

# Three phases of the Cold War?

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## **Abstract**

The author of the present study thinks that we live in a New Cold War era. The study analyses some well known features of the Old Cold War, then the start of the New Cold War era, plus the interim period of the Post-Bipolar era between them. Using contemporary sources, such as public speeches and essays by renowned politicians, the author analyses the new international environment after the Russian-Ukrainian war, thus he researches the characteristic processes of the contemporary history. The author raises the questions: What are the surviving features of the Old Cold War? And what are the new historical features which distinguish the Old Cold War from the new one? Looking at the evidence and the argument of other scholars, the author argues that the Post-Bipolar era used to mark a time period when there was one single global hegemon, namely the USA, practically without any serious challengers. The new era of the New Cold War is being marked with appearance of new challengers who have stepped up on the world stage to challenge the current international system and order. Based on detailed historical arguments, the author offers a new historical periodization from the Old Cold War through the Post-Bipolar era until the beginning of the New Cold War.

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## **Introduction**

There is a new situation in international relations. The international political climate has cooled down, once again. A “New Cold War” is often mentioned nowadays. If it sounds like and looks like a “New Cold War”, isn’t it possible that there is a “New Cold War”? We perhaps need to rephrase our vocabulary in order to understand the world around us, and it is perhaps time to rephrase our knowledge on the historical period we have been living in recently. In spite of our rich, multi-layered, and in-depth knowledge of the Cold War, there are definite signs that our thinking about the nature of the Cold War has been retrospectively influenced by the Russo-Ukrainian war. Are we able to recognize the dynamics of our times?

I am suggesting a new periodization for the most recent history:

- the Old Cold War era (from 1945 the earliest, until 1988/1989/1990/1991 the latest)
- the Post-Bipolar era (from 1988 the latest, until 2007/2014/2022 the latest)<sup>1</sup>
- the New Cold War era (from 2007/2014/2022)<sup>2</sup>

Today we live in a “new” or “re-started” or “re-newed” or “re-launched” Cold War<sup>3</sup>; from now on, I prefer using simply the term “the New Cold War era”. Momentarily, the scale of the New Cold War is smaller than the scope and the scale that the Old Cold War used to have. Nevertheless, its significance regarding the world order is not smaller: Is it a start of a new world order based exclusively or dominantly on sheer force?

## The Old Cold War

There was once the Old Cold War which began in 1945 (the earliest) or in 1947 (more likely), and ended sometimes between 1988 and 1991; depending on what event or process one considers to be the most relevant factor of the historical turn.

The Old Cold War started at an enormous breaking point at the end of or after the Second World War. It was a rare historical moment to start to build an entirely new world system on the ashes of the most devastating war of the human mankind. Does it have a significance that the Old Cold War set in after the failure of a specific Italian and a specific German regime that themselves had attempted to create a new order, a fascist-national-socialistic world order? Even if it does not, it seems evident that there used to be several attempts to change the existing world order both in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century – why did we think that it might not or would not be repeated?

Having read through a massive quantity of scholarly literature on the topic, it seems easy to define what we understand under the term “Cold War”. Using its most everyday meaning, the Cold War was equal to “four decades of tension and confrontation” (Scholz 2023) thus today it is generally meant as “a confrontation between major countries”.<sup>4</sup> (Of course, when thinking of the major confrontations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one may realize the insufficiency of this definition.)

1 Term “post bipolar age” is mentioned by Viktor Marsai in *Válasz online* 2022.09.14.

2 Term “a newer Cold War” appears at Péter Stepper in *Magyar Nemzet online* 2022.07.14. Term “new cold war” was used by Viktor Marsai in *Válasz online* 2022.09.14. The terms in Hungarian: régi hidegháború – poszt-bipoláris korszak – új hidegháború.

3 Term “modified Cold War” [„módosított hidegháború”] was used by strategic expert Réka Szemerkenyi; according to her, it is justified to speak about a new chronology of the Cold War. See Réka Szemerkenyi in *Mandiner online* 2022.04.11.

4 “Divide the world into blocks of great powers and vassal states”. Scholz, Olaf: The Global Zeitenwende. How to avoid a New Cold War in a multipolar Era. In: *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2023.

