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CHINA–RUSSIA–USA and the FUTURE OF EUROPE

1. Who determines the international order?

If one considers the historical development of the international order, it becomes clear that it has repeatedly changed whenever the **balance of power between the great powers** has shifted. Spain and the Habsburgs were the dominant powers of the 16th century. After the Thirty Years' War, France became the dominant power on the European continent. First the Netherlands and then England became the dominant naval and trading powers.
The European balance of power in the 18th century was fundamentally shaken by Napoleon and France. The Industrial Revolution enabled the rise of Great Britain and the creation of the British Empire. After the First World War and the Second World War, the victors established a new international order in each instance. The states' quest for power and the struggle between them has always been a fundamental pillar of the European system of states.

How did this new 'era of great powers' come about in world history? In 2002, I wrote a booklet entitled 'From the World of States to the World State – and Back Again' for the publication series of the
National Defence Academy's publication series. Following its victory in the Cold War, the USA succeeded in achieving global supremacy. The subsequent phase of globalisation led to a largely unified global market and further strengthened American dominance. At the same time, however, a decisive economic upswing took place in other countries, particularly in China. This has resulted in new countries becoming significantly stronger economically. China and the BRICS nations sought to translate this new economic strength into greater political influence within a new world order. The US, on the other hand, wishes to retain its existing hegemony, whilst new powers are striving for change. Strong economic interdependence still exists,

but political rivalries, the pursuit of military power and the struggle for global influence now shape political events.

The era in which the US dominated almost unchallenged after the end of the Cold War is over. The world is once again shaped to a large extent by competition between the major powers. Today**,** China, Russia and the US are the **powers that determine the international order.** Since the Second World War**,** the US has been the pre-eminent political, economic and military power and remains a dominant force in key areas such as high technology. Russia possesses the largest arsenal of nuclear weapons; and China has, in the space of a few decades, become a dominant economic power with a monopoly on certain rare-earth elements. What all three powers have in common is that their international engagement is rooted in a sense of mission, which is to be realised through concrete foreign policy.

Now, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney had already proposed at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2026 that **the 'middle powers'** should cooperate more closely in order to better represent their interests as a counterweight to the superpowers. He received great applause for this. The question, however, is what this model might actually achieve in practice, with the difficulties beginning with the very issue of who should take the lead in such a constellation.

Another theory points out that the **nature of power** has changed and that great powers can no longer, as in the past, arbitrarily impose their will on other states. The difficulties faced by Russia in the war with Ukraine; those faced by the Americans in Iran; or those faced by Israel with Hamas and Hezbollah are cited as examples of this. Whilst it is true that technological and social developments have made it more difficult to impose one's will on others through military force, the military capabilities developed by the great powers, their economic strength and their capacity to develop new technologies are still decisive in determining who shapes the international order.

2. The sense of mission of the major powers

In this context, we shall first examine how China, Russia and the USA view their own sense of mission and how they intend to realise it on the world stage. This sense of mission is consistently characterised by the fact that geopolitical objectives can take precedence over economic interests.

A key element of **China's sense of mission** is the 'great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation'. As the 'Middle Kingdom', China was one of the world's most important civilisations for centuries. It was only through industrialisation in the 19th and 20th centuries that the West was able to establish its global hegemony. This was then used, in the
'Opium Wars' (1839–1842; 1856–1860) not only to defeat China but also to humiliate it. Western powers occupied territories and forced concessions. The opium trade had to be permitted; China could no longer determine for itself the conditions under which foreigners conducted trade. The imperial official Lin Zexu put up resistance. In 1839, he had the opium stocks of British traders destroyed in a futile battle against the narcotic that was flooding China. He is now a national hero. Hong Kong had to be ceded to Great Britain. The West did not merely gain political control over China; the British, Americans, French and others were no longer subject to Chinese jurisdiction whilst in China. China was forced to limit import duties on Western goods to a low, contractually fixed level. This era went down in Chinese history as the 'Century of Humiliation'.

Since the victory of the Communist Revolution in 1949, sovereignty and self-determination have become defining features of Chinese politics.
China must never again be weak and dependent on foreign powers. The **economic boom** of recent decades now provides the basis for granting Beijing a leading role in a multipolar world. In world trade, in the field of high technology and, indeed, in shaping the international order, China wishes to show other countries that modernisation and economic success are not only possible within a Western-style political system.

Whilst the United States' sense of mission is geared towards bringing universal values, freedom and democracy to the whole world,

China's focus is on **national rebirth** and the restoration of Chinese strength. This includes reunification with Taiwan, as well as long-term economic and political networks. Whilst the
American worldview is characterised by a 'friend or foe' dichotomy ('Whoever is not with us is against us'), Beijing seeks **pragmatic relations** with countries, even those with different political systems. In this spirit, China is seeking to forge closer ties with countries in Europe, Asia and Africa through the Belt and Road Initiative by expanding infrastructure. Through the expansion of ports, railways, roads and energy projects, it has succeeded in establishing a comprehensive network of economic relations. Overall, the **'New Silk Road'** project has reached a financing and investment volume of $1,400 billion between 2013 and 2025.

President Xi Jinping outlined the key features of this policy in March 2023 as part of the **Global Civilisation Initiative**. Hannes Fellner writes: Whilst earlier concepts of globalisation were often driven by economic and political interests, this initiative places the cultural and civilisational dimension at the forefront. Without mutual **understanding between cultures**, without respect for the distinctive characteristics of civilisations that have developed over history, any international order remains incomplete and fragile. Governments should not impose their own values and political institutions on other countries. The West's endeavour to impose its human rights on others is seen as a new form of colonialism. Today, the focus is on cooperating across cultural boundaries. The Global Civilisation Initiative is an invitation to view the differences between cultures, traditions and developments not as barriers, but as bridges. **Harmony** arises precisely from the ability to respect existing differences.

Russia, for its part, sees itself – in its sense of mission – not merely as a nation state, but as **a civilisation in its own right** that must be defended. This applies to the Russian language and culture; the Russian Orthodox tradition; and its own historical development. These values and institutions are to be defended within the framework of a strong state organisation and authority. This model can certainly be seen as standing in contrast to the system of liberal values advocated by the West.

Russia's religious and historical tradition dates back to the Middle Ages. Following the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the notion arose that Moscow had now become **the 'Third Rome'** as the centre of Orthodox Christianity. This gave rise to the idea that Russia had a special historical and religious mission. Consequently, Russia sees itself as the protector of Orthodox Christians and, today, also of the Russian-speaking population beyond its borders. This naturally plays a role in relations with the former Soviet republics. Herein lies a major difference from a classical Western nation state: the Russian nation is conceived as extending beyond the territorial borders of the Russian Federation. Moscow therefore sees its mission, quite decisively, as the preservation and **protection of the 'Russian world'.**

To fulfil this task, **Russia** must be **a great power**. This entails military strength and influence over neighbouring states. Its permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council and its vast arsenal of nuclear weapons are intended to ensure its capacity to act on the world stage. Memories of the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union play an important role in this regard. Indeed, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia lost many of the territories that had become part of Russia since the time of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great in the 18th century. It is no wonder that Vladimir Putin once described the collapse of the USSR as the 'greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century'.

Russia's sense of mission is therefore deeply rooted in the country's history and is also expressed in the term 'Russkij Mir', which means both 'peace' and 'Russian world'. This 'Russian world' stands for a cultural and linguistic community and thus also has a political, indeed geopolitical, significance. Consequently, based on its own self-image, Russia must be a great power; a mere regional power would not be consistent with this self-image. The decision taken by the government in Kyiv in 2014 to ban the Russian language, the Orthodox tradition and indeed Russian culture in Ukraine therefore represented a blow to everything Russia stands for. NATO's expansion into Ukraine was therefore seen by Moscow as an attempt by the West to push back Russian influence even in places where it had been historically and culturally entrenched for centuries. After all,

Russia sees its history, indeed its very origins, rooted in the central role played by Kievan Rus'.

