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The Cold War ended with the victory of Western countries led by the USA, and the formal act (event) of the end of that war was the demolition of the Berlin Wall (1989), as its symbol. The fall of the Berlin Wall was followed by "tectonic disturbances", which are known as powerful disintegration processes. The most significant of these processes are: 1) the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and 2) the collapse of the USSR, which occurred in 1991. Among the disintegration processes affecting our reality, not so much world processes, is the breakup of the SFR Yugoslavia, which began in 1991 and has not yet been completed (Forca, 2021).

The USA tried to use the newly created situation in international relations after the Cold War to create a unipolar world order, with its own dominance. For the sake of strengthening the levers of its own power, America preserved NATO, even though the Warsaw Pact fell apart. Also, the USA wholeheartedly supported the formation of the European Union (1992), as a product of the end of the Cold War, but kept it "under its control".

One of the problems that arose after the Cold War was the position of the countries of the former VU, the USSR and SFR Yugoslavia. The USA used its power and influence, and attracted most of the states from the mentioned areas to NATO, which in 2023 reached the number of 32 member states, from 12 when it was formed in 1949, or 16 at the end of the Cold War.

With the continuous expansion of NATO to the east, the Alliance broke out on the borders of Russia. Russia opposed NATO expansion, but did not have the capacity to counter it in the first decade after the Cold War. When NATO more seriously threatened to admit Georgia and Ukraine, as former republics of the USSR, into its membership, Russia strongly objected. First, in 2008, with a military intervention in Georgia, it blocked its path to NATO, and recognized its two parts (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) as independent and independent states. The matter with Ukraine was much more complicated. Russia first annexed Crimea in 2014 (returned Crimea to Russia), then in 2022 it would militarily attack Ukraine. Russia named the military intervention in Ukraine as a "special military operation", while the UN General Assembly called the act aggression.

The countries of the world reacted differently to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The countries around the USA (the collective West) wholeheartedly sided with Ukraine, offering it all kinds of help, which is especially expressed by the delivery of weapons and military equipment. On the other hand, sanctions were introduced against Russia that were not recorded in history. A large number of countries in the world, which, like the collective West, condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine, did not take sides, and especially did not impose sanctions on Russia.

The war in Ukraine is still going on, and relations between NATO and Russia are becoming increasingly strained. The world is threatened by the Third World War. In such conditions, the latest world order is being created, which, it seems, will not have the character of either multipolar or unipolar, but globalization will be replaced by a cluster arrangement of the world.

2. THE NEW WORLD ORDER

From a theoretical point of view, as befits discussions at a scientific meeting, it is necessary to refer to the phrase "new world order" and its characteristics in recent history. Without carrying out the methodological approach of defining the world order, we will use its dictionary-encyclopedia definition (Table 1) and the widespread definition given by Aksapar.

Aksapar defines the world order as follows:

"Every international order is a reflection of the global political and economic architecture that takes shape as circumstances allow; as such, the world order is not written or predestined, but

rather an arrangement selected from among existing options; the world order is shaped by the permanent interests and convictions of the leading actors; each new order corrects some of the shortcomings of previous orders; each world order consists of numerous competing economic, political, military global and regional orders; world orders have not been truly universal until now" (Akçapar, 2009).

Table 1. Definitions of world order (Source: Prorokovic, 2017)

DEFINITION	SOURCE
A system of controlling events in the world, and especially a set of international arrangements established to preserve global political stability.	Oxford Dictionary, 2015. www.oxforddictionaries.com
A political situation in which countries are no longer divided by their support for the US or the USSR and are instead oriented towards working together to solve international problems.	Cambridge Dictionary, 2016. http://dictionary.cambridge.org
A political, economic or social situation in the world in a certain period of time that produces consequences for relations between different countries	MacMillan Dictionary, 2015. www.macmillandictionary.com
A system for controlling world events in order to maintain political stability.	21st Century Lexicon, 2014. www.dictionary.com

Numerous examples of the typology of the world order are known in theory, and we will mention only a few. American political scientist Kaplan, in 1957, offered six models of world order: System of balance of power; Loose bipolar system (loose bipolar system); Tight bipolar system; Universal international system (universal international system); Hierarchical international system; Unit veto system. (More: Kaplan, 1957).

American politician and diplomat Henry Kissinger in "World Order" (2015), sees world order as a regional or civilizational concept of the nature of a just arrangement and redistribution of power that is applicable to the entire world. Any successful world order, according to Kissinger, is based on a balance between legitimacy and power, where legitimacy is a set of generally accepted rules that define the limits of acceptable action. On the other hand, power is necessary, but not sufficient. Kissinger highlights four specific conceptions of "order": 1) the European system, especially its Westphalian model of sovereign states with equal status in the system; 2) the Islamic system based on the idea of community or community; 3) the Chinese system based on traditional ideas of the Middle Kingdom as a great center of regional power; and 4) an American system that will be dominant around the world, which is under unprecedented pressure (Kissinger, 2015).

Starting from the claim that states were and remain the key subjects of international relations, and that the world order is state-centric, numerous authors use three models in its classification: 1) unipolar, 2) bipolar and 3) multipolar world order. That classification will be key in this paper.

2.1. Bipolar world order

In theory, there is a consensus that the period after the Second World War until the last decade of the last century was essentially a bipolar world order, dominated by two world superpowers: the USA and the USSR. In conditions of bipolarity, international relations are dominated by two centers of power, two poles with opposing interests. Their total power potentials significantly deviate from the indicators of other actors. That is why the other actors individually are not able to match either of the two genders. They are forced either to join together to protect their interests, or to join one of the sexes (Prorokovic, 2018).

It is interesting to look at how the term "bipolarity" came about. Namely, the origin of that term is linked to the prominent theoretician of neorealism, Kenneth Waltz. Waltz himself says about it in an interview:

"I first published the article on the stability of the bipolar world in 1964. It was controversial. Many were enraged by my views. First, I presented it in the form of a presentation for a conference organized by Harvard and MIT. My presentation caused a lively and heated discussion. I argued that we live in a world with two forces, therefore a bipolar world. Others answered me: 'No, wait, Europe also counts'. Well, yes, of course, Europe also counts, but not as much as it was the case before and nowhere near as much as the USA and the Soviet Union. In the end, the fate of the world depended on the USA, the Soviet Union and their mutual relations" (Site: <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/people3/Waltz/waltz-con4.htm>).

The Cold War, as another name for the period of bipolarism in international relations, is theoretically understood in a narrower and broader sense. In a narrower sense, the Cold War is placed in the period from the end of the Second World War, until the "Cuban crisis", in 1962 (Naj, 2006:113-114; Vukadinovic, 2001:50). Nevertheless, the broader meaning of the duration of the Cold War, which is the most used in the literature, was given by Cagli and Witkoff, who break it down into three phases: 1) the first phase - *confrontation*, from 1945 to 1962, 2) the second phase - *from coexistence to détente*, from 1963 to 1978 and 3) the third phase - *from renewed confrontation to rapprochement*, from 1979 to 1991 (Kegley & Witkoff, 2006).

