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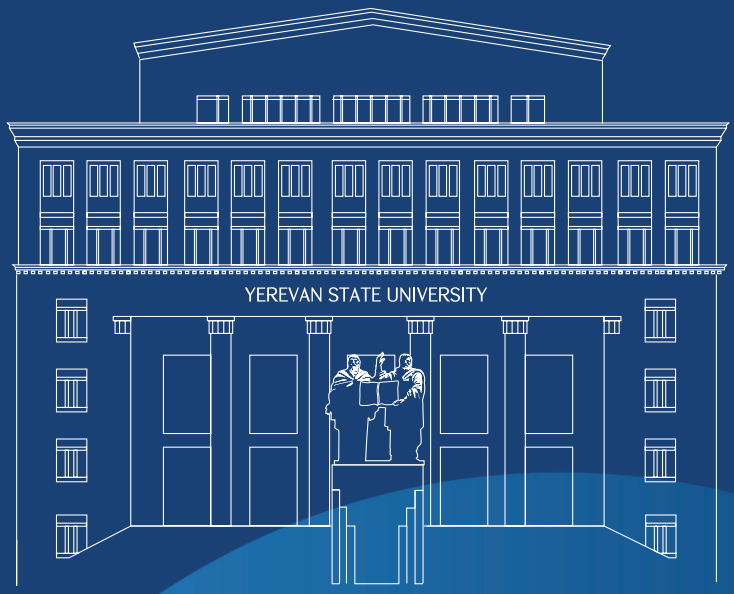

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The *YSU Journal of International Affairs* (YSUJIA) is a peer-reviewed academic journal fostering debate and dialogue on international affairs across humanities and social sciences, including international relations, international history, international law, international political economy, diplomacy, and foreign policies. It aims to link scholars and policymakers while encouraging innovative, interdisciplinary contributions that broaden the scope of current scholarship. While *YSUJIA* publishes high-quality interdisciplinary, quantitative, and qualitative research, it prioritizes providing a platform for work that emphasizes new approaches, as well as AI in IR, theoretical, and policy advancements. The journal is also interested in articles that situate contemporary international affairs debates within a broader historical context. The *YSUJIA* welcomes submissions of unpublished original manuscripts and articles from panels, workshops, and conferences, theoretically informed, empirically rich, and methodologically rigorous articles. The *YSUJIA* is edited at the Faculty of International Relations of Yerevan State University and is published twice a year by the YSU Press.

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CONTENTS

Editorial Foreword

Tigran Yepremyan, Suren Tadevosyan
Reimagining International Order: What History Leaves Unfinished 7

Discussion Article

Raoul Delcorde
In a World in Upheaval, Can Europe Emerge as a Global Leader?.....12

Articles

Marcin Składanowski
Strategic Autonomy of the European Union:
The Resource-Conversion Deficit and a Value-Based Model of Security Provision 21

Tadashi Iwami, Rouben Azizian
Japan's Engagement with the South Caucasus 40

Roman Melikyan
The New Strategic Priorities of the US in a Changing World Order:
The Diplomacy of War and Peace 61

Anastasia Eganova
The Role of the BRICS New Development Bank in Promoting Climate Governance:
A Sustainable Financing Mechanism 82

Ara Poghosyan, Norayr Dunamalyan
The Concept of Sharp Power in the South Caucasus: Beyond the
Autocracy–Democracy Divide 101

Oluchukwu Ignatus Onianwa
Gabon and Franco-British Diplomacy During the Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970 ...123

Book Review

Bagrat Vardanyan
Peter J. Katzenstein, *Entanglements In World Politics: The Power Of Uncertainty*
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2026).....140

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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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IN A WORLD IN UPHEAVAL, CAN EUROPE EMERGE AS A GLOBAL LEADER?

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Abstract

This discussion article examines whether Europe can emerge as a major global power amid profound changes in the international security environment. It argues that the European Union's capacity to assume greater geopolitical responsibility is shaped by four interrelated developments: Europe's longstanding structural dependence on the United States and NATO; Washington's strategic reorientation toward great-power competition, particularly with China; the growing erosion of the liberal international order; and internal political and institutional challenges within the European Union. Against this background, the article explores the increasingly prominent concept of European strategic autonomy. Rather than interpreting autonomy as political or military emancipation from the United States, it presents it as the capacity of European states to act strategically, assume greater responsibility for their security, and exercise greater freedom in defining objectives and choosing partners while preserving the transatlantic relationship. The article discusses both the opportunities and constraints associated with this trajectory, including European military capabilities, defense cooperation, nuclear deterrence, political cohesion, and decision-making mechanisms. It concludes that the European Union possesses significant economic, diplomatic, and emerging military capabilities, but that its transformation into a fully autonomous great power remains constrained by institutional fragmentation, resource limitations, and continued reliance on the United States.

Keywords: *European Union, structural dependence, strategic autonomy, great-power competition, international order.*

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Can the European Union rise to the rank of a major diplomatic and military power? I will try to offer a number of points for consideration, based on a realistic assessment of the Union's current situation and its regional environment.

Europeans' Structural Dependence on the United States and NATO

In recent years, Europe's immediate neighborhood has been marked by growing instability and the resurgence of conflicts. After nearly three decades of relative calm following the end of the Cold War, Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, followed by the military aggression of 2022, has brought issues of collective defense and security back to the forefront of European concerns.[1] The states of Central and Eastern Europe now feel threatened by a revanchist and aggressive Russia, whose military capabilities have been significantly strengthened thanks to the "new look" reforms launched in 2008.

Even before the outbreak of the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the European security environment had already deteriorated significantly. This deterioration stemmed in particular from Russia's large-scale military exercises—conducted on a regular basis—as well as its use of information, cyber, and hybrid operations directed against neighboring states.

The deterioration of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa—that is, along Europe's southern border—has heightened the sense of regional instability. These developments have reignited the debate on European defense and reinforced the idea that Europe must be capable of ensuring its own protection, including militarily.

However, in the post-Cold War period, most European states prioritized normative power and economic power—at the expense of military power—to advance their interests.

This has resulted in a structural dependence of Europeans on the United States and NATO for their territorial defense—an arrangement whose limitations and vulnerabilities were becoming increasingly apparent. This is the first point I wished to make.

A Fundamental Shift in US Security and Defense Priorities

The second observation is the fundamental shift in US security and defense priorities—particularly toward Asia—and the resulting change in the transatlantic relationship. After several decades of cooperation focused first on the Soviet threat and then on the fight against terrorism, Washington's new watchword is "great-power competition," with China as its main rival.

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[1] It is more appropriate to speak of an "invasion" or "aggression" rather than a "Russian-Ukrainian war," since Ukraine is not at war with Russia but is defending itself—with the support of the European Union, Canada, and several other states. See United Nations General Assembly, "Aggression against Ukraine," resolution ES-11/1, March 2, 2022, https://docs.un.org/A/RES/ES-11/1.

In a context marked by intensified strategic competition and the weakening of the rules-based international order, the United States faces a growing number of military challenges. Given the scale of its global commitments, growing domestic economic and political constraints, and the rise of rival powers, it seems unlikely that Washington will be able to maintain, in the long term, the same level of commitment to European stability. The recent announcement of a withdrawal—albeit a limited one—of US troops stationed in Europe illustrates this point.

This development is fueling a growing debate within European foreign ministries over the question of who, how, and to what extent European states can and should now assume greater responsibility for their own security. Concerns have intensified further during the Trump presidency, whose positions have called into question not only the foundations of the transatlantic order but also those of the liberal international order. Washington is now challenging multilateralism—the rules-based order that underpins the European vision. But since the start of Donald Trump's second term, the situation has changed. The US administration has now dispelled any ambiguity and is openly embarking on a profound restructuring of its strategic priorities. The US's acknowledged refocusing on competition between major powers—particularly China—as well as a refocusing on the Western Hemisphere, is reflected in practice by a desire to reduce the US's strategic presence in Europe. This shift creates an urgent need for Europeans to assume greater responsibility for their own security. This development comes against a specific backdrop in which Europe has already been weakened by other shocks: the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, which have led Europe to seek greater autonomy or sovereignty in various areas, notably global health; Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the European support that followed have led Europe to have to assume its power and define how it intends to project it. Whether we refer to European strategic autonomy, European sovereignty or European strategic action—one thing is certain: Europeans cannot afford to sidestep the pressing question of their capacity for action, not only in their immediate neighborhood, but also on a global stage that is coming under increasing pressure due to tensions between the United States and China.

The United States now favors an approach based on state sovereignty and bilateral relations, to the detriment of the multilateral frameworks to which Europe remains committed. The bilateral military agreement recently concluded between Poland and the United States, aimed at maintaining US troops on Polish soil, is a telling example of this. The Trump 2 administration is now embracing a multipolar world and a refocusing on the Western Hemisphere and Asia to contain China, continuing the "pivot" initiated under Obama. In practical terms, this translates into a disengagement from the European continent. Even staunch Atlanticists, such as Friedrich Merz and Donald Tusk, are now calling for a reduction in military dependence on the United States.

Let's also take a look at what is happening in Greenland. This island, which is a Danish dependency, is becoming a new source of tension between Europe and the United States. Donald Trump has revived the idea of buying the territory, citing

security risks posed by Russia or China, and even suggesting that he might take more decisive action if necessary. Denmark and the Greenlandic authorities have categorically condemned these threats and reaffirmed their sovereignty over the territory. And the presence of the US base at Pituffik serves as a reminder of just how strategically important the region is. For the European Union, this episode reveals one thing: sovereignty remains fragile in the face of a partner that can, at times, become unpredictable.

Furthermore, President Trump has introduced an openly transactional approach, under which US commitments depend on allies' financial contributions or "good behavior." This approach calls into question one of NATO's founding principles, set forth in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, according to which the security of one member is a prerequisite for the security of all.[2]

A General Collapse of the Liberal Order

Closely linked to transatlantic dynamics, the liberal international order is undergoing a process of general disintegration, even as most Europeans continue to regard it as of central importance, without the contours of an alternative order clearly emerging.

This challenge is not limited to the United States. It extends to other major international actors, foremost among them Russia and China, which challenge several central components of this order. The circle of states adopting a revisionist stance in this regard is thus expanding. Furthermore, actors with divergent normative views and interests are actively seeking to divide Europeans within the European Union and to influence its internal functioning.

For a long time, Europe has viewed itself as a "civil" power, a "normative" power, or even a "transformational" power. Through its trade policy, its shared resources (the space sector, for example), its policy, that is to say, its aid policy (particularly development aid), its partnership and free trade agreements, its single market and its ability to regulate it, its single currency, and its capacity to transform its close partners through its Neighbourhood Policy (2004), the EU has established itself as a major economic and legal power, defending both its interests and its values—that is to say, a vision of a "rules-based multilateral order." A specifically military dimension has been added to this essentially civilian dimension. Since 2003, the EU has launched 40 operations under its "Common Security and Defence Policy" (CSDP), 20 of which are ongoing in 2026. It has been particularly active in the Balkans, where it has deployed increasing resources as it has taken over from NATO, and in maritime security operations (off the coast of Somalia, off the coast of Libya and in the Red Sea).

The war in Ukraine undoubtedly provides the most striking example of this increased European power, which has been able to impose heavy sanctions on Russia (more than 20 rounds of sanctions) and provide substantial assistance to Kyiv

[2] North Atlantic Treaty, signed April 4, 1949, art. 5, https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/1949/04/04/the-north-atlantic-treaty.

(200 billion euros in economic and military support, including aid from member states). Without being a belligerent in the strict sense of the term, the EU has been able to redress the balance of power between Ukraine and Russia, and defend Ukraine's sovereign choice to align itself with Europe. However, the supply of lethal weapons through the European Peace Facility (EPF) mechanism has demonstrated just how determined Europeans are to contribute as much as possible to a Ukrainian victory. The significance of this Copernican revolution cannot be overstated: for the first time in the EU's history, the Union has supplied lethal weapons, and to a country that is not (yet) a member of either the EU or NATO.[3] Since the implementation of the EPF, a proposal to proceed with joint purchases of ammunition and missiles for Ukraine has been put forward, and another proposal to jointly produce this ammunition within the EU was adopted in May 2023. In November 2025, the European Parliament adopted the very first European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP), effectively enshrining the principle of "European preference." With a budget of €1.5 billion, it aims to encourage the launch of joint armaments projects and to limit the cost of components manufactured outside the EU, and will also enable the launch of a €300 million support instrument for Ukraine.[4] However, these measures are not enough to provide Ukraine with all the weapons it needs to secure a decisive victory, and Europe has committed to doing more.

Internal Challenges to the European Union

In several European countries, the rise of Euroskeptic and nationalist governments now threatens to profoundly undermine the continent's political cohesion and solidarity, thereby contributing to the fragmentation of the European Union. Combined with external crises, these internal dynamics are placing considerable pressure on the Union's normative, political, and institutional structures.

The most obvious manifestation of this fragility was the 2016 British referendum on Brexit, which, incidentally, took place shortly before the launch of the European Union's Global Security Strategy.[5] Brexit disproved the long-held conviction among institutions and member states that European integration was following an irreversible path toward ever-closer and more extensive integration. What had seemed unthinkable then came to pass: the process of European integration proved to be reversible.

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[3] Council of the European Union, Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/338 of 28 February 2022 on an Assistance Measure under the European Peace Facility for the Supply to the Ukrainian Armed Forces of Military Equipment, and Platforms, Designed to Deliver Lethal Force, art. 1, *Official Journal of the European Union* L 60 (February 28, 2022): 1–4, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2022/338/oj/eng.

[4] Council of the European Union, "European Defence Industry Programme: Council Gives Final Approval," December 8, 2025, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2025/12/08/european-defence-industry-programme-council-gives-final-approval/.

[5] European Union, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy* (June 2016), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf.

Brexit also placed France in a pivotal position with regard to European security. Together with Germany, France deemed it essential to demonstrate that the European project remained alive. For France, this translated into a commitment to pursue an ambitious Common Security and Defence Policy program capable of evolving toward enhanced cooperation. This debate has expanded to include sensitive issues, notably that of nuclear deterrence. Indeed, some believe that, should France so decide, nuclear weapons could contribute to the protection of all European Union member states.

In a security context marked both by Russia's resurgence as a major power and by terrorist threats at Europe's southern borders, the development of a European security and defense policy appears to be a natural choice. It is within this framework that a central concept now takes center stage: that of strategic autonomy.

Strategic Autonomy

To clarify the debate, I will present—in a deliberately educational manner—several arguments in favor of strategic autonomy, as well as certain points that could fuel opposition to it. This overview should then facilitate a discussion, since it is precisely around this concept that the strengthening of Europe's military and security capabilities is currently taking shape.

For the majority of policymakers and analysts, the rationale for strategic autonomy lies above all in strengthening Europe's capacity for action. It constitutes a conceptual and operational framework describing the means Europeans would need to act in a truly strategic manner. Specifically, the aim is to equip the European Union's foreign policy with more robust tools when European and American interests do not align. This issue arises particularly in connection with military operations in which the United States does not wish to participate, especially on the African continent.

Moreover, the European Union would not be the sole beneficiary of such a development. Advocates of strategic autonomy emphasize that NATO and, more broadly, the transatlantic relationship could benefit from an overall strengthening of European capabilities. This is commonly referred to as the "European dimension of NATO," a topic currently the subject of intense debate in Brussels. From this perspective, member states would maintain a single set of forces that could be made available to either the European Union or NATO. Strategic autonomy would thus address a long-standing demand from the United States for more equitable burden-sharing within the Alliance.

For the vast majority of its proponents, strategic autonomy should be understood as an essentially practical proposal. It implies neither radical emancipation, nor self-sufficiency, nor a rejection of existing alliances. Rather, it aims to guarantee the freedom to choose partners according to one's own rules. The objective is therefore not to pursue a security policy in political or military isolation, but to have the capacity to decide on the objectives pursued and to control the outcomes. Europeans have developed their capacity to tackle the economic and security chal-

lenges posed by the interdependence from which they have drawn their strength. They must now defend the transatlantic alliance and their ambition to turn it into a partnership of equals. Preparing for Europe's future begins now and involves the Herculean task of answering the following question: what does Europe need to make Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union applicable? Article 42(7) is the EU's solidarity clause in the face of external threats. It stipulates that "if a Member State is the victim of an armed attack on its territory, the other Member States shall have an obligation to aid and assist it by all means at their disposal." The wording of this article makes it even more binding than Article 5 of the NATO Treaty.[6] However, it does not specify how member states are to go about this, whether through EU institutions or intergovernmental cooperation. Furthermore, Europe has made enormous progress in providing military aid to Ukraine and has now surpassed the United States in terms of commitment: 50 per cent of military aid to Ukraine now comes from European countries.

From this perspective, strategic autonomy goes beyond a strictly defensive or reactive conception of security. It is not merely a matter of preserving the way the European Union operates, but of incorporating a dimension of proactive shaping: the ability to establish, modify, and enforce international rules, rather than merely following standards defined by other actors.

This vision of strategic autonomy naturally draws criticism and reservations. Unsurprisingly, many of these objections come from the United States, where warnings are being raised that an excessive emphasis on this autonomy could unnecessarily marginalize the American role, weaken NATO, and exacerbate transatlantic tensions. From this perspective, the European Union would be acting irresponsibly by stepping outside its institutional "comfort zone," as this would undermine the balance of the historic partnership between the two sides of the Atlantic.

Such a course of action could, moreover, accentuate the United States' gradual distancing from European security, providing ammunition to those in Washington who advocate for greater disengagement from the continent. These critics could then portray the European Union as seeking to free itself from the US role, which would complicate the task of those who support a close transatlantic relationship. As we can see, the debate remains particularly heated.

What European states perceive as a fair contribution to the transatlantic burden-sharing and as an expression of increased responsibility could, paradoxically, be interpreted by Washington as a sign of disengagement. Such a misunderstanding could accelerate the US withdrawal from European defense at a faster pace than Europeans would be able to develop their own political, military, and industrial capabilities.

In conclusion, European states that remain skeptical of the concept of strategic autonomy—Poland in particular—should view it for what it actually is, rather than

[6] Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union, art. 42(7), *Official Journal of the European Union* C 202 (June 7, 2016): 13–46, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/treaty/teu_2016/oj/eng; North Atlantic Treaty, art. 5.

for what they fear it might become. It is in their best interest to participate actively in order to shape its definition and implementation, rather than standing on the sidelines and then criticizing its limitations.

Even among its most ardent defenders, the strategic autonomy initiative is in no way intended to weaken the transatlantic relationship. Rather, it is an effort to strengthen Europe's capacity to act responsibly and credibly in the realm of security and defense. Admittedly, the European Union cannot claim to speak on behalf of the entire continent, and the complexity of its institutional architecture makes it difficult for clear leadership on security matters to emerge. Nevertheless, it remains the most natural and legitimate framework for advancing the project of European strategic autonomy.

The potential exists for the EU to play a full role in the sphere of military power, and crisis management structures are in place in Brussels; however, this potential is limited by the need for unanimous agreement, leadership from the major member states, and the mobilization of the necessary resources—with the associated risks—by the governments concerned.

The nuclear issue is key here because, apart from France and the United Kingdom, European countries rely on the US nuclear umbrella through NATO. In March 2026, France proposed implementing an "advanced deterrent" by combining its nuclear capabilities (which will remain under its sovereignty) with those of the United Kingdom and the conventional capabilities of other states, and seven non-nuclear European countries (including Germany, Poland and Belgium) have declared themselves ready to join such a scheme.[7] This may be the starting point for an autonomous European defense capability that would complement the protection provided by the North Atlantic Alliance.

The EU could only establish itself as a major power on the world stage if it were able to ensure its own security independently—through its capabilities, organization, resolve, diplomacy and alliances. At present, not all the conditions are in place for the EU to transform itself into a Westphalian great power, speaking on an equal footing with the world's other great powers. Rising to the challenge of European power means accepting the constraints that come with it.