In its ripest form, the Old Cold War used to mean a bipolar world order which was dominated by the USA and the Soviet Union. It was a flow of international relations, a process that took place in an overall atmosphere of mistrust and animosity between two political and military hegemonies and their respective block members. When we knead together various scholarly historical interpretations of the Old Cold War, and when we condense them into a coherent definition, we can conclude that whoever today mentions “Cold War”, claims a phenomenon where (in order of importance) we see a conflict of interest of some major powers who are imbued with ideology, for whom the nuclear option is available, and whose impact extends well beyond the direct actors up to a global scale. Whoever sees any current international conflict as a “Cold-War event” implies, assumes and claims this.

Just for the sake of order, when did the Old Cold War end? Honestly, picking its end is quite optional. For many, and not only for Germans, the Old Cold War started to end symbolically in November of 1989 when the Berlin Wall came down, and ended by the re-unification (restoration?) of the German state in October 1990. From the perspective of the re-united Western and Eastern Europe, the Old Cold War ended with a solemn political declaration, the “Charter of Paris for a New Europe” at the Paris Conference of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in November 1990.

For those East Central European citizens who care remembering historical turning points, especially the one that was the turning point of their lifetime, the Old Cold War started to end at the moment when they got sense of their re-gained national independence in the fall of 1989. The official break-up or dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991 can be described not simply as a reassuring end of a historical process but rather as a big and deep sigh from the chest of millions of East Central European people: Free, at last free without Russians!

And when did the Cold War end for Russia? Without too much ado and detail, if one considers presence of the Russian Army in Moldova/Transnistria since 1992; or reads Vladimir Putin’s speech at the 43th Conference on Security Policy in Munich in February 2007; or looks at Russia’s war in Georgia/South Ossetia/Abkhazia in August 2008; or studies Russian occupation of the Crimea in 2014; or looks at the all-out attack of Russia on Ukraine in February 2022 – so, judging from these events, it is rather obvious that the Cold War never ended for Russia. Some would add that the Old Cold War never ended for *imperial* Russia.

## The Post-Bipolar era

The historical period, what from now on I will refer to as the Post-Bipolar era, began in the late 1980s. Earlier, and particularly before the Russo-Ukrainian war, this post-1991 time period was called either commonly as “the era after the Cold War”, or more professionally as “Post-Cold War era”.

However, since there is a New Cold War, neither naming is sustainable any more. Both designation (“after, post”), that have been used routinely by scholars<sup>5</sup>, are wrong because it presupposes that the Cold War ended once and for all. Since general public assumed that some new era would come (and this perception was strengthened especially as the 21<sup>st</sup> century set in), both designations (“after, post”) were very convenient to use. Nevertheless, both prefixes had up until recently mistakenly suggested that the Cold War ended, and that we are “over it”. In fact, this period has not ended. More precisely, what ended was the Old Cold War; that indeed gradually ended between 1988 and 1991. After the collapse of the Soviet Union it was generally believed by many scholars as well as politicians that the Old Cold War was over; some even thought it was the end of history as such. Can you name anybody who had thought that the Post-Cold War period, a prosperous time of two generations without major wars in Europe, was supposed to be provisional or interim? Of course, the question what proceeded after the Old Cold War has been a subject of debate since 1991, but only now, under the influence and impact of recent historical events, we know that we had lived in an interim age.

Instead of “Post-Cold War era” we should use the term “Post-Bipolar era” which set in gradually, even almost unobserved, as the jubilation over the liberation of big chunks of Central and Eastern Europe from the Soviet-type communism suppressed most skepticism over the success of US-type democracy. The Soviet Union was in ruins, thus no surprise that the Post-Bipolar era, in political terms, meant a US dominated world order, combined with prosperity visible not only in the Post-Soviet geographical region, but on a global scale, as well. Therefore some call it poignantly “the era of lost hope and optimism” or “three nice and naïve decades”<sup>6</sup>. Apart from the lack of the might of the Soviet Union/Russia on the world scene, the Post-Bipolar era represents a 30-year-long peace time and a stable economic growth, again, not only in Europe. This is what some call globalization, some even literally a “Post-Cold War phase of globalization”. (Scholz 2023: 8)