Guided by this understanding of history, Russian President **Vladimir Putin** set out his vision for a future world order at the **Munich Security Conference** in 2007. In the West, these remarks were widely portrayed as an 'attack on the international order', whilst Putin's aim was rather to illustrate what a multipolar order of the future might look like. It was not a "speech against the West", as was widely reported, but a speech about how the West had quite simply disregarded Russian interests. The Russian President thus criticised the fact that, following the end of the Cold War, the US sought to become the sole world power with global decision-making authority. "The unipolar model is unsuitable in today's world." Putin accused the US of seeking to impose its national and political order on other states, whilst resorting to military force without UN authorisation. He criticised the US for seeking to expand its political and economic dominance in defiance of international law. His fundamental criticism was that a world order dominated by a single power creates new conflicts rather than security.

As regards **NATO's eastward expansion**, Putin accepted in principle that sovereign states are free to choose their own alliances. However, he explicitly asked why NATO's expansion also meant bringing tanks and missiles closer to Russia's borders. Putin warned against a return to the arms race and against the fact that the deployment of new American missile systems could undermine security in Europe. At the same time, he emphasised that the use of military force must be authorised by the UN Charter
. "The UN must not be replaced by NATO or the EU".

The clear message of this speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference was that the Russian President opposed the **security order** established in Europe after 1991 at Russia's expense. Whilst this speech was fundamentally defensive in nature, it was portrayed by Western media as being aggressively directed against the West.
In fact, Putin advocated for multiple centres of power in which Russia's interests would also be taken into account. The strategic balance

between the major powers should be maintained. Evidently, the West either did not wish to understand this message or was seeking a justification for its own offensive strategy.

Whilst China and Russia, in their sense of mission, place their **own civilisation** at the centre – be it as a 'national rebirth' or as the basis for their own hegemony – **American Exceptionalism** has a **universal character** and affects the most diverse areas of life. Accordingly, the USA stands for universal values, for freedom and democracy throughout the world, and indeed for an American leadership role in the 'free world'. America dominates, as is evident from the terms used in this
context: there is an 'American way of life'; an 'American dream'; indeed, an 'American century'. America is, quite simply, more than just a country. America is an idea which, as many believe, is built on firm values. The US is, quite simply, the chosen nation, 'the shining City upon the Hill', a shining example for all.

Even though many today have the impression that the way American democracy functions deviates considerably from the prescribed ideal, even political opponents believe in their country's **role as a model**. Joe Biden, for instance, spoke of the United States as 'the finest and most unique nation in the world'; and Donald Trump used similar words when he
emphasised that "America is the greatest and most exceptional nation in the history of the world". One could go on and on with such statements by American presidents. George W. Bush, for example, declared that God and history had destined America to serve as an example to the world. Furthermore, in his second inaugural address, Bush said that American values should, if necessary, be exported by aircraft carriers. Ultimately, all these paeans to America as a special nation can be traced back to the sermons of the Puritan John Winthrop, Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. As early as 1630, he declared to his compatriots
, citing the Bible: 'You are the light of the world!' Some have termed this 'cinematic nationalism', particularly because Ronald Reagan, in particular, repeatedly championed this idealised view of his country. Be that as it may, the American elites have been convinced for generations that their country has saved the whole world time and again and that the future belongs to America.

The crucial question now is how great powers, all of which are driven by a sense of their special mission, can co-exist peacefully. John J. Mearsheimer has already argued in his book ***The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*** that great powers can be drawn into war through competition, arms races and the pursuit of power. Even an idealistic sense of mission can lead to aggressive policies due to power-political interests. Precisely in order to fulfil their own missions, China, Russia and the US must maximise their own power. To avoid tragedies nonetheless, it is extremely important to understand each other's motives as well as possible, rather than those who seek to discredit them, as is currently the case. Great power rivalry without at least an attempt at dialogue carries the risk of catastrophe.

3. The foreign policy of China, Russia and the US in practice

The actual foreign policy of China, Russia and the US is very strongly shaped by how they put their sense of mission into practice. In Washington, alliances are formed according to the motto 'If you're not with me, you're against me'. President Biden wanted to establish an **'alliance of democracies'** as the dominant player in international relations. China, on the other hand, conducts its international relations in a much more open manner, as is evident from the list of visitors who came to Beijing in the first few months of 2026: Donald Trump appears on it just as much as the Iranian Foreign Minister; Vladimir Putin and the Pakistani Prime Minister; and even the dictator of Burma, Min Aung Hlaing, was given the red-carpet treatment.

Undoubtedly, it is China's economic strength that motivates many states to maintain contacts with the 'Middle Kingdom'. However, it is also the **Beijing's stance** is one that does not seek alliances, but rather **partners in economic and political affairs**. It does not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, and they, too, should behave in the same way. Could this policy be described as 'partnership-light'? In any case, Beijing maintains cooperative relations even with countries that are in conflict with one another: with Ukraine and Russia; with India and Pakistan; with Israel and the Palestinians; with Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Whilst Americans and Europeans often adopt a patronising attitude towards other countries – for example, by sending delegations to Africa to teach people about 'gender' – China has adopted a very pragmatic approach. Any conflicts are resolved behind closed doors, although there are certainly red lines: Taiwan is part of the People's Republic; it is best not to raise the issues of Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong. Non-interference in a country's internal affairs is an essential part of Chinese foreign policy.

The basis of **a partnership with Beijing** is precisely economic relations, which do not include military support. Although Nicolas Maduro, the President of Venezuela, and Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Shia in Iran, were regarded as close confidants of Beijing, their overthrow by the US military was accepted.

The basis for this policy is the **Global Governance Initiative**, which was presented by President Xi Jinping in September 2025 within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Its key points are: the sovereign equality of all states; international law as the basis of international relations; multilateralism rather than unilateral decisions by individual major powers; and a policy that serves the welfare of the people and leads to concrete results through practical cooperation. Examples of this include the 'Belt and Road Initiative' and the fact that China is now the largest trading partner for 140 countries around the world.

As far as **Russian foreign policy** is concerned, Russia has been portrayed in the West for decades as a threat, and relations with the European Union have reached an all-time low. Since the large-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian army in February 2022, Vladimir Putin has been portrayed in the West as a tyrant who has lost all touch with reality. Surrounded by cowardly sycophants, he no longer understands the world in which he lives. Obsessed with the belief that he is a new Peter the Great, he does not, moreover, represent Russian interests. Without him, Russia would be a democracy, indeed an ally of the West. There are no limits to the **anti-Putin fantasy** . In John Sweetly's book *The Killer*, for example, one reads that Putin is traumatised because he is the product of an extramarital affair; furthermore, he is a paedophile and will not die a natural death.

This highly critical portrayal of the Russian president is, however, nothing new. As early as 1 November 2003, **The* Economist* presented the Russian president, who had been in office for just three years, as 'Vlad the Impaler'. In it, Putin is portrayed, much like Dracula, as mentally deranged and cruel. The reason: Putin had begun to dismantle the system of his predecessor Yeltsin, which had led Russia into the abyss, and was in the process of reining in the oligarchs. Countless reports of this kind followed. In a special edition of the same British weekly magazine from October 2016, for example, 'Putinism' is blamed for the fact that, 25 years after the fall of communism, Russia is neither a democracy nor an ally of the West.

This **total rejection of Vladimir Putin** initially emanated from political circles in the US. Not only was the then Senator John McCain an influential Russia-hater; leading media outlets, too, very soon adopted an extremely critical stance. President Biden called him a 'killer', and Senator Lindsey Graham was not the only one calling for Russia to be defeated with the help of Ukraine. Russia's very ambition to be a great power is regarded by these circles as a sacrilege. They hate Putin, who is committing this sacrilege. 'They' are the Western elites, the media, think tanks and those politicians who have committed themselves to an anti-Russia policy. Hatred of Putin has become a strategy which has been extremely successful in that it has succeeded in instilling deep fear of the Russian President across a wide range of social strata in the West. 'Putin' has become the embodiment of evil, the figure one must fear.