As journalist Fareed Zakaria rightly observed, "Europe is the place where the end of the *Pax Americana* poses the most significant security challenge."[8] This observation underscores the urgency of embracing a genuine ambition to be a major

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[7] Emmanuel Macron, "Speech by the President of the Republic on France's Nuclear Deterrence," Île Longue, March 2, 2026, Élysée, https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2026/03/02/visit-to-the-ile-longue-operational-base.

[8] Fareed Zakaria, "We Are Witnessing the End of the 'Pax Americana.' Russia, Which Has the World's Largest Nuclear Arsenal, Is Challenging America Head-On," interview by Marc-Olivier Bherer, *Le Monde*, May 2, 2022, in French: [Fareed Zakaria, "*Nous assistons à la fin de la 'pax americana'. La Russie, qui dispose du plus grand arsenal nucléaire au monde, défie l'Amérique de manière frontale*," propos recueillis par Marc-Olivier Bherer, *Le Monde*, 2 mai 2022], https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2022/05/02/guerre-en-ukraine-nous-avons-quitte-l-ancien-monde-dans-lequel-l-economie-a-pendant-trente-ans-domine-le-politique_6124404_3232.html. Translated from French.

power, grounded in an autonomous, credible, and coherent defense. This, in essence, is the core challenge of European strategic autonomy: it is more imperative today than ever before.

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STRATEGIC AUTONOMY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: THE RESOURCE-CONVERSION DEFICIT AND A VALUE-BASED MODEL OF SECURITY PROVISION

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Abstract

This article analyzes the conditions under which the European Union can convert its considerable demographic, economic, technological, institutional and military potential into the capacity to provide security autonomously. The point of departure is the shifting transatlantic division of responsibilities, driven by the growing salience of the Indo-Pacific in US strategy, the return of high-intensity warfare to Europe and mounting pressure on European defense readiness. Drawing on a qualitative analysis of EU strategic documents and selected official external sources, the article introduces the category of a resource-conversion deficit. The concept explains the disparity between Europe's aggregate resources and its ability to align them politically, coordinate them institutionally and employ them operationally. The second element of the contribution involves treating values as a conditional strategic resource. They constrain the EU's short-term flexibility but, when supported by adequate material capabilities and consistent practice, they enhance the predictability, legitimacy and durability of the security provided. Strategic autonomy is presented as the development of European agency within the transatlantic system.

Keywords: *strategic autonomy, European Union, security provider, resource-conversion deficit, values, NATO.*

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Introduction

The contemporary debate on the European Union's strategic autonomy stems from the disproportion between the scale of European resources and the capacity to harness them for shaping the security environment. The EU brings together 27 Member States, approximately 450 million inhabitants, a vast internal market, an advanced technological and industrial base, and a broad array of financial, regulatory and diplomatic instruments. Yet its collective capacity to act in the security domain remains markedly weaker than this potential would suggest. The *Strategic Compass* links the growth of European responsibility to the development of the EU as a stronger and more capable security provider, while the 2025 *White Paper* points to years of under-investment in readiness, the fragmentation of capabilities and the need to rebuild the European defense-industrial base.[1] The historical roots of this asymmetry lie in the post-war transatlantic order. The guarantees, military presence and leadership of the United States within NATO created the conditions for the reconstruction and integration of Western Europe, while simultaneously securing for the United States a lasting strategic position on the continent. The system served the fundamental interests of both sides and for decades reduced the need to develop an autonomous European defense capability. After the Cold War, cuts in expenditure, armed forces, stockpiles and production capacity entrenched this dependence to a degree that largely resulted from the choices of the European states themselves.[2] The contemporary shift of US attention towards the Indo-Pacific and Russia's war against Ukraine are changing the functionality of the existing division of roles. European security now demands a greater capacity to act under a variable level of US engagement.[3]

This article asks under what conditions the EU can convert its resources into the capability to provide security autonomously while remaining anchored in the

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[1] Council of the European Union, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence – For a European Union That Protects Its Citizens, Values and Interests and Contributes to International Peace and Security*, doc. 7371/22 (Brussels, March 21, 2022), 2, 6, 13, https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7371-2022-INIT/en/pdf; European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Joint White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030*, JOIN(2025) 120 final (Brussels, March 19, 2025), 1–3, https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6d5db69-e0ab-4bec-9dc0-3867b4373019_en.

[2] Geir Lundestad, "Empire by Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945–1952," *Journal of Peace Research* 23, no. 3 (1986): 263–71, https://doi.org/10.1177/002234338602300305; Bjørn Olav Knutsen, "A Weakening Transatlantic Relationship? Redefining the EU–US Security and Defence Cooperation," *Politics and Governance* 10, no. 2 (2022): 165–70, https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v10i2.5024; Linde Desmaele, "America's 'China-First' Grand Strategy and the Transatlantic Bargain: Revisiting the Security–Economics Nexus," *International Politics* (published online May 27, 2024): 1–6, 14–18, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-024-00577-6.

[3] United States, *2026 National Defense Strategy* (Washington, DC, 2026), 4, 11, 18–20, https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF; European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Preserving Peace – Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030*, JOIN(2025) 27 final (Brussels, October 16, 2025), 1–3, https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/56143695-ed00-4a70-a1de-c97e0b05ff07_en.

transatlantic system and in its character as a community of values. The initial hypothesis is that the Union's fundamental weakness lies in the mechanisms that translate aggregated potential into joint decisions and action. This problem is captured by the category of a resource-conversion deficit, developed in the analytical section. Strategic autonomy is a response to the changing division of responsibility within the transatlantic system, and its credibility depends on political cohesion, industrial coordination, access to critical operational capabilities and the willingness of Member States to bear the costs of collective action. Another issue concerns the values that define the EU's constitutional character and the objectives of its external action.[4] Values may narrow the range of instruments and partnerships, especially in an environment of growing transactionalism and the pluralization of cooperation models. They can also increase the predictability, legitimacy and durability of European commitments. The article treats their significance as conditional: normative credibility becomes a security resource only when it rests on material capabilities and consistent practice. The practical significance of this article lies in identifying the political, institutional and operational constraints on the conversion of European resources into collective capabilities. The findings can be used for capability planning, the coordination of investments and the assessment of whether security commitments are supported by material capabilities and consistent practice.

The article sets out the analytical framework, methodology and scope of the study and reviews the literature on strategic autonomy, agency and values. The analytical sections examine the changing transatlantic division of responsibility, the EU's resource-conversion deficit and the role of values in security provision, followed by the discussion and conclusions.

Analytical Framework, Methodology and Scope of the Study

Three concepts are central to the analysis presented in this article: strategic autonomy, the resource-conversion deficit and the value-based security provider.

Strategic autonomy is gradable and relational in character. The EU may enjoy considerable regulatory or economic freedom while remaining deeply dependent in military, technological or intelligence terms. Here, strategic autonomy means the capacity to define security objectives independently, take collective decisions and mobilize the necessary means even when external partners are only partially engaged. It encompasses the ability to take a decision, access to the instruments required to implement it and the capacity to regenerate critical industrial and technological resources. The level of autonomy depends on the extent to which external

[4] *Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union*, *Official Journal of the European Union*, C 202 (June 7, 2016), arts. 2, 3(5), and 21, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX%3A12016M%2FTXT; European Union, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy* (Brussels, June 2016), 8–11, 15, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf.

dependencies affect the feasibility of a European decision.[5] This conceptualization retains NATO as the foundation of collective defense for its European members and locates autonomy in a greater European capacity to act, which can also strengthen Europe's contribution to the Alliance.[6]

The possession of resources does not predetermine strategic capability. The process leading from potential to security outcomes can be represented as a sequence: resources, conversion capacity, strategic agency and security provision. The resource-conversion deficit denotes the disproportion between the scale of resources available to the EU and its Member States, on the one hand, and the ability to reconcile them politically, activate them legally, coordinate them organizationally and apply them operationally, on the other. The notion of conversion directs attention towards mediating mechanisms: convergence of threat perceptions, political will, decision-making procedures, financing, industrial coordination, interoperability and the capacity to sustain an adopted course of action. The concept develops research on European agency by incorporating a problem known from analyses of state power, in which economic and demographic resources influence military capabilities through administration, mobilization and organization.[7]

A security provider is understood as an actor capable of recognizing threats, defining a desired state of security, mobilizing instruments and generating security goods for its own community and for partners. In the EU's case, military means are combined with economic, financial, regulatory, civilian and integration instruments.[8] Security provision thus encompasses deterrence and protection, the strengthening of resilience, the reduction of vulnerability to coercion, institutional stabilization and the creation of conditions that allow partners to preserve sovereignty and strategic freedom of choice. The language of values serves to reconstruct the way in which the EU defines the object of protection, the legitimate purposes of action and the limits of permissible instruments.[9] The category of a value-based security provider describes an actor that combines material capabilities with the institutional anchoring of cooperation and the consistent application of declared principles. It is analytical in character and does not prejudge the consistency of EU

[5] Niklas Helwig and Ville Sinkkonen, "Strategic Autonomy and the EU as a Global Actor: The Evolution, Debate and Theory of a Contested Term," *European Foreign Affairs Review* 27, special issue (2022): 2–6, 14–17, https://doi.org/10.54648/EERR2022009; Niklas Helwig, "The Ambiguity of the EU's Global Role: A Social Explanation of the Term 'Strategic Autonomy'," *European Foreign Affairs Review* 27, special issue (2022): 22–29, 35–37, https://doi.org/10.54648/EERR2022010.

[6] European Union, *Shared Vision, Common Action*, 9–11, 13; Council of the European Union, *A Strategic Compass*, 12–14.

[7] Christopher Hill, "The Capability–Expectations Gap, or Conceptualizing Europe's International Role," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 31, no. 3 (1993): 306–15, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.1993.tb00466.x; Ashley J. Tellis, Janice Bially, Christopher Layne, and Melissa McPherson, *Measuring National Power in the Postindustrial Age* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2000), 4–15, 133–39, https://doi.org/10.7249/MR1110; Johannes Lindvall, Magnus Lundgren, and Jan Teorell, "Projecting Power at Home and Abroad: Domestic State Capacity and Military Capability," *Journal of Peace Research* 63, no. 4 (2026): 507–12, 517–19, https://doi.org/10.1093/jopres/xjaf018.

[8] Council of the European Union, *A Strategic Compass*, 12–14, 17–18, 41–46.

[9] *Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union*, arts. 2, 3(5), and 21; Council of the European Union, *A Strategic Compass*, 2, 6, 12–13.

rhetoric with practice. The perspective of ontological security is used in a supporting role to interpret passages in which new defense tasks are presented as a continuation or redefinition of the EU's existing role. This perspective concerns the continuity of political identity and does not explain the material causes of autonomy or the mechanism of resource conversion.[10]

The study is based on a qualitative analysis of documents, guided by the adopted analytical categories: strategic autonomy, resources and their conversion mechanisms, forms of security provision, the function of values and the external attribution of roles. Documents are treated as sources of strategic self-definition, the assignment of responsibility and the justification of courses of action. The analysis focuses on the meaning of concepts within each document's argumentative context; their frequency is of ancillary importance. The temporal scope covers 2016–2026, with particular emphasis on the period following the adoption of the *Strategic Compass* in 2022. The core of the corpus consists of the Treaty on European Union, the *EU Global Strategy*, the *Strategic Compass*, the *Joint White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030*, *Preserving Peace – Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030*, the 2026 progress report on the implementation of the *Strategic Compass* and data from the European Defence Agency.[11] EU documents are used to reconstruct how the Union defines its own role and responsibility. The external point of reference is provided by selected official US, Russian and Chinese documents.

The article does not present a systematic comparison of Member States' security strategies, full case studies or a quantitative assessment of the EU's operational effectiveness. The example of Ukraine illustrates different forms of security provision and does not constitute a representative sample. Strategic documents indicate objectives, justifications and agreed commitments, and their adoption does not prove full implementation. External role attribution is treated as a relational indicator of agency, the content of which remains dependent on the interests and cognitive categories of the actor in question.

Literature Review: Strategic Autonomy, Agency and Values in the EU Security Policy

The literature on strategic autonomy has developed around disputes over the scope of European self-reliance, its relationship with defense integration and its impact

[10] Jennifer Mitzen, "Anchoring Europe's Civilizing Identity: Habits, Capabilities and Ontological Security," *Journal of European Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (2006): 270–74, 282–83, https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760500451709; Vincent Della Sala, "Narrating Europe: The EU's Ontological Security Dilemma," *European Security* 27, no. 3 (2018): 267–70, 278–82, https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2018.1497978.

[11] European External Action Service, *2026 Annual Progress Report on the Implementation of the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* (Brussels, June 5, 2026), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/2026-annual-progress-report-implementation-strategic-compass-security-and-defence_en; European Defence Agency, *Defence Data 2025–2026* (Brussels: European Defence Agency, 2026), https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-publications/2026-eda_defencedata_webpublic.pdf.

on transatlantic ties. The concept encompasses the capacity to conduct operations without direct US support, the reduction of critical dependencies, the development of a European industrial base and the expansion of political freedom of decision. Its ambiguity reflects the differing preferences of Member States: some associate autonomy with a stronger European pillar within NATO, while others attach greater weight to decisional independence and the capacity to act outside the Alliance's structures.[12] The debate often concentrates on the degree to which Europe could become independent of the United States. This perspective aptly captures the political disagreement but is less effective in explaining the changing function of autonomy as the transatlantic division of responsibility evolves. The literature on the US pivot towards China indicates that a larger European share in continental security is becoming part of a broader reorganization of US priorities. In this view, autonomy means the capacity to assume tasks that remain important for Europe but have declined in relative importance in the US hierarchy of priorities.[13]

Research on EU actorness identifies competences, coherence, decision-making autonomy and recognition by other actors as conditions of international agency. The concept of the capability–expectations gap highlighted the discrepancy between expectations of European foreign policy and the instruments, procedures and political will required to fulfill them. More recent work further shows that recognition of the EU as an actor remains sector-specific and depends on the type of state and policy area.[14] The literature on power complements this body of work by analyzing the processes mediating between wealth, population and technology, on the one hand, and the capacity to project force, on the other. Similar economic resources can produce different military effects depending on state capacity, mobilization, organization and institutional quality. Transferring this problem to the EU level requires considering the multi-level distribution of resources and competences. Armed forces and the bulk of military assets remain under national control, while EU institutions possess particularly developed regulatory, budgetary and coordination competences. Research on the ideational significance of autonomy confirms that its practical effects are stronger in areas where EU institutions have their own instruments.[15]

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[12] Helwig and Sinkkonen, "Strategic Autonomy and the EU as a Global Actor," 2–8, 14–17; Helwig, "The Ambiguity of the EU's Global Role," 22–29, 35–37; Tara Varma, "European Strategic Autonomy: The Path to a Geopolitical Europe," *The Washington Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (2024): 67–72, 79–82, https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2024.2327820.

[13] Desmaele, "America's 'China-First' Grand Strategy," 1–6, 14–18; Knutsen, "A Weakening Transatlantic Relationship?," 165–74.

[14] Hill, "The Capability–Expectations Gap," 306–15; Joseph Jupille and James A. Caporaso, "States, Agency, and Rules: The European Union in Global Environmental Politics," in *The European Union in the World Community*, ed. Carolyn Rhodes (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 213–17, https://doi.org/10.1515/9781685854485-012; Christian Rauh, "International Recognition of European Union 'Actorness': Language-Based Evidence from United Nations General Debate Speeches 1970–2020," *International Interactions* 51, no. 5 (2025): 792–800, https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2025.2530513.

[15] Tellis et al., *Measuring National Power*, 4–15, 133–39; Lindvall, Lundgren, and Teorell, "Projecting Power at Home and Abroad," 507–12, 517–19; Ana E. Juncos and Sophie Vanhoonacker, "The

The concept of Normative Power Europe portrays the EU as an actor capable of shaping standards of legitimate international conduct. The realist critique points to the selectivity of normativity, the importance of Member State interests and the material conditions for effective influence. Research on the EU as a security actor also shows that inconsistency between declared principles and practice can weaken legitimacy and the credibility of engagement.[16] This article does not examine norm diffusion, nor does it adjudicate whether the EU remains a normative power. It uses this debate to analyze a more specific problem: the impact of values on the choice of instruments, the credibility of commitments and the durability of the security provided to partners. The perspective of ontological security complements this analysis to a limited extent, concerning the continuity of the European role during the assumption of greater military responsibility.[17]

Existing research extensively discusses strategic autonomy, institutional constraints on agency and the normative character of the EU, but less often combines them in an analysis of the process leading from aggregate resources to security outcomes. The article contributes the category of a resource-conversion deficit, which explains why an increase in expenditure or potential does not automatically translate into a joint capacity to act. The second element of the contribution is the treatment of values as a conditional resource: they constrain flexibility, but with adequate capabilities and consistent practice they can enhance legitimacy, predictability and the durability of the security provided. External role attribution serves to test whether the EU's self-definition is reflected in the strategies and arrangements made with other actors.

The Changing Transatlantic Division of Responsibility for Security

The contemporary need for strategic autonomy arises from the changing conditions in which the transatlantic division of responsibility has operated. For several decades, US leadership and NATO enabled Europe to develop economic, social and institutional resources without simultaneously creating an autonomous defense capability commensurate with the scale of those resources. Changes in the threat environment and in US priorities mean that this asymmetry is now increasingly constraining European agency.

Sources of European Strategic Dependence: The post-war security dependence of Western Europe on the United States was part of an arrangement that served the fundamental interests of both sides. The European states needed guarantees against the military preponderance of the Soviet Union, while the US presence

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Ideational Power of Strategic Autonomy in EU Security and External Economic Policies," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 62, no. 4 (2024): 955–60, 967–70, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13597.

[16] Ian Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 2 (2002): 239–42, 252–53, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00353; Adrian Hyde-Price, "'Normative' Power Europe: A Realist Critique," *Journal of European Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (2006): 218–24, 229–33, https://doi.org/10.1080/13501760500451634; Erik Skare, "Staying Safe by Being Good? The EU's Normative Decline as a Security Actor in the Middle East," *European Journal of International Security* 8, no. 3 (2023): 337–41, 348–52, https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2022.29.

[17] Mitzen, "Anchoring Europe's Civilizing Identity," 270–74, 282–83; Della Sala, "Narrating Europe," 267–70, 278–82.

stabilized relations among the Western European powers and created the conditions for reconstruction. The United States gained the position of principal organizer of the Western security architecture, with a permanent military presence and influence over the policy of a strategically vital region. The notion of an "empire by invitation" underlines the active role of the West European states in anchoring the United States on the continent.[18] US foreign and security policy supported the development of European capabilities, and successive administrations demanded a greater contribution from allies. The preferred model embedded those capabilities in NATO, nuclear deterrence and command structures that preserved the leading role of the United States. Europe's limited defense self-reliance was a structural consequence of an order premised on US strategic leadership. It is ahistorical to speak today of European "free-riding," even if there are grounds for criticizing post-Cold War neglect.[19]

After the Cold War, European states reduced budgets, force sizes, stockpiles and production capacity, and adapted their military structures to expeditionary operations conducted under conditions of Western technological superiority. The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) developed civilian missions, limited military operations and coordination mechanisms, but the low level of strategic pressure inhibited the construction of a fuller capacity for autonomous action. The contemporary disproportion thus has a dual origin: it arose within the post-war transatlantic order and was entrenched by the post-Cold War choices of the European states.

