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REIMAGINING INTERNATIONAL ORDER: WHAT HISTORY LEAVES UNFINISHED

Editorial Foreword

The contemporary international order is undergoing a profound reimagination. The distribution of power is becoming increasingly diffuse, established hierarchies are being contested, and the institutional foundations of global governance are facing mounting pressures. The relative redistribution of economic, technological, military, and political capabilities, coupled with intensifying geopolitical competition and growing uncertainty about the future of multilateralism, raises fundamental questions about the nature of international leadership and the conditions under which international order can be sustained. Beyond the familiar narratives of hegemonic decline or great-power rivalry, an emerging challenge is to understand how power is exercised, translated into influence, and institutionalized in a complex and interconnected international system.

International order has never been simply a reflection of the distribution of material capabilities among states. It is equally shaped by uncertainty, institutional practices, competing interpretations of political reality, and the complex entanglements through which actors exercise power and influence. As contemporary international relations increasingly transcend established geopolitical boundaries and conventional distinctions between domestic and international, security and development, and material and ideational power, the capacity to anticipate, manage, and respond to uncertainty has become a defining challenge of global governance. The difficulty is not merely that the international system is becoming more unpredictable, but that the instruments, institutions, and political assumptions through which states seek to make it governable are themselves transforming the environment in which they operate. Consequently, understanding the emerging international order requires moving beyond linear accounts of hegemonic rise and decline towards a more relational perspective that considers the interaction of power, institutional authority, strategic agency, and systemic uncertainty. It also requires asking who possesses the authority to define risks, shape the terms of international cooperation, and determine the distribution of responsibility and vulnerability in the international order. It is against this intellectual and geopolitical background that the present issue of the YSU Journal of International Affairs explores the new architecture of global governance beyond hegemony.

This issue of the YSU Journal of International Affairs explores these transformations through a multidisciplinary examination of power, strategic autonomy, institutional adaptation, and international agency. Its contributions move beyond conventional understandings of international order as an arrangement primarily

sustained by a dominant power. Instead, they investigate how states and international institutions seek to preserve, redefine, and expand their strategic agency through new forms of influence, cooperation, and governance.

Raoul Delcorde opens the issue with a direct question: "In a World in Upheaval, Can Europe Emerge as a Global Leader?" His assessment is exacting about the continued reliance on American security guarantees, the movement of US strategic attention toward China, and the limits of European military and political cohesion. Delcorde is especially attentive to the cost of a security promise that governments lack the means to fulfil. Greater European responsibility requires decisions that governments have deferred, among them the willingness to develop capabilities and accept the obligations attached to their use. He places this task within the transatlantic relationship. That is one of the article's strengths: it recognizes an inherited alliance as both the condition that made European integration possible and an arrangement whose terms now require revision. Rather than interpreting strategic autonomy as emancipation from the transatlantic relationship, the article approaches it as the capacity of European states to exercise greater strategic agency, assume responsibility for their security, and diversify their partnerships while maintaining transatlantic cooperation. The discussion highlights a central tension in contemporary international relations: the distinction between possessing substantial aggregate resources and developing the political cohesion, institutional mechanisms, and operational capabilities necessary to exercise autonomous influence.

The companion problem, studied by Marcin Składanowski, is that Europe has more resources than it can readily turn into common action. His "resource-conversion deficit" locates the difficulty in political coordination, industrial fragmentation, and operational readiness. Aggregate expenditure can conceal severe deficiencies when procurement and command remain organized separately. Składanowski also examines Europe's commitments to political values. These can make some partnerships harder to pursue, but a consistent record of honouring them can strengthen the credibility of European security provision. The argument is deliberately conditional: values acquire strategic weight through institutions capable of making commitments credible. Reading the two contributions together, one sees how much of the present debate concerns obligations that Europe's earlier political success enabled it to postpone.

The same lag between ambition and action can be observed elsewhere, though its causes differ. In "Japan's Engagement with the South Caucasus," Tadashi Iwami and Rouben Azizian reconstruct Tokyo's changing relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia since the Soviet collapse. The South Caucasus first entered Tokyo's policies through assistance to newly independent states, then through resource diplomacy, the language of political values, and, more recently, economic security and Eurasian connectivity. Yet the authors' comparison of Japanese official development assistance tells a less dramatic story than the succession of diplomatic initiatives. Policy remains predominantly bilateral. The different patterns of engagement with the three republics reflect institutions designed for particular projects and country relationships. A government can redraw its strategic map fast-

er than it can reorganize the instruments with which it acts upon that map. The South Caucasian states must assess what such initiatives offer them. To become important in somebody else's geopolitical imagination does not guarantee that one's own priorities will shape the resulting policy. Connectivity corridors are often described as though geographical position alone conferred political opportunity. In practice, the benefits depend upon decisions about finance, infrastructure, and the states permitted to influence them. Iwami and Azizian give these familiar geopolitical claims the test of an empirical record.

The transformation of American leadership constitutes another important dimension of the changing international order. Roman Melikyan approaches American foreign policy without announcing either the demise or the restoration of US hegemony. His account of "transformed hegemony" considers support for Ukraine, NATO responsibilities, and competition with China in technology and investment. Washington retains extensive capabilities; making them effective increasingly involves alliances, regulation, and economic coordination. The instruments of leadership change even where power remains substantial. Their effectiveness remains open to political contest. An alliance amplifies US capacity because other governments participate in it, and that participation always has political conditions. Europe seeks greater room to act; Washington seeks greater allied contributions. The negotiations are occurring inside an institutional order that both sides helped perpetuate.