Kegley and Witkoff, in their work *World Politics - Trend and Transformation*, when it comes to the Cold War, primarily focused on the relationship between the USA and the USSR, analyzing it through the previously mentioned stages. However, the bipolar world order, or the Cold War, globally, had other general characteristics. The general characteristics of the bipolar world order include: 1) bloc grouping, 2) anti-colonialism and the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement, and 3) the arms race (Forca, 2022a).

America was the first to articulate the danger of spreading the influence of the USSR in Europe and the world after the Second World War. In this sense, in 1949, at the initiative of the USA, the Agreement on the formation of the North Atlantic Alliance - NATO was concluded in Washington. When it was formed in 1949, NATO consisted of the USA and Canada and 10 European countries. Although NATO was formed in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter, as a defense alliance of the North Atlantic area, the goals of its formation were "formulated" differently by its first secretary general, Lord Ismay, with the words: 1) Germany under control, 2) Russians out of Europe and 3) America to Europe (Kekovic, Dimitrijevic, 2017:403). Kegley and Witkoff saw in the formation of NATO, in fact, the effort of the USA to create a unipolar order, relying on its superiority in nuclear weapons and attracting Western European states to the Alliance, in order to prevent the influence of the USSR (Kegley, Witkoff, 2006). Kegley and Witkoff recognized such an effort by the USA in the "Truman Doctrine" (a strategy to contain the influence of the USSR) immediately after the Second World War. That is why the first period of the Cold War is called "confrontation". That confrontation was mitigated by the fact that the USSR very quickly produced nuclear weapons.

In the beginning, the USSR did not pay much attention to the formation of NATO, because Stalin believed that the Soviet influence in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe was strong and sufficient to oppose it. However, when West Germany was admitted to NATO (1955) and the deployment of American missiles in Turkey began, the USSR formed the Warsaw Pact in 1955 with the eight socialist countries of Europe. Like NATO, the Warsaw Pact was formed in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter. Thus, by 1955, two of the

strongest military alliances ever made in human history were formed (Figure 1), whose armed forces numbered in the millions.

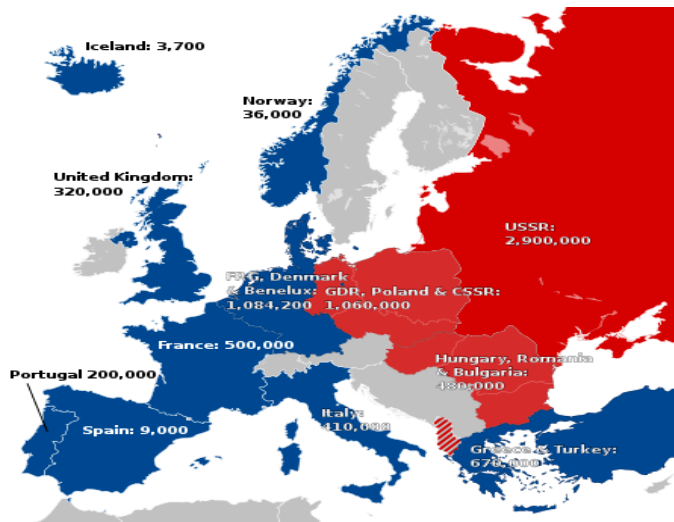


Figure 1. NATO and the Warsaw Pact in 1955

Source: <https://vk-spy.ru/bs/animals/vosstaniya-v-stranah-varshavskogo-dogovora-varshavskii-dogovor/>

With the formation of two military blocs, a strong arms race began, led by the USA and the USSR, keeping the world in constant fear of another major war. During the Cold War, the world was closest to the Third World War in 1962, in the so-called the Cuban crisis, that is, in opposing the USA that the USSR installs missile systems on the territory of Cuba. The conflict between the USA and the USSR (NATO and VU), however, did not occur, but the antagonism of the world powers was transferred to the UN Security Council, and manifested itself by vetoing the adoption of resolutions by that body. The right of veto is established in the UN Charter (UN Charter, 1945: Art. 27). Professor Adam Roberts claims that during the Cold War (until 1989) the right of veto was used 230 times: 114 times by the USSR, 67 times by the USA, 30 by the United Kingdom, 18 by France and 3 by China (Chomsky, 1993).

Although the world powers did not directly clash during the bipolarism (Cold War), nevertheless, they were the cause and participants of numerous wars of that period. In theory, there are extremely different data on the number of wars during the Cold War. Thus, according to the data of the Austrian political scientist Heinz Gertner, during the Cold War, 159 wars took place, in which more than half of the total number of countries participated (94 out of 174), and the number of wars was led by Great Britain (16 wars) and France (13 wars) as colonial powers, followed by the USA (11 wars), India (10 wars), South Africa and China (9 wars each). (Petranovic, 1990:14). According to another source, during the Great War, 95 wars took place (30 inter-state and 65 intra-state), and major powers participated in most of them (Delibasic et al., 2017:9-30). Similarly, the data also show that during the Cold War there were 93 wars, of which 38 (41%) were interstate, and in almost all wars the USA was involved (Jeffic et al., 2018).

Participation in two wars is characteristic of the USA and the USSR. First, the USA learned lessons from the war in Vietnam, after which there was a radical change in the way of warfare and recourse to the so-called low-intensity conflicts, with a focus on the so-called operations

beyond the significant engagement of armed forces. On the other hand, the USSR became mired in a ten-year war in Afghanistan, from which it emerged in 1989, just before its collapse.

The arms race, however, produced results for one side (the US and its allies) in the Cold War. Namely, as Todor Mirkovic claims:

"The arms race between the USA and the USSR, that is, NATO and the Soviet Union, was, in essence, a race between unequal competitors. This inequality was primarily reflected in their economic power. Thus, at the end of the seventies (1977), according to data from the World Bank, the ratio of economic power, measured by gross national product, was 4.45:1 in favor of the USA and its allies, including Japan" (Mirkovic, 2007).

The USSR and the Soviet Union, therefore, lost the arms race to the USA and the Western allies, which, along with other problems within the USSR itself, but also the Soviet Union, led to the end of bipolarism, i.e. the Cold War.

2.2. A unipolar world order

Unipolarity is a term that implies the domination of world politics by one superpower. Thus, Prorokovic says; "Every issue in international relations and, therefore, international security can be influenced from one center of power." And not only on the international, but also on the national security of other countries" (Prorokovic, 2018). In theory, there are diametrically opposed views on the characteristics of the unipolar world order, and on the possibility of its establishment in practice. In principle, it is believed that "ruling the world" from a single center (a single superpower) is impossible, although there are different approaches to the efforts of hegemony to achieve this.