It was this historical period of the Post-Bipolar era that ended in February 2022, or perhaps earlier, maybe already in 2007 or 2014. Year 2007 as the beginning of a new era might sound unusual, but already at the Conference on Security Policy in Munich in 2007 one question from the audience to Vladimir Putin was inquisitive about the changes in international relations: “I am confident that the historians of the future will not describe our conference as one on which the Second Cold War was declared” – was the answer of the Russian leader.<sup>7</sup>

For close observers it can be no question that the Post-Bipolar era indeed ended. If you do not trust me, read the German Chancellors’ words about “the end of an exceptional phase of globalization” and a start of a brand new era, the *Zeitenwende*. Alternatively, we could call the time span between 1988 up until

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5 Some contemporary historians mark the period after 1989–1991 as an “ex-Soviet”, or “post-Soviet era”, or the era of “post-1991 Russia”; see e.g. Graziosi 2021: 89-125.

6 Réka Szemerényi in *Mandiner online* 2022.04.11.

7 Vladimir Putin’s speech and his reactions at the following discussion at the Conference on Security Policy in Munich on 10 February 2007. Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQ58Yv6kP44>

2007/2014/2022 as the era of the “unipolar world”. Unipolarity refers to the United States as an unchallenged hegemon – for some a benign hegemon, for some an aggressive one – on the international stage. Let us brush aside some cynical opinions that “international order based on law and order [...] in the American vocabulary means US based international order”<sup>8</sup>, and let us just read the Russian leader’s carefully formed words of “one centre”: the unipolar world was a time of “one centre of authority, one centre of force, one centre of decision-making”. Even though Vladimir Putin described the phenomenon of an unipolar world without directly pointing his finger toward the US, it must have been crystal clear for his audience (back in 2007) that such an “unipolar model is [...] unacceptable” for Russia.<sup>9</sup>

## The New Cold War

First of all, why do I think that we live in a new era? And if we live in a new era than when and how it started. It seems now that Russia has massively contributed to open a new historical era. After Michail Gorbachev’s historical decision in 1989, Russia did so second time in our lifetime. We might never know by who, when and under what considerations the decision was taken; nevertheless, the start of the new era is rather obvious from the occupation of the Crimea by Russia, and its full-scale military attack on Ukraine in 2022.

Of course, the notion of a new era is not new neither among Cold War historians<sup>10</sup> nor among politicians and journalists. Recently, for instance, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz wrote about a “new global dichotomy” and a huge cataclysm of our times when he declared that “the world is facing a *Zeitenwende*: an epochal tectonic shift”. (Scholz 2023)

I would perfectly agree with Miklós Mitrovits that “this [*Russo-Ukrainian*] war fundamentally re-arranges the status quo created in 1945”<sup>11</sup>. But in my understanding it is not the Russo-Ukrainian war that re-arranged the status quo. On the contrary, gradually changing status quo in the world order had resulted in war; new wars are triggered by shifting the balance of international power. The rules of the game change not because of one single particular event; but it is a gradually changing “game” in which players adjust their behavior to the new general rules. Yes, we live in a new era, and retrospectively it is necessary to rephrase our knowledge on the historical period we have been living in recently.

Another question is if there is a *new era* regarding the international relations. I think there is. The Post-Bipolar era used to mark a time period when there used

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8 Jeffrey David Sachs in *Mandiner online* 2022.12.13.

9 Vladimir Putin’s speech and his reactions at the following discussion at the Conference on Security Policy in Munich on 10 February 2007. Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQ58Yv6kP44>

10 See for instance a forum launched by Philip Zelikow et al. “Ending the Cold War and Entering a New Era: Perspectives on *To Build a Better World*”, in *Journal of Cold War Studies* (2021) 23 (4): 181–210.

11 Miklós Mitrovits in *Index online* 2022.05.24.

to be one single global hegemon, namely the USA, practically without any serious challengers. When the duality of power during the Old Cold War ended, and only one superpower remained on the stage – this was the Post-Bipolar (less precisely: unipolar) age.

The new era of the New Cold War is being marked with appearance of new challengers on the horizon who have stepped up on the world stage to openly challenge the current international system and order. Some speak of an “economically strong and politically assertive China”, as Olaf Scholz does when he writes that “Many assume we are on the brink of an era of bipolarity in the international order”(Scholz 2023: 8). Even if the Chinese leader Xi Jinping can speak of a “shifting global structure of power and wealth from the West to the East”<sup>12</sup>, and even if it is true that in the last decades or so China has developed a lot – yet, in terms of real capacities, China is far from the global economic and military dominance comparable to the power of the USA. Russia is even further away.