It is therefore worth recalling the speech that Vladimir Putin delivered in February 2007 at the Munich Security Conference, in which he took stock of Western policy over the past 15 years. Speaking before the leaders of the Western elites – the German Chancellor, the US Secretary of Defence and the NATO Secretary-General – he spoke of how, **after the Cold War**, **Russia** was treated by the West not as a partner but as a defeated nation. Promises were not kept; disarmament treaties, such as the ABM Treaty, were unilaterally terminated; and NATO was aggressively expanded eastwards. 'Colour revolutions' were intended to undermine Russia's influence in the country's immediate neighbourhood. Western NGOs were trained and deployed to bring about 'regime change' in each case.

If one reason for viewing Putin as an enemy was that he rejected the new international order unilaterally imposed by the West, another was arguably even more serious: he made 'Russia great again'. The years following the collapse of communism were a disaster for Russia – politically, economically and in terms of social policy. Russia, as the heartland of the Soviet Union, lost 24 per cent of its territory and 48.5 per cent of its population when the Soviet Union dissolved; it also lost 41 per cent of its gross national product and 39 per cent of its industrial potential. But above all, the Russian population was hit hardest. In 2000, 30 per cent were living below the poverty line. Life expectancy for men fell below 60 years, and criminal gangs ruled the country. Whilst the rouble had long been officially pegged to the dollar, by the 1990s it was worth no more than one cent. In 1998, the country suffered an economic collapse. It is no wonder that the key terms of that era, 'democracy' and 'reform', carried very negative connotations amongst the broadest sections of the Russian population.

From the outset, Vladimir Putin's priority as president was to restore the **state's ability** to **function** and to improve people's standard of living – something he certainly succeeded in doing. But what is the ideal state for Putin? Surely not the nation state, which is not possible in a multi-ethnic empire such as Russia. In Putin's state, the primary focus is on a functioning state authority – on the power of the state, exercised through the executive. The Russian state does not exist through the people, but above them and also outside them (Thomas Fasbender). Russia has never been a democracy based on the Western model and is unlikely to become one in the future either.

In this sense, Putin has re-established state authority in the regions, over the media and the super-rich oligarchs, thereby ensuring that Russia has remained a major power. Despite the considerable losses resulting from the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia retained significant military and nuclear capabilities. The associated willingness to bear high costs in pursuit of geopolitical objectives is a key component of his position of power.

In the West, it was lamented that the approach adopted in this regard did not conform to the principles of the separation of powers and the principles of Westminster-style

democracy. That is true, but Russia's political system has functioned differently for 1,000 years, both under the tsars and under the communists. And the West has, when it mattered, also allied itself with these regimes. When the brutal dictator Joseph Stalin died in March 1953, he was referred to as 'Uncle Joe' in the Western media, and the French Parliament even observed a minute's silence in his honour. So why, then, is there such hatred towards Vladimir Putin now?

Undoubtedly, the **American sense of mission** – which once again became dominant following victory in the Cold War and the rise of the neoconservatives – always needs an enemy. Putin presented himself as a suitable target because he opposed the US's claim to sole leadership and strove to restore Russia's status as a great power. The hatred that may already have existed in various quarters in the US was certainly intensified by the fact that 'Russiagate' played a central role in the 2016 election campaign. According to many Democrats, Russia's interference in the election campaign played a key part in Donald Trump's victory over his opponent, Hillary Clinton. Although Robert Mueller, the special counsel appointed to investigate the matter, was unable to confirm these allegations, Donald Trump was unable to shake off the suspicion that he had a particularly close relationship with Putin. In the highly polarised domestic political landscape of the US, this meant that hostility towards one figure spilled over into hostility towards the other.

This hostility came to the fore when President Joe Biden sent Putin a
He called him a "killer" and, during the proxy war in Ukraine, called for Russia to be defeated. For a long time, it was frowned upon in the West to even mention peace negotiations in relation to **the war in Ukraine**. When Donald Trump nevertheless sought to do so and ultimately succeeded, he was once again accused of favouring Vladimir Putin. Furthermore, the total demonisation of the Russian president has made it possible to turn the European peace project on its head and to place the **European Union in a state of war**. The stated aim is now to spend 5 per cent of the EU's GDP on defence. The justification given is that Putin must be stopped from conquering Poland, the Baltic states, indeed the whole of Europe. The security interests actually cited by Russia in the war in Ukraine are never mentioned. These centre on preventing NATO missiles from being deployed in Ukraine and on ensuring that the Russian-speaking community in the country is no longer oppressed. These

Russian demands essentially encompass what Austria conceded to the Allies in the State Treaty and the Neutrality Act of 1955: no military alliances, no foreign troops in Austria, arms restrictions and protection of the linguistic minority. Here in Austria, 1955 is still, quite rightly, celebrated as the 'Year of Freedom' and the
'newly regained sovereignty' of the country. Similar concessions demanded of Ukraine, however, are dismissed as 'total capitulation'. And: when President Kennedy, at the time, demanded the immediate withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba under the threat of a nuclear war, nobody – quite rightly – portrayed him as a warmonger. Now, Vladimir Putin has been successfully portrayed as a threat to the whole of humanity simply because he articulated clear security interests for his country.

One thing is certain: Russia's policy in the coming years will likely be judged by **the war in Ukraine**. We are told daily by numerous media outlets that Russian President Vladimir Putin launched an
"unprovoked war of aggression" against Ukraine in 2022. In contrast, Scott Hoton demonstrates in his book *Provoked* that not only is this claim false, but also how successive US administrations since the end of the Cold War have pursued their own interests without regard for the fact that this could give rise to new tensions with Russia – indeed, a new Cold War. The author, director of the Libertarian Institute in Austin, Texas, bases his arguments on 6,600 footnotes and 7,800 different sources.
Broken promises regarding NATO enlargement and domestic political considerations play just as much a part in this as the attempt to secure economic advantages. Above all, however, it is the endeavour of the US foreign policy elite to portray their own policies, in keeping with the American sense of mission, as a struggle for 'good' against
'Evil'. Above all, the US is concerned with securing its global hegemony.

A first step towards this was to unite **Europe under NATO's rule** and expand the military alliance eastwards. This was despite the fact that James Baker, whilst US Secretary of State, had already promised the then Soviet President Gorbachev that the military alliance would not be expanded 'an inch' to the east. As this was a condition set by Moscow for agreeing to the reunification of Germany, the then German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher also stated that

that Soviet security interests must not be compromised in any way. The American side also emphasised that NATO's role was no longer to contain the Soviet Union, but solely to keep Germany in check. Furthermore, NATO was to be transformed into a political organisation and the Soviet Union incorporated into a new security structure.

Things turned out quite differently. President Bill Clinton (1993–2001) embarked on a path of **confrontation with Russia**; NATO was expanded; and the Balkan wars were used to assign a new role to the military alliance.

This tactic was employed wherever the aim was to topple Russia-friendly governments, repeatedly in Ukraine. It was a policy of misleading and deceiving Russia, which was continued by the successors to G. H. W. Bush. Although there were also proposals within the National Security Council in Washington for Ukraine to remain neutral, Bush Jr. pushed for the admission of Ukraine and Georgia into NATO at the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest. In doing so, as even the US ambassador to Moscow, William Burns, noted, "the clearest of all red lines" was crossed. At the same time, support for the terrorists operating in operating in Chechnya was not abandoned, and the 'Democracy building' in Moscow continued. In Washington, the hawks have prevailed.

Barack Obama then announced a 'reset' at the start of his term in office, meaning an improvement in relations with Russia. But when his Vice-President, Joe Biden, visited Moscow in 2011, he stated that he had looked Putin in the eye and 'seen no soul'. At the same time, he invited all opposition leaders to the US Embassy. Another development proved decisive: when the democratically elected president was overthrown by the **Maidan coup in Kyiv in 2014**, a radical group came to power in Ukraine which not only openly displayed its Nazi insignia but also pursued correspondingly radical policies. The Russian-speaking population was forbidden from using their own mother tongue; war was declared on the people of Donbass, claiming 12,000 victims – mostly civilians – in the very first year. Reports of war crimes committed by Ukrainian forces were consistently ignored in the West, whilst Ukraine continued to be held out the prospect of NATO membership. Every escalation was attributed to Russia

because it had occupied Crimea in 2014, rather than the fact that more and more NATO troops were being stationed on the Russian border. It was there, too, that the largest NATO manoeuvres ever conducted took place. The new Cold War had thus begun.