The progenitor of offensive structural realism, John Mearsheimer, in his work *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, published in 2001, presented the basics of his views, recognizable in the so-called five assumptions (principles) of John Mearsheimer. In conclusion, Mearsheimer claims: „Ultimate security can only be achieved by the most powerful state in the system" (Mearsheimer, 2001).

Joshua Goldstein argued that a unipolar world order is the most stable and therefore the most desirable. In this sense, Goldstein says: "...if one superpower concentrates as much power as possible in its hands, other actors will be less and less able to challenge its leadership." A superpower achieves preponderance of power and there are no equal competitors who could threaten it" (Goldstein, 1994:48).

Wohlforth William expresses very similar views on the unipolar world order to Goldsatin, who claims: "...competition in these circumstances is minimal because the dominance of one power leads to the absence of war between great powers." The other participants do not have sufficient power potential to oppose the superpower, so the confrontations that occur with the other actors are of low intensity and are mostly conducted for prestige. Simply, the power of a superpower is so great that it removes "hegemonic rivalries" due to which the importance of the balance of power on international relations decreases" (Wohlforth, 1999:5-41).

Robert Gilpin argued that hegemony in a unipolar world order excludes the balance of power ("hegemonic rivalry") and says: "...changes in structure occur due to the 'overexertion' of a superpower, as a result of which its power begins to decline." Maintaining order costs money, and every superpower faces a moment when the costs of maintaining the system become greater than the profits to be reaped. Thus, space is opened for the rise of a new hegemon that will establish a new order with its own rules of the game and new values that it will promote" (Gilpin, 1988:591-613).

The majority of analysts agree that the attempt to create a unipolar world order came after the Cold War (period of bipolarity). The USA tried to establish such an order. Namely, using the newly created situation after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the USSR, America saw a chance to establish global hegemony, that is, a unipolar world order. Although the aspiration for US world domination dates back to Woodrow Wilson (Avramov, 1997) and later Harry Truman, the hegemony in the new world order was very clearly and publicly announced by the then US President George Bush (senior) in the editorial of the US National Security Strategy from In 1991, and after the war in Iraq:

"The New World Order is not a fact; it is an aspiration and an opportunity. We have an extraordinary opportunity, enjoyed for several generations, to build a new international system in accordance with our values and ideals, while old patterns and certainties crumble around us. There can be no retreat for America from the world's problems. Within the wider community of nations, we clearly see our role. We must not only protect our citizens and our interests, but also help create a new world in which our core values not only survive but flourish. We must work with others, but we must also be leaders" (National Security Strategy of the USA, 1991).

American strategists respected the views of security studies, especially those that pointed to the fact that the world cannot be ruled from one center, that is, that one power alone cannot be the world hegemon. In this sense, using the position of Russia after the collapse of the USSR and the still unconsolidated European Union, the USA, in addition to its evident economic power, also needed a strong military lever of power. In this sense, the US managed to preserve NATO, even though the Warsaw Pact fell apart. In his doctoral dissertation, Vladimir Ateljevic writes about the way in which the USA is the guardian of NATO after the Cold War:

"Although it was formed as a defense alliance, the new paradox after the end of the Cold War is that NATO appears in practice as a regional arrangement in the sense of Chapter VIII. Regardless of the opinion of one group of authors that NATO cannot be considered a regional organization in the sense of Title VIII, practice seems to refute this theoretical point of view, because UN Security Council Resolution 787 put NATO in the position of a regional organization. More precisely, there are four operations on the territory of the former Yugoslavia in which NATO is participating in terms of measures to implement the decisions of the Security Council, that is, on the basis of Article 53. These are the following operations: *Operation Maritime Monitor*, *Operation Sharp Guard* and *operations Deny Flight* and *Close Air Support* (Ateljevic, 2016).

Considering that it survived in the mentioned way, it was expected that the role of NATO would be replaced by the USA, which happened relatively quickly. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the USSR created a "buffer zone" between Russia and NATO, which consisted of European countries, former members of the Soviet Union, and newly formed states in the territory of the former USSR. (Figure 2) The introduction of these countries into its composition was first started by the EU, in 1995, when it received Austria, Sweden and Finland. However, these were militarily neutral states. NATO began its expansion in 1999 with the admission of Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic. On the other hand, in 1999, on its 50th birthday, NATO demonstrated the power of the new world order on a half-disintegrated state, that is, it carried out aggression against FR Yugoslavia.



Figure 2. Buffer zone between NATO and Russia at the end of the Cold War

Source: Forca, 2003

The grotesqueness of the fact about the expansion of NATO to the east is all the greater if it is known that Western leaders, especially from the USA, assured the then president of the USSR Gorbachev "... that with the unification of Germany (1990) and its membership in the Alliance, NATO will not expand even an inch to the east" (Forca, 2022a).

On the 50th birthday of NATO (1999), under the strong influence of the USA, the sixth Strategic Concept of the Alliance was adopted, which will symbolize the aspiration of the USA to be a leader, as well as the new role of the Alliance. Ateljevic writes about this: "The novelty brought by this document is contained in the wording that since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, NATO has not only the task of self-defense, but also of ensuring global security against terrorism, organized crime, obstacles in the flow of vital resources, and unrestricted movement large number of people, etc. (Ateljevic, 2016). Thus, NATO, unequivocally, from a defense alliance, formed in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter, grew into a lever of US power to rule the world. Thus, in that strategic concept from 1999, two very dangerous goals of the Alliance were determined: 1) expansion to east and 2) engagement outside the North Atlantic area, with or without the mandate of the UN Security Council (The Alliance's Strategic Concept, 1999).

The US intentions and NATO's position in their plans were completely exposed in 2001, after the Al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on facilities in New York and Washington. Clearly surprised by the way terrorists operate, US President George Bush (Junior) announced America's preemptive strategy and announced three days after the terrorist attacks, which was also written in the US National Security Strategy, 2002, and told the nation:

"Just three days away from these events, Americans do not yet have the distance of history." But our responsibility to history is already clear: to respond to these attacks and free the world from evil. They attacked us with theft, fraud and murder. This people is peaceful, but fierce when provoked to anger. The conflict began at a time and under conditions determined by others. It will end in a way, precisely on the hour, of our choosing" (National Security Strategy of the USA, 2002).

America, using NATO, really started a "fierce" response to Afghanistan, which provided shelter to Al Qaeda during the terrorist attacks in 2001. Thus, already in the autumn of the

same year, the bombing of Afghanistan began, and the war in that country will last for 20 years, that is, it will end shamefully. with the withdrawal of the USA and NATO in 2021. However, the war in Afghanistan was not the only one. America and NATO began to get bogged down more and more in military interventions around the world. Thus, it was the turn of a new attack on Iraq, in 2003, which was carried out under false accusations that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, then the war in Libya (2011), Syria (2014) and other interventions around the world.