The Shift in US Strategic Priorities and the Return of High-Intensity Warfare: The shift of US attention towards the Indo-Pacific stems from China's growing importance for US security, the US economy and the country's international position. This tendency characterized successive US administrations, although Donald Trump's policy justified it in more unequivocal and transactional terms. The *2026 National Defense Strategy* establishes the deterrence of China in the Indo-Pacific as its second priority, after the defense of the homeland and the Western Hemisphere, and assigns to European allies the primary responsibility for the conventional defense of the continent, with critical but more limited US support. The document explicitly links a greater contribution from partners to the possibility of concentrating US resources on the defense of its own territory and the Indo-Pacific.[20]

Russia's war against Ukraine has placed Europe in close proximity to a high-intensity conflict. It has confirmed the importance of NATO and US capabilities in reconnaissance, command, strategic transport, air and missile defense, long-range strike systems and nuclear deterrence. At the same time, it has revealed limited stockpiles, industrial fragmentation and the long lead times for increasing produc-

[18] Lundestad, "Empire by Invitation?," 263–71; Desmaele, "America's 'China-First' Grand Strategy," 3–6, 14–18.
[19] Knutsen, "A Weakening Transatlantic Relationship?," 166–74; European Commission and High Representative, *Joint White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030*, 1, 7–8.
[20] United States, *2026 National Defense Strategy*, 4, 11, 18–20; Desmaele, "America's 'China-First' Grand Strategy," 1–4, 16–18.

tion in Europe. Member States and EU institutions mobilized considerable financial, economic and military resources. In many areas, however, the effectiveness of action still depended on US decisions and capabilities. The *Preserving Peace – Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030* links the rebuilding of European capabilities to the enduring Russian threat, the changing global environment and the shift of traditional allies' attention towards other regions. It envisages the development of an independent, interoperable strategic capability enabling responses to threats to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Europe. The same document stresses close cooperation with NATO, the need for planning coherence and the avoidance of unnecessary duplication.[21] Autonomy is thus embedded in a more balanced division of responsibility within the Alliance.

Strategic Autonomy as a New Division of Responsibility and a Source of EU Agency: The *Strategic Compass* links increased autonomy with the protection of European values and interests, greater readiness to act and a positive contribution to transatlantic security. The EU is to develop rapid-response capabilities, strengthen resilience and support partners in the neighborhood and beyond. Autonomy thus encompasses defense, crisis response, economic and technological security, infrastructure protection and countering hybrid threats.[22] The broader repertoire of instruments allows the EU to act in areas where NATO lacks either the mandate or the appropriate set of tools.

The importance of European self-reliance also appears in the official documents of Russia and China. Russia's 2023 *Foreign Policy Concept* presents the European states as subordinated to the United States and makes the possibility of improving relations conditional on their greater independence. The Chinese policy paper on the EU attributes to the Union considerable strength and a strategically important international role, and official statements from 2025 openly support European integration and the EU's pursuit of strategic autonomy. Na Yang interprets this stance as an expression of the expectation that a more independent Europe will favor multipolarity and constrain automatic alignment with US policy.[23] These materials are self-interested role attributions and reflect the strategic preferences of their authors. The change in the European security architecture therefore consists in

[21] European Commission and High Representative, *Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030*, 1–3; European Commission and High Representative, *Joint White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030*, 3, 7–8.

[22] Council of the European Union, *A Strategic Compass*, 12–14, 41–46.

[23] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*, approved March 31, 2023, paras. 59–61, https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *China's Policy Paper on the European Union* (December 2018), pts. I–II, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zy/gb/202405/t20240531_11367378.html; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Xi Jinping Has a Phone Call with President of the European Council António Costa," January 14, 2025, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/zyxw/202501/t20250115_11534500.html; Na Yang, "How China Perceives European Strategic Autonomy: Asymmetric Expectations and Pragmatic Engagement," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 16, no. 4 (2023): 482–90, 498–503, https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/poad014.

a move from an arrangement in which limited self-reliance was for a long time functional for both sides of the Atlantic to one requiring a greater European capacity to generate security. Strategic autonomy becomes an instrument of a new division of responsibility and a condition for the fuller use of European resources in protecting Europe's own territory and supporting partners.

From Potential Power to Security Provision: The EU's Resource-Conversion Deficit

An assessment of the EU's potential requires separating resources, the capacity to mobilize them and the strategic effects achieved. Aggregate data on population, economy, defense expenditure and industry describe the basis for possible action. The capacity for rapid decision-making, force deployment and the maintenance of sustained engagement depends on mobilization and coordination mechanisms.

The Multidimensional Resource Base of European Security Power: The EU's potential includes approximately 450 million inhabitants, developed education and research systems, a highly qualified workforce and competences relevant to the defense industry, cybersecurity, dual-use technologies and public administration. The single market, the euro, budgetary instruments and a common trade policy make it possible to finance defense, impose coordinated sanctions, restrict an adversary's access to technology and support the resilience and reconstruction of partner states. European industry retains advanced capabilities in aviation, space, electronics, energy, shipbuilding and arms production.[24] Member States possess significant armed forces, and their combined defense expenditure reached €418 billion in 2025, equivalent to 2.2% of aggregate GDP. Equipment procurement amounted to €115 billion. The scale of spending indicates a substantial material basis for security, but its strategic significance depends on the structure of investment, stockpiles, readiness, joint planning and interoperability. The European Defence Agency assesses that national approaches still dominate, limiting efficiency, economies of scale and long-term convergence.[25]

A particular part of the EU's potential consists of regulatory and institutional instruments. Trade policy, export controls, technological standards, sanctions, financial assistance, enlargement policy and association agreements can affect the capacity of other actors to act and strengthen the resilience of partners. The EU can combine military assistance with economic integration, institutional reforms and long-term political anchoring. This distinguishes European security provision from models based primarily on military guarantees, arms sales or *ad hoc* exchanges of benefits.

The scale of resources justifies the assessment that Europe possesses the foundations for playing a considerably larger strategic role. The sum of national potentials, however, does not automatically create a collective capability. Research on

[24] Eurostat, "Population on 1 January," online data code tps00001, https://doi.org/10.2908/tps00001; European Commission and High Representative, *Joint White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030*, 2–4, 6–8.
[25] European Defence Agency, *Defence Data 2025–2026*, 6, 16–17.

state power shows that wealth and population influence military capabilities through the quality of institutions, mobilization and organization. In the EU, this mechanism operates across the national, Union and private levels, creating more points at which coherence may be lost or delays may arise.[26]

Political, Institutional and Operational Sources of the Resource-Conversion Deficit: The fundamental constraint arises from the diversity of interests, threat perceptions and strategic cultures among Member States. Differences concern the hierarchy of threats, readiness to use force, the importance of deterrence, attitudes towards the United States and NATO, and the scope of competences that governments are willing to entrust to EU institutions. Joint strategic documents contribute to converging diagnoses, while divergences in investment priorities and in political readiness to act persist.[27]

The decision-making structure reinforces the consequences of these differences. EU security and defense policy retains its intergovernmental character; Member States control armed forces, and decisions on their use are subject to different constitutional procedures. Unanimity remains the norm in matters with military or defense implications. It protects the sovereignty of states, but at the same time lengthens the response process and makes it possible to block joint action. The capacity for external autonomy therefore depends on generating sufficient internal agreement within the EU.[28] A significant part of the deficit arises during the transformation of expenditure into capabilities. In 2025, joint procurement, including European investments and cooperation with partners outside the EU, accounted for 24% of equipment expenditure. Nineteen Member States reported European collaborative orders corresponding to 11% of aggregate spending in this category. Parallel national programs lead to duplication of research and development costs, the maintenance of multiple types of similar weaponry, smaller production runs and difficulties in supplying spare parts and ammunition.[29] Increases in expenditure may therefore outpace the development of a joint strategic capability.

The operational dimension of dependence includes satellite reconnaissance, integrated command, strategic transport, air-to-air refueling, missile defense, precision long-range strike systems and nuclear deterrence. European states possess some of these capabilities, but their scale and integration rely to a considerable degree on the US contribution and NATO structures. EU documents also point to gaps in air and missile defense, artillery, ammunition, military mobility, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, electronic warfare and strategic enablers.[30] The devel-

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[26] Tellis et al., *Measuring National Power*, 4–15, 133–39; Lindvall, Lundgren, and Teorell, "Projecting Power at Home and Abroad," 507–12, 517–19.

[27] Helwig and Sinkkonen, "Strategic Autonomy and the EU as a Global Actor," 4–8, 14–17; Varma, "European Strategic Autonomy," 67–72, 79–82.

[28] *Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union*, arts. 31(1) and 42(4); Council of the European Union, *A Strategic Compass*, 13–14.

[29] European Defence Agency, *Defence Data 2025–2026*, 17.

[30] European Commission and High Representative, *Joint White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030*, 7–8, 12–13; European Commission and High Representative, *Defence Readiness Roadmap 2030*, 2–5.

opment of autonomy requires selectively filling these gaps while maintaining alliance interoperability.

The resource-conversion deficit is not a fixed quantity. EU institutions can reduce it by financing joint projects, creating stable industrial demand, supporting collaborative procurement, coordinating planning and setting standards. The effectiveness of these instruments depends on the willingness of Member States to subordinate part of their national preferences to common priorities. Achieving autonomy requires a change in the way resources are planned and combined. A nominal increase in the volume of resources alone does not solve the conversion problem.

Ukraine constitutes the most important contemporary test of the conversion of European resources. The EU and its Member States combine arms deliveries, training, financing of procurement and production, sanctions, macro-financial assistance, energy infrastructure support, protection of displaced persons and the integration process. The 2025 *White Paper* places support for Ukraine at the center of defense readiness and advocates deeper integration of Ukrainian industry into the European defense-industrial base. The 2026 progress report on the implementation of the *Strategic Compass* presents these actions as a means of strengthening the EU's role as a security provider in its immediate neighborhood.[31] The case of Ukraine reveals both the strength of European financial and integration instruments and a persistent dependence on certain critical military capabilities.

Values as a Constraint and a Strategic Advantage for the European Security Provider

Values influence the objectives, instruments and credibility of European security provision. Their significance is ambivalent: they narrow the range of possible actions, yet they may also increase predictability, legitimacy and the durability of commitments. Analyzing this dual impact makes it possible to move beyond the simple opposition between a normative EU and a geopolitical EU.

Normative Limits to Strategic Agency: The EU's treaty-based order links external action to democracy, the rule of law, human rights, international law and peace. Military cooperation, financial assistance, sanctions and arms transfers are subject to legal procedures, political scrutiny and conditionality. This restricts the possibility of concluding short-term agreements with actors that violate the Union's fundamental norms and raises the costs of agreeing on policy in situations of conflict between values and interests.[32] The significance of this constraint increases in an environment in which security models are becoming more plural. China's Global Security Initiative bases cooperation on sovereign equality, non-interference and the right of states to choose their own political system and path of development. Official Chinese discourse has its own normative foundation and does not make support conditional on the adoption of a liberal-democratic model of governance. The policy of the Trump administration, in turn, prioritizes US interests defined in immediate terms, reciprocity and increased contributions from partners. The Euro-

[31] European Commission and High Representative, *Joint White Paper for European Defence Readiness 2030*, 3, 9–12; European External Action Service, *2026 Annual Progress Report*.
[32] *Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union*, arts. 2, 3(5), and 21.

pean offer remains more institutionalized and politically demanding, which may reduce its attractiveness to governments seeking rapid support without internal reforms.[33] The credibility of values is weakened by the gap between declarations and practice. Selective responses to human rights violations, differential treatment of similar partners and the subordination of conditionality to *ad hoc* interests give rise to accusations of double standards. Research on EU policy in the southern neighborhood shows that prioritizing short-term stability may limit normative agency and weaken the institutional durability of cooperation.[34] Values thus act as a constraint, particularly when they raise expectations of the EU that are not matched by the means required to meet them.

Values as a Security Resource: Normative constraints may enhance the long-term quality of security provision. Agreements, financial procedures, monitoring mechanisms and legal oversight reduce the dependence of commitments on personal relations between leaders and on the current political climate. Values may thereby strengthen predictability and the institutional durability of cooperation, provided they are applied consistently. A particular resource of the EU is its capacity to combine security with economic, regulatory and institutional integration. Market access, legal harmonization, investment, the mobility of people and the prospect of deepening relations can durably alter the strategic environment of a partner state. In the case of Ukraine, European integration provides the foundation for Ukraine's long-term anchoring in the European security architecture. In other relationships, this mechanism operates less strongly, yet may still strengthen institutions, diversify dependencies and enhance freedom of strategic choice.[35]

Values acquire the status of a strategic resource when material capabilities and political consistency coexist. A state threatened by violence assesses a partner's credibility by the partner's willingness to bear costs, deliver equipment, maintain sanctions and provide long-term financing. Normative commitment backed by real capacity for action may distinguish the EU as a partner offering predictable and institutionalized security. Insufficient capabilities or selective practice increase the gap between expectations and outcomes. Assuming greater responsibility for security also requires that the development of military capabilities be embedded in the EU's established self-definition as a community of law, integration and values. The perspective of ontological security allows this process to be interpreted as a transformation of role: new capabilities may strengthen the continuity of European iden-

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[33] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, *The Global Security Initiative Concept Paper*, February 21, 2023, sec. II, pts. 1–4, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zy/gb/202405/t20240531_11367484.html; The White House, "America First Policy Directive to the Secretary of State," January 20, 2025, secs. 1–2, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/america-first-policy-directive-to-the-secretary-of-state/; United States, *2026 National Defense Strategy*, 4, 11.

[34] Hyde-Price, "'Normative' Power Europe," 218–24, 229–33; Skare, "Staying Safe by Being Good?," 337–41, 348–52.

[35] European Union, *Shared Vision, Common Action*, 8–10, 15; Council of the European Union, *A Strategic Compass*, 2, 12–14; Anna Michalski and Charles F. Parker, "The EU's Evolving Leadership Role in an Age of Geopolitics: Beyond Normative and Market Power in the Indo-Pacific," *European Journal of International Security* 9, no. 2 (2024): 264–67, 272–78, https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2023.34.

tity when they are justified in terms of protecting citizens, institutions, international law and the freedom of political choice.[36] A value-based security provider thus combines the material capacity for protection with stable, institutionalized commitments. This category describes a condition of effectiveness and functions as an ideal type.

Discussion: Conditions for Value-Based Strategic Autonomy

The findings of the article support an interpretation of European dependence as an element of the transatlantic bargain that, for a significant part of the post-war period, remained functional for both sides. The existing division of roles no longer corresponds to the shift in US priorities and the European threat environment. Trump-era criticism points to a genuine imbalance of capabilities and insufficient effort on the part of some allies after the Cold War, while at the same time overlooking the historical order in which European capabilities were developed under US leadership. Strategic autonomy thus takes the form of a renegotiation of responsibility within the existing transatlantic system.[37]

The EU's main problem lies further upstream than the classic capability–expectations gap. Hill compared expectations of Europe's international role with the available instruments and the will to act. The resource-conversion deficit explains why existing resources fail to take the form of a shared capability. In the case of a state, conversion depends on administration, mobilization and organization. In the EU, it additionally operates across the national and Union levels, where resources, competences and decision-making authority are distributed. This multi-level character means that a nominal increase in expenditure may coexist with fragmentation, limited interoperability and slow decision-making.[38] The category of the resource-conversion deficit thus constitutes the central contribution of the article to security studies.

The autonomy that emerges from the analysis remains embedded in the alliance system. NATO provides planning, command and deterrence structures that would be scarcely realistic to recreate rapidly within the EU framework. The development of European capabilities may, however, alter the nature of the relationship by enabling Europe to assume greater responsibility, reduce its vulnerability to shifts in US priorities and increase its capacity to act in areas beyond the Alliance's mandate. This outcome corresponds to the strand of literature that views autonomy as the capacity to act within a partnership while maintaining allied interdependencies.[39]

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[36] Mitzen, "Anchoring Europe's Civilizing Identity," 270–74, 282–83; Della Sala, "Narrating Europe," 267–70, 278–82.

[37] Lundestad, "Empire by Invitation?," 263–71; Desmaele, "America's 'China-First' Grand Strategy," 14–18; Knutsen, "A Weakening Transatlantic Relationship?," 165–74; Helwig and Sinkkonen, "Strategic Autonomy and the EU as a Global Actor," 14–17.

[38] Hill, "The Capability–Expectations Gap," 306–15; Tellis et al., *Measuring National Power*, 4–15, 133–39; Lindvall, Lundgren, and Teorell, "Projecting Power at Home and Abroad," 507–12, 517–19; Juncos and Vanhoonacker, "The Ideational Power of Strategic Autonomy," 955–60, 967–70.

[39] Helwig and Sinkkonen, "Strategic Autonomy and the EU as a Global Actor," 14–17; Knutsen, "A Weakening Transatlantic Relationship?," 170–74; Varma, "European Strategic Autonomy," 79–82.

The analysis of values yields a conclusion that lies between the concept of normative power and the realist critique. The impact of values is conditional and encompasses both benefits and strategic costs. It depends on material capabilities, consistency of practice and the type of threat. Values enhance the credibility and durability of security provision when they institutionalize commitments and are upheld through real means. They weaken agency when they generate high expectations without adequate readiness to act or are applied selectively.[40] The treatment of values as a conditional resource constitutes the second element of the article's original contribution.

External role attribution remains sectoral and uneven. The United States expects increased European responsibility. Russia and China interpret autonomy through the prism of their own visions of international order. This outcome corresponds to research indicating the relational and sector-specific nature of European agency.[41] The source base does not permit generalization regarding the global perception of the EU. It does show, however, that the capacity to provide security requires both the internal conversion of resources and external recognition of commitments as relevant to the calculations of partners.

The combination of both propositions yields a coherent research model. The resource-conversion deficit explains the gap between potential and capacity for action. The category of the value-based security provider concerns the character and quality of the outcome achieved. Effective autonomy thus requires material capabilities, political cohesion, the institutional capacity to mobilize resources and the credibility of the principles that define the purpose of their use. The model may be applied in further comparative research on individual capability sectors, Member States' strategies and regional perceptions of European security policy.

Conclusions

The need for strategic autonomy arises from the changing transatlantic division of responsibility and the growing risk associated with Europe's insufficient capacity for independent action. The United States remains the principal ally, and NATO is the foundation of collective defense for most EU Member States. The growing significance of the Indo-Pacific and the return of high-intensity warfare, however, demand greater European agency in protecting Europe's own territory and supporting partners. The EU possesses a demographic, economic, technological, industrial and institutional base that enables it to play a considerably greater role as a security provider. The principal constraint lies in the mechanisms for transforming aggregated resources into shared capabilities and lasting strategic effects. Divergence of interest, the intergovernmental character of decision-making, industrial fragmenta-

[40] Manners, "Normative Power Europe," 239–42, 252–53; Hyde-Price, "'Normative' Power Europe," 218–24, 229–33; Skare, "Staying Safe by Being Good?," 337–41, 348–52; Michalski and Parker, "The EU's Evolving Leadership Role," 272–78.

[41] Rauh, "International Recognition of European Union 'Actorness'," 792–800; Yang, "How China Perceives European Strategic Autonomy," 482–90, 498–503.

tion and dependence on certain US operational capabilities create a strategic resource-conversion deficit. Reducing it requires joint planning, investment coordination, interoperability and the political capacity to sustain agreed action. The resource-conversion deficit complements Hill's capability–expectations gap by focusing on the process through which existing resources take the form of shared capabilities.[42] Values constrain certain EU instruments and partnerships, yet, given an appropriate level of material capabilities and consistency, they can enhance the predictability, legitimacy and durability of the security provided. This finding relates the concept of normative power developed by Manners[43] to Hyde-Price's realist critique.[44] The analysis addresses the difference between these perspectives by identifying how material capabilities, consistency of practice and the type of threat condition the impact of values. The foremost challenge of strategic autonomy, therefore, consists in transforming European potential into collective agency without losing the characteristics that distinguish the EU from more transactional models of cooperation. A value-based security provider remains anchored in the transatlantic system, while simultaneously possessing the capacity to protect its own territory, support partners and co-shape the regional security architecture.

In practical terms, the framework can be used to identify where joint planning, investment coordination, interoperability and collective decision-making need to be strengthened. It can also support the assessment of whether commitments to partners are matched by material capabilities and consistent practice.

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[42] Hill, "The Capability–Expectations Gap," 306–15.
[43] Manners, "Normative Power Europe," 239–42.
[44] Hyde-Price, "'Normative' Power Europe," 218–24, 229–33.