When Joe Biden took office in 2021, his policy was geared from the outset towards increasing **tensions with Russia**. Military manoeuvres were carried out on the Russian border, fighter jets were stationed in Norway, and Putin was subjected to a series of personal insults. Ukraine was massively re-armed. Russian security interests were not taken into account in any way; the focus was exclusively on American interests. In this vein, President Biden later stated that the primary aim of the proxy war in Ukraine is to weaken, indeed to dismantle, Russia. And Lindsey Graham, Senator for South Carolina, soberly observed, 'This war is the best investment we have ever made. Russians are dying, but not a single American'.

Whilst the foreign policy of many countries can only be determined following in-depth studies and analyses, the US regularly publishes its foreign policy guidelines in **strategic documents**. For instance, the Trump administration presented a **National Security Strategy** in November 2025 and a **National Defence Strategy** in January 2026. Both documents are very strongly shaped by the President's foreign policy vision. The extent to which these are then put into practice is another matter. For instance, Donald Trump has repeatedly spoken out against 'endless wars', only to find himself embroiled in a protracted war in Iran.

Those who repeatedly emphasise that Donald Trump is completely unpredictable must be disappointed by the 2025 National Security Strategy presented in November. This is the logical continuation of Trump's 'America First' policy on the international stage, a guiding principle for the 'conservative revolution' at the international level. This motto applies to NATO allies just as much as to potential challengers. It is true that Donald Trump often tailors his rhetoric to his audience. But his view of the world and the resulting political priorities have, in key areas, often remained unchanged for decades.

The aim, therefore, is to ensure the **United States' supremacy** in a world where rising powers pose a new challenge, even for the next generation. According to the President's vision, diplomacy and the military are to serve this objective. The US armed forces must remain the strongest and most technologically advanced in the world. Should wars break out, they must be won swiftly and decisively. The motto is 'Peace through Strength'. It goes on to say: 'We want the world's strongest, most dynamic economy'. This is the foundation of the American way of life and America's position in the world.
Furthermore, the US's 'soft power' is also to be utilised to safeguard the country's influence and interests around the world.

A key aspect of **Trump's realism** is his view that the **nation state** is the fundamental actor in international affairs. This is linked to national interests and national sovereignty. Whether the conclusion drawn from this – that 'the world's welfare is best served when every nation pursues its own interests' – is valid is open to question.

Some of the statements in the Security Strategy reflect traditional American attitudes; other key points are familiar from the campaign for the first presidency. For instance, in his book *Sovereignty or Submission – Will Americans Rule Themselves or Be Ruled by Others?*, published in 2011, John Fonte spoke out strongly against the US subordinating itself to international organisations, a view shared by many traditionalists. The idea that US economic and trade policy should be geared towards creating jobs for American workers was also a central theme in the 2015 election campaign. Now, allies are being invited to undertake a massive rearmament programme, and it is being strongly suggested that they do so using American weapons systems.

Key chapters contained in the 'Strategy' have sparked debate. It is somewhat peculiar that some have expressed 'surprise'
'shocked', even by statements that should have been common knowledge for some time. This is evidently a consequence of the fact that Donald Trump was – and continues to be – viewed by the elites in Brussels and the leading European media exclusively through the lens of domestic American opposition. As is well known, the New York Times has made it its mission to criticise Trump round the clock

. This criticism has been adopted by many Europeans. Even anyone who has merely attempted to objectively assess the businessman who entered politics , was negatively labelled a ‘Trump sympathiser’. Now Europe is being made to pay the price for this. As far as Trump is concerned, the EU is on the back burner.

Vice-President J.D. Vance already made it clear at the 2025 Munich Security Conference that the current administration in Washington sees **Europe as being on the decline**. According to the strategy paper, this decline affects not only the economy but civilisation as a whole. As far as the economy is concerned, it is pointed out that a generation ago Europe still accounted for 25 per cent of global GDP, whereas today it accounts for only 14 per cent. The reasons cited for this are the regulatory frenzy in Brussels and among individual Member States of the European Union. This stifles the creativity necessary for economic dynamism. Overall, Trump appears to view the European Union as what was once described as a ‘prison of nations’.

One fact is that**,** as noted in the strategy paper, the **European Union** has massively weakened itself through the war in Ukraine and the associated policy towards Russia. Initially, sanctions against Russia were imposed in order to follow the anti-Russia policy set out by the Biden administration. Whatever the impact on Russia may have been, the Europeans have done themselves a great deal of harm in the process. The fact that EU leaders are now acting as warmongers, whilst Donald Trump, on the other hand, is pushing for peace and seeking to mediate between Brussels and Moscow, can well be regarded as an ‘irony of history’.

The same applies to Donald Trump’s proposal in October 2026 that the Europeans should resume buying oil and gas from Russia. Just a few years ago, there were bitter complaints in Washington that European countries such as Germany had placed themselves in a dangerous position of dependence on energy from Russia. Now the tables have turned completely: President Trump has lifted some sanctions against Russia in order to source diesel from there. The EU countries, on the other hand, are sourcing expensive energy from other regions and intend to maintain all sanctions against Russia, even if this is to the detriment of their own economies.

For Washington, in turn, it will be very difficult to implement the new security strategy in all its radicality. Rebuilding America is one thing; curbing the continued rise of other countries, such as China, is quite another. Moreover, the wars of recent decades have shown very clearly that the use of military force is far from always yielding the desired results.

So, on the whole, one thing can probably be said: Donald Trump is not our daddy and the US is not our mummy. We should not, as the heads of government of some major European countries or the NATO Secretary-General have done, swing from one extreme to the other. Rather, we should take the guidelines set out in the American defence strategy very seriously, whilst remaining fully aware that they primarily concern American interests. Based on this realisation, Europeans could then determine which European interests are to be realised within the framework of a new transatlantic partnership.

Donald Trump's claim to **Greenland**, the abduction of the Venezuelan president, and the twelve-day **war against Iran** in June 2025 were already very much in line with the concepts set out in the National Security Strategy. Furthermore, the US Department of War has since published another groundbreaking document setting out where and how the US intends to deploy its military power
world. Under the motto 'Restoring Peace through Strength for a New Golden Age of America', the 2026 National Defence Strategy (NDS) sets out the priorities Washington intends to pursue in relation to both friends and foes. In practical terms, it is an implementing regulation for the National Security Strategy, which was published at the end of 2025. This document serves as a guideline for decision-makers at the Pentagon and the leadership of the US armed forces

So where do the visible differences lie compared with previous policy? The top priority is the defence of US territory (the Homeland) and the Western Hemisphere. This explicitly means the defence of American interests from Greenland, through the 'Gulf of America' (formerly the Gulf of Mexico), to the southern tip of Latin America. The protection of its own borders plays just as important a role in this as the fight against drug trafficking.

One **shift** in focus is that the importance attached to alliances is now openly stated. It is openly acknowledged that allies are primarily assigned a supporting role. At least since the time of John Foster Dulles, alliances were often regarded as an end in themselves. Potential adversaries in Europe or Asia were to be confronted collectively.
From now on, allies will be openly judged by how useful they are to the US. The criterion is clear: **allies must be of greater benefit to the US than they cost**. They must primarily bear the costs of their own defence themselves and, where possible, purchase the necessary weapons from the US.

There is also a new approach in the NDS with regard to **China**. Beijing is no longer portrayed as an enemy that must be fought; rather, the focus is on 'deterrence through strength'. The focus is no longer on direct confrontation; rather, the aim is to prevent China from gaining the upper hand over the US. It remains largely unclear what difference this policy will make in practice, but the intention to put relations back on a more business-like footing is clear. Taiwan is not mentioned by name in the new text, and bilateral communication is to be improved in both the diplomatic and military spheres.