America needed a stronger NATO to engage around the world. Therefore, after the first expansion in 1999, the Alliance expanded significantly in 2004, when it received seven new member states. Thus, in 2004, NATO grew to 26 member states, and primarily the countries of the former Warsaw Pact and the newly created states in the territory of the USSR were admitted. So, NATO was erasing the "buffer zone" with Russia. That year, in 2004, with the admission of the Baltic States, NATO broke out on the borders with Russia. The expansion of NATO was accompanied by the expansion of its ally – the European Union. However, an unwritten rule was established - *first in NATO, then in the EU* (Forca, 2021).

The idea of blocking (preventing) Russia by the USA is older than the time of the formation of NATO. Namely, that idea is contained in the works of Alfred Machen: *Expansion along the meridians* and *The Anaconda Strategy*, from the beginning of the 20th century (Figure 3).



Figure 3. (a) US expansion along meridians and (b) Anaconda strategy
Source: Dugin, 2004

As far back as 1900, Mehen believed that American expansion into new areas and appropriation of new territories was a natural expansion (Figure 3a), citing as similar examples the British conquests of Gibraltar, Malta, Egypt, India, and Cyprus. In that expansion, the main threat to Mehen was Russia. Mehen designated the Pacific as a kind of "zone of responsibility" for the USA and stated that, in order to dominate the World Ocean, it would be necessary to form a whole system of naval bases (Cuba, Panama, Hawaii, the Philippines and others), in order to realize the stated goal. . The proposal for solving geopolitical problems and with the aim of achieving American national interests was formulated by Mehen in the form of the so-called "anaconda strategies" (Figure 3b). (Mehen, 1900).

Machen's theory is followed by Nicholas Spykman's theory. Spykman developed the "concept of integrated power", believing that global dominance is possible only if the "principle of combined approach to land and sea power" is applied, he concluded that "the US must achieve its presence around the world by installing naval and air power in strategically key points of the world in order to be able to guarantee stability in the world" (Despotovic, Glisin, 2020).

Thus, according to the data of Professor David Vine at the American University in Washington, the USA has around 800 bases in the world today, and the number of soldiers varies and ranges from 150,000 to 200,000 (Forca, 2022b). In this sense, after the formation of NATO, as well as using American bases in the world, the so-called pincers around Russia (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Pliers around Russia

Source: <https://www.koreni.rs/ratovi-u-sfrj-pocetak-pohoda-na-rusiju/>, 10.09.2023

2.3. Multipolar World Order and US Resistance

From a theoretical point of view, multipolar world order implies the equal influence of several (more than 2) centers of power on the totality of international relations. Prorokovic writes about this:

"This phenomenon in international politics, viewed from a realistic point of view, is described as "classification of states according to their military, economic and other war-fighting capabilities. However, multipolarity can also be understood as the ability of an actor to influence other participants in a cultural-historical, ideological-political or informational sense. The potentials of military and economic power are certainly the most important, but not the only factors that an actor can use in order to become an important pole of international relations" (Prorokovic, 2018).

The theory does not have a consistent answer to the question of a multipolar world order, which can be understood, however, in the state-centric understanding of the international system, there were and are different theories about the structure of that order. These views on multipolarity came about immediately after the collapse of the bipolar world order, i.e. at the end of the Cold War. We will mention only a few examples:

"Bergner saw Germany, Japan and the USA as the powers of the 21st century. Richard Rosecrans believes that five big centers will be able to control international relations: USA, Russia, European Union, Japan and China. Prof. Dr. Ranko Petkovic projects a kind of genesis of influence in international relations, namely: unipolarism (USA) turns into tripolarism (USA, Germany, Japan), which he believes is still present in unipolarism; tripolarism turns into pentagonalism (USA, Germany, Japan, China and Russia). Considering that in addition to the aforementioned forces on the global level, the influence of certain countries on the regional level is stronger, Prof. Dr. R. Petkovic says 'then we can be close to the conclusion that the future of the world is in multipolarism, regardless of the forms and time of its manifestation and predominance'. Professor Muhong gives an interesting vision of future multipolarity through four triangles, which represent a square as a whole. The first triangle consists of the

USA, Japan and China (the deciding factor in the Asia-Pacific region); others consist of China, the USA and Russia, but in it bilateral relations between China and Russia are the foundation; the third is composed of the USA, Japan and Europe, but in it Japan and Europe are partners subordinate to the USA; the fourth triangle consists of the USA, Russia and the European Union, in which changes are taking place. In that fourth triangle, some EU members want to break away from US influence (especially Germany and France), and Russia is a key element between the EU and the US. Prominent Indian jurist Swarup-Pathak sees the world as multipolar with the UN as the foundation of the world community, without specifically specifying the centers of power. Swiss experts in the field of international relations, Rhipilpe Braillard and Mohammad-Reza Djali, have a similar opinion, who say: *'...The bipolar structure of the world has been replaced by an extremely complicated system, but without reference points'* (Forca, 2003).

Acclaimed theoretician Joseph Nye is of the opinion that not only states are influential factors influencing the creation of a multipolar world order, but that there are also other "dispersers of power". In this sense, Nye, about the world order after the Great War, writes:

""The bipolar world no longer exists, but it will not be replaced by a unipolar world empire controlled by the US alone. The world, from an economic point of view, is already multipolar, and as the information revolution progresses and interdependence increases, and transnational actors on the international stage become more and more important, there will be a dispersion of power. The new world will not be perfectly ordered and you will live with it" (Nay, 2006).

Observing the world from a state-centric point of view, most theorists agree that the multipolar world order in official documents and in their practice was first advocated by Russia and China, in the first and second decades of this century. In this sense, there is talk of three world powers, to which the European Union is added in some works, but until the ugly conflict between Russia and Ukraine in 2022. Namely, since then numerous analyzes point out that the EU has fallen under the complete domination of the USA and NATO.

Trying to point out the perniciousness of unipolarity in international relations, in February 2007, in an address at the conference on international security in Munich, Russian President Putin "presented a series of criticisms against the existing form of international relations, labeling the USA as the main "culprit" of excessive the use of force in international relations and the overstepping of one's own borders, which produced a global sense of insecurity and stimulated an arms race. In addition, Putin noted that the sum of the GDP of India and China is already higher than the GDP of the United States, as well as that a similar calculation of the GDP of the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) exceeds the cumulative GDP of the European Union" (Website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQ58Yv6kP44>, 11.09.2023).

In his speech from 2007, Putin presented the positions of Russian foreign policy in relation to the USA, arguing against the unipolar international order, and therefore the global dominance of the United States. Putin also announced that the multipolar international order has already taken hold, thereby indicating that the unipolar order is a thing of the past. In challenging the legitimacy of the international order, Putin managed to secure the support of a significant number of countries, the most significant of which was certainly the one that came from the People's Republic of China. Along with the diplomatic offensive to ensure the support of the great powers, Russia made enormous diplomatic efforts to emphasize the importance of existing international organizations, especially the United Nations and the OSCE, due to the unique legitimacy these organizations have in the international framework, and especially due to the fact that in them Russia is an indispensable subject in the decision-making process (Obradovic, 2021).