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JAPAN'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the evolution of Japan's foreign policy toward the South Caucasus region since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It argues that Japan's regional engagement has evolved through four phases: ad hoc humanitarian assistance (1991–1996); the resource-driven pivot of Hashimoto's Eurasian Diplomacy (1997–2005); the values-based framing of Asō's Arc of Freedom and Prosperity (2006–2017); and Kōno's Caucasus Initiative (2018–present), which frames the South Caucasus as a transport "linchpin" and "gateway" connecting Asia and Europe within the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision. Drawing on Diplomatic Bluebooks and official development assistance (ODA) records, the article maps this trajectory onto a two-by-two matrix of rhetoric and substantive action. While Tokyo's rhetoric has become regional and geostrategic, its actions have remained bilateral: energy-centric loans in Azerbaijan, connectivity infrastructure in Georgia, and capacity building in Armenia. This gap is institutional rather than a question of political will. The article asks whether the Takaichi administration's economic security agenda can close this gap or leave engagement with the region governed by inherited bilateral instruments.

Keywords: *South Caucasus, Japanese foreign policy, ODA, economic security.*

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Introduction

Japan experienced a historic turning point in its domestic politics in October 2025. Sanae Takaichi, the president of the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), was elected Japan's first female prime minister. In the general election in February 2026, the LDP won 316 of the 465 seats in the House of Representatives. It was the first time in Japan's postwar history that a single party had secured a two-thirds majority on its own. Following this victory, Takaichi formed her second cabinet the same month, reappointing every minister. In foreign and security policy, Takaichi's posture closely aligns with the legacy of the late Prime Minister Shinzō Abe. She takes a hardline stance on national security and Japan's defense capabilities in its immediate neighborhood while continuing to collaborate with other like-minded nations to sustain peace and security globally.

To counter threats from China, Russia, and North Korea, all of which jeopardize Japan's national security in East Asia, Takaichi has opted to enhance Japan's military capabilities both institutionally, by revising existing defense-related policy documents, and practically. In her first policy address in October 2025, she announced that the target of raising defense-related spending to two percent of GDP, previously set for fiscal 2027, would be met in fiscal 2025. This target was reached through the supplementary budget enacted in December 2025.[1] The Takaichi administration is currently reviewing three core security documents and expects to release them at the end of 2026.

Takaichi has also made economic security a signature priority—a natural extension of her tenure as minister of state for economic security under Prime Minister Fumio Kishida between August 2022 and October 2024. The portfolio itself was created in October 2021 and first held by Takayuki Kobayashi. Takaichi succeeded him in the cabinet reshuffle of August 2022 and held the post for over two years, longer than any other incumbent to date.

Takaichi's emphasis on economic security has elevated the position of the South Caucasus region. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the route running from Central Asia through the Caspian Sea and the South Caucasus to Europe has gained importance as an economic corridor that can bypass Russia. For Japan under Takaichi, this route can provide supply chain resilience, helping to ensure its economic security.

However, Japan's relationship with the South Caucasus region remains conspicuously underexplored. Some existing literature predates both the Caucasus Initiative announced in 2018 by then Foreign Minister Tarō Kōno and the Russian invasion in 2022.[2] This article updates the literature and argues that Japan's rheto-

[1] Sanae Takaichi, "Press Conference by Prime Minister Takaichi," December 17, 2025, Prime Minister's Office of Japan, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/104/statement/202512/17kaiken.html.

[2] David Goginashvili, "Japan's Foreign Policy Towards the South Caucasus States: Policy of 'Low-Relevance and High Purpose' on the Crossroad Between Russian and Western Interests," *Journal Global Policy and Governance* 5, no. 2 (2016): 51–66, https://doi.org/10.14666/2194-7759-5-2-004; Syuzanna Vasilyan, "Japan's Policy towards the South Caucasus: Pragmatic Even If Enigmatic," *Asia Europe Journal* 15, no. 1 (2017): 55–73, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10308-016-0462-1; Tomohiko Uyama, Christopher Len, and Tetsuya Hirose, eds., *Nihon no Chūō Ajia gaikō: Tamesareru chiiki senryaku* [*Japan's Central Asian Diplomacy: A Regional Strategy Put to the Test*] (Sapporo: Hokkaido Daigaku Shuppankai, 2009).

ric toward the region has become regional and geostrategic. However, its instruments, mainly official development assistance (ODA), have remained bilateral.[3] This gap is best explained by the institutional structure of Japanese ODA rather than political will.

This article first analyzes the development and trajectory of Japan's foreign policy toward the South Caucasus region. It shows how Tokyo came to decouple the newly independent republics from its unresolved dispute with Moscow. It then traces four phases of engagement with the region: a more ad hoc relationship that followed independence in 1991; the era of Eurasian Diplomacy under Prime Minister Ryūtarō Hashimoto from 1997; the emergence of the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity under Foreign Minister Tarō Asō in 2006; and the launch of Foreign Minister Kōno's Caucasus Initiative in 2018. Third, it examines the empirical record of Japanese ODA disbursements to the region. Fourth, it maps that record onto a two-by-two matrix of rhetoric and action. Finally, it analyzes what the Takaichi administration's economic security agenda implies for the region. This study does not claim to be exhaustive; rather, it provides an updated perspective on this underexplored relationship in its contemporary context.

This article argues that Japan's engagement with the South Caucasus reveals a persistent asymmetry between the regional ambition of its diplomatic discourse and the predominantly bilateral character of its policy instruments. Since the launch of Eurasian Diplomacy, the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity, and the Caucasus Initiative, Tokyo has increasingly framed the South Caucasus not merely as a collection of newly independent states, but as a strategically significant space connecting Europe and Asia. Yet this regional framing has not produced a correspondingly integrated approach to policy implementation, which continues to rely heavily on country-specific instruments, particularly official development assistance (ODA). This article contends that the discrepancy cannot be explained simply as a lack of political will. Rather, it reflects the tension between Japan's growing interest in regional connectivity and economic security and an established mode of engagement organized around bilateral relationships and nationally defined development projects. By tracing the evolution of Japan's diplomatic discourse alongside its ODA commitments to Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, the article demonstrates that regional strategic recognition does not automatically translate into regionally coordinated policy. This distinction provides a framework for assessing whether Japan's emerging economic-security agenda will generate a more coherent South Caucasus policy or continue to operate through inherited bilateral mechanisms.

[3] It is likely that Tokyo has sought to complement its bilateral ODA instruments through multilateral financial institutions, such as the Asian Development Bank, in relation to cross-border infrastructure and connectivity initiatives such as the Middle Corridor. While this paper focuses exclusively on bilateral ODA, we recognize the need for further investigation into Japan's engagement with the South Caucasus through multilateral financial institutions and leave this as a topic for future research.

Japan's Foreign Policy and the Decoupling of the South Caucasus from Russia

To understand Japan's contemporary engagement with the South Caucasus region, it is first necessary to examine the broader evolution of Japanese foreign policy since World War II. Broadly speaking, this evolution has proceeded through distinct phases. The first phase corresponds to the Cold War period, during which Japan aligned itself with the Western bloc, relying heavily on the US nuclear umbrella for its national security to maintain a regional balance of power. Under the foundational framework of the Yoshida Doctrine, Japan deliberately avoided a prominent geopolitical role, focusing instead on postwar economic recovery and industrial development. Consequently, Tokyo adopted a reactive and reluctant posture in international politics and security. For instance, although Japan joined the United Nations in 1956, four years after the San Francisco Peace Treaty restored its sovereignty, it imposed strict self-restraints on its practical participation in UN initiatives, particularly regarding contributions to international peace and security through peacekeeping operations. This policy of diplomatic self-restraint persisted largely intact until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Instead, Japanese foreign policy during the Cold War remained predominantly centered on economic development. Drawing conceptually from Friedrich List's model of state-led economic intervention, the Japanese government implemented protectionist policies to nurture domestic industries in their early stages. Private enterprises were heavily influenced and institutionally guided by the powerful Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI). This tight trilateral alliance among private corporations, MITI, and the central government served as a strategic apparatus to accelerate export-oriented growth, shielding domestic markets while aggressively enhancing global competitiveness. As a result, Japan achieved its celebrated "economic miracle," emerging as the world's second-largest economic powerhouse behind the United States by the 1970s.

This economic ascendancy eventually provided a mechanism to bridge the gap left by Tokyo's limited political profile. Japan used its material wealth to expand foreign aid, specifically ODA. Propelled by rapid growth, Japan became the world's largest bilateral ODA donor by the late 1980s. A portion of this aid infrastructure would eventually extend to the South Caucasus states following their independence. Throughout this period, Japan consistently downplayed its political and security presence on the global stage, relying instead on economic leadership and robust ODA disbursements to define its superpower status within the constraints of the Cold War order.

However, the Japan–Soviet relationship during the Cold War period remained consistently strained. Following the Soviet Union's breach of the bilateral Neutrality Pact at the end of the Second World War and its subsequent occupation of the Northern Territories, Japan maintained a deep sense of distrust toward Moscow. Primarily due to this unresolved territorial dispute, Tokyo and Moscow never signed an official peace treaty. While Japan maintained a low political and security profile in the wider international community, it concentrated its national defense capabilities along its northern frontier, particularly in the Hokkaido region. Offi-

cially, Tokyo anchored its approach in the strict principle of the "inseparability of politics and economics" (*seikei fukabun*), stating that no large-scale economic cooperation would occur without a clear resolution of the territorial issue.[4] Yet, beneath this rigid stance, Japan pursued a pragmatic approach; vital economic links, particularly energy cooperation in the Sakhalin oil and gas sectors, were quietly maintained despite the ongoing geopolitical tension.

The collapse of the Soviet Union necessitated a fundamental redefinition of Japan's foreign policy. As a nascent "new world order" began to take shape, the international community increasingly expected Tokyo to play a more active role, particularly through security commitments, in addressing emerging regional conflicts. Following intense domestic legislative debates and widespread public demonstrations, Japan gradually expanded its security responsibilities. A watershed moment occurred in 1992, when Japan authorized the deployment of its personnel to UN peacekeeping operations. The September 11 terrorist attacks against the United States in 2001 served as another catalyst for broadening Japan's international security mandate. This was followed by the deployment of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) to Iraq in 2004. Unlike the peacekeeping deployments that had begun in 1992, this mission was undertaken outside a UN peacekeeping framework and in a country where hostilities were ongoing. Concurrently, Tokyo had to navigate immediate regional threats, such as the North Korean nuclear and missile crises of the late 1990s. Compounding these security pressures, the structural foundation of the "economic miracle" fractured in the mid-1990s, plunging the nation into an extended period of domestic economic stagnation known as the "lost decades."

In navigating the post-Cold War era, Japanese policymakers faced two competing structural challenges. First, as a leading global economic power, Japan faced systemic pressure to contribute meaningfully to regional and international stability; however, it had to do so within deeply entrenched domestic legal, constitutional, and normative constraints without destabilizing domestic politics. Second, Japan had to formulate a viable foreign policy that no longer relied purely on an expanding economic surplus. Policymakers were forced to seek alternative diplomatic and strategic tools to adapt to three decades of domestic stagnation while safeguarding long-term national economic security.

When the Soviet Union dissolved, Japan did not immediately draw a firm line between Russia and the other successor states. In the earliest years, Tokyo approached the whole of the post-Soviet space with caution due mainly to wariness of political volatility and uncertain trajectories across the region.[5] Japan's engagement

[4] Akio Kawato, "Tai Chūō Ajia seisaku no suii: 'Shirukurōdo gaikō' kara 'Chūō Ajia purasu Nihon' e" [The Transition of Central Asian Policy: From 'Silk Road Diplomacy' to 'Central Asia Plus Japan'], in *Nihon no Chūō Ajia gaikō: Tamesareru chiiki senryaku* [*Japan's Central Asian Diplomacy: A Regional Strategy Put to the Test*], ed. Tomohiko Uyama, Christopher Len, and Tetsuya Hirose (Sapporo: Hokkaido Daigaku Shuppankai, 2009), 38.

[5] Tetsuya Hirose, "Tai Chūō Ajia gaikō no gaikan: Jitsumu reberu de no seisaku ritsuan-sha no shiten kara" [An Overview of Diplomacy towards Central Asia: From the Perspective of a Working-Level Policymaker], in *Nihon no Chūō Ajia gaikō: Tamesareru chiiki senryaku* [*Japan's Central Asian Diplomacy: A Regional Strategy Put to the Test*], ed. Tomohiko Uyama, Christopher Len, and Tetsuya Hirose (Sapporo: Hokkaido Daigaku Shuppankai, 2009), 4.

with the South Caucasus was correspondingly modest and ad hoc. A clearer differentiation emerged only gradually. Over time, Japanese policymakers came to regard the South Caucasus states, together with the other newly independent states of the former Soviet Union, as nations newly emancipated from the Soviet empire. Unlike Russia, they were regarded as states that had no territorial dispute with Japan and therefore possessed the potential to become constructive contributors to the international order.[6] Thus, strategic wariness and the unresolved island dispute were concentrated on Russia alone. This decoupling of the emancipated republics from Moscow crystallized over the course of the 1990s rather than being a premise Tokyo held from the outset.

This emerging distinction carried direct practical consequences, best understood against the Soviet-era legacy described above. Toward Moscow, Tokyo had long bound economic engagement to the principle of *seikei fukabun*, withholding large-scale cooperation until the territorial question was resolved.[7] By contrast, the South Caucasus states were subject to no such precondition because they had no territorial dispute with Japan. This absence of a territorial dispute freed Tokyo to extend grant aid and, subsequently, Japanese yen loans to the South Caucasus region without tethering them to any political precondition.[8]

Japan was careful to cultivate friendly ties with the South Caucasus without provoking Russian anxieties over its former periphery, and it had no wish to drag the region into its bilateral disputes with Moscow.[9] The result was a deliberately pragmatic posture anchored in the provision of foreign aid. It was at the intersection of domestic institutional constraints, shifting international expectations, and this delicate balance between strategic wariness of Russia and the conscious decoupling of the emancipated post-Soviet states from Moscow that Japan's contemporary approach to the South Caucasus first took shape.

Four Phases of Japan's Foreign Policy towards the South Caucasus

While there were some historical connections between Japan and the South Caucasus countries before the end of the Cold War and World War II, Japan's modern

[6] Tomohiko Uyama, Christopher Len, and Tetsuya Hirose, "Jo" [Introduction], in *Nihon no Chūō Ajia gaikō: Tamesareru chiiki senryaku* [*Japan's Central Asian Diplomacy: A Regional Strategy Put to the Test*], ed. Tomohiko Uyama, Christopher Len, and Tetsuya Hirose (Sapporo: Hokkaido Daigaku Shuppankai, 2009), i.

[7] Kawato, "Tai Chūō Ajia seisaku no suii," 38.

[8] Yōko Hirose, "Minami Kōkasasu to 'hazama no chiseigaku'" [The South Caucasus and the 'Geopolitics of the In-Between'], in *Yūrashia dainamizumu to Nihon* [*Eurasian Dynamism and Japan*], ed. Japan Forum on International Relations, supervised by Hirotaka Watanabe (Tokyo: Chuo Koron Shinsha, 2022), 288.

[9] Tomohiko Uyama, "Tai Chūō Ajia gaikō no rekishiteki bunmyaku to tenbō: Ajia shugi to Nichibei kankei no hazama de" [The Historical Context and Outlook of Central Asian Diplomacy: Between Asianism and Japan-US Relations], in *Nihon no Chūō Ajia gaikō: Tamesareru chiiki senryaku* [*Japan's Central Asian Diplomacy: A Regional Strategy Put to the Test*], ed. Tomohiko Uyama, Christopher Len, and Tetsuya Hirose (Sapporo: Hokkaido Daigaku Shuppankai, 2009), 91; Hirose, "Minami Kōkasasu to 'hazama no chiseigaku,'" 288.

foreign policy toward the region began to develop across four distinct phases following the collapse of the Soviet Union.[10]

Setting Up the Diplomatic Channels for Japanese ODA (1991–1996): The first phase spans 1991–1996. In 1991, following the dramatic end of the Cold War, Japan began seeking ways to connect with the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. In August 1992, Georgia became the first country in the South Caucasus region to establish formal diplomatic relations with Japan. Armenia and Azerbaijan followed shortly after in September of the same year. With official diplomatic channels open, Japan began providing ODA to these three nations. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the primary agency for Japanese foreign aid, reported that the country began distributing ODA to the South Caucasus in 1994. Recognizing that these newly independent states were in the fragile early stages of state-building, facing political transitions toward democratization, weak basic infrastructure, and economic instability, Japan focused its efforts on technical cooperation for human resource development and grant aid to meet basic human needs. Japan also extended its first official yen loans to Georgia and Azerbaijan for power plant projects in fiscal 1997.[11]

However, during this initial phase from 1992 to 1996, prior to the announcement of "Eurasian Diplomacy" by then-Prime Minister Ryūtarō Hashimoto, Japan's foreign policy toward the South Caucasus remained modest. This minimal and somewhat ad hoc engagement stemmed from Tokyo's cautious approach to taking on international roles in the post-Cold War order, as well as its careful management of the politically unstable post-Soviet space.[12] The underlying attitude at the time favored small, manageable commitments over a grand strategic mandate.

Hashimoto's Eurasian Diplomacy (1997–2005): Following this initial period of minimal engagement, Japan gradually shifted its foreign policy toward the region from 1997. This change became clear when then-Prime Minister Hashimoto announced his "Eurasian Diplomacy" framework, which served as Japan's first policy-oriented vision for the post-Soviet space, including the South Caucasus. While Hashimoto's view of "Eurasia" primarily encompassed Russia, China, and Central Asia, his underlying objective was to secure the long-term strategic inter-

[10] Vasilyan, Len, and Takahata also characterize Japan's foreign policy toward the wider Eurasian region, including Central Asia, in similar phases. See Vasilyan, "Japan's Policy towards the South Caucasus"; Christopher Len, "Nihon no Chūō Ajia ni taisuru kanyo o dō rikai suru ka: Kaihatsu senryaku no saihyōka" [Understanding Japan's Central Asian Engagement: A Reassessment of Development Strategy], in *Nihon no Chūō Ajia gaikō: Tamesareru chiiki senryaku* [*Japan's Central Asian Diplomacy: A Regional Strategy Put to the Test*], ed. Tomohiko Uyama, Christopher Len, and Tetsuya Hirose, trans. Masaru Suda (Sapporo: Hokkaido Daigaku Shuppankai, 2009), 39–54; Yōhei Takahata, "'Yūrashia gaikō' to iu Nihon no sentaku" [Japan's Choice of 'Eurasian Diplomacy'], in *Yūrashia dainamizumu to Nihon* [*Eurasian Dynamism and Japan*], ed. Japan Forum on International Relations, supervised by Hirotaka Watanabe (Tokyo: Chuo Koron Shinsha, 2022), 129–61.

[11] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Chiikibetsu enjo no dōkō" [Trends in Assistance by Region], in *Wagakuni no seifu kaihatsu enjo no jisshi jōkyō (1997-nendo) ni kansuru nenji hōkoku* [*Annual Report on the Implementation of Japan's Official Development Assistance (FY1997)*] (1998), https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shiryo/hakusyo/nenji97/nji97_2.html#2_1_3.

[12] Goginashvili, "Japan's Foreign Policy Towards the South Caucasus States"; Vasilyan, "Japan's Policy towards the South Caucasus."

ests of a resource-scarce Japan by building stronger ties with the resource-rich nations of the South Caucasus.

When Hashimoto addressed the Japan Association of Corporate Executives on July 24, 1997, he introduced three pillars for his Eurasian Diplomacy vision. First was political dialogue. He aimed to enhance mutual trust and understanding by conducting regular high-level political exchanges. The second pillar was economic cooperation and resource development. Hashimoto attempted to strengthen economic ties to foster mutual prosperity, specifically by supporting the transition of post-Soviet economic systems toward market-oriented economies. The third pillar involved cooperation for peace and stability through democratization and nuclear nonproliferation.

For the South Caucasus, Hashimoto's vision meant that Japan formally recognized the geostrategic value of the region, viewing it as a potential bridge for trade and a vital source of natural resources. In this context, Hashimoto expressed great interest in seeing Japanese corporations participate in oil and energy exploration in Azerbaijan.[13] This step demonstrated the first tangible shift toward elevating Japan's diplomatic presence in the region.