The military operation launched by Israel and the US against **Iran** at the end of February 2026 shows that wars do not always go to plan.
Military successes do not necessarily mean that political objectives have been achieved. Despite the massive destruction wrought by the American-Israeli forces, Iran was able to use the Strait of Hormuz as a strategic lever. US air strikes managed to weaken Iran's military capabilities, but did not solve all the problems. However unpopular the Iranian regime may be, it could not be overthrown by bombing. Nor have the claims by Iranians in exile – that the entire population would rise up if supported by foreign intervention – proved true. One thing has also become clear: Washington can speak of a victory only if the American war aims have been achieved. Iran, on the other hand, does not need to defeat the American armed forces to claim victory; it is sufficient for the country to remain functional in some way. It may also have been underestimated that a war involving many oil-producing states can have serious repercussions even for friends and partners.

The use of the US justice system to enforce American interests around the world involves far less risk. Wherever great wealth is accumulated, there is a possibility that not all legal regulations have been strictly adhered to. Individuals who stand in the way of American political or economic interests run the risk of coming under the scrutiny of the US justice system. The charges can range from breaching sanctions to the use of US dollars in business transactions; individuals who stood in the way of these endeavours had to be neutralised. The following section will therefore first outline the objectives of US foreign policy in this context; it will then examine the means employed, with particular reference to
'lawfare'; finally, the analysis will highlight how important Ukraine was and remains for US foreign policy, and why it was necessary to neutralise rivals.

'Lawfare' is a key instrument of American foreign policy. It is obvious that the US, with a military budget that is practically as high as that of the rest of the world combined and with 800 military bases around the globe, regards military strength as the foundation of its foreign policy. Military strength is an integral part of American foreign policy, in line with the maxim: "Foreign policy without the backing of the military is like a baseball match without a baseball bat" ("A foreign policy without the support of the military is like a baseball match without
'Baseball bat'). That is the guiding principle. Linked to this is the belief that 'war can resolve political problems', as Edward N. Luttwak writes. But armaments are expensive, and an economic war can also cause great damage to one's own economic interests. That is why the US uses the **law**, **as** it interprets it, **as a weapon**; 'lawfare' is considerably more cost-effective.

Citizens of other states are thus arbitrarily subjected to **American jurisdiction**, for instance on the grounds that they have carried out transactions in dollars or that their products contain American components. Under the pretext of combating corruption or championing human rights, the American judiciary can thereby interfere anywhere in the world. In this way, other states can be brought to their knees, just as economic competitors or undesirable individuals can be

In this context, it is often claimed 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, war in Ukraine would probably never have broken out in the first place. This raises the question: does an order built on military supremacy serve the cause of peace? In fact, the principle that had applied since the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 – 'The balance of power ensures peace' – has been replaced by the motto 'Benevolent American hegemony means
peace'. But just as there were unceasing wars in the 18th century to maintain the 'balance for peace', so for a generation there has been unceasing war to prop up American hegemony.

'Lawfare' is therefore deployed wherever anyone opposes American interests. Furthermore, the US is extremely inventive when it comes to interpreting 'the law' in a way that serves its interests. Thus, prisoners at Guantanamo can be detained for life without trial, 'without violating American law'. And since the torture of prisoners is prohibited in the US, they have been flown out to allied states – a practice known as 'rendition' – where the local police carry out the torture.

The use of 'lawfare' highlights **Ukraine's geopolitical significance** for the US. This geopolitical significance of Ukraine for the US cannot be overestimated. After all, Washington has been attempting for decades to turn Ukraine into an American protectorate.
As early as February 2025, President Donald Trump stated that the US had spent the considerable sum of 350 billion US dollars on the war in Ukraine. All this because the elites in Washington were convinced that control over Ukraine, extending far beyond the country's borders, is of the utmost importance for control over the entire Eurasian region. With Ukraine, Russia is the leading power stretching as far as the Pacific; without Ukraine, it is merely a regional power.

It was precisely in this vein that the President's adviser, **Zbigniew Brzezinski**, had already expressed himself when he wrote that Ukraine is "an important space on the Eurasian chessboard, the control of which is supposed to make domination over the world possible". The point, therefore, is that control over Ukraine can enable world domination. At the same time, he also noted that, without Ukraine, Russia can no longer be a great power.

As for maintaining relations with both the European Union and Russia, one could read: ‘Time is running out for his Administration’.

The **Orange Revolution** and the **Maidan coup** were a result of this policy. The constant efforts by the US and the West to bring Ukraine into their own sphere of influence were made particularly clear by the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Maidan coup ten years later.
Negotiations with Moscow served primarily to buy time to rearm Ukraine. Angela Merkel wrote quite openly about this in her memoirs regarding the ‘Minsk Agreement’ concluded at the time.
Furthermore, there was a noticeable tendency on the part of the EU to offer ‘slogans rather than solutions’: a document from September 2014 on EU-Ukraine relations states that Ukraine is a ‘Priority Partner’ – a status it had already held under the ‘Partnership and Co-operation
Agreement’ concluded as far back as 1998. Question: Which of the EU’s partners are not a priority, and was any consideration given to the fact that, in order to survive at all, the Ukrainian economy would have needed
no less than €40 billion at that time simply to survive?

4. Bilateral relations between China, Russia and the US

As regards bilateral relations between China and the US, some see the central question as whether **a war** will break out between the two **superpowers**. Naturally, there is a wide range of views on this. Some consider a military conflict to be quite likely, whilst others warn of the danger of war but emphasise at the same time that it can be prevented.

Graham Allison’s book *Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides’s Trap* attracted a great deal of attention. In his treatise on the Peloponnesian War, the Greek historian wrote that the origins of that war lay in the established power, Sparta, defending itself against the rising power, Athens. The question now is whether the US and China can escape this ‘trap’ amidst today’s shifts in power. In his book *The Avoidable War*, former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd analyses the strategic, ideological and cultural differences between Washington and Beijing. He warns of a

devastating war, but does not believe it is inevitable. It is up to the political leadership of both countries to prevent a total escalation. Hal Brands and Michael Beckley argue that the most dangerous phase of the rivalry between China and the US is already upon us. They attribute this, amongst other things, to the fact that, whilst China is growing stronger militarily, it is also coming under pressure due to domestic political problems.

Robin Nibett of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, on the other hand, puts forward the thesis that the United States and China are already embroiled in a **new Cold War**. He is convinced that this conflict will have a decisive impact on international politics in the 21st century. This new Cold War will differ significantly from the confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union in the 20th century. The centre of the Cold War of that era was Europe; the new Cold War is playing out in the Indo-Pacific and the Global South. Furthermore, the 'free
West' on the one hand and the communist sphere of influence on the other were two clearly defined blocs with different economic systems.
Today, alliance affiliations are far less clear-cut; take India, for example, which maintains special relations with the US on the one hand, but is also part of the BRICS on the other. The new world order could therefore be characterised by a 'system of overlapping alliances'. Furthermore, the US and China now have very close economic ties, whilst at the same time there is fierce competition in the fields of technology, trade and even supply chains. The former strategy of containing the Soviet Union therefore certainly cannot be applied so easily to China.

It is true that **China's rise** challenges America's sole hegemony in the world. The US makes it very clear that it wishes to retain its leading position in the international order. At the same time, building on its new economic, technological and military strength, China aims to expand its influence in world politics. In fact, over the coming years, periods of tension are likely to alternate repeatedly with periods of détente in relations between the two superpowers; summit meetings that appear harmonious, yet feature combative statements in which economic competition is the primary focus, will represent an interplay of cooperation and competition.