The USA and its allies did not pay too much attention to the views of President Putin, in which sense the expansion of NATO continued, and in 2008, at the summit in Bucharest, an invitation was sent to Georgia and Ukraine to join the Alliance. In such conditions, using inter-national antagonisms in Georgia, Russia militarily attacked that country in 2008 and after a short war recognized its parts Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent and independent states. Such a move by Russia was met with indignation by the USA and Western countries. However, President Russia did not refer to that fact. Thus, already in 2009, Russia adopted the first National Security Strategy, in which the international order was assessed as multipolar, and the USA and NATO were identified as the key security threats (Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation until 2020, 2009). Another significant geostrategic move made by Russia is the formation of a political-economic organization known by the acronym BRICS, which refers to five countries: Brazil (B), Russia (R), India (I), China (K) and the Republic of South Africa (S). BRICS was formed in 2008, covers about 30% of the surface of the planet Earth, three billion people live on the territory of the countries that make up that organization, which is over 42% of the world's population. The gross national income (GNI) of the BRICS member states is estimated at over 16 trillion US dollars, which is over 22% of the total world GNI. (Tesanovic, 2018:40).

America and NATO paid less attention to Russia's moves, and became more and more mired in wars, primarily in Libya (2011) and Syria (2014), along with the already existing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, with its strategy, Russia has announced a more significant involvement in mutual relations, which is shown by its direct participation in the war in Syria, about which Trapara writes:

"Sooner or later, Russia had to start projecting power beyond its immediate environment, especially in a strategically important (primarily due to maritime routes and energy) area such as the Middle East." For her, the Middle East in the geographical sense was actually always the "Middle South" and one of the arenas of confrontation with other great powers, so it was only a matter of time when the "great game" that Russia started in the 19th century with the Great Britain, and later continued with the USA. Putin was certainly aware of this when, after coming to power, he closed the Soviet naval bases in Vietnam and Cuba, but not in Syria" (Trapara, 2020).

After the US again invited Georgia and Ukraine to join the Alliance, in 2014 Russia returned Crimea to its composition, which the West characterized as an illegitimate annexation of part of Ukraine's territory. Also, Russia supported the resistance of the pro-Russian population in the southeast of Ukraine, which opposed the regime in Kiev. That situation influenced a stronger tightening of relations between the USA (the West) and Russia, which will be discussed in more detail in the next question.

China avoided the Cold War conflicts between the USA and the USSR and built its economy and economic influence in the world with great strides. China's strongest economic surge at the global level has been occurring since 2013, when Vice President Xi Jinping announced the "Belt and Road" Initiative (New Silk Road). China avoided entering into military integrations such as NATO, VU and the like, and instead built its influence on economic strength. However, from a regional point of view, China has made it known that its interests in the South China Sea, especially around the island of Taiwan, cannot be threatened. Also, China advocated for a multipolar world order, which is why it came under attack from the US (Forca, 2019).

The American response arrived very quickly. In the National Security Strategy from 2017, the USA identified Russia and China as revisionist states and key security threats (National Security Strategy, 2017). In this sense, the homogenization of the West began against those

two countries, as two key opponents. Russia was marked as a security problem, and China as an economic opponent.

At the NATO summits, especially since 2016, from which a special declaration is issued, the development of the Defense in 3600 program began, which essentially means the already established encirclement of Russia. In the Declaration from the 2018 NATO summit, on the Defense in 3600 program, it is stated:

„Planned, the defense in 3600 includes: 1) strengthening in the north-east: the formation of four battalion-strength combat groups, about 4,500 soldiers, and their deployment in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, 2) the Black Sea region - multinational training brigades in Romania, 3) strengthening of national capacities and cooperation of NATO with partners in the South, 4) formation of a center for cyber warfare in Belgium, 5) maintenance of nuclear forces (members that have them: the USA, France and the UK) at the level of deterrence, i.e. depending on how this is respected by the other side - Russia (START program), 6) warning Russia not to respect the Vienna Convention on Conventional Arms Control, and the position that NATO will manage to maintain balance in that area as well, 7) with the total forces they provide for NATO, the allies will (item 14: "4×30") additionally provide: 30 naval units, 30 so-called heavy battalions of the ground army and 30 aviation squadrons, with readiness for use within 30 days or less and 8) special measures for more operational use of NATO forces: (a) provide by the end of 2019 permits for non-NATO members to quickly cross the border (land, sea, air), (b) by the end of 2018, determine the basic and alternative routes of supply and transport and (c) intensify training activities. On the other hand, the NATO "ballistic military defense" - BMD, which is operational around Russia, is interpreted as a barrier against intercontinental missiles from other areas, and not as a threat to Russia, which the Russian side does not trust" (Forca, 2020).

Against China, the USA introduced a real economic war, which it also demanded from its allies, especially in Europe. In such conditions, Russia's armed attack on Ukraine took place in 2022.

3. RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT

The beginning of the war between Russia and Ukraine in 2022 was preceded by the period since Ukraine became an independent and independent state (1991), which in theory is called the "Ukrainian crisis". From a geopolitical point of view, the position of Ukraine after gaining independence can be understood in the Theory of Regional Security Complexes - TRBK, developed by the Copenhagen School of Security at the end and after the Cold War. The original creator of TRBK is Professor Barry Buzan and his work from 1983 - *People, States and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations*, which was continued together with Ole Weaver (Waever Ole), in 1988, in the *Work - Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, boulder, and completed in 2003 in the part - *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*. In the aforementioned works, the professors of the Copenhagen School divided the world into nine RBCs, among which, according to this paper, the European and Post-Soviet RBCs stand out (Figure 5).

Although, according to Buzan, Ukraine is entering the post-Soviet regional security complex (RBK), that country still played the role of an *insulator*. The state, in the status of an *insulator*, is located between at least two regional security complexes (RBK) and separates their security dynamics, that is, it is in a position to draw or exchange the energy of those RBK. A typical example of an insulator state is Turkey, which is located between three RBKs.