The vision was translated into an operational framework in January 1998, when the government adopted the Silk Road Diplomacy Action Plan under Foreign Minister Keizō Obuchi. Under this plan, Obuchi set out three priorities: the enhancement of political dialogue, cooperation on developing energy sources and infrastructure, and cooperation on nuclear nonproliferation and democratization.[14] Succeeding Hashimoto as prime minister in July of the same year, Obuchi reiterated the importance of this plan during his speech at the UN General Assembly in September 1998.[15]

Several practical steps soon followed. In May 1999, Foreign Minister Masahiko Kōmura visited Baku, Azerbaijan, marking the first official visit by a Japanese foreign minister to the South Caucasus since the Second World War. Kōmura's historic visit brought concrete support, including a new yen loan for a power plant project, infrastructure grants for the UN Voluntary Trust Fund for Mine Action, and an agreement to help protect local cultural heritage. In January 2000, the Japanese government opened its first embassy in the region in Baku, a gesture that Azerbaijan returned by opening its Tokyo embassy in 2005.

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[13] Ryūtarō Hashimoto, "Address to the Japan Association of Corporate Executives: The Future Direction of Japan's Foreign Policy, Focusing on Relations with Russia," July 24, 1997, Japanese text reproduced in The World and Japan Database, https://worldjpn.net/documents/texts/exdpm/19970724.S1J.html.

[14] Institute of Developing Economies, JETRO, "Ajia dōkō nenpō jūyō nisshi kensaku shisutemu" [Asian Trends Annual Report: Important Events Database], accessed August 26, 2026, https://d-arch.ide.go.jp/Doukou/AZ1990.html.

[15] Keizō Obuchi, "Dai 53-kai Kokuren Sōkai ni okeru Obuchi sōri daijin ippan tōron enzetsu: Fukudai Heiwa to kaihatsu, sono tame no kaikaku" [Address by Prime Minister Keizō Obuchi at the 53rd Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations: Peace and Development, and Reforms to These Ends], September 21, 1998, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/enzetsu/10/eos_0921.html.

In short, Hashimoto's Eurasian Diplomacy and the practical steps taken by Obuchi and Kōmura laid a solid foundation for Japan's post-Soviet relations with the South Caucasus. While this phase was not a complete overhaul of Japan's foreign policy, it helped Japan pursue a more active role on the global stage.

Tarō Asō's Arc of Freedom and Prosperity (2006–2017): Japan's foreign policy toward the South Caucasus entered a third phase in November 2006, when then-Foreign Minister Tarō Asō, serving under the first Shinzō Abe administration, announced his vision for the "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity." In his landmark speech, Asō emphasized two major shifts. First, alongside ties with traditional allies such as the United States and regional powers such as China and Russia, Japan's foreign policy would now emphasize universal values such as democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and market economies. Second, using these values as a foundation, Japan aimed to form an "arc" of stable, prosperous nations along the outer rim of the Eurasian continent.

Asō explicitly pointed to the South Caucasus as a key region for this policy, noting that Central Asian and Caucasus nations such as Georgia and Azerbaijan were extremely important to global energy and natural resource supply chains.[16] He committed Japan to serving as an "escort runner" to support these countries in their long-term development and political transitions.[17]

Compared to Hashimoto's earlier policy, Asō's framework highlighted a much more direct, geostrategic connection between Japan and the South Caucasus, viewing the region as a potentially vital corridor linking Japan to Europe. This conceptual shift matched steady growth in Japan's ODA allocations to the region starting around 2006.

However, the "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity" vision was relatively short-lived. Its heavy focus on values faced resistance from regional powers; Russia viewed the policy as a containment strategy disguised as democracy promotion, and China took a highly cautious stance. Even some Southeast Asian countries were uncomfortable treating liberal democratic principles as universal values, as they also faced domestic human rights issues. Additionally, domestic political instability in Tokyo, including a rapid succession of short-lived prime ministers (Shinzō Abe, Yasuo Fukuda, and Tarō Asō himself between 2006 and 2009), prevented Japan from fully using this vision to deepen its ties with the South Caucasus states.

Tarō Kōno's Caucasus Initiative (2018–Present): A major turning point arrived when Shinzō Abe returned to office as prime minister in 2012. Abe's foreign policy focused on a global approach, driven by his vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP). He also sought to diversify Japan's diplomatic channels by engaging partners with pragmatic strategic interests beyond the immediate Indo-Pacific area. This approach sought to implement Japan's "diplomacy from a panoramic

[16] Tarō Asō, "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Japan's Expanding Diplomatic Horizons," speech at the Japan Institute of International Affairs Seminar, Tokyo, November 30, 2006, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/fm/aso/speech0611.html.
[17] Asō, "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity."

perspective of the globe." As part of this effort to build trans-regional connections between Asia and Europe, Abe made historic visits to Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan) in October 2015 to reinvigorate the "Central Asia Plus Japan" Dialogue,[18] and strongly supported the development of the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor.

It was within this strategic context that Foreign Minister Tarō Kōno, under the second Abe administration, advanced Japan's regional policy by launching the "Caucasus Initiative" during his official visit to the region from September 3 to 5, 2018. Kōno's trip was highly significant for several reasons. First, it was the first visit to Armenia and Georgia by a Japanese foreign minister. For Azerbaijan, it was the second such visit, following Masahiko Kōmura's visit in May 1999. Second, Kōno explicitly described the South Caucasus as the "linchpin" of the transport corridor spanning the Eurasian continent and a crucial "gateway" connecting Asia and Europe. This was the clearest reaffirmation of the place of the South Caucasus in Japan's foreign policy as vital for Abe's "diplomacy from a panoramic perspective of the globe" (*Chikyū wo fukan suru gaikō*). Third, the initiative laid out two clear pillars: cooperation on human resource development for long-term state-building, and support for high-quality infrastructure to open up business opportunities under the banner of an "Appealing Caucasus."[19]

Under the first pillar, Japan focused on training programs centered on the rule of law, environmental protection, and disaster risk reduction through JICA. Under the second pillar, Kōno highlighted large-scale yen loan projects for power, water, and sanitation infrastructure in Azerbaijan. In Georgia, he signed an agreement for a substantial loan to support the East-West Highway Improvement Project, directly enhancing the logistics link between the Black and Caspian Seas. Armenia received aid for disaster prevention, crisis communication, and rural development, alongside growing collaboration in the technology sector.[20] A visible extension of this technological connection appeared in June 2025, when TUMO Gunma opened in Takasaki as the first Asian franchise of Armenia's TUMO Center for Creative Technologies. The center allows Japanese youth to learn information technology and creative design through an Armenian-designed educational platform.[21]

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[18] The Central Asia Plus Japan Dialogue was established by then-Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi under Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi in August 2004. Kawaguchi launched it during foreign ministerial meetings with Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan). She set three goals: promoting regional cooperation, enhancing multilateral relationships among the Central Asian countries beyond bilateral relations, and contributing to regional stability and prosperity. Abe incorporated this existing framework into the strategic diversification of Japan's foreign policy to promote transregional connectivity between Asia and Europe.

[19] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Kōno gaimu daijin no Arumenia, Jōjia, Azerubaijan oyobi Doitsu hōmon" [Foreign Minister Kōno's Visit to the Three Caucasus Countries and Germany], September 6, 2018, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/erp/ca_c/page24_000954.html; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Japan's Caucasus Initiative* (2018), 1–2, https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000436761.pdf.

[20] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Japan's Caucasus Initiative*, 1–2.

[21] Japan International Cooperation Agency, "Armenia × Gunma × Digital: TUMO Gunma, a Partnership between Armenia's TUMO Center and Gunma Prefecture, Has Opened," June 2, 2025, https://www.jica.go.jp/information/seminar/2025/1569394_66420.html.

Furthermore, Kōno's political signaling during this phase was highly tailored. He recognized Armenia and Georgia as important partners that shared fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.[22] When dealing with Azerbaijan, Kōno stepped away from values-based rhetoric and instead focused on pragmatic economic security, emphasizing that Azerbaijan plays a key role in international energy security and that it is vital for Japan to further enhance bilateral relations with Azerbaijan.[23]

In September 2022, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida marked the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations with the three South Caucasus nations. Reinforcing the narratives established by Kōno in 2018, Kishida formally recognized Armenia and Georgia as crucial partners in building a free and open international order based on the rule of law,[24] while highlighting Azerbaijan as a key partner for regional peace and stability.[25] Kishida's statements solidified Japan's ongoing commitment to the Caucasus Initiative, firmly cementing the region's status as an indispensable gateway for Asia-Europe connectivity.

Empirical Pillars: Diplomatic Bluebooks and ODA in the South Caucasus

The previous section traced Japan's evolving foreign policy toward the South Caucasus through four distinct phases. This section analyzes how Japan has perceived the region and what practical actions it has taken when engaging with these nations. To assess the scope and intensity of Japan's regional engagement, this study draws on the *Diplomatic Bluebook* and the *ODA White Paper* as its principal official sources. To capture these policy dimensions, the original Japanese-language versions of these publicly available documents were examined.[26]

The South Caucasus in Japan's Diplomatic Bluebooks: An analysis of the *Diplomatic Bluebooks* over the years reveals changes in the assessments of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). Generally, the early editions described the South Caucasus strictly within a post-Soviet context dominated by persistent regional conflicts. Over time, while the documents continued to view the region as a group of newly independent states affected by localized disputes, they began

[22] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan-Armenia Foreign Ministers' Meeting," September 3, 2018, https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/ca_c/am/page6e_000137.html; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan-Georgia Foreign Ministers' Meeting," September 4, 2018, https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/ca_c/ge/page6e_000136.html.

[23] Tarō Kōno, "Minister Taro Kono: It Is an Honor for Me to Contribute to Further Development of Azerbaijan-Japan Relations," AZERTAC, September 5, 2018, 1, reproduced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000396796.pdf.

[24] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Kōkasasu kakkoku to no gaikō kankei juritsu sanjū-shūnen ni saisuru shunō-kan oyobi gaishō-kan no shokan no kōkan ni tsuite" [Exchange of Letters between Leaders and Foreign Ministers on the Occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations with the Caucasus Countries], September 28, 2022, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/erp/ca_c/shin4_000064.html.

[25] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Kōkasasu kakkoku to no gaikō kankei juritsu sanjū-shūnen."

[26] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Diplomatic Bluebook," Japanese-language archive, accessed October 16, 2026, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/bluebook/index.html.

placing greater emphasis on the gradual development of bilateral relations and the region's role in safeguarding Japan's geostrategic interests.

Phase One (1991–1996): The *Diplomatic Bluebooks* during this initial phase focused heavily on post-independence political instability. They highlighted the outbreak of violent conflicts in South Ossetia (Georgia) and Nagorno-Karabakh (involving Azerbaijan and Armenia). The Bluebooks also depicted the region as struggling economically due to a collapse in production, hyperinflation, and mounting refugee crises.

Phase Two (1997–2005): The tone of the Bluebooks remained largely cautious as regional conflicts persisted. However, Azerbaijan's potential value to Japan's geostrategic and energy security interests was explicitly recognized during this period. Consequently, the Bluebooks began highlighting Japan's commitment to enhancing political dialogue, economic and resource cooperation, and peacebuilding assistance as core components of its regional strategy.

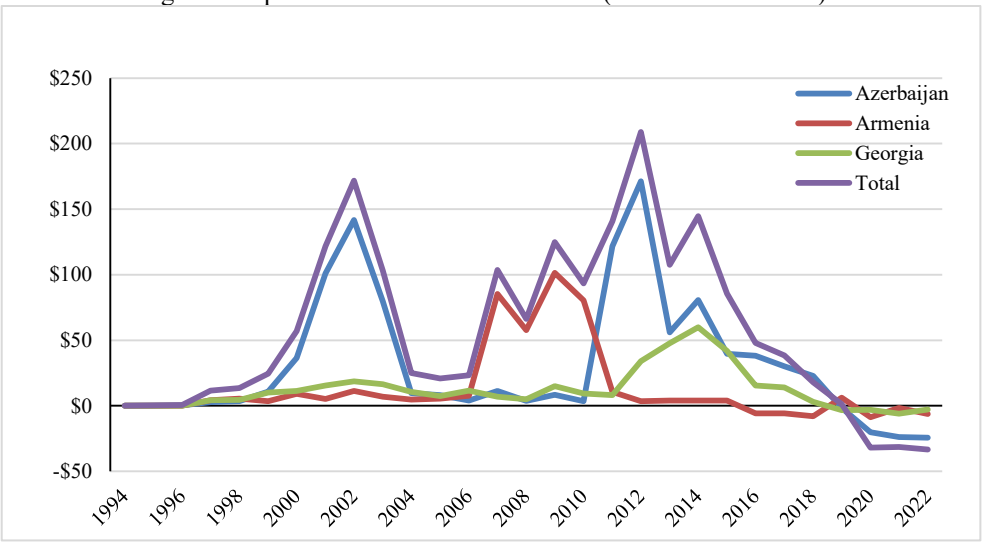
Phase Three (2006–2017): Continued military confrontations in South Ossetia and the subsequent Russian intervention in 2008 remained primary security concerns in the Bluebooks. Despite this volatility, the Bluebooks stressed major institutional milestones in building a stronger diplomatic foundation, notably the opening of mutual embassies. Georgia opened its embassy in Tokyo in February 2007 and Japan opened its embassy in Tbilisi in January 2009. Armenia opened its embassy in Tokyo in July 2010 and Japan opened its embassy in Yerevan in January 2015. Together with the Japanese embassy in Baku, opened in January 2000, and the Azerbaijani embassy in Tokyo, opened in 2005, this gave Japan resident missions in all three capitals for the first time.

Phase Four (2018–Present): Japan continued to voice deep concern regarding regional instability, first during the war of September to November 2020 and then during the Azerbaijani operation of September 2023, after which more than one hundred thousand ethnic Armenians left Nagorno-Karabakh for Armenia. While calling for prompt and peaceful conflict resolution, recent Bluebooks explicitly welcomed the joint statement of December 2023, in which Baku and Yerevan reaffirmed their intention to normalize relations and conclude a peace treaty. On August 8, 2025, the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a Joint Declaration in Washington, witnessed by the US president; the foreign ministers of the two countries also initialed the agreed text of their peace agreement. Most significantly, this phase highlighted the launch of Foreign Minister Kōno's "Caucasus Initiative," formally framing the region as a vital "linchpin" and "gateway" connecting East and West.

Japan's ODA toward the South Caucasus: Beyond tracking policy rhetoric in the *Diplomatic Bluebooks*, Japan's primary mechanism for practical engagement has been the consistent distribution of ODA. Figure 1 illustrates Japan's ODA net disbursements to Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia, alongside the regional total since 1994. The data show that Japan initially directed the bulk of its regional ODA toward Azerbaijan. While Baku remained a primary partner, Armenia and Georgia later became major beneficiaries of Japanese assistance. Because these figures in-

clude both net grant aid and yen loans, the data occasionally reflect low or negative values; these are primarily due to the structured repayment schedules of large yen loans rather than a sudden withdrawal of Japanese financial aid.

Figure 1. Japan's Net ODA Disbursements (Million US Dollars)[27]



Azerbaijan: In the immediate post-Soviet era, Japan focused primarily on providing humanitarian assistance to Azerbaijan. Early *ODA White Papers* show that Tokyo supplied medical goods and funded human resource training programs, alongside a $2.66 million allocation to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).[28] However, Japan's long-term strategy for Azerbaijan relied far more heavily on yen loans than grant aid, prioritizing three main sectors: economic infrastructure (energy, logistics, and communications), social development, and human resource training. Major projects in the country included the Severnaya Gas Combined Cycle Power Plant Project, implemented in two phases between 1997 and 2003, for which MOFA records indicate Japan committed ¥39.03 billion;[29] the Provincial Cities Water Supply and Sewerage Project, authorized in

[27] The data were retrieved from Japan's ODA country databooks for various years. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "Japan's ODA Data by Country," accessed August 26, 2026, https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/data/index.html. The low or negative figures in the graph primarily reflect repayment schedules for Japanese yen loans rather than a sharp decrease in ODA disbursements.

[28] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Seifu kaihatsu enjo (ODA): Kunibetsu dēta bukku 2002* [*Official Development Assistance (ODA): Databook by Country 2002*] (2002), https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shiryo/kuni/02_databook/caj/top_caj.html.

[29] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *Seifu kaihatsu enjo (ODA): Kunibetsu dēta bukku 2004* [*Official Development Assistance (ODA): Databook by Country 2004*] (2004), Azerbaijan, table 8, https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/shiryo/kuni/04_databook/03_c_asia/c_asia_06/c_asia_06_t08.html. This is approximately US$330 million, assuming ¥120 to US$1.

2009 with a JICA loan totaling approximately ¥32.85 billion;[30] and the Shimal Gas Combined Cycle Power Plant Project (Second Unit), for which construction was initially scheduled for 2007–2009 but deferred to 2011–2019, with ¥28.83 billion disbursed under the Japanese loan.[31]

Armenia: Japan's ODA framework for Armenia focused on three distinct pillars: human resource development alongside basic infrastructure, the promotion of human security, and capacity building for disaster prevention and relief. As in Azerbaijan, Japan initiated its relationship with humanitarian aid, distributing $4.99 million in direct relief and $4.3 million to the UNHCR in 1993, followed by specialized disaster prevention training programs in 1994. Landmark projects included the Yerevan Combined Cycle Co-Generation Power Plant Project, which commenced in 2005, with ¥26.399 billion disbursed under the loan by July 2013;[32] and the Project for Improvement of Fire Fighting Equipment in Yerevan City, for which a grant agreement was signed in February 2009, with actual disbursements of ¥781 million to modernize firefighting services in the Armenian capital through specialized rescue gear and technical support.[33] By 2022, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and JICA classified both Armenia and Georgia as upper-middle-income countries and territories (UMICs).

Georgia: Japan's initial ODA to Georgia followed a familiar blueprint, prioritizing basic economic infrastructure, specifically in the energy sector, alongside human resource training. Initial support consisted of a $4.83 million package providing medical supplies, fuel, and vaccines. In fiscal 1997, Japan approved a ¥5.332 billion loan to modernize generation capacity at the Lajanuri and Khurami hydropower plants.[34] Following the August 2008 military conflict in South Ossetia, the focus of Japanese ODA shifted heavily toward highway and logistics infrastructure to secure regional trade lines. Launching the East-West Highway Improvement Project (Phase One) in 2009, Japan extended a ¥17.722 billion loan to overhaul the country's primary transit route.[35] This was followed by a subsequent

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[30] Japan International Cooperation Agency, *Ex-Ante Evaluation (for Japanese ODA Loan): Provincial Cities Water Supply and Sewerage Project* (2009), 1–2, https://www2.jica.go.jp/en/evaluation/pdf/2009_AZB-P4_1_f.pdf.

[31] Hisae Takahashi, *FY2019 Ex-Post Evaluation of Japanese ODA Loan: Shimal Gas Combined Cycle Power Plant Project (Second Unit) (*Japan International Cooperation Agency, n.d.*),* 3, 9, accessed October 16, 2026, https://www2.jica.go.jp/en/evaluation/pdf/2019_AZB-P3_4_f.pdf.

[32] Kenichi Inazawa, *FY2015 Ex-Post Evaluation of Japanese ODA Loan: Yerevan Combined Cycle Co-Generation Power Plant Project (*Japan International Cooperation Agency, n.d.*),* 2–3, accessed October 16, 2026, https://www2.jica.go.jp/en/evaluation/pdf/2015_ARM-P2_4_f.pdf.

[33] Koichiro Ishimori, *Ex-Post Evaluation of Japanese ODA Grant Aid Project: The Project for Improvement of Fire Fighting Equipment in Yerevan City (*Japan International Cooperation Agency, n.d.*),* 2, accessed October 16, 2026, https://www2.jica.go.jp/en/evaluation/pdf/2013_0867940_4_f.pdf.

[34] Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund, "First Yen Loan to Georgia: Japan Assists Modernization of Two Hydro-Power Plants," January 19, 1998, 1, https://www2.jica.go.jp/yen_loan/pdf/en/4637/19980119.pdf.