Yet, both challengers almost unanimously speak of a need for a “multipolar” world. On February 4, 2022, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping signed a mutual statement about “international relations entering a *new age*”. What they meant by it was a transition of international relations from “one pole system” toward “a multipolar world order”. Russia seems to imagine the new world order in a form of a polycentric world: “The modern world has to be polycentric”, as it was stated by Vladimir Putin recently at the meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. In this sense we can assume that the Russo-Ukrainian war is a “post-hegemonial conflict”<sup>13</sup> in which the actual sole hegemon, the USA is trying to control the challengers of its power, this time Russia, through a proxy war in Ukraine.<sup>14</sup> But it is not only the Russian and the Chinese supreme leaders who speak about a “genuine multilateralism”. The German Chancellor, almost one year into the Russo-Ukrainian war, also writes about “an increasingly multipolar world”, a “new multipolar reality”, and stresses his desire to find “multilateral solutions to global problems” (Scholz 2023).

Meanwhile one must not forget that in the current American foreign policy doctrine China and Russia are the enemy.<sup>15</sup> Even if some think that “recent years have eroded the American hegemony”<sup>16</sup>, it seems that current world order can only and exclusively be maintained by the USA, momentarily no other state can maintain it. In this sense, the interim period of the Post-Bipolar era has not ended yet. But the presence of overt challengers and already the pure question that how long will the USA be able to maintain its global influence, are creating some tangible tension in world politics.

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12 Xi Jinping, Chinese Communist Party, Central Committee General Secretary at the 20<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China, quoted in *The China Daily* 2022.11.18-24.

13 I found the expressions at Péter Tálas in *Magyar Narancs* 2022.11.24.

14 “This is an influence war between two superpowers”. Jeffrey David Sachs in *Mandiner online* 2022.12.13. „[It] can be called a proxy war”, wrote Péter Stepper in *Magyar Nemzet* 2022.07.14.

15 Jeffrey David Sachs in *Mandiner online* 2022.12.13.

16 Péter Stepper in *Magyar Nemzet* 2022.07.14.

Having answered the question whether we indeed live in a new era, regarding international relations at minimum, it is worth asking if the new era is a New Cold War era? Why is the concept of the Cold War being mentioned so regularly and in so many different aspects? Why do some commentators interpret “Cold War” as something still ongoing and effective? We could read of, for example, “Cold War mentality” as well as “Cold War-type international tensions of our times”. How can one speak or write of Cold War at all when the Cold War ended in 1991, and we are now three decades into the Post-Bipolar era?

For instance, US President Joe Biden felt it necessary to state recently in Bali that “the US does not seek a New Cold War”<sup>17</sup>. Of course, public speakers, when referring to a rather expressive metaphor of the “Cold War”, not necessarily consider the historical relevance of the term they use. After all, many of the phenomena that used to characterize the Old Cold War (an era very, very close in time for many of us) have been living with us. Vladimir Putin put this in a poignant form when he once said that “the Cold War left us with live ammunition, figuratively speaking”<sup>18</sup>. Those who had lived through it and had experienced (minimally from the political news) what Old Cold War international relations were like, can agree that many familiar elements can be discovered in today’s Russo-American relations, as well as in a wider spectrum of international relations that indeed remind us the Old Cold War. For instance, the nuclear threat has haunted us since the early days of the Cold War; sharp opposition between the superpowers can resemble the 1960s; the usage of the “oil weapon” is well known from the 1970s, etc. It does not need much effort to realize that the *déjà vu* is completely natural.

One can also add that the Russian occupation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014, and especially the Russian all-out attack on Ukraine in February 2022, created a completely new situation not only in geopolitics, but also in terms of linguistic concepts referring to the era. Our experiences have not stopped affecting neither our thinking, nor our linguistic and conceptual inventory. Nowadays, we can read about “deterrence”, even “nuclear deterrence”, and we can read about “the [Nato] Alliance [*that*] must credibly deter further Russian aggression”. (Scholz 2023: 5) Quite naturally, we incline to re-use, re-cycle the conceptual apparatus of an earlier era, at least some parts of it, for newer international situations – who can shake off this temptation?