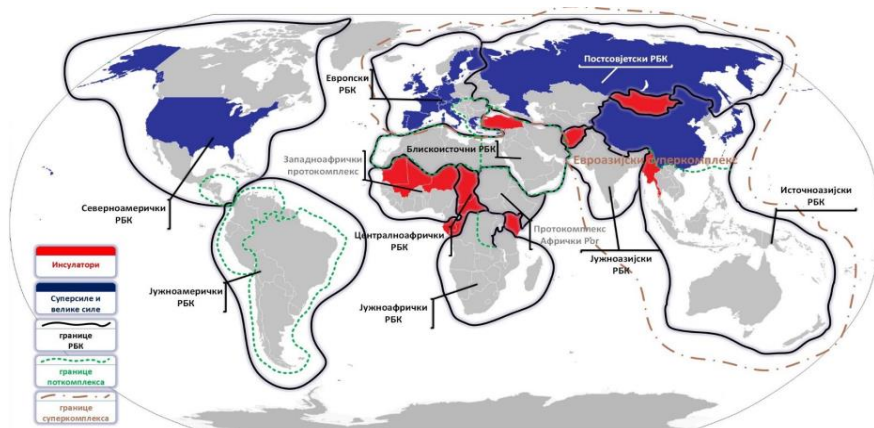


Figure 5. Regional security complexes after the Cold War
 Source: Barry and Weaver (2003), in Lipovac V. Milan, 2016

In its development as an independent and independent state, Ukraine oscillated between Russia and the West (NATO and the EU), depending on which political group was in power. During the pro-Russian regime, Ukraine even passed the *Law on Military Neutrality*. On the other hand, pro-Western governments wholeheartedly pushed for membership in the EU and NATO. In this sense: "The Ukrainian crisis developed on the issue of a series of contradictions, the identity and geopolitical position of the south-eastern pro-Russian and on the other hand the north-western regions of the country, where after the Orange Revolution in 2004, the dissolution of Yanukovich's government in 2007, and the putsch on the street in February 2014, the crisis is occurring parliamentarism and pluralism, rebellions and dissatisfaction in the Southeast, which, with the interference of foreign factors, the suppression of democratic freedoms in the country and the opening of the religious problem, deepened into an unfinished conflict until today" (Petrovic & Bukvic, 2019).

After Russia returned Crimea to its composition in 2014, the areas of Ukraine with a majority Russian population in the southeast, Donetsk and Luhansk, tried to follow the same path. In those parts, riots broke out leading to armed conflicts, due to the attitude of the Ukrainian authorities towards the pro-Russian population. Russia sided with the population in Luhansk and Donetsk. The European powers Germany and France intervened in the resolution of the conflict, so that two armistice agreements, known as the Minsk Agreements from 2014 and 2015, were concluded. However, it will be shown that the Minsk Agreements, as former German Chancellor Angela Merkel says, as a participant in them, were essentially "buying time for Ukraine, because it was clear that that country could not stand up to Russia" (Website: https://www.vostok.rs/index.php?option=btg_novosti&catnovosti=2&idnovost=139188&RT:-Sporazumi-iz-Minska-dali-Ukrajini-vreme-da-postane-jaca---Merkelova). Thus, in the period 2014-2022, Ukraine continued its persecution and terror against the pro-Russian population in Luhansk and Donetsk, during which time it is believed that around 14,000 people were killed and countless of them were forced to emigrate from the country. On the other hand, Ukraine began to strongly establish its position on the lines reached in Luhansk and Donetsk, in which the Western countries were complicit. Also, NATO member countries have taken care of the training of the Ukrainian armed forces. Ukraine was preparing for war against Russia!

In addition to supporting the pro-Russian forces in Ukraine, Russia warned the authorities in Kiev that they will not tolerate their attitude towards the population of Lugansk and Donetsk, while providing the international community with information about the situation and

processes in the southeast of Ukraine. The US and Western countries did not attach much importance to the Russian information, except that they continued to support Ukraine with constant calls for admission to NATO. Ukraine received the last invitation to join NATO after the US and NATO left Afghanistan in 2021. Russia did not approve of that call for Ukraine to join the Alliance, and at the end of 2021, it proposed to America and NATO a new security structure in Europe (Table 2).

Table 2. Russian proposal from 17.12.2021

(Source: <https://www.sektorbezbednosti.com/osvrt-na-nove-ruske-predloge-ugovora-o-bezbednosnim-garancijama-sa-sad-i-merama-za-jacanje-bezbednosti-sa-nato-od-17-decembra-2021-godine/>)

No-divided of Security	No nuclear war	Land-based missiles	Non-expansion of NATO to the east
<p>-which is why the security interests of all parties must be taken into account, - the parties will refrain from deploying troops and weapons, warships or overflights heavy bombers outside their national territories, in areas where theirs deploying and acting can be seen by the other party as a threat or from which they can attack the other side, -NATO will not conduct any military activities in the territories surrounding Russia – in Ukraine and Eastern Europe, in the South Caucasus and Central Asia.</p>	<p>-therefore, it is necessary to strengthen measures to prevent any conflict between the parties, in particular avoiding incidents at sea and in the air, - create additional or improve existing cooperation mechanisms, -refrain from conducting military activities involving use scenarios of nuclear weapons - training or exercises - with non-nuclear states armament and - refrain from training or exercising military and civilian personnel of non-nuclear states to use nuclear weapons.</p>	<p>-parties would not deploy medium- and short-range land-based missiles outside their own national territories, as well as in the areas of their national territories from which they cantarget the territory of the other contracting party/parties, -parties will refrain from deploying nuclear weapons outside their national borders territory, and all such already deployed weapons will be returned to the foreign owner in at the moment of entry into force of the Agreement on Security Guarantees, while the existing one will infrastructure for deploying such weapons outside their national territories be destroyed.</p>	<p>- The USA undertakes to prevent and block the further expansion of NATO to former countries members of the USSR, that they will not establish military bases on the territories of these states that are not NATO members, use their infrastructure for any military activities or develop bilateral military cooperation with them, -NATO member states undertake to refrain from further expansion of NATO to The East, including Ukraine and the old NATO member states (which were in May 1997.years before the first decision on enlargement and the NATO-Russia agreement) that they will not deploy additional armed forces and armaments on the territories of the new member states.</p>

Given that the USA and NATO did not respond to Russian proposals, the preventive deployment of Russian armed forces around Ukraine began and war was certain. After unsuccessful attempts in negotiations with the USA and NATO to redefine the security of Europe, especially to stop the expansion of NATO to the east and the positions of the Alliance to return to 1998, in January, Russia recognized the Lugansk People's Republic and the Donetsk People's Republic as independent states. Such a move by Russia can be interpreted in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter, as the right of states to self-defense by association. In this sense, on February 24, 2022, Russia militarily attacked Ukraine, calling it

a "special military operation". The term "aggression" was used by the UN General Assembly in its resolution, after Russia's military intervention.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine is still ongoing and there is no end in sight. In addition to the human losses and enormous material destruction to which Ukraine is exposed, Russia annexed four regions of that country after a referendum (September 23-27, 2022) during the war, namely: the Lugansk People's Republic, the Donetsk People's Republic, the Zaporozhye Region and Kherson region. In addition (Figure 6) to the fact that about 20% of the territory, with about 15% of the population, is outside its control, Ukraine also faced a mass exodus of the population, mainly to EU countries. It is estimated that around 10 million residents of Ukraine have left the country so far.