[35] Japan International Cooperation Agency, "Signing of Japanese ODA Loan Agreement with Georgia: Road Infrastructure to Assist with Regional Economic Development and Post-war Rehabilitation," December 17, 2009, 1–2, https://www2.jica.go.jp/yen_loan/pdf/en/5978/20091217.pdf.

loan of ¥4.41 billion,[36] which was later supplemented by an additional ¥38.735 billion loan.[37] This concentrated investment in transit infrastructure highlights the strategic value Japan assigns to Georgia. The East-West Highway serves as an indispensable portion of the broader Eurasian transit corridor, physically linking the Black and Caspian Seas. In the view of Japanese policymakers, Georgia possesses significant potential to serve as a vital logistics hub bridging the European and Asian continents.

Rhetoric and Instruments: A Two-by-Two Reading

So far, we have analyzed Japan's engagement with the South Caucasus region by examining the political rhetoric of Japanese decision makers and substantive cooperation via ODA. To clarify the scope and direction of Japan's engagement with the region, we map its rhetoric and substantive actions onto the following two-by-two matrix.

The horizontal axis distinguishes the rhetoric of Japanese decision makers from substantive actions commensurate with that rhetoric. The vertical axis indicates the scale of Japanese engagement, from bilateral engagement at the micro level to regional geostrategic positioning at the macro level. Up to this point, Japan's engagement with the South Caucasus region has primarily been expressed through rhetorical descriptions of Eurasia and the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity. The substantive actions taken by Tokyo have primarily involved the initial establishment of diplomatic relations and subsequent provision of grants and yen loans to ensure human security and basic infrastructure development.

	Rhetoric	**Substantive Actions**
Bilateral/Micro-Level Analysis	Hashimoto's Eurasian Diplomacy Asō's Arc of Freedom and Prosperity	Establishment of diplomatic relations Provision of grants and loans through ODA for human security and basic infrastructure development
Regional Geostrategic Positioning/Macro-Level Analysis	Kōno's Caucasus Initiative Post-"linchpin" and "gateway" Absence of Takaichi's rhetoric	East-West Highway Improvement Project

[36] Japan International Cooperation Agency, "Signing of Japanese ODA Loan Agreement with Georgia: Strengthening Competitiveness as a Regional Logistics Hub by Improving an International Corridor," March 8, 2016, 1, https://www2.jica.go.jp/yen_loan/pdf/en/6671/20160308.pdf.

[37] Japan International Cooperation Agency, "Signing of Japanese ODA Loan Agreement with Georgia: Eliminating a Logistics Impediment and Contributing to Strengthened Transportation Capacity through Improvement of a Major International Corridor," September 4, 2018, 1, https://www2.jica.go.jp/yen_loan/pdf/en/6975/20180904_01.pdf.

Kōno's Caucasus Initiative signaled the beginning of a rhetorical shift, recasting the South Caucasus as a "linchpin" and "gateway." Substantive action, however, has been slower to follow. During his visit to Georgia, Kōno signed an agreement for a substantial yen loan to support the East-West Highway Improvement Project, directly enhancing the logistics link between the Black and Caspian Seas. This project was administered as a bilateral infrastructure loan to Georgia, consistent with the micro-level pattern established since the 1990s.

Yet, its function is not confined to that level. The corridor it improves is the same route that now carries a growing share of Middle Corridor trade bypassing Russia. This suggests that the project's strategic significance operates at the macro level even though its administration remains bilateral.

The bottom-right cell of the matrix is not entirely empty; it is populated by a single case whose macro relevance is latent rather than declared, an infrastructure loan whose geostrategic significance was never articulated in Tokyo's own rhetoric at the time it was made. What is genuinely missing is a substantive action conceived and justified as macro-level engagement from the outset. It is cooperation that Tokyo designs, funds, and frames explicitly as regional-corridor policy, rather than bilateral aid that later acquires geostrategic relevance in retrospect.

Why does this gap persist at the macro level? The primary reason lies in the institutional nature of Japan's ODA. Both Japanese grants and yen loans are structured around bilateral agreements negotiated with a single recipient government, with disbursement tied to that government's development plans and, for loans, repayment capacity. This institutional architecture is well suited to funding a specific national project, such as a highway segment or a power grid upgrade, precisely because there is one government to negotiate with, one budget cycle to align, and one set of conditionalities to satisfy.

Financing a regional corridor that runs across all three South Caucasus states, by contrast, would require harmonizing terms, timelines, and priorities across multiple sovereign governments simultaneously. Such coordination becomes a hurdle for which Japan's ODA framework, designed for bilateral delivery, offers no ready-made instrument. It is not necessarily that Tokyo lacks the political will to fund macro-level connectivity; rather, the institutional framework through which Japanese aid has always flowed makes bilateral, country-by-country engagement the path of least resistance, even when the strategic rationale being invoked is explicitly regional.

Conclusion

Since taking office in October 2025, Prime Minister Takaichi has placed a strong emphasis on ensuring economic security. This was a natural extension of her policy as minister for economic security under the Kishida administration. In Hanoi, Vietnam, in May 2026, Takaichi announced an updated version of the FOIP framework built on three priority areas: building economic infrastructure for the age of artificial intelligence and data, including resilient supply chains for energy and critical materials; co-creating economic growth opportunities and sharing rules

through public-private cooperation; and expanding security cooperation for regional peace and stability.[38] Supply chain resilience thus became a headline FOIP commitment, signaling her emphasis on supplies critical to energy and the economy.

While Takaichi was the first to frame it in terms of economic security, Japan had already articulated its position on strengthening supply chains. Since 2023, Japan has emphasized the growing importance of the South Caucasus region in the context of the "Trans-Caspian Sea Route" (*Kaspikai rūto*), a transport corridor connecting Central Asia and Europe through the region while bypassing Russia. The same physical corridor is more commonly known internationally as the Middle Corridor, and Japan's own aid documents also use the term Trans-Caspian International Transport Route. These developments seem to suggest that Takaichi should place strong geostrategic importance on the South Caucasus region in her own economic security agenda.

However, Takaichi has remained quieter and slower to articulate a similar narrative in this regional context, let alone to take actions commensurate with such an agenda. As of August 2026, some ten months after she first took office and six months after the general election, no political speeches, documents, or diplomatic initiatives have been delivered, published, or initiated under the Takaichi administration.

There are three plausible reasons for this relative absence of narrative and action. First, and most optimistically, the South Caucasus may simply be incorporated into the wider, updated FOIP framework under Takaichi, without requiring specific labeling of the region. In this case, the absence is due primarily to a change in the level of abstraction in Japan's approach to the region, not necessarily a decline in its regional interest. Second, it may be a matter of priority. Takaichi's administration is relatively new, and it prioritizes immediate issues such as relations with the US, China, Russia, and Iran, and its own defense budget. A narrative and initiative dedicated to the South Caucasus region may follow once Takaichi has satisfactorily dealt with these higher-priority issues. Third, and least optimistically, Takaichi may have decided not to provide the institutional weight or develop a separate initiative beyond already existing rhetoric and actions, due to the pressing issues mentioned above. The South Caucasus, in this case, remains marginal to Japan's economic security strategy, regardless of the recognition it received under previous administrations.

The reality is likely a combination of these three factors. Whether Takaichi's economic security diplomacy eventually produces a distinct South Caucasus policy or whether the region continues to be governed by inherited bilateral instruments,

[38] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, "The Updated 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP),'" May 2, 2026, https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/pageite_000001_01612.html.

namely ODA, remains an open question that only the coming years of her administration can answer.[39]

Japan's engagement with the South Caucasus has become more regional in its strategic framing without undergoing a comparable transformation in its policy instruments. Tokyo increasingly recognizes the region's significance as a link between Europe and Asia and as a potential component of broader connectivity and economic-security strategies. The future trajectory of Japanese engagement will depend on whether economic security and connectivity become organizing principles of practical cooperation or remain primarily features of diplomatic discourse. Japan's experience thus offers a broader insight into contemporary foreign policy: how regional strategic ambition and bilateral implementation can coexist.

Conflict of Interests
The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.
Ethical Standards
The authors affirm this research did not involve human subjects.

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[39] Takahata, "'Yūrashia gaikō' to iu Nihon no sentaku." Takahata proposes that Japan consider what he calls "Eurasian Diplomacy 2.0" in addition to the current FOIP framework and the US-Japan alliance system. He argues that geostrategic competition among the US, Russia, and China will continue. Under these circumstances, Japan should recognize that many countries and regions in Eurasia could offer it support. Doing so will help shape Japan's diplomatic choices.

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THE NEW STRATEGIC PRIORITIES OF THE US IN A CHANGING WORLD ORDER: THE DIPLOMACY OF WAR AND PEACE

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Abstract

The changing international order has altered how the United States exercises global power. This article examines how the US strategic priorities have adapted to the diffusion of military, economic, technological, and institutional power and asks whether contemporary policy represents a restoration of post-Cold War primacy or an adaptation of American leadership to a more competitive international system. Drawing on realist and liberal institutionalist perspectives and soft power, the article develops the concept of "transformed hegemony." Using qualitative comparative case analysis and process tracing, it examines US support for Ukraine, NATO enlargement and burden-sharing, and US controls on strategically significant technologies and outbound investment involving China. The analysis finds that US influence increasingly operates through alliance mobilization, institutional coordination, economic statecraft, technological regulation, and diplomatic networks rather than through unilateral action alone. These mechanisms convert US capabilities into collective strategic capacity while distributing costs among allies and partners. At the same time, their effectiveness is conditional on allied cohesion, technological leadership, domestic political continuity, and the responses of competing states. The article concludes that US strategy is better understood as a networked and adaptive form of strategic primacy than as a restoration of classical unipolar hegemony.

Keywords: *changing world order, US grand strategy, transformed hegemony, strategic primacy, alliance activation, economic statecraft.*

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the international system has undergone a redistribution of material capabilities, strategic influence, and institutional weight rather than a straightforward transition from one stable international order to another.[1] The post-Cold War period provided the United States with an unusually broad margin of strategic freedom and enabled Washington to exercise predominant influence across security, economic, technological, and institutional domains. However, the subsequent rise of China, Russia's renewed resort to military force, the diffusion of advanced technological capabilities, and the growing strategic autonomy of regional actors have progressively constrained the feasibility of unilateral management of international affairs. The 2022 US National Security Strategy explicitly identifies intensified strategic competition as a defining characteristic of the contemporary environment while simultaneously emphasizing alliances, partnerships, and cooperation in addressing transnational challenges. The central analytical problem, therefore, is not whether US power has disappeared, but how the United States seeks to transform its substantial material and institutional capabilities into sustainable international influence under conditions of intensified systemic competition.[2]

This question is particularly important because contemporary US foreign policy cannot be adequately explained through a purely military or capability-centered conception of power.[3] The strategic environment increasingly combines cooperation, competition, coercion, and limited conflict across interconnected domains.[4] Consequently, the exercise of US power involves the simultaneous use of military deterrence, economic statecraft, technological regulation, diplomatic coordination, institutional influence, and partnerships. The 2022 US National Defense Strategy placed integrated deterrence at the center of American defense planning, linking military capabilities with allied and partner contributions and coordinated action across domains.[5] This shift suggests that contemporary US strategic influence increasingly depends on coordinating multiple instruments and actors rather than relying exclusively on unilateral material superiority.[6]

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[1] Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers in the Twenty-First Century: China's Rise and the Fate of America's Global Position," *International Security* 40, no. 3 (Winter 2015/16): 8–9, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00225.

[2] The White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, October 2022), https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf.

[3] Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, "Power in International Politics," *International Organization* 59, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 39–41, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818305050010.

[4] Thomas Wright, *All Measures Short of War: The Contest for the Twenty-First Century and the Future of American Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

[5] US Department of Defense, *2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: US Department of Defense, October 27, 2022), 1, 8, https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF.

[6] Michael J. Mazarr and Ivana Ke, *Integrated Deterrence as a Defense Planning Concept*, PE-A2263-1 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, June 2024), 1–3, https://doi.org/10.7249/PEA2263-1.

Alliance policy provides one of the clearest empirical manifestations of this transformation. Contemporary US alliance management is increasingly concerned with interoperability, burden-sharing, operational coordination, capability development, and political alignment rather than with the preservation of inherited institutional arrangements alone.[7] NATO developments following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine provide a particularly important empirical reference point. Finland joined NATO on April 4, 2023, while Sweden became a member on March 7, 2024, bringing the Alliance to 32 members.[8] These accessions reflect both NATO's institutional enlargement and the renewed demand for collective security generated by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. At the 2024 Washington Summit, NATO further reported that more than two-thirds of its members had reached the two percent of GDP defense spending benchmark, while NATO estimated an eighteen percent increase in defense expenditure by European Allies and Canada for 2024.[9] Together, these developments indicate stronger alliance capacity, broader burden-sharing, and deeper coordination within US-led security cooperation.[10]

The transformation is also visible in forms of strategic cooperation extending beyond formal alliance structures. US foreign policy increasingly relies on overlapping bilateral, multilateral, and minilateral arrangements through which partner states contribute military capabilities, intelligence, diplomatic support, technological capacity, economic resources, or geographic access.[11] This pattern can be understood as networked leadership, in which US influence is exercised through the coordination of multiple actors whose participation expands the material capacity and political sustainability of strategic initiatives.[12]

The response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine provides a significant case in this regard. By January 2025, the US Department of State reported approximately $65.9 billion in US military assistance to Ukraine since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022, while nearly 50 Allies and partner countries had also provided security assistance. This evidence shows that US

[7] Celeste A. Wallander, "Institutional Assets and Adaptability: NATO after the Cold War," *International Organization* 54, no. 4 (Autumn 2000): 705–6, https://doi.org/10.1162/002081800551343; NATO, "Washington Summit Declaration," July 10, 2024, paras. 6–7, https://www.nato.int/en/about-us/official-texts-and-resources/official-texts/2024/07/10/washington-summit-declaration.

[8] Louisa Brooke-Holland, *NATO Enlargement: Finland and Sweden*, Research Briefing 9574 (London: House of Commons Library, March 11, 2024), 2–3, https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9574/CBP-9574.pdf.

[9] NATO, "Washington Summit Declaration," para. 6.

[10] Joseph Clark, "Biden Meets with Fellow NATO Leaders at Washington Summit," US Department of Defense, July 10, 2024, https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3834908/.

[11] Luis Simón, Alexander Lanoszka, and Hugo Meijer, "Nodal Defence: The Changing Structure of U.S. Alliance Systems in Europe and East Asia," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 44, no. 3 (2021): 360–88, https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2019.1636372.

[12] Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, Miles Kahler, and Alexander H. Montgomery, "Network Analysis for International Relations," *International Organization* 63, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 570–72, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818309090195.

strategic leadership in a major security crisis has relied on coalition mobilization and coordination rather than direct unilateral military intervention.[13]

Soft power also remains relevant to contemporary US influence. Cultural influence, higher education, scientific cooperation, international communication, and the attractiveness of US institutions can contribute to the formation and durability of international coalitions. Nevertheless, contemporary US influence cannot be sufficiently explained through soft power alone.[14] The empirical developments examined in this article suggest an increasingly integrated combination of hard power, soft power, economic statecraft, technological regulation, and institutional coordination. These instruments can reinforce one another: military capabilities can strengthen diplomatic bargaining power; alliances can facilitate economic measures; technological restrictions can complement deterrence; and institutional cooperation can reduce the political and material costs of unilateral action.[15]

Against this background, the article addresses the following research question: How are the mechanisms of US strategic influence being transformed under conditions of intensified great-power competition and an increasingly multipolar international environment? The central argument is that the United States is not simply attempting to restore the unilateral form of post-Cold War primacy. Rather, it is adapting its leadership through a combination of alliance mobilization, institutional coordination, economic statecraft, technological regulation, and selective deterrence. The article conceptualizes this emerging pattern as transformed hegemony, a form of influence in which US material capabilities remain central but are increasingly translated into strategic outcomes through networks of allies, institutions, and economic and technological instruments.

Methodology and Analytical Framework

This study combines qualitative comparative case analysis with process tracing to examine how the mechanisms of US strategic influence have evolved under conditions of intensified great-power competition.[16] This approach addresses a limitation of purely descriptive analyses of US foreign policy: the tendency to identify changes in strategic behavior without sufficiently demonstrating the mechanisms through which policy instruments are translated into political, institutional, economic, and strategic outcomes. Accordingly, the study focuses not only on what instruments the United States employs, but also on how these instruments are coordinated,

[13] US Department of State, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, "U.S. Security Cooperation with Ukraine," January 9, 2025, https://2021-2025.state.gov/bureau-of-political-military-affairs/releases/2025/01/u-s-security-cooperation-with-ukraine/.

[14] Ernest J. Wilson III, "Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (March 2008): 110–24, https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207312618.

[15] Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004); Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The Future of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011).

[16] Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

through which institutional and relational channels they operate, and under what conditions they generate or constrain US influence.

The analysis covers the period in which the transformation of the international security and economic environment became particularly pronounced, with primary attention to developments following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the intensification of strategic and technological competition between the United States and China. This temporal focus makes it possible to examine contemporary changes in US strategy through identifiable policy decisions, institutional developments, and measurable milestones rather than relying exclusively on long-term structural assumptions. At the same time, the analysis incorporates relevant earlier theoretical and historical developments where they are necessary to establish the conceptual background for understanding changes in American power and hegemony.

Three cases are selected for comparative analysis because they represent distinct but interconnected dimensions of contemporary US statecraft: (1) security and alliance mobilization in response to Russia's war against Ukraine; (2) institutional adaptation through NATO enlargement and burden-sharing; and (3) geo-economic and technological competition through advanced-technology export controls and outbound-investment restrictions directed toward China. The cases are selected analytically to capture three distinct mechanisms through which US capabilities are converted into influence: US coalition mobilization, institutional coordination, and the strategic use of economic and technological regulation.[17]

Process tracing is used within each case to identify sequences of policy decisions, institutional responses, and observable outcomes. This method is particularly appropriate because the study seeks to identify mechanisms of influence rather than establish simple correlations.[18] The analysis therefore traces the sequence from strategic assessment and policy decision to institutional or coalition response and observable strategic outcomes. For example, in the alliance cases, the analysis examines how changes in the perceived security environment contributed to new commitments and institutional developments; in the technology case, it examines how strategic assessments concerning advanced technologies were translated into increasingly comprehensive regulatory measures.

The evidence base combines primary and secondary sources. Primary evidence includes US strategic documents, official statements, Department of Defense and Department of State materials, Department of Commerce export-control regulations, Department of the Treasury investment regulations, and NATO declarations and institutional documents. These sources are supplemented by established international relations scholarship addressing hegemony, power transition, alliances, institutions, economic statecraft, and strategic competition. The use of official

[17] Jason Seawright and John Gerring, "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options," *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (June 2008): 294–308, https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912907313077.

[18] David Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44, no. 4 (October 2011): 823–25, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096511001429.

policy and regulatory sources is particularly important because it enables the analysis to distinguish between general interpretations of US strategy and formally articulated policy objectives and measures. Secondary scholarship situates these developments within broader theoretical debates and provides the context necessary to interpret individual policy decisions.

The analytical framework distinguishes between material power, leadership, and hegemony. Material power refers to the aggregate military, economic, technological, and institutional resources available to the United States. Leadership refers to the capacity to mobilize these resources in cooperation with other actors and to shape collective responses to international problems. Hegemony, in contrast, concerns the broader capacity to establish or influence the rules, institutions, expectations, and strategic choices within which other actors operate. This distinction is important because superior capabilities translate into political influence through effective strategic conversion, while political influence can also operate through coordination, institutions, and indirect forms of leadership.

The framework consequently evaluates contemporary US strategic influence through four interconnected analytical dimensions: (1) capacity, encompassing available military, economic, technological, and institutional resources; (2) coordination, concerning the ability to mobilize allies, partners, and institutions; (3) strategic conversion, involving the translation of resources into concrete policy instruments and collective action; and (4) constraints, including the responses of other states, economic interdependence, institutional limitations, domestic political factors, and the costs associated with sustained strategic competition. These dimensions allow the analysis to assess the extent of US power, how effectively its capabilities are converted into influence, and where that process encounters structural or political limits.[19]

The Prospects and Constraints of Reasserting US Hegemony

The position of the United States in the contemporary international system remains central to theoretical and empirical debates concerning hegemony, primacy, and international leadership. Following the end of the Cold War, the United States possessed an exceptional concentration of military, economic, technological, and institutional capabilities. This concentration enabled Washington to exercise substantial influence over international security arrangements, global economic governance, and major international institutions. However, the structural conditions that characterized the immediate post-Cold War period have changed considerably. The rise of China as a major economic and technological power, Russia's renewed willingness to employ military force, the increasing strategic autonomy of regional powers, and the diffusion of advanced technologies have reduced the ability of the United States to translate its material advantages automatically into unilateral political outcomes.