So let us suppose that we do live in a Cold War era. Then did we return to the past, meaning that we are witnessing the same typical features of the Old Cold War? Is it the same Old Cold War times, perhaps its slightly renewed/altered version, or do we experience something new? Some observers of our times have already been sensing some kind of back-shift in times, such as Martin McCauley in his book “Cold War 1949–2016” (McCauley 2017), where already the title suggests that 1991 might have not been the end of the Cold War. On one hand, the

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17 US President Joe Biden in 2022.11.14. in Bali, Indonesia; cited in China Daily, November 18-24, 2022.

18 Vladimir Putin’s speech and his reactions at the following discussion at the Conference on Security Policy in Munich on 10 February 2007.

terminological uncertainty has been greatly intensified following the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian War in 2022, when political and media discourse analyzing the Russian-Ukrainian war has so often referred to the Russo-Ukrainian war as a “Cold War conflict”. Yet, on the other hand, this major conflict, nothing similar seen by two generations of Europeans, might retrospectively help us understanding a historical process that is unfolding right before our eyes.

Hence, I think that we today live in New Cold War era. This does not change the fact that the Old Cold War ended in 1991. The Old Cold War had had some well know features that did not cease with the end of that era; on the contrary, they have been with us practically since 1945. Since the re-start or re-launch of the New Cold War recently took place in a new international environment, different from the one in the mid-1940s or 1970s or 1980s, it is worth looking over the characteristic features of the changing times. What has been re-branded from the Old Cold War era, and what has been taken over from it into the New Cold War? What are the new historical features that never existed before, and which clearly distinguish the Old Cold War from the new one?

## Signs of Historical Continuity

The conceptual confusion caused by actual references to the “Cold War” is triggered by the fact that some factors, considered today as “Cold Warians”, indeed were typical features of the Old Cold War and today they indeed refer back to those times.

The idea, commonly shared by masses of European citizens, that open “aggression and imperialism” (Scholz 2023) was long ago over, at least in Europe, was a mistake. Of course, a hot European war before our eyes is a very, very sad reality, an entirely new phenomenon for all Europeans who were born after 1945. The fact that wars have been with us ever, is a strong sign of historical continuity.

Nothing new is in the return of the Russian imperialism (“imperialism had returned to Europe”)(Scholz 2023), in re-branded form, namely the return of “Russia’s revanchist imperialism” (Scholz 2023), meaning revisionist acts made by Russia. It is nothing new for historians who have always seen strong and paradigmatic continuity between imperial Russia, then the imperialist allures of the Leninian – Stalinian – Brezhnevian Soviet Union, hidden first under the blanket of international communism, then the imperialism of the Post-Bipolar Russia once again. Political systems change, Russian imperialism remains.

The ways and means how energy is weaponized and how acts of sabotage (e.g. the Nord Stream pipeline) are purposefully used/misused, is not new; we saw this, for example, during the oil crises in the 1970’s.

Several forms of “disinformation campaigns and influence peddling” (Scholz 2023: 7) are very well known from the times of the Old Cold War (if not earlier), in colourful forms of covert radio stations (e.g. Radio Free Europe), sponsored political party journals and confident news outlets, with the KGB, the CIA, and others, etc. in the backyard. In fact, “psychological warfare” as well as “dezinformatsia” are grassroute Cold Warian expressions. (Shultz and Godson 1984) Perhaps the me-



dia coverage of the Russo-Ukrainian war is faster and more diverse than any Cold War “media event” (bloody wars, dramatic abdications, hostage crises, etc.) ever had been. The goal, however, what the instant stream of information is supposed to achieve, i.e. influencing the public media environment according to one's own interests (e.g. the rubbish Russian blah-blah about “demilitarization and de-nazification”) can be traced back at least to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but in the worst case, to the period between the two world wars.

Who would not know the re-emerging issue/question of Taiwan, commencing in 1949 by the partition of mainland communist China and the nationalist China led by Chiang Kai-shek? I would not like to be cynical, but Taiwan often appears to me as an epithet constant in a long saga.