Figure 6. Territory of Ukraine appropriated by Russia

Source: mondo.rs/Info/Svet/a1695254/Koji-deo-ukrajinske-teritorije-je-prisvojila-Rusija.html, 12.09.2023

The reaction of the USA and Western countries, primarily the EU and NATO, could be said to have been expected. The collective West wholeheartedly sided with Ukraine, providing it with all-out support in extraordinarily large financial donations, measured in tens of billions of dollars, as well as massive military aid. On the other hand, almost all contacts with Russia were cut off, and unprecedented sanctions were introduced. According to numerous analysts, Russia's attack on Ukraine homogenized the collective West, which was shaken, especially after the shameful exit from Afghanistan in 2021. Also, numerous analysts agree that a hybrid war of the collective West against Russia is underway, as well as the creation of the latest world order.

4. STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

The basic question in the current geopolitical conditions after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine is - *where does it all lead and what are the geostrategic implications of that conflict?* Given that the war in Ukraine is multidisciplinary, the answers to the above questions can best be sought in the geostrategic determinations of the main actors of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, that is, in their security strategies.

Russia adopted its last (third in a row) national security strategy before the start of the conflict in Ukraine, i.e. in 2021 (STRATEGY of national security to the Russian Federation, 2021). In that strategy, Russia's attitude towards international relations and security is very clear. International relations are multipolar, and the main threat to security is the USA and the expansion of NATO to the east. When it comes to the conflict in Ukraine, President Putin at

the beginning of the "special military operation" determined its goals: the de-nazification and demilitarization of Ukraine, while solving the issue of the Dombas region in accordance with the Minsk agreements. It is difficult to explicitly answer the question of what the denazification and demilitarization of Ukraine means, but it is likely that it implies the destruction of pro-fascist forces and not allowing Ukraine to become a member of the Alliance. As for the Dombas region (Luganjsk and Donetsk), the situation on the ground has changed, that is, the Minsk agreements have been abandoned, and Dombas has been annexed to Russia.

In principle, the Russian strategy has several goals: to punish Ukraine for decades of behavior towards Russia and the pro-Russian population in Ukraine; do not allow Ukraine to become a member of NATO; to prevent the expansion of NATO to the east, and to position ourselves as favorably as possible in the latest world order that is being created.

In the past year and a half, the collective West has brought important strategic documents, among which stand out (in order of adoption): Strategic Compass for Security and Defense of the EU (March, 2022), NATO Strategic Concept (June, 2022) and the US National Security Strategy (October, 2022). An insight into all three documents unequivocally depicts the situation that the collective West, primarily the EU and NATO, fully obeys the interests of the USA.

The European Union welcomed Russia's aggression against Ukraine completely unprepared. The moves of the Union were initiated by the decisions and interests of the USA. The strategic concept of security and defense is just an attempt for the Union to restore the importance of the Common Security and Defense Policy, as part of the Common Foreign and Security Policy established in the Lisbon Treaty in 2007 (see: Lisbon Treaty, 2007).

NATO is unequivocally a lever of US power, which has been proven in over four decades of its existence, especially after the Cold War. The strategic concept of NATO (eighth in order) adopted in June 2022 is, in essence, support for the interests of the USA. In 2023, NATO received Finland and Sweden and thus grew to 32 member states, i.e. exactly 100% compared to the end of the Cold War (Figure 7).



Figure 7. NATO in 2023

Source: <https://hcz-zu.hr/evolucija-ruske-strategije-prema-ukrajini/>, 10.09.2023

What is not written in the Alliance's Strategic Concept, but what is realized in practice, is the creation of a new center of gravity of the Alliance in Europe (the Eastern wing of NATO).

That center will be Poland with the so-called countries. Bucharest group (B9)^b, plus Finland and Sweden. This is indicated by at least two facts. First, apart from Ukraine, Russia has the strongest antagonisms with Poland. This fact is primarily based on the historical facts of the relationship between Poland and Russia in the centuries-old history of existence. Another fact is the enormous military strengthening of Poland, in the sense of the doubling of military personnel (numerical status) and very large expenditures for equipment and modernization in the next decade, which is expressed in the projected 110 billion euros. Thus, practically, NATO is turning the former "buffer zone" with Russia, which was part of the VU, into the so-called *eastern bulwark of the Alliance ("American Wall") towards Russia*, but also China, in modern conditions. It is, at the same time, the American response to the Berlin-Paris axis, which was trying to get out from under US control.

The last US national security strategy was adopted at the end of October 2022. It is a timely continuity with the previous strategy in terms of identifying two key adversaries - Russia and China, with stronger assessments of the hostility between them and the steps that will be taken to, as President Biden claims: Contain Russia and overcome China. (National Security Strategy, 2022). It is a very indicative fact that in all three strategic documents of the collective West, the positions on Russia and China are given almost identically. This is proof that these documents were "dictated" from the same center - from Washington.

The big enigma remains China. In the strategic documents of the collective West, China is marked as an adversary along with Russia, which is given greater importance. Namely, it is claimed that only China has the strength (power) to influence the design of the latest world order. In this sense, numerous analysts point out that "after Russia, it is China's turn". Is it a bill without an innkeeper? The West is aware of China's strength and its inability to quickly resolve the conflict in Ukraine. In this sense, the documents of the collective West even foresee the possibility of cooperation with China, while for Russia that option is completely excluded.

China is aware of its strength, primarily economic. However, she is also aware of the efforts made by the West, primarily the US, to suppress the "Belt and Road" initiative, especially in Europe. According to some analysts, the Belt and Road Initiative is "dead" in Europe. China condemned Russia's military intervention in Ukraine as a matter of principle, respects the territorial integrity of states and advocates international law. But China is of the opinion that "not all the mistakes" are on the Russian side, and it directs criticism at the USA and some Western countries. In this sense, China did not impose sanctions on Russia, even more so with that country and strengthens the concluded strategic partnership and joint activities within the framework of the integrations to which both countries belong, especially BRICS and the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization).

4.1. The latest world order

The general geostrategic consequence of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, or the conflict of the collective West against Russia, will be the creation of a latest world order, or the world will enter World War III. In the latest order, the great powers will, first of all, try to realize their interests, and other countries will adapt according to their own capabilities.

^b After Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, at the initiative of Romania and Poland, nine countries of Central and Eastern Europe gathered, all of which are members of NATO, and which formed their formal alliance in 2015 in Bucharest (Romania), hence the name "Bucharest Nine" - B9. These countries are: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria.

The latest world order will be neither unipolar, nor bipolar, nor multipolar. It will be the arrangement of relations between cluster-type states. Therefore, globalization is giving way to the cluster arrangement of the world. The following facts, found in documents and actions of world powers and other states, point to such a conclusion.