[19] David A. Baldwin, "Power Analysis and World Politics: New Trends versus Old Tendencies," *World Politics* 31, no. 2 (January 1979): 163–64, https://doi.org/10.2307/2009941.

The theoretical literature provides several complementary but distinct explanations of this process. Offensive realism, particularly in the work of John Mearsheimer, emphasizes the structural incentives facing great powers to maximize relative capabilities and prevent the emergence of peer competitors. From this perspective, the US efforts to preserve a favorable distribution of power and constrain potential challengers are consistent with the logic of great-power competition. Joseph Nye's approach places greater emphasis on the distinction between hard and soft power and on the ability of states to combine coercive capabilities with attraction, persuasion, and agenda-setting. John Ikenberry, meanwhile, emphasizes the institutionalization of American power and the capacity of the United States to embed its influence within international institutions and rules rather than relying exclusively on coercion. These perspectives are better understood as complementary approaches to different dimensions of US power. Taken together, they suggest that contemporary US influence is best examined through the interaction of material capabilities, institutional structures, strategic networks, and forms of attraction and persuasion.[20]

This theoretical synthesis has an important methodological implication. US hegemony cannot be assessed adequately through indicators such as military expenditure, force projection, or the global distribution of military bases alone. These indicators capture material capabilities more readily than their conversion into sustained political influence. A more comprehensive assessment must also consider the ability of the United States to organize collective action, sustain alliances, shape institutional rules, influence technological ecosystems, coordinate economic measures, and persuade other states to contribute resources toward shared strategic objectives. The distinction between capacity and strategic conversion is therefore central to this study. The United States may retain substantial material capabilities while simultaneously experiencing greater difficulty in converting those capabilities into predictable outcomes because other states possess greater autonomy and bargaining power.

The European security environment provides an important illustration. Finland joined NATO on April 4, 2023, followed by Sweden on March 7, 2024, bringing the Alliance to 32 members. These accessions illustrate NATO's institutional adaptation to the transformed European security environment. Their significance for the analysis of US hegemony lies both in NATO's enlargement and in the continued centrality of the United States within a security institution whose strategic relevance has increased in response to heightened threat perceptions. At the same time, the accessions should not be interpreted as evidence of unilateral US control. Finland and Sweden made sovereign strategic decisions, and their participation demonstrates that contemporary alliance structures are shaped through interaction between US leadership and the strategic preferences of other states.[21]

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[20] John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001); Nye, *Soft Power*; G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

[21] NATO, "Finland Joins NATO as 31st Ally," April 4, 2023, https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/articles/news/2023/04/04/finland-joins-nato-as-31st-ally; NATO, "Sweden Officially Joins NATO," March 7, 2024, https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/articles/news/2024/03/07/sweden-officially-joins-nato.

The Ukraine case provides further evidence of this networked form of strategic leadership. Following Russia's full-scale invasion on February 24, 2022, the United States became the principal military and diplomatic supporter of Ukraine within a broader coalition of states. By January 2025, the US Department of State reported approximately $65.9 billion in US military assistance to Ukraine since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, while nearly 50 Allies and partner countries had also provided security assistance. These figures indicate considerable US capacity for coalition mobilization. More importantly for the present argument, they show that US strategic influence was exercised through a distributed network of states rather than through direct military confrontation between the United States and Russia.[22]

The three cases therefore reveal a common mechanism: the United States increasingly seeks to convert its material advantages into strategic outcomes through institutionalization, coalition-building, and regulatory leverage. In the security domain, this occurs through alliances and military assistance; in the institutional domain, through NATO enlargement and burden-sharing; and in the technological domain, through export controls and investment restrictions. These instruments differ substantially in their immediate objectives and modes of operation, but they share an important characteristic: each attempts to shape the strategic behavior of other actors without requiring direct territorial control or continuous unilateral coercion.

However, networked hegemony also faces important structural limitations. First, dependence on alliances and institutional networks means that US leadership is conditioned by the preferences and capabilities of partners. Broader participation can increase coordination costs, sharpen divergent interests, and intensify bargaining over the distribution of burdens. Second, economic and technological restrictions may generate unintended consequences, including incentives for competitors to develop alternative supply chains, domestic technological capabilities, financial mechanisms, or institutional arrangements. Third, the increasing autonomy of China, Russia, and other regional powers limits the ability of the United States to determine outcomes independently. Consequently, networked influence may increase the efficiency and legitimacy of collective action while simultaneously reducing the degree of unilateral control available to Washington.

Strategic Competition with Major Powers and the US International Agenda

The contemporary international environment is increasingly shaped by strategic competition among major powers, but the nature of this competition differs significantly across issue areas and adversaries. For the United States, the most consequential challenge arises from the interaction of geopolitical rivalry, technological competition, economic interdependence, and the contest over international rules and institutions. The 2022 US National Security Strategy (NSS) explicitly distinguishes between the challenges posed by the People's Republic of China (PRC)

[22] The White House, *National Security Strategy*.

and the Russian Federation. China is identified as the only competitor possessing both the intention to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological capabilities to do so, whereas Russia is characterized as an immediate and persistent threat requiring containment and deterrence. The distinction provides an important analytical basis for understanding contemporary US strategic priorities: Washington treats China primarily as a long-term systemic competitor while responding to Russia principally through deterrence, alliance defense, sanctions, and crisis management.[23]

This differentiation is also reflected in the evolution of US policy since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The Russian case has generated a predominantly security-centered response. The United States has sought to strengthen NATO's eastern deterrence posture, impose extensive economic and financial sanctions on Moscow, provide military and economic assistance to Ukraine, and increase allied burden-sharing. NATO's 2022 Madrid Summit Strategic Concept identified Russia as the Alliance's "most significant and direct threat," while simultaneously describing China as a systemic challenge to Euro-Atlantic security. By the Washington Summit of July 2024, this distinction had developed into a broader strategic framework in which Russia remained the most immediate military threat, while China's growing capabilities, coercive policies, and partnership with Russia were treated as interconnected elements of the wider strategic environment.[24]

The Ukraine war therefore provides an important empirical case for examining how the United States has mobilized its alliance network as a broader strategic instrument extending beyond traditional military commitments. The July 2024 Washington NATO Summit, for example, produced decisions to strengthen deterrence and defense, increase defense-industrial capacity, expand support for Ukraine, and deepen cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners, including Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and New Zealand.[25] NATO also reported that 23 Allies had reached the two percent of GDP defense spending benchmark in 2024.[26] These measures demonstrate that what may be termed the "activation" of the US alliance system involves concrete mechanisms: increased defense spending, coordinated military planning, industrial cooperation, intelligence and technological cooperation, sanctions coordination, and the distribution of the costs of strategic competition among partners. Thus, alliance politics combines its military function with a broader role in strengthening the political and institutional legitimacy of US strategic action.

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[23] The White House, *National Security Strategy*.

[24] NATO, *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept* (Brussels: NATO, 2022), paras. 8, 13, https://www.nato.int/content/dam/nato/webready/documents/publications-and-reports/strategic-concepts/2022/290622-strategic-concept.pdf; NATO, "Washington Summit Declaration," paras. 3–4, 26–27.

[25] NATO, "Washington Summit Declaration," paras. 5, 7–11, 15, 30.

[26] Jens Stoltenberg, "Press Conference," NATO, July 10, 2024, https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2024/07/10/press-conference.

The China challenge is structurally different. Unlike Russia, China combines economic scale, technological capacity, military modernization, diplomatic influence, and deep integration into global production networks, giving Beijing the capacity to shape the distribution of power across multiple dimensions simultaneously. The 2022 NSS therefore defined US policy toward China in terms of "responsibly managing competition" while investing in US domestic capabilities, strengthening alliances and partnerships, and defending a free and open international system. The resulting strategy is neither conventional containment nor simple economic decoupling. Rather, it increasingly resembles a policy of selective de-risking and strategic constraint focused on sectors considered critical to national security.[27]

The policy was further expanded on December 2, 2024, when the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) introduced new controls covering 24 categories of semiconductor-manufacturing equipment, three categories of software tools, and high-bandwidth memory (HBM), while adding 140 entities to the Entity List.[28] The stated objective was to constrain China's capacity to produce advanced-node semiconductors relevant to artificial intelligence, advanced computing, and military applications. The scope of this measure is particularly significant: US policy increasingly targets US-finished chips and also the equipment, software, memory technologies, and industrial capabilities necessary to produce advanced semiconductors domestically. The case therefore illustrates a shift from conventional export restriction toward strategic management of technological dependencies and supply-chain chokepoints.

A comparable logic has emerged in the area of capital flows. On August 9, 2023, the Biden administration issued Executive Order 14105 establishing the framework for regulating certain US outbound investments involving sensitive national-security technologies in countries of concern. The subsequent Treasury Department final rule, issued on October 28, 2024 and effective from January 2, 2025, established restrictions covering three principal technological areas: semiconductors and microelectronics, quantum information technologies, and artificial intelligence. Certain transactions were prohibited, while others became subject to notification requirements.[29]

The resulting strategic pattern can therefore be understood as a form of multidimensional balancing. Against Russia, the United States relies heavily on military

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[27] Jake Sullivan, "Remarks by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Renewing American Economic Leadership at the Brookings Institution," The White House, April 27, 2023, https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/04/27/remarks-by-national-security-advisor-jake-sullivan-on-renewing-american-economic-leadership-at-the-brookings-institution/.

[28] US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Industry and Security, "Commerce Strengthens Export Controls to Restrict China's Capability to Produce Advanced Semiconductors for Military Applications," December 2, 2024, https://media.bis.gov/press-release/commerce-strengthens-export-controls-restrict-chinas-capability-produce-advanced-semiconductors-military.

[29] US Department of the Treasury, "Treasury Issues Regulations to Implement Executive Order Addressing U.S. Investments in Certain National Security Technologies and Products in Countries of Concern," October 28, 2024, https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy2687.

deterrence, forward defense, sanctions, and alliance solidarity. Against China, it combines military deterrence in the Indo-Pacific with technological restrictions, economic risk management, industrial policy, investment controls, and coalition-building. These approaches are different but increasingly interconnected. The 2024 NATO agenda illustrates this convergence: support for Ukraine, strengthening European defense capabilities, and deeper engagement with Indo-Pacific partners were treated as mutually reinforcing components of a broader strategy for managing strategic competition.[30]

At the same time, this strategy faces significant structural limitations. Extensive export controls can accelerate technological substitution by encouraging China and other competitors to develop indigenous alternatives; sanctions can generate incentives for alternative financial and trade arrangements; and greater reliance on allies requires sustained political coordination and willingness to share economic and security costs. Consequently, the effectiveness of US strategic competition depends on material capabilities as well as the ability to maintain coalition cohesion, technological leadership, institutional legitimacy, and sufficient economic resilience. The 2022–2024 period shows that contemporary American influence increasingly rests on the capacity to mobilize networks of allies and partners and translate technological and economic advantages into coordinated strategic outcomes.

US Responses to Global Crises and Issues

The United States' response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine provides one of the clearest empirical cases for examining how contemporary US foreign-policy instruments operate in combination. In response to the invasion on February 24, 2022, Washington employed multiple instruments of state power. It combined military assistance to Ukraine, extensive economic and financial sanctions against Russia, intelligence and information cooperation, diplomatic coordination, humanitarian assistance, and the mobilization of US allies and partners. This combination reflects a shift from predominantly bilateral crisis management toward a coalition-based model in which military, economic, diplomatic, and institutional instruments reinforce one another.

The scale of US military assistance provides measurable evidence of this approach. By January 9, 2025, the US Department of State reported that the United States had provided $65.9 billion in military assistance to Ukraine since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion.[31] The assistance included air-defense systems, artillery, ammunition, anti-armor capabilities, unmanned systems, training, and other military equipment. The United States has also used Presidential Drawdown Authority on 55 occasions since August 2021, providing approximately $27.688 billion in military assistance from US Department of Defense stocks.[32]

[30] NATO, "Washington Summit Declaration," paras. 4–7, 29–30.
[31] US Department of State, "U.S. Security Cooperation with Ukraine."
[32] US Department of State, "U.S. Security Cooperation with Ukraine."

The crisis also demonstrates that US leadership increasingly depends on the capacity to mobilize and coordinate external partners.[33] The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) became a principal institutional mechanism for transforming bilateral US support into a broader coalition framework. At the July 2024 Washington Summit, Allied leaders established NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU) to coordinate the provision of military equipment and training, while also advancing the establishment of the NATO-Ukraine Joint Analysis, Training and Education Centre (JATEC) to strengthen interoperability and institutional learning.[34] NATO leaders additionally adopted a long-term security-assistance pledge with a minimum baseline of €40 billion for Ukraine for the following year.[35]

These measures give concrete empirical content to the concept of alliance activation. Alliance activation extends beyond treaty commitments and political declarations. In operational terms, it involves the conversion of existing commitments into coordinated military planning, capability provision, financial contributions, training, defense-industrial cooperation, intelligence sharing, institutional coordination, and political burden-sharing. The Washington Summit provides evidence of each of these dimensions. The establishment of NSATU created an institutional mechanism for coordinating military assistance; JATEC was intended to strengthen military interoperability and the exchange of lessons learned; and the €40 billion financial baseline introduced a measurable mechanism for distributing the costs of long-term support among Allies.

The evolution of NATO defense spending provides additional evidence of this process. At the Washington Summit, Allied leaders reaffirmed the commitment to invest at least two percent of GDP in defense and noted that more than two-thirds of Allies had reached that benchmark. NATO subsequently reported that European Allies and Canada had increased defense expenditure substantially in response to the changed security environment.[36] These developments suggest that the war in Ukraine has increased US assistance to Ukraine while also contributing to a redistribution of defense responsibilities within the transatlantic alliance. The United States' leadership role therefore increasingly operates through a combination of direct national capabilities and the mobilization of allied resources.[37]

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[33] US Government Accountability Office, *Ukraine: U.S. Agencies Should Improve Tracking of Authorized U.S.-Origin Defense Article Transfers Requested by Foreign Donors*, GAO-24-106745 (Washington, DC: US Government Accountability Office, August 2024), 9–11, https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-24-106745.pdf.

[34] NATO Allied Command Transformation, "Advancing NATO-Ukraine Defence Cooperation and Interoperability," May 30, 2025, https://www.act.nato.int/article/nsatu-jatec/.

[35] NATO, "Washington Summit Declaration," para. 15.

[36] NATO, "Washington Summit Declaration," para. 6; NATO, *The Secretary General's Annual Report 2024* (Brussels: NATO, April 2025), 2, 16–17, https://www.nato.int/content/dam/nato/legacy-wcm/media_pdf/2025/4/pdf/sgar24-en.pdf.

[37] Kiel Institute for the World Economy, "Ukraine Support after 3 Years of War: Aid Flows Remain Low but Steady—Shift towards Weapons Procurement," February 14, 2025, https://www.kielinstitut.de/media/news/ukraine-support-after-3-years-of-war-aid-flows-remain-low-but-steady-shift-towards-weapons-procurement/.

A second dimension of US crisis and strategic policy can be observed in the technological sphere. The United States increasingly treats advanced technologies as both economic assets and national-security capabilities. This is particularly evident in policies concerning advanced semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and semiconductor-manufacturing equipment. The December 2024 semiconductor-control package provides a concrete example. The US Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security introduced controls covering 24 categories of semiconductor-manufacturing equipment, three categories of software tools, and high-bandwidth memory (HBM). The package also added 140 Asian entities to the Entity List and introduced additional measures intended to address diversion and circumvention risks.

The significance of these measures extends beyond conventional trade regulation. Semiconductor-manufacturing capacity is strategically important because advanced chips and the technologies required to produce them contribute to artificial intelligence, high-performance computing, and advanced military systems.[38] The US policy therefore seeks to constrain access to selected capabilities that Washington considers strategically sensitive. At the same time, the measures are targeted rather than equivalent to a comprehensive economic embargo. It is therefore more analytically accurate to describe them as strategic technology controls, technological risk management, or selective technological containment rather than as a complete "technological blockade."

This development suggests that contemporary US responses to global crises increasingly transcend the traditional distinction between military and economic instruments. Washington increasingly employs a multidimensional approach in which military power, economic statecraft, technological regulation, diplomacy, intelligence cooperation, and alliance coordination operate as complementary instruments. The effectiveness of this approach, however, depends on the ability of the United States to maintain technological advantages, sustain domestic political support, coordinate allied interests, and manage the risks of escalation arising from strategic competition.

The New Vision and Prospects for the Development of US Foreign Policy

This study suggests that the emerging US foreign-policy vision is best understood as a form of adaptive leadership under conditions of constrained primacy. The United States continues to possess exceptional military, economic, technological, diplomatic, and institutional capabilities; however, the international environment in which these capabilities are exercised has become considerably more competitive and interdependent. China has emerged as a long-term systemic competitor, Russia has generated a major security challenge to the European order, and middle and regional powers increasingly seek greater strategic autonomy. Under these condi-

[38] Karen M. Sutter, *U.S. Export Controls and China: Advanced Semiconductors*, CRS Report R48642 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, August 22, 2025), 1–3, https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/R/PDF/R48642/R48642.2.pdf.

tions, the central question for Washington concerns how predominant US power can be converted into sustainable political influence when unilateral action is increasingly costly and coalition support is increasingly necessary.

On this basis, the concept of transformed hegemony offers a more useful analytical framework than a simple restoration of post-Cold War unipolarity.[39] Classical unipolarity implied an exceptionally favorable distribution of material capabilities in which the United States could exercise considerable freedom of action.[40] The contemporary environment is different. US power remains substantial, but it operates within a system characterized by greater economic interdependence, technological diffusion, strategic competition, institutional pluralism, and the increased capacity of other major powers to resist or modify US preferences.[41] The transformation of American leadership therefore concerns both the scale of US power and the mechanisms through which that power is organized, transmitted, and converted into political outcomes.

The Ukraine case provides particularly strong evidence for this transformation. Since February 2022, the United States has supplied extensive military assistance to Ukraine while simultaneously coordinating sanctions, diplomatic initiatives, intelligence cooperation, humanitarian support, and allied contributions. The creation of NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU) at the 2024 Washington Summit further institutionalized the coordination of military assistance. These developments indicate that US leadership is increasingly exercised through coalition structures in which American capabilities catalyze broader collective action.[42] The United States remains the most consequential actor within this system, but the effectiveness of its strategy depends on the willingness and capacity of other states to contribute resources and accept associated costs.

NATO's post-2022 development reinforces this conclusion. Finland's accession on April 4, 2023 and Sweden's accession on March 7, 2024 expanded the Alliance to 32 members.[43] Their accession was particularly significant because both states had historically maintained military non-alignment and reconsidered their strategic positions following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The enlargement therefore reflects a broader shift in strategic calculations generated by the war and a further consolidation of the transatlantic security framework. From the perspective of US strategy, this strengthens the importance of alliances as instruments through which American security preferences can become embedded in a broader institutional order.

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[39] G. John Ikenberry, "Liberal Internationalism 3.0: America and the Dilemmas of Liberal World Order," *Perspectives on Politics* 7, no. 1 (March 2009): 80–83, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592709090112.

[40] William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 24, no. 1 (Summer 1999): 7–10, https://doi.org/10.1162/016228899560031.

[41] Amitav Acharya, "After Liberal Hegemony: The Advent of a Multiplex World Order," *Ethics & International Affairs* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 271–85, https://doi.org/10.1017/S089267941700020X.

[42] US Government Accountability Office, *Ukraine: U.S. Agencies Should Improve Tracking*, 9–12.