The NATO is a rather demonstrative example of historical continuity. Established in 1949 as a military-political instrument of the Old Cold War, the basic strategic goals of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization were completely clear: to defend the freedom and stability of member states in the North Atlantic area. While the Warsaw Pact ceased to exist in 1991, the NATO survived, showing a great deal of historical durability and continuity.

Last but not least, if one of the consequences of the Russian barbarism in Ukraine is that the USA, the EU and many other states seek isolating Vladimir Putin (personally) and Russia (as an international actor), then we see a new containment period, something that was originally designed at the very beginning of the Old Cold War by G.F. Kennan and President Truman.<sup>19</sup> Would it be possible that containment of Russia was re-woken, or perhaps it was never called off?

## Signs of Historical Dis-Continuity

On the other hand, we might see signs of strong historical discontinuity and novelty.

The first historical discontinuity is linked to the involvement of NATO in the Ukrainian war. NATO and its former rival, the Warsaw Pact Treaty, had been of course in constant confrontation during the Old Cold War. Earlier, member states of the European Communities had not ever undergone a direct military confrontation with the Soviet Union. However, the direct military intervention of some NATO members including many EU member states in the Russo-Ukrainian war on the side of Ukraine in the form of arms supplies or other logistical and intelligence assistance is a new phenomenon. To justify the situation, in the shade of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the NATO adopted a new strategic concept in the summer of 2022, in which the Russian Federation is described as the most important and most immediate threat to NATO and also to the peace of the North Atlantic region, as well as the main threat to its stability; thus the document makes Russia a clear and unambiguous opponent.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See the reference in *The New York Times*, April 19, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> In the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, Point 6 states: “The Euro-Atlantic area is not at peace.”

The second significant historical discontinuity is the entry of Finland and Sweden into the NATO alliance. It is a completely new step that specifically contradicts one specific feature of the Old Cold War, the exemplary concept of “Finlandization”. Finlandization used to express that Finland (which was part of the Russian Empire for a long time and then waged war with the Soviet Union) was able to maintain its state independence after 1945, but during the Old Cold War it had to tacitly adapt its foreign policy to the current Soviet and subsequently Russian foreign policy. Every participant of the international relations was well aware of the Finlandization and accepted it. However, during the current Russo-Ukrainian war “definlandization” appeared as a new term, which on one hand obviously refers to the Old Cold War, but on the other hand means the exact opposite of Finland’s foreign policy after the World War Two.

## Growing insecurity once again?

If we live in a dangerous times of a New Cold War then does it mean growing insecurity (once again)? What does the New Cold War mean from the perspective of “global structure of power”, what kind of new world order are we speaking about?

“No country is the backyard of any other” (Scholz 2023: 8), has the German Chancellor written recently. Even if we put aside some differences that arise from the sheer size of states, who is surprised that natural differences may mean (and usually mean) rather different advocacy capacity of international actors? Olaf Scholz tends to forget that in terms of real-politics, weaker states and stronger states, i.e. power groupings have always existed – long before the Old Cold War. Creating, maintaining, and expanding spheres of influence by mighty states (great powers, superpowers, whatever we call them) is a long-known political, military, and strategic goal in international relations. At this point we can recall, for example, the Second World War, when the anti-fascist allies (the to-be victorious powers) were able to cooperate during the World War (i.e. shortly before they started a Cold War), not least in order to establish and maintain their great power influence; this phenomenon was named by Ferenc Fischer as “pragmatic antagonistic cooperation”. (Fischer 2005: 56-57)

The Old Cold War was more often a sensible equilibrium rather than rattling sabres. Now we know that this fragile but sensible (diplomatic-military) equilibrium had greatly contributed to the 40-year-long peace in Europe. Now we know that the equilibrium of fear of the Old Cold War made sure that no war took place on

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The Russian Federation has violated the norms and principles that contributed to a stable and predictable European security order. We cannot discount the possibility of an attack against Allies’ sovereignty and territorial integrity. Strategic competition, pervasive instability and recurrent shocks define our broader security environment. The threats we face are global and interconnected; Point 8: The Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. It seeks to establish spheres of influence and direct control through coercion, subversion, aggression and annexation.”