Clusters is a term that originated in economics, and is also used in other spheres. Thus, the well-known Porter says: "Under a cluster we mean a group of industries and organizations that are connected in buying and selling relationships or that share the same infrastructure, clients or skill base and whose connections improve the competitive advantage of the participants" (Forca, 2023b)! Clusters are best understood if we consider them as regional systems. Translated to international relations, clusters are groups of states that are connected by common interests and act as such on the international scene. Clusters are similar to regional security complexes - RBK, as seen by the Copenhagen School of Security and its famous professors Barry Bazan, Ole Vive Jaap Del Vide, Lene Hansen and others. However, the basic difference between clusters and RBK is that some common interest prevails in clusters, while in RBK that interest is not primary, but some common characteristics of (geo)space.

The strategic decisions and moves of the world powers, especially the USA, China and Russia, but also the European Union, point to the conclusion about the cluster organization of the latest world order.

The USA managed to assert itself again and more strongly as the leader of the collective West. However, the need for America to strengthen its position by creating numerous alliances (clusters) of states is felt even more clearly. The USA put the EU under full control, brought NATO to the forefront and managed to expand it to two new members - Finland and Sweden. NATO remains a strong counterweight to Russia in Europe. However, the key rival of the US, as stated in the 2022 US National Security Strategy, is not Russia but China. Therefore, the motto of that strategy is: "Contain Russia and overcome China".

In addition to NATO and the EU, the USA strongly relies on and emphasizes the importance of new and old alliances, of which the following stand out in particular:

- Group of the seven most developed countries in the world - G7: USA, Great Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan;
- Five Eyes: Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand, Australia and the USA. The admission of Japan to this organization is also expected;
- Quad: USA, India, Japan and Australia;
- Aukus: USA, Australia and Great Britain. There is an initiative to expand this alliance to Japan and South Korea (Aukus+);
- I2+U2: India and Israel + USA and UAE i
- C5+1: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan + USA.

China and Russia, together and separately, also pay great attention to the formation and development of alliances with other countries.

China is strategically reoriented not to enter into military alliances, but to enter into integrations, primarily in the economic sphere, which also have a security aspect. In this sense, the following stand out in particular:

- Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), to which Iran will join in 2022 and which now consists of: China, Russia, Iran, India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The total territory of the SCO member countries is more than 35 million km², or

65% of the territory of Eurasia. The total population of the SCO countries (2022) is about 3.5 billion people. The organization's main tasks are strengthening stability and security in the wider area, uniting participating states, fighting terrorism, separatism, extremism, drug trafficking, developing economic cooperation, energy partnership, scientific and cultural interaction (Forca, 2021).

- BRICS, which is gaining more and more prestige among the countries of South America, Asia and Africa. After the BRICS summit in South Africa in August of this year, six countries were invited to join: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, Argentina and the United Arab Emirates. According to some data, more than 40 countries of the world expect to become BRICS members, while 23 of them have submitted an official request for membership (Site: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/samit-briks-saradnja-johanesburg/32565107.html>).

- RCEP: The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership consists of 10 Southeast Asian countries, as well as South Korea, China, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, which was signed by 15 countries on November 15, 2020 and

- China + 17: Part of the Belt and Road initiative, which China is developing with 17 European countries, regardless of whether they are EU members or not.

In addition, China exerts an extremely strong influence in the area of Africa and some South American countries (a strategic partnership was signed with Venezuela).

Russia, in addition to its membership in the SCO and BRICS, is particularly engaged in strengthening:

- Organizations of collective security agreements - CSTO, as a security organization that is a pan-NATO and which, in addition to Russia, consists of: Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Forca, 2021).

- Eurasian Economic Union, which includes Russia: Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia.

Like China, Russia has a growing influence in Africa and, in particular, within the group of oil producing countries OPEC, which is also named as OPEC PLUS.

A possible geostrategic consequence of the Russian-Ukrainian war is World War III, which some analysts say is already underway. However, that war, if it starts with a more direct armed conflict between Russia and NATO, cannot go without the use of nuclear weapons. **In the conditions of the use of nuclear weapons, any analysis is meaningless.**

5. CONCLUSION

War has no goal, but it has a function! Historically speaking, big wars started when some of the world powers were dissatisfied with the distribution of power in international relations, and their outcome was the creation of a new world order.

In recent history, world orders are recognizable in the alternation of their three forms: bipolarism, unipolarism and multipolarism. These forms are primarily determined by the relationship between world powers and their influence on global international relations. Since the First World War, and especially the Second World War, two superpowers have stood out in international relations: the USA and the USSR, later Russia. In the 21st century, China is unequivocally joining those forces, primarily in the economic sense. Although some analysts are of the opinion that the European Union should be counted among world powers, nevertheless, the state and processes in the Union point to the fact of its disunity and the excessive influence of the USA.

The United States has had the greatest influence on processes in international relations in recent history. America, therefore, tried to establish a unipolar world order, preserving NATO as a lever of power, force in international relations and influencing other countries with its overall power. For some time after the collapse of the USSR, Russia was excluded from the main world events. However, since the first decade of this century, Russia has returned to the ranks of world powers, precisely through military power and the war in Georgia. China, with its economic power and influence, has unequivocally intervened among the world powers. Thus, in the state-centric system, the USA tried to maintain dominance, while China and Russia extended the multipolar order.

For the sake of preserving their own hegemony, the USA and NATO got too bogged down in war conflicts, from which they did not realize profits. It was obvious that one of the rivals (China or Russia, or both) had to be eliminated. In this sense, the USA "lit the fuse" - Ukraine, on the "line of fire" with Russia. It was not difficult, if you take into account the historical relations between Russia and Ukraine. China is "left for later".

Russia "fell" on the American trap and militarily attacked Ukraine. With this act, Russia seeks to: punish Ukraine for its attitude towards Russia, but also the pro-Russian population in its country; to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO; to stop the expansion of NATO to the east and to position itself as best as possible in the latest world order that is being created.

America profited from Russia's attack on Ukraine, because it homogenized the collective West, but not only in supporting Ukraine, but in strengthening its shaky position. The European Union unprepared for the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and completely fell under the influence of the USA. China avoided conflict in the Cold War, and now tries to remain neutral. However, since the USA and the collective West have marked China as a key opponent, that country is trying to eliminate the influence of the West and create the most favorable position for itself.

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which has turned into a conflict between the West and Russia, is still going on and there is no end in sight. Obviously, the only one that will lose in that conflict is Ukraine, and the question is whether and in what form it will survive. From a geostrategic point of view, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict will produce the creation of the latest world order. That order will be neither unipolar, nor bipolar, nor multipolar. All parties, especially the world powers, are creating cluster-alliances, and the latest world order will leave globalization and adopt a cluster type of relationship.

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict could turn into World War III. If that happens, it is inevitable that nuclear weapons will be used. In the conditions of the use of nuclear weapons, any analysis is meaningless.

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