Dan Wang, a researcher at the Hoover Institute at Stanford, is probably right when he writes that China will not dethrone the United States as the world's leading power, but will be a **strong rival**, particularly when it comes to the technologies of the future. Americans and Chinese share the same passion for technological progress and the same pragmatism. However, there is also one very significant difference: China is a society of **engineers**, whilst the United States is one of **lawyers.**

According to Dan Wang, China and the US are **military and technological superpowers.** This is despite the fact that in China, the political system and engineers can put the brakes on this momentum, just as lawyers do in the US. But America also dominates the global financial market, and cultural life in America remains highly attractive. In China, by contrast, engineers seek to control the financial market and the state seeks to control cultural output. Indeed, for years there has been remarkable cultural creativity in China. But ultimately, the authorities have curbed this.

As regards relations between **China and Russia**, the Global Governance Initiative's statement on the war in Ukraine states that every effort should be made to achieve a peaceful solution. With this in mind, China, together with Brazil and the Global South, has established the
'Group of Friends for Peace on the Ukraine Crisis'.

In any case, relations between China and Russia are now among the factors that are **shaping the new world order.** Both states want an international system in which the US no longer dictates the rules alone. At the same time, both countries have their own national economic, military and geopolitical interests. In this sense, it is fair to say that China and Russia are strategic partners today, but not allies in the traditional sense. Their cooperation is based on shared interests, mutual benefits, and competition with the US and its allies. At the same time, there may also be conflicting interests.

The 'Power of Siberia' gas pipeline began operations in 2019 and supplies natural gas to China. Its export capacity is 38 billion m^3 of natural gas per year. A second pipeline, known as 'Power of Baikal', with a capacity of up to 50 billion m^3 of natural gas per year, is planned and is set to run from Western Siberia via Mongolia to China. In 2025,

trade in goods between Russia and China stood at $228 billion; in 2020, the figure was $107.8 billion – not even half that amount (at that time, Chinese exports to Russia totalled $50.6 billion, whilst Russian exports to China amounted to $57.2 billion). Following the EU sanctions, Russia has found an important buyer for its raw materials in China. However, this has also given China greater economic influence over its northern neighbour.

Both countries have also expanded their **military and security cooperation**. As far as international relations are concerned, China and Russia are in agreement on several key issues. Both states want power to be distributed among several centres on the international stage. They reject the idea that Washington alone should decide on sanctions, security matters and international rules. To advance these shared interests, both countries are working together within the framework of the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Within this framework, they should also succeed in curbing the dominance of Western currencies and Western financial institutions.

Overall, it is fair to say that Sino-Russian relations are more than just a short-term alliance of convenience. Not least because of the West's stance, these relations have become more firmly established institutionally, economically and politically. Looking ahead, the future will likely also depend on how the bilateral balance of power develops and what impact the war in Ukraine will ultimately have on Russia. There is no doubt that the future world order has already received a decisive impetus from Sino-Russian cooperation.

Relations between the United States and Russia have a long history and, even today, are not defined exclusively by the war in Ukraine, as is the case with relations between the EU and Russia. Rather, the US is concerned with how it can maintain its global supremacy, what benefits trade with Russia continues to bring, and what role Russia itself can play in the face of China's rise. Both countries are the world's largest nuclear powers; global security depends to a very significant extent on their bilateral relations. Since the end of the Cold War in 1991, both countries have experienced phases of collaboration and cooperation. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, elites in Washington evidently believed that Moscow would, in the long term, submit to the wishes of the US

, which was undoubtedly the case for a time under a compliant Russian President Boris Yeltsin. The US-backed transformation of Russia during this period plunged the country into chaos and has left a lasting mark.

Without taking Russian interests into account, the US then set about, together with its European allies, establishing a new **security order in Europe directed against Russia**. NATO was expanded eastwards, and Ukraine was to be fully integrated into the American sphere of influence, as was clearly expressed in a telephone conversation at the time between Victoria Nuland and the American ambassador in Kyiv. The EU, for its part, refused to allow Ukraine to act as a bridge, as sought by the then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych in connection with a Ukraine–EU Association Agreement.

Following his return to the White House in January 2025, **Donald Trump** sought new avenues for direct talks with Moscow. After all, one of his campaign slogans was that he would “end the war in Ukraine in 24 hours ’.” The US initiated peace talks, but these did not yield the desired success in the short timeframe one might have expected. Since 2014, and increasingly since 2022, the US has imposed sanctions on Russian banks, companies, individuals and entire economic sectors. The primary aim was to restrict Russia’s access to capital and Western technology and to increase the cost of the war for Moscow. In September 2026, the US then decided to impose tougher sanctions on Russia, partly to honour the staunch Russia-sceptic Lindsey Graham. However, when petrol prices in America reached new highs, Trump and Putin struck a ‘gas deal’ that enabled Russia to supply larger quantities of diesel to the US. This agreement caused an outcry amongst many Europeans, who were evidently unaware of the fact that America had never severed its business ties with Russia. Business is simply business.

5. China, Russia and the US in international organisations

As regards the activities of the three world powers within international organisations, the key issues are, firstly, what priorities they set within the

United Nations; which organisations, furthermore, were created to serve their specific interests; and to what extent they wish to change the current system as a whole.
Within the current international system, **China** has succeeded in rising to become the world's second-largest economic power, with a GDP of 20,850 billion dollars (2026). In 2025, the country achieved a trade surplus of 1,100 billion dollars; in 2026, exports of electric cars increased by 110 per cent compared with the previous year, whilst those of solar panels rose by 60 per cent. Beijing also exercises strong control over global production of rare earths.

Beijing is therefore hardly keen to abolish the **current international system**, but rather to develop it further in its own interests. For in the political sphere, too, China has succeeded in expanding its influence within the framework of the existing system of the United Nations and international organisations, building on the principles established in 1945, such as the sovereignty of states and non-interference in a country's internal affairs. If a country does business with China, it need not fear that its government will be told how to govern, or that sanctions will be imposed if its political system differs from China's.

Beijing therefore aims to help shape a **multipolar world order** and set its own priorities. This involves protecting its own sovereignty; strengthening its own influence whilst limiting that of the West; and mobilising the Global South. One example of this is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). This organisation also includes Russia, India, Pakistan and Iran. The SCO serves the purposes of security cooperation, counter-terrorism and regional cooperation. It is not a formal military alliance. Within the framework of the BRICS, China cooperates with Brazil, Russia, India, South Africa and other states. Among other things, this group calls for greater representation of emerging and developing countries in international institutions. Although this group is repeatedly criticised for often acting in a chaotic manner, the BRICS have helped Moscow in a crucial way to withstand Western sanctions. To a more modest extent, they have also already succeeded in replacing the US dollar in international transactions. Another example of an alternative promoted by

Beijing-backed alternatives is the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). This multilateral development bank, which began operations in 2016, is headquartered in Beijing. Among other things, it finances transport, energy and infrastructure projects. Overall, therefore, the aim is to give China the opportunity to influence the international order beyond the organisations and institutions established by the West.

The **Soviet Union** was a founding member of the United Nations following the Second World War. After the collapse of the USSR, Russia took over its seat on the United Nations Security Council, where it repeatedly exercised its right of veto on crucial issues. For this reason alone, Russia wishes to preserve the UN's central role. In this way, the United Nations gives Russia the opportunity to play a geopolitical role. **Moscow's** role **in the United Nations** has frequently been confrontational, precisely because Russia seeks to prevent international organisations from being dominated solely by the US and its allies. At the same time, this is intended to secure Russia's own status as a centre of power.

However, Russia is also endeavouring to exert its influence beyond the traditional international organisations. For instance, within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Moscow has expanded its cooperation with Beijing and is more closely integrated with the Global South through the BRICS. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was founded, though it has not lived up to the expectations originally held for it.

India's foreign policy is characterised by its connection to the tradition of 'Dvaidhibhava', which can be interpreted as a 'dual strategy' or a 'policy of dual approach'. The term originates from the teachings of the Indian political philosopher Kautilya, who lived in the fourth century BC. He advocated a realist understanding of politics, according to which states pursue their own interests; power and security are central prerequisites for state survival; and diplomacy and war should be employed accordingly as instruments of politics. In this sense, a state's various relationships should be utilised in such a way as to serve its own strategic interests.