the European continent. Russia under Vladimir Putin insists to maintain the equilibrium, despite it has lost its superpower ability. In Munich, Vladimir Putin consistently spoke of “two superpowers” back in 2007, actually about “two powers that ensured global security”, and insisted that “We are indebted to the balance of powers between these two superpowers. There was an equilibrium and fear of mutual destruction.”<sup>21</sup>

So the question is if today the equilibrium has tipped over, and if it has then does this mean and cause less security in the world? Writing on the current state of international relations, Olaf Scholz outlined a rather dark Cold-War perspective: “The World is doomed to once again [!] separate into competing blocs.” (Scholz 2023) The German politician was echoing an often voiced concern of experts, regarding the world order we are living in, to “avoiding the return of the policy of sphere of influence” in international relations. Why “once again”, Mr. Scholz? Has not politics always divided international actors along division lines of interest, selfishness, greed, or hatred? In terms of real politics and real power, international relations have always been divided into some kind of blocs, groupings, etc., dividing states who follow their national interests. In the realm of real power, “brute force dictates the rules”, as the German Chancellor himself writes. (Scholz 2023) Of course, majority of international actors does not seek return to the custom of forceful annexations, a common step, for instance, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, “zones of influence” have always existed in human history, since Persians, Romans, Spartans, Napoleon, Bismarck, Entente Cordiale, etc. As we have seen, the NATO itself does not refrain from force; of course, refraining would be a surprise from a military alliance which in fact, has never ever stopped to maintain its military readiness, dominance, and superiority. If neither “competing blocks”, nor “zones of influence” are welcome today then how should we call the unanimous commitment of Finland and Sweden if not as a determined engagement on the side of a particular power grouping?

The German Chancellor, in the very same context, completely misinterprets the phenomenon of “competing blocs”, when he outlines a quite special meaning of “spheres of influence”. Olaf Scholz sees the new Cold War as turning away from openness and turning toward isolation. He uses the opposition of “blocs” versus “open society”, and stresses the opposition between “open world” and “isolation, closeness, and imperialism”, what more, between “open world” and “imperialistic and autocratic kleptocracy”. (Scholz 2023) This is misleading since “competing blocs” on the international stage have to do with might, power, advocacy capacity, etc. rather than with “openness”. Might, power, and advocacy capacity are the reasons why almost all EU countries (including non-EU-member Switzerland) had started to expand their military capabilities (not only direct spending on army but on training, human resources and military industry, etc.) well before the Russo-Ukrainian war.

What is in the background of European countries beefing up their military presence? On January 23 of 2023 the French President Emmanuel Macron declared

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<sup>21</sup> Vladimir Putin's speech and his reactions at the following discussion at the Conference on Security Policy in Munich on 10 February 2007.

that “the Post-Cold War is over, so France starts to [...] increase its military spending in order to preserve its liberty, safety, and prosperity.”<sup>22</sup> Being worried by the prospect of “competing blocs”, the German Chancellor himself is aware that since the “international peace architecture” (Scholz 2023) is creaking and groaning, more effective means in order to “uphold a global order that binds power to rules” (Scholz 2023) are needed. In Autumn of 2022, the German government had proposed a “new German policy on arms exports” (Scholz 2023) meaning its firm intention to spend 100 billion dollars on the Bundeswehr in the coming years. (Scholz 2023: 4)<sup>23</sup> And what is the rationale behind this huge German military preparation? Mr. Scholz argues that the German government is reacting upon the “new mindset in German society” when adjusting itself to a “new strategic culture”. (Scholz 2023: 4) He further argues that the potential need of a brute force is needed to reinforce the “international order based on the principles” in general and the “rules-based international order as enshrined in the [*Organization of*] United Nations Charter” (Scholz 2023) in particular. Only the German Chancellor knows why he uses well-sounding euphemisms (“new mindset in German society, new strategic culture”) when initiating such a huge German military spending not seen in three generations. By means of this, today’s German policy has embarked on a large-scale military development which, considering the possibility that in the future the potential of one envisaged new and much larger international role of Germany may be created, in a certain sense of the word is a return to the past.