The promise of an alternative financial order has its own practical test. Anastasia Eganova examines the BRICS New Development Bank through its work in climate finance. It was established to enlarge financing opportunities for emerging and developing economies. What will establish its place in the international system is the character of the lending it can actually provide: access to capital, local-currency instruments, institutional responsiveness, and the distribution of financial risk. A new institution may improve the choices available to borrowers without displacing the institutions that preceded it. Eganova's subject also resists the easy drama of geopolitical succession. Governments facing costly adaptation and infrastructure requirements cannot afford to wait for historians to agree that an old order has ended. They need financing whose conditions they can sustain. Climate damage and the costs of adaptation are distributed differently from the historical benefits of industrial development. Institutions that claim to make development finance more equitable must be judged by what their arrangements permit borrowers to do. A declaration of institutional independence gives no answer to the question of whether a vulnerable country can finance a necessary project without surrendering unreasonable discretion over its future budget. The architecture of global governance is experienced through such particulars.

In "The Concept of Sharp Power in the South Caucasus: Beyond the Autocracy–Democracy Divide," Ara Poghosyan and Norayr Dunamalyan question the habit of identifying manipulative informational practices chiefly by whether their author is democratic or authoritarian. Their distinction between defensive and offensive sharp power directs the reader toward conduct: the methods employed, the

vulnerabilities exploited, and the purposes served. Democratic institutions may have legitimate reasons to defend their information environments. That legitimacy does not exempt defensive measures from scrutiny. A government can claim to protect political independence while restricting the conditions in which its citizens exercise independent judgment. The political standing of a system settles little about the methods used to defend it.

An earlier chapter of international history supplies a useful corrective to any account that begins and ends in Europe. In "Gabon and Franco-British Diplomacy During the Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970," Oluchukwu Ignatus Onianwa examines the diplomatic choices of a recently independent African state. Gabon's recognition of Biafra in 1968 gave it a channel to the secessionist leadership that British and French diplomats sought to use for different purposes. The country was pursuing interests of its own, but it operated among powers that possessed far greater resources and influence over the conflict. Recognition created diplomatic possibilities; it could not secure Biafra's survival. Decolonization had been a profound transformation of international society. It had not resolved the questions of borders, political community, and self-determination that emerged within newly independent states. Onianwa's archival inquiry restores the contingent decisions obscured by the comfortable shorthand of a completed postcolonial transition.

Bagrat Vardanyan's review of Peter J. Katzenstein's *Entanglements in World Politics: The Power of Uncertainty* closes the issue with a challenge to the habits of explanation themselves. Katzenstein distinguishes calculable risk from uncertainty in which even the possibilities may be unknown. In finance, the models through which risk is measured can shape the markets they purport to describe; in international crises, political judgment occurs amid mechanisms and perceptions no leader can command fully. Vardanyan's engagement with the book raises a demanding question for scholarship that labels historical periods and then attributes causal force to the labels. The task is to establish what institutions and actors actually did, including how their expectations altered the circumstances they were trying to understand.

An important implication emerging from this collection is that the international order beyond hegemony should not necessarily be understood as an order without leadership or hierarchy. Rather, it may be characterized by more complex configurations of authority, influence, and responsibility, in which traditional and emerging powers, regional actors, and international institutions interact through overlapping and sometimes competing frameworks. The central analytical challenge is therefore not simply to determine which state will succeed an established hegemon, but to understand how international order is negotiated, reproduced, and transformed through multiple centers of power and institutional agency.

For the South Caucasus, these transformations are of particular significance. Situated at the intersection of Eurasian geopolitical spaces, the region provides an important setting in which the changing dynamics of international order become especially visible. The engagement of the United States, the European Union, Japan, and other international actors, alongside the region's own political and strate-

gic trajectories, illustrates how global transformations intersect with regional agency, institutional vulnerability, and competing visions of connectivity and security. The South Caucasus is thus not merely an arena in which external powers pursue their interests; it is also a region whose states and institutions participate, with varying degrees of capacity, in shaping the emerging international environment.

Taken together, these contributions illuminate several dimensions of an international order in transition. They demonstrate that power can no longer be understood exclusively in terms of material capabilities or the position of dominant states. Its exercise increasingly depends on the capacity to mobilize networks, shape information environments, coordinate institutions, establish alternative financial mechanisms, and translate strategic ambitions into effective political action. At the same time, the studies reveal that the redistribution of power does not automatically produce a more balanced or stable international system. New forms of agency coexist with persistent asymmetries, institutional fragmentation, competing geopolitical visions, and continuing dependencies.

Ultimately, reimagining international order requires moving beyond the assumption that global stability depends exclusively on the restoration of a singular hegemonic structure. It calls for renewed attention to the conditions under which diverse forms of power can be translated into legitimate leadership, effective institutional cooperation, and sustainable international governance. The contributions in this issue do not offer a single model or definitive answer to this challenge. Instead, they provide complementary conceptual and empirical perspectives on the changing architecture of international relations and invite further scholarly debate on the possibilities and limitations of global governance beyond hegemony.

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