The **role of the USA in the United Nations** is a fairly accurate reflection of the changes in the international order since 1945. After the Second World War, the USA was the driving force behind the shaping of the emerging international system. The UN, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as well as international trade relations, were rebuilt in accordance with American ideas. This was entirely legitimate, given that the Americans had just won a world war. Whilst Europe lay in ruins, discussions took place at Dumbarton Oaks, a suburb of Washington, on how peace and security in the world could be guaranteed in future. Accordingly, the UN was made responsible for maintaining peace; specialised agencies were established for economic and social development. Just as the 'New Deal' programme had played a decisive role in helping the USA overcome the consequences of the 1929 Depression, international organisations were now intended to contribute to securing social development – and thus peace – on an international scale. However much the equality and sovereignty of all states were emphasised, the veto power held by the five permanent members of the Security Council made it very clear that power politics would continue to play a role.

Washington regarded the new international institutions as crucial to international security and stability, but they were also intended to safeguard American interests. Despite the formation of the Communist bloc led by Moscow, this remained entirely possible as long as most states were Western-oriented. After more and more states gained their independence in the 1960s, giving rise to a 'Third World', the majorities within the various UN bodies shifted. From that point onwards, there were repeatedly strong voices in the United States emphasising that international
cooperation must never lead to 'submission' – that is, to the US being subordinated to an international body.
The latest sanctions imposed by Washington against the **International Criminal Court** in October 2026 are a particularly striking expression of this policy. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio justified the American action, amongst other things, by stating that the US had never
Court. "We don't need it, and we don't want it," he said. Indeed, both Democrats and Republicans have consistently rejected the idea that the "World Criminal Court" should have the power to

“prosecute American citizens, members of the US military or political decision-makers”.

Sceptical of international organisations, the US has concluded **numerous bilateral agreements** in recent years – under both Joe Biden and Donald Trump – to expand its own influence. These agreements primarily concern defence, trade, technology, raw materials, energy and cooperation with various countries. The following examples illustrate this for the period 2021–2026: AUKUS with Australia and the UK, which covers high-tech defence systems and cooperation on the construction of nuclear submarines; an agreement with Japan on cooperation regarding critical minerals, particularly for electric car batteries; and a new trade agreement with the UK covering tariffs and economic cooperation. Agreements have been reached with Saudi Arabia on defence, armaments cooperation and investment. A framework agreement on mutual trade and investment has been concluded with Argentina. An agreement on bilateral trade has also been concluded with El Salvador; similarly with Ecuador and Guatemala. A strategic agreement with South Korea covers trade and investment.

6. What does the future hold for Europe?

Whilst the three world powers align their policies with their own interests and maintain relations amongst themselves – albeit not always without tension – Europe is indulging in self-righteousness. It is convinced of its own moral superiority; it sees the faults of others, but not its own. Relations with Russia have been destroyed by the war in Ukraine, whilst in dealings with China, buzzwords such as ‘de-risking’ and ‘decoupling’ dominate; and it refuses to acknowledge that its relationship with the US needs to be realigned. A prime example of this overconfidence is arguably the statement by the EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Kaja Kallas, who declared at the Hudson Institute in Washington in February 2025: ‘We must first defeat Russia in order to then be able to take on China’.

As a substitute, there is talk of a vague **‘alliance of middle powers’** – with Canada, for example – without any clear idea of what this might entail. But there is no substitute for

relations with the major powers that shape world affairs. As the disputes between Canada and the US have led to a full-blown trade war, voices have been raised suggesting that it is now time for Canada and the European Union to draw closer together. This line of thinking is not without foundation. As the Austrian Ambassador to Canada, I wrote a brochure over 20 years ago entitled 'Canada – A Country Between Two Worlds'. I justified the title by arguing that Canada is, in essence, a European state on American soil. Canada remained part of British North America long after the Declaration of Independence of the 13 colonies 250 years ago. There was never a break with England. Canada entered the First World War following a resolution by the British Parliament. When entering the Second World War, a separate resolution was passed 14 days after that of the British Parliament. Even today, the British monarch remains the country's head of state. My letters of credence as Austrian Ambassador were addressed to Queen Elizabeth II.

In fact, **Canadian-American relations** developed on an extremely friendly basis during the 20th century, after the 8,892 km-long border had been mutually agreed upon in 1908. The two nations fought side by side in both world wars; Canada became a founding member of NATO in 1949; and both countries have established a joint air command. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy declared in a speech to Parliament in Ottawa:
"Those whom nature hath so joined together, let no man put asunder". In 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the USA, Canada and Mexico came into force. Economic ties with the USA became so strong that in some years 87 per cent of Canadian exports went to its southern neighbour.

Of course, there were also repeated conflicts. For instance, the US regularly accused the Canadians of providing state subsidies for their timber exports, which it claimed put American forest owners at a disadvantage. President Richard Nixon once called the Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau (the elder) 'son of a bitch'; to which he replied: 'I have been called worse things by better people'. Recently, Canadian national pride has been particularly put to the test when President Donald Trump declared that Canada should become the 51st state of the USA. When Trump then took measures "against Canada's unfair trade practices" and the Canadian

Prime Minister responded with tariffs on US imports worth $20 billion, an all-out trade war ensued.

It would now be a mistake for Austria and the EU to realign their relations with Canada as **an act of defiance against Trump**. It is indeed highly strange that Canada and China have suddenly agreed on a 'strategic partnership', given that, not so long ago, the Canadians imprisoned Huawei's chief financial officer, Meng Wanzhou, at the behest of the US under a flimsy pretext. Instead, we should be giving serious thought to how relations with Canada could be strengthened.

It should therefore be possible, in the interests of both sides, to step up **student exchanges**, for example, and to expand cooperation in the fields **of science** and **research,** including **AI**. Canada is an impressive country in many respects. Particularly in the context of its dealings with its southern neighbour, Canadian intellectuals repeatedly demonstrate their patriotic stance. This certainly contributes to the fact that Canada enjoys a high standing in the world today, and that cosmopolitanism and patriotism need not be mutually exclusive. With this in mind, we could aim for closer cooperation with Canada in the future, although this cannot be a substitute for relations with the major powers.

As far as transatlantic relations with the USA are concerned, President Barack Obama has already proclaimed a 'pivot to Asia'. As a result, **Europe** has **slipped into the background**. Donald Trump then made this development even clearer in his own way. Yet Finland's accession to NATO initially sparked a great deal of euphoria amongst the 'transatlanticists'. The fact that their country's fate has time and again depended on decisions made by the major powers, over which they had no influence, is deeply ingrained in the consciousness of many Finns. After the country had been part of Sweden for centuries, Napoleon and the Russian Tsar Alexander I decided in 1807 at a summit in Tilsit that Finland should henceforth be a grand duchy under the Tsar's rule.

In 1945, Finland was forced to cede territories to the Soviet Union and pay reparations, but it was the only country in the Tsarist Empire of that time that was not occupied by Soviet troops. Helsinki's decision to remain non-aligned was intended to serve as a guarantee of national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Preserving these played a role in all

foreign policy decisions. When Finland joined the European Union in 1995, alongside Austria, the then
Prime Minister once said to me about those opposed to accession: “They have obviously completely forgotten Tilsit”.

At the time, only a few intellectuals, such as Max Jacobson, along with around 30 per cent of the population, were in favour of **NATO membership**. The view of President Matti Ahtisaari prevailed; he said: “NATO membership should bring greater security, not greater insecurity; greater stability in the region, not greater instability”, which was clearly aimed at Moscow’s reactions. Yet Finland has always taken its national defence very seriously. Even in economically difficult times, the military was kept very well equipped; modern American fighter aircraft were purchased and every effort was made to secure the 1,300 km-long border with Russia. In recent years, Finland has also taken part in NATO manoeuvres.