## More questions

Differing advocacy capacity of international actors certainly may result in conflicts. But it does not necessary mean automatically growing international insecurity. The current situation is indeed complex. If the slogan “No country is the backyard of any other” is true, and all states are exactly as legitimate international actors as the USA or any other state, then how should Russian (Chinese, Ukrainian, etc.) interests be taken into consideration? Russia wants to control Ukraine, a country that has declared many times in many forms that it does not want to belong to the “sphere of influence” of Russia. Is the plan of a “neutral Ukraine” realistic? And what about Russia’s security concerns? Vladimir Putin said openly that the NATO expansion from Russian point of view “represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust”<sup>24</sup>. Do geostrategic and national security concerns of Russia count or not count on the international stage, when considering the declaration of the NATO in 2008 that it would enhance its enlargement toward Georgia and Ukraine?<sup>25</sup>

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22 In *Mandiner online* 2023.01.23.

23 It is not clear if this military spending includes the German share of the costs of the other proposal by Chancellor Scholz, the European Sky Shield Initiative, see Scholz 2023: 8.

24 Vladimir Putin’s speech and his reactions at the following discussion at the Conference on Security Policy in Munich on 10 February 2007.

25 Jeffrey David Sachs in *Mandiner online* 2022.12.13. From the NATO Bucharest Summit

Further on, to what extent do Russian interests count in case of Crimea which has been the home of the Russian Black Sea Fleet since 1783, even if on lease from Ukraine in the recent times?<sup>26</sup> Anybody remembers the Monroe Doctrine and anybody remembers the Cuba crisis back in 1962 as a vital strategic interest of the US? If Ukraine is part of Russia's core national-security interests<sup>27</sup> and "the aim of the US and its European allies is to peel Ukraine away from the Soviet [*Russian*] orbit and incorporate it into the West"<sup>28</sup>, then some kind of conflict is inevitable.

International actors like to declare the noble idea of "non-interference" in internal affairs of other countries. However, the big actors also like to talk about the need for "a reliable world order", be it "a global structure" or "global governance system"<sup>29</sup>. We perhaps agree that there always must be a global word order; or at least some kind of world order. Human structures have to be kept together by some kind of agreement or power or force. The Old Cold War was, throughout most of its times, a rule-based international order, during which both superpowers implemented their respective might (mostly within their own internationally accepted sphere of influence, sometimes outside of it) using combined tools commencing from peaceful diplomacy through aggressive pressure ending up in open wars.

Global security system has to be built up and kept in a good shape. No surprise that Vladimir Putin in 2007 in Munich spoke about a "global security *architecture*"<sup>30</sup>, i.e. about something that should be carefully designed. Yes, the Old Cold War was a series of dangerous times. But today we do know that building of world structure – where allied/vassal/subdued/etc. states were the bricks, and mutual fear was the binder cement – greatly contributed to maintaining a long peace. The mutual agreement of rival superpowers contributed to maintaining the world order. Even if they were lethal rivals (no doubt they were), their cooperative superpower might have contributed to keep up a status quo that fit for both of them. One thing we have learnt from history is that even during the Old Cold War it was not the sheer force that prevailed. Yes, the brute force was indeed present, among others in a form of 7/24 ready-to-use bestial nuclear arsenal. But international relations in general and crisis management in particular were throughout the whole Old Cold War handled firmly, in the first round in a manner of "pragmatic antagonistic cooperation", and not in hostile military terms.

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Declaration on 03.04.2008: "Point 23. NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO. Both nations have made valuable contributions to Alliance operations. [...]"([https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_8443.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm))(2022.12.26.)

26 Jeffrey David Sachs in *Mandiner online* 2022.12.13.

27 As it was stated in a lecture by John Mearsheimer at the University of Chicago on 2015.09.25. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrMiSQAGOS4>)

28 Lecture by John Mearsheimer at the University of Chicago on 2015.09.25.

29 "China support the united Nations-centred global governance system [...] Reform of the global governance system." Xi Jinping at the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, on 2022.10.16., quoted in *The China Daily* 2022.11.18-24.

30 Vladimir Putin's speech and his reactions at the following discussion at the Conference on Security Policy in Munich on 10 February 2007.

These are the main reasons why I think that a New Cold War does not necessarily and not automatically mean a growing international insecurity. By negotiations and by seeking *modus vivendi*, similar stability can be obtained and maintained as it was characteristic for the Old Cold War. If states seek *modus vivendi*, then big as well as small states can benefit from mutually acceptable compromises.

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