The brutal invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops then evidently proved the decisive factor in Finland, together with Sweden, seeking full membership of NATO. My book at the time was entitled ‘Finland – A Nation in Transition’. What I meant by that at the time was the
the country’s modernisation, its role in the high-tech sector, and its openness to the world. With NATO membership, a further historic transformation has taken place. However euphorically Finland and Sweden’s new membership of NATO was welcomed by many, it did nothing to alter the US view that the **alliance’s objectives** should be realigned.

The very fact of asking whether NATO has a future suggests the possibility that the North Atlantic military alliance may be heading for difficult times. It is clear that the organisation, which now comprises 32 members, must be reoriented. What this new direction will look like depends on **three developments**: the outcome of the war in Ukraine; the extent to which American interests will align with European views in the future; and what the role of a military alliance – which originally focused on Europe – might be in tomorrow’s world.

NATO is heavily involved in *the war in Ukraine*; some even speak
even of a ‘proxy war’ that NATO is waging against Russia. What is certain is that many of the drones striking the Russian hinterland are

manufactured in NATO countries; that Western intelligence services are selecting targets in Russia; and that the war would have ended long ago without NATO's support. Recently, in particular, we have 'mainstream media' that Ukraine is on the road to victory. The 'drone miracle' in Ukraine is said to have brought about a turning point in the war, and a new 'wonder weapon' is soon to tip the balance in Kyiv's favour. The outcome of a war, however – particularly its longer-term consequences – remains highly uncertain. Credible analysts such as Scott Ritter and Alexander Mercouris suggest that Ukraine is now merely existing in the shadows and is being kept artificially alive by the West.

These critical voices are unlikely to be entirely wrong. Indeed, the latest report by the US intelligence services, published in March 2026, states that, despite the losses suffered, Russian ground forces have so far emerged stronger from the conflict in Ukraine. The Russian air and naval forces, too, remain intact and are more effective than they were before the invasion in February 2022. Furthermore, according to the report, Russia is continuing to expand its already highly formidable nuclear arsenal. Russia is also likely to be able to continue defying Western sanctions, even if this harms its own economy. The resulting shift towards China could, in the long term, lead to greater dependence on Beijing. In any case, the US intelligence services note that Russia has managed to maintain the upper hand in the war in Ukraine over the past year, which is why Moscow sees no reason to cease hostilities as long as its troops are making territorial gains.

Another question that will decisively shape **NATO's future** is the extent to which *European and American interests* will continue to align, or rather, the extent to which the European stance corresponds to US interests. When NATO was founded almost 80 years ago, Western Europe was still one of the world's major centres. Britain and France still held many of their colonies. In 1955, the Federal Republic of Germany was also brought into the Alliance, whose objectives were shared equally by all: 'To keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down', as the Alliance's first Secretary-General, Lord Ismay, so aptly put it.
In any case, the Americans had a massive interest in ensuring that

Western Europeans stood up to any potential communist expansion and maintained their nuclear umbrella over Europe.

Even during his first term in office, Donald Trump made no secret of what he thought of NATO and the European allies. He described NATO as a 'paper tiger' and called on the Europeans to finally do more for their own defence, so as to at least meet the stated target of spending 2 per cent of GDP on the military. Shortly after the start of the second term, Vice-President J. D. Vance explained at the Munich Security Conference in February 2025 what the new administration actually thought of the Europeans: he did not speak about Ukraine, but criticised the Europeans for what he saw as restricted freedom of expression and their misguided immigration policy.
"The greatest threat to Europe," said the Vice-President, "is not Russia; it is the threats from within." In line with this, Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth declared that his country was "no longer the ultimate guarantor of European security".

Now, some might believe that these are the excesses of the Trump administration; that once his term is over, things would return to the way they were. That is probably not the case. The view that NATO allies should support **American** global **hegemony** has long been the prevailing opinion in wide circles in Washington. For instance, Victoria Nuland, a leading Democrat on foreign policy, wrote the following during her time as US Ambassador to NATO (from 2005 to 2008): "NATO must deploy its forces worldwide, on the front line in confronting the 21st century". A debate like the one in 2003, when the French President and the German Chancellor spoke out against the US invasion of Iraq, must not be allowed to happen again. NATO must, in future, address all the world's trouble spots – the Middle East, Iran, North Korea and China, Nuland wrote. So when Donald Trump today criticises the Europeans for not supporting him enough in the war against Iran, this is very much in keeping with tradition. NATO was established after the Second World War as an alliance against Russia. From Washington's perspective, it was only logical that this alliance should take on a global orientation following the collapse of the Soviet Union. The future of NATO will depend on whether this is the case, as William Pfaff wrote in an article in the New York Times on 12 January 2006.

The question, then, is whether **NATO** can be successfully reoriented **within a new world order**. The world of 2049 will not be the same as that of 1949. In the

In the year NATO was founded, China and India together accounted for just 2 per cent of global economic output; by 2049, this figure is expected to reach 28 per cent. One could cite numerous other criteria to demonstrate that the centre of the world has shifted from Europe to the Indo-Pacific region. This applies in particular to American security interests, which were different in 1949 than they are today. It is obvious that Washington takes these realities into account when assessing its global security interests.
If, in the face of this development, the Europeans go to war in Ukraine, it will not stop the US and the rest of the world from moving on past Europe.

The **war hysteria** that has now broken out is repeatedly fuelled by reports from 'British intelligence' claiming that 'Putin' is planning to invade Europe in a few years' time. One sometimes gets the impression that the British have never forgiven the Russians for causing them to lose their own empire. Yet the official propaganda is highly contradictory in itself. On the one hand, the Russians are accused of having a corrupt and incompetent army, as evidenced by the fact that only one per cent of Ukrainian territory can be captured in a year. On the other hand, it is claimed that 'Putin' would march straight through to Lisbon were it not for the brave Ukrainians holding him back. In the programme for the play *The Last Days of Mankind*, one can read:
'In the *Neue Freie Presse*, Karl Kraus sees the perfect example of a bourgeois-liberal newspaper that comes to terms with power, legitimises it and, in doing so, pretends to report objectively'. Has anything changed since then?

When people call for a war economy, we need to understand what that means. Is our **welfare state** to be transformed into a **war state**? The budget proposal for 2027 recently presented in Washington by the Trump administration shows where the priorities lie in the US: military spending is set to reach $1,500 billion next year, representing a 44 per cent increase in a single year. Spending on education and training, which already amounts to just $76.5 billion, is, by contrast, to be cut by 3 per cent. Now, it is true that in the United States, spending on education is primarily borne by local authorities. But the federal budget, too, shows very clearly what sort of society is being sought (New York Times, 10 April 2026). In areas relating to essential public services, the burden in the US falls primarily on the individual citizen. A place at university can easily cost $30,000 per term. 27 million people

still have no health insurance. 1.2 million private security guards have to be employed because the public sector cannot guarantee security. (This figure does not include the security staff employed in many buildings in Manhattan and other major cities.) In European countries, the state endeavours to lay the foundations for a good quality of life for its citizens; in the US, it does not.

There should be no doubt that the Austrian Armed Forces receive the resources necessary to safeguard our country. By contrast, the US is not concerned with defensive security, but with maintaining **global hegemony** by military means. Europeans are urged to play their part in this. For this reason, as President Donald Trump also emphasised, the 'Department of Defence' was 'Department of War'. That is perfectly legitimate, but must we go along with it? Our welfare state can undoubtedly be modified in one area or another, but does that mean the entire system must be converted to a war economy?

In the face of all these challenges, the question arises: what role might Europe actually play in the world of the future? History does not repeat itself, but one role springs to mind: the role that **Greece** played **in antiquity** in relation to Rome.
Greece was conquered by Rome. Yet the Romans admired the much older Greek culture. Philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics influenced the Roman elites. Roman authors such as Cicero, Virgil and Horace modelled themselves on Greek examples. Roman artists adopted Greek styles and copied Greek sculptures. Greek was the language of the educated Roman upper classes. Eventually, many Greek gods were also equated with the Roman gods. Ultimately, Horace's statement, which expressed the new relationship between Greece and Rome: 'Conquered Greece, in turn, conquered its savage conqueror'. Could Europe do more for world history?

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