[43] NATO, "Finland Joins NATO as 31st Ally"; NATO, "Sweden Officially Joins NATO."

The technological dimension provides a second indicator of transformed US leadership. The export-control measures introduced in October 2022 and subsequently strengthened in 2023 and 2024 demonstrate that Washington increasingly seeks to influence the international distribution of power by regulating access to strategically sensitive technologies.[44] The December 2024 semiconductor package, which expanded restrictions on semiconductor-manufacturing equipment, software tools, high-bandwidth memory, and designated Chinese entities, shows how national-security strategy increasingly extends into global production networks. The US outbound-investment regime similarly shows how strategic competition has expanded beyond trade to encompass the regulation of capital flows in strategically sensitive technologies.

Transformed hegemony therefore describes a relational form of influence in which US power depends on coordination with other actors rather than unilateral control. The effectiveness of networked leadership is inherently relational. Alliance partners retain their own national interests, domestic political constraints, economic dependencies, and strategic priorities. The experience of NATO since 2022 illustrates both the strength and the limitations of coalition-based leadership. Although the war encouraged greater defense spending and strengthened transatlantic cooperation, Allies have differed over the scale, timing, and form of military assistance to Ukraine and over the appropriate balance between deterrence, escalation management, and long-term support. Consequently, US leadership within alliances should be understood as a process of coordination and bargaining rather than hierarchical command.[45]

The economic dimension presents a comparable dilemma. Sanctions and financial restrictions can impose high costs on adversaries and reduce their access to markets, capital, and technologies. However, extensive use of economic coercion may also encourage affected states to seek alternative payment mechanisms, trading partners, financial institutions, and reserve assets. The strategic effectiveness of sanctions is therefore shaped by both the economic weight of the United States and the degree of international participation in the relevant financial and commercial system. US economic power remains considerable precisely because it is embedded in global networks; at the same time, those networks create opportunities for adaptation by states seeking to reduce their dependence on US-dominated structures.[46]

Transformed hegemony operates through several distinct but interconnected modalities of US influence. First, alliance-based leadership enables the United States to multiply its security capabilities through partners and distribute the costs

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[44] Gregory C. Allen, *Understanding the Biden Administration's Updated Export Controls* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 11, 2024), 1–2, https://www.csis.org/analysis/understanding-biden-administrations-updated-export-controls.

[45] Glenn H. Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics," *World Politics* 36, no. 4 (July 1984): 463–68, https://doi.org/10.2307/2010183.

[46] Henry Farrell and Abraham L. Newman, "Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion," *International Security* 44, no. 1 (Summer 2019): 42–79, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00351.

of deterrence. Second, institutional leadership allows Washington to influence rules, standards, and collective decision-making through multilateral frameworks and coordinated action. Third, geo-economic leverage allows the United States to pursue strategic objectives through financial measures, trade policy, investment controls, and sanctions. Fourth, technological leadership provides influence over critical infrastructures and future sources of economic and military power. Finally, normative and diplomatic influence remains important for sustaining the legitimacy and attractiveness of the broader order that Washington seeks to preserve.[47]

The interaction of these modalities is more significant than any individual instrument. Military power can deter aggression, but alliances increase its political and operational effectiveness. Economic power can impose costs, but coordinated sanctions increase their reach.[48] Technological advantages can generate strategic leverage, but partnerships and supply-chain coordination determine whether that leverage can be sustained. Diplomatic influence can facilitate coalition formation, but institutional credibility affects whether partners are willing to accept long-term commitments. US power is therefore increasingly network-dependent: its effectiveness derives from the interaction between American capabilities and the capabilities, interests, and choices of other states.[49]

The prospects for this model remain uncertain. Its sustainability will depend on whether the United States can reconcile strategic ambition with domestic political constraints, preserve technological leadership while limiting economic fragmentation, maintain alliance cohesion while accommodating divergent partner interests, and use economic and military power while preserving the institutional legitimacy of the order it seeks to influence.[50] If Washington succeeds in managing these tensions, the United States may retain a central position in the international system even without restoring the degree of dominance associated with the immediate post-Cold War era. If it fails, the same processes of technological diffusion, strategic diversification, and institutional pluralism that currently constrain US primacy may accelerate the emergence of a more fragmented international order.

Conclusion

The study suggests that the principal transformation of American hegemony is based on the changing mechanism through which it is exercised. The cases of Ukraine, NATO, and strategic technology controls demonstrate that US capabilities increasingly generate strategic outcomes through networks of allies, institutions,

[47] Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Soft Power and American Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly* 119, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 255–70, https://doi.org/10.2307/20202345.
[48] US Department of the Treasury, *The Treasury 2021 Sanctions Review* (Washington, DC: US Department of the Treasury, October 2021), 5, https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/Treasury-2021-sanctions-review.pdf.
[49] Anne-Marie Slaughter, "America's Edge: Power in the Networked Century," *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 1 (January/February 2009): 94–113, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20699436.
[50] Jake Sullivan, "The Sources of American Power: A Foreign Policy for a Changed World," *Foreign Affairs* 102, no. 6 (November/December 2023): 10–14, 26–29, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/sources-american-power-biden-jake-sullivan.

and economic and technological dependencies. Transformed hegemony therefore should not be understood as a weaker form of hegemony, but as a different mode of hegemonic power, in which influence depends simultaneously on material capabilities and the capacity to organize collective action, shape institutional rules, and regulate strategically significant networks. At the same time, this form of hegemony is inherently more conditional, because outcomes depend on the cooperation of other actors and the growing autonomy of competing powers. The changes in the contemporary international order have reconfigured the mechanisms through which US power is converted into international influence. The movement from the relatively unipolar structure that characterized the post-Cold War period toward a more contested and increasingly multipolar environment has reduced the scope for unilateral dominance while simultaneously increasing the importance of alliances, institutional cooperation, economic statecraft, technological capabilities, and diplomatic coalition-building. Accordingly, the US strategic priorities increasingly favor networked, adaptive, and multidimensional forms of leadership over predominantly unilateral power projection.

The comparative analysis of the cases examined in this study supports the argument that current US leadership is increasingly characterized by what may be termed "transformed hegemony." This concept does not imply the restoration of the unipolar order of the 1990s, nor does it assume the possibility of absolute American hegemony. Rather, it refers to a form of international leadership in which the United States seeks to preserve its structural advantages by combining material capabilities with alliance networks, multilateral institutions, economic instruments, technological regulation, and normative influence.

The response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine provides a particularly significant illustration of this transformation. Since February 2022, the United States has combined military assistance, economic sanctions, diplomatic coordination, and alliance mobilization rather than relying on direct military intervention against Russia. The scale and multilateral character of this response demonstrate that contemporary US power is increasingly exercised through coalition-based mechanisms. In this sense, alliance activation involves the operationalization of existing commitments through coordinated capabilities, burden-sharing, deterrence, and political alignment. Technological policy further illustrates the changing character of US strategic power. Export controls and outbound-investment restrictions show how Washington increasingly integrates economic and technological policy with national-security objectives. Competition with China now extends beyond military capabilities to critical technologies, supply chains, and investment flows. These measures represent targeted efforts to constrain access to strategically sensitive capabilities while preserving broader economic interdependence.

It may be argued that the United States possesses substantial structural advantages, but these advantages do not translate automatically into unrestricted strategic freedom. The rise of China, Russia's capacity to challenge the European security order, the growing autonomy of regional actors, economic interdependence, and the institutional constraints of multilateral governance limit the possibility of restoring an earlier form of unilateral American primacy. Consequently, US leader-

ship is increasingly dependent upon the ability to persuade, coordinate, and mobilize other actors rather than simply compel them.

Thus, changes in the international order are reconfiguring the form and mechanisms of US leadership. The United States remains a central actor in the international system because of its military capabilities, economic weight, technological advantages, institutional position, alliance network, and capacity for diplomatic coalition-building. Nevertheless, these resources increasingly operate through interdependent and negotiated structures rather than through unilateral dominance. The future effectiveness of US foreign policy will consequently depend less on its ability to reproduce the conditions of post-Cold War unipolarity and more on its ability to manage strategic competition, sustain alliances, preserve technological and economic advantages, and participate effectively in institutions of global governance.

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THE ROLE OF THE BRICS NEW DEVELOPMENT BANK IN PROMOTING CLIMATE GOVERNANCE: A SUSTAINABLE FINANCING MECHANISM

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Abstract

Climate change is one of the most pressing global challenges facing humanity today, affecting all countries, particularly vulnerable developing nations. Although international climate finance mechanisms have evolved over the years, their scale and effectiveness remain inadequate to address the growing impacts of the climate crisis. The BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) represents a significant departure from traditional climate finance structures, offering an alternative approach to climate governance through its focus on development and sustainability. Established by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, the NDB aims to promote sustainable economic growth by catalyzing investment in renewable energy, green infrastructure, and climate-resilient projects. Grounded in an integrated framework combining global governance theory, climate finance architecture, and systemic ecological pressures, this study examines the NDB's role in reshaping multilateral climate governance. It evaluates the Bank's operational effectiveness in terms of institutional agility, mobilization of nonconcessional and local-currency resources, and alignment with national development priorities, with particular attention to South–South financial cooperation.

Keywords: *climate change, NDB, BRICS, South–South cooperation, climate finance theory.*

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Introduction

Global climate change represents one of the most significant challenges of the twenty-first century. It is causing widespread changes in ecosystems, increasing the frequency of extreme weather events, and exacerbating socioeconomic problems such as poverty, inequality, and migration. Developing countries are particularly vulnerable to these impacts because they have limited resources to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change.

Climate finance plays a crucial role in combating climate change. It involves providing financial resources, technologies, and knowledge to implement environmentally sustainable projects. Its primary goal is to support countries struggling to fulfill their commitments under climate agreements, such as the Paris Agreement. However, current funding mechanisms are often insufficient to address the scale of these challenges.[1]

The modern architecture of climate finance encompasses several key areas. First, international funds such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF) support projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and help countries adapt to climate change. Second, private sector initiatives can attract investment in renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure. Nevertheless, financing remains below the levels needed, and bureaucratic barriers often hinder vulnerable countries' access to funds.

Improving the effectiveness of climate finance requires a comprehensive approach. This includes increasing the transparency of fund distribution, simplifying access procedures, and strengthening partnerships between developed and developing countries. Only collective action by the international community can minimize the consequences of climate change and ensure sustainable development for all countries.

Institutional Context and Analytical Framework

In 2014, the BRICS countries—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—established the New Development Bank (NDB) in response to the inefficiencies and limitations of existing international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The NDB's primary goal is to meet the needs of developing countries, particularly in the Global South, taking into account their specific socioeconomic and environmental challenges.[2] The analysis of this institutional shift draws on global governance theory, which views international institutions and multilateral mechanisms as essential to coordinating

[1] Natalia L. Smakotina and Maria A. Egorenkova, "Global Governance or Global Regulation?," *Social and Humanitarian Knowledge*, no. 4 (2021): 118–30, in Russian: [Смакотина Н. Л., Егоренкова М. А. "Глобальное управление или глобальное регулирование?" *Социально-гуманитарные знания*, № 4 (2021): 118–130], https://doi.org/10.34823/sgz.2021.4.51636.

[2] Yana V. Leksyutina, "The BRICS Efforts to Modify the International Monetary and Financial System," *Digest Finance* 24, no. 4 (2019): 448–65, in Russian: [Лексютина Я. В. "Усилия БРИКС по изменению мировой валютно-финансовой системы." *Дайджест-финансы* 24, № 4 (2019): 448–465], https://doi.org/10.24891/df.24.4.448.

collective action to address transnational crises. Traditional climate governance structures, particularly the Bretton Woods institutions, have faced substantial academic and political criticism. This critique centers on the entrenched dominance of developed nations in their decision-making processes, which often results in insufficient attention to the vulnerabilities and development needs of the Global South.[3] In the contemporary climate crisis, this structural asymmetry is particularly problematic: developing nations bear disproportionately high socioeconomic and environmental costs despite their limited historical contributions to global greenhouse gas emissions.[4]

In contrast to these established institutions, the NDB occupies a distinctive position. One of its defining features is the consensus among its founding countries; each initially held an equal share of votes, preventing a single country from dominating the agenda. This approach promotes an inclusive model of international cooperation and ensures that all members' interests are taken into account.[5] From the perspective of global governance theory, the NDB exemplifies a polycentric approach to international relations—a system in which governance is decentralized and conducted through interactions among multiple actors.[6] The NDB seeks to correct historical imbalances in international financial flows by offering more inclusive financing approaches, including flexible credit lines and loan conditions adapted to local contexts. By supporting infrastructure projects that promote sustainable development and reduce carbon footprints, the Bank aligns its operations with the Paris Agreement and the UN 2030 Agenda. Global governance theorists emphasize that institutions like the NDB serve as alternative funding sources and help shape normative standards and institutional practices oriented toward fairness, sustainability, and a more multipolar, balanced system of international cooperation.[7]

Alongside this governance perspective, the research draws on climate finance theory. This field focuses on financial flows, architectures, and mechanisms aimed at mitigating climate change and enhancing adaptive capacities in vulnerable regions. The NDB addresses the climate finance gap, which remains especially acute in emerging economies, through innovative financial approaches. A cornerstone of this approach is the issuance of green bonds. These instruments channel investment

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[3] Alena O. Stepanova, "Analysis and Prospects of the New BRICS Development Bank," *Skif. Questions of Student Science*, no. 1 (77) (2023): 29–39, in Russian: [Степанова А. О. "Анализ и перспективы нового банка развития стран БРИКС." *Скиф. Вопросы студенческой науки*, № 1 (77) (2023): 29–39], https://sciff.ru/analiz-i-perspektivy-novogo-banka-razvitija-stran-briks/.

[4] Kathryn Hochstetler, "The BRICS and Global Climate Governance," in *The BRICS and Coexistence: An Alternative Vision of World Order*, ed. Cedric de Coning, Thomas Mandrup, and Liselotte Odgaard (London: Routledge, 2015), 138.

[5] Jiejin Zhu, "The New Development Bank and Its Institutional Innovation," *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 12, no. 1 (2019): 112.

[6] Matthew D. Stephen, "Rising Powers, Global Capitalism and Liberal Global Governance: A Historical Materialist Account of the BRICs Challenge," *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no. 4 (2014): 915, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066114523655.

[7] Andrew F. Cooper, *The BRICS: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 84.

into renewable energy generation, energy efficiency, sustainable transport, and water resource management. Beyond providing capital, green bonds raise investor awareness of sustainable development and use structural safeguards to minimize financial risks, encouraging long-term private investment in environmentally significant public projects.[8]

This study combines three complementary theoretical dimensions: global governance, climate finance, and systemic ecological pressure. Global governance theory explains the shift toward a multipolar system and equal voting rights, while climate finance theory details the tools—such as de-risking investment and concessional loans—needed to close the Global South's investment gap. Connecting these dimensions is systemic ecological pressure, which pushes emerging economies to decarbonize while maintaining economic growth. Together, these frameworks provide three criteria for evaluating the NDB. The first is institutional autonomy: whether the Bank respects national policy space by using domestic "country systems" instead of imposing rigid external conditions. The second is financial mobilization: the NDB's ability to attract private capital and provide local-currency lending. The third is climate impact: whether the Bank's investments deliver measurable, context-specific results in mitigation and adaptation across its diverse member states.

Complementing the green bond framework, the project loans provided by the NDB are tailored to the macroeconomic conditions of developing nations, taking account of their financial constraints and development trajectories. With flexible repayment terms and extended maturities, these loans make climate capital accessible to countries with limited sovereign resources. Such mechanisms are indispensable for financing large-scale, capital-intensive climate adaptation initiatives.[9]

Since its establishment, the NDB has used these financial tools to approve numerous projects supporting economic growth and sustainable development in member countries. For example, it has financed solar energy projects in India, modernized transport infrastructure in Russia, and supported water resource development in Brazil.[10] The effectiveness of these instruments is evaluated by their capacity to attract additional investment from private sector entities and international donors.[11] By working closely with national governments to ensure that projects

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[8] William Daldegan and Vitória de Borba, "The Development Concept in BRICS: An Analysis of Projects Financed by the NDB," *International Organisations Research Journal* 18, no. 4 (2023): 7–33, in Russian: [Далдеган У., де Борба В. "Концепция развития БРИКС: Анализ проектов, финансируемых НБР." *Вестник международных организаций: образование, наука, новая экономика* 18, № 4 (2023): 7–33], https://doi.org/10.17323/1996-7845-2023-04-01.

[9] Andrey V. Shelepov, "The Role of the NDB and AIIB in Catalyzing Private Infrastructure Financing," *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations* 18, no. 3 (2018): 656–72, in Russian: [Шелепов А. В. "НБР и АБИИ как катализаторы частных инвестиций в инфраструктуру." *Вестник РУДН. Серия: Международные отношения* 18, № 3 (2018): 656–672], https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2018-18-3-656-672.

[10] Daldegan and de Borba, "Development Concept in BRICS."

[11] New Development Bank, "All Projects," accessed September 28, 2026, https://www.ndb.int/projects/all-projects/.

respond to local needs, the NDB demonstrates how institutional financial innovations can bridge gaps left by traditional climate finance arrangements that have historically prioritized high-income jurisdictions.

To examine these theoretical propositions and empirical developments, this study employs a qualitative research design combining document analysis and a comparative institutional approach. Its primary methodological objective is to assess the NDB's integration into the global climate finance architecture and evaluate the effectiveness of its financial mechanisms. Data were collected from a range of primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include official NDB policy documents, notably the *General Strategy for 2022–2026*, the *Environment and Social Framework* (ESF), annual reports, project summary documents, and BRICS summit declarations.[12] These documents provide the empirical basis for examining the Bank's strategic priorities and its implementation of international sustainable development objectives.[13]

These primary data are complemented by peer-reviewed academic literature, policy briefs from international think tanks, and reports from financial monitoring organizations. This literature was subjected to thematic analysis to identify and interpret academic debates about the NDB's geopolitical and economic position relative to the Bretton Woods institutions. The analysis uses the global governance and climate finance frameworks to interpret how the NDB navigates the complexities of South–South cooperation.

Finally, the study uses targeted case studies to connect its theoretical frameworks with implementation. It examines NDB-financed projects in renewable energy expansion in India, sustainable infrastructure modernization in Russia, and climate adaptation in Brazil. This approach enables a grounded evaluation of how the NDB's financial instruments, including green bonds and project loans, function in practice. This methodological triangulation provides the empirical basis for the study's conclusions.

Institutional Evolution and Strategic Paradigms of the NDB

The establishment of the New Development Bank represents an important innovation in international development finance, designed to give borrowing nations substantial autonomy over their economic trajectories amid deepening global financial integration. The NDB was conceived to bridge development financing gaps without imposing the restrictive structural conditions that have historically constrained borrowers' policy space. The Bank positions itself as a complement to the established global financial system. Its creation reflects a pragmatic response to changes

[12] New Development Bank, *Environment and Social Framework* (Shanghai: New Development Bank, 2016), 5, https://www.ndb.int/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ndb-environment-social-framework-20160330.pdf.

[13] New Development Bank, *General Strategy for 2022–2026: Scaling Up Development Finance for a Sustainable Future* (Shanghai: New Development Bank, 2022), 14, https://www.ndb.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/NDB_StrategyDocument_Eversion-1.pdf.

in the international political economy and its member states' objective of navigating the global system without provoking institutional friction.[14]

The NDB's origins can be traced to the 2012 BRICS summit in New Delhi, followed by the adoption of the Agreement on the New Development Bank and the Treaty for the Establishment of a BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) at the 2014 Fortaleza summit.[15] Its founding treaty states:

> The Bank shall mobilize resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies and developing countries, complementing the existing efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global growth and development.[16]

This mandate dispelled early speculation that BRICS institutions were designed to supplant the IMF or the World Bank. Instead, the NDB pursues South–South cooperation within the broader multilateral system. This complementary approach is reinforced by the CRA, a $100 billion liquidity mechanism that requires a prior agreement with the IMF before any member state can access funds exceeding 30 percent of its designated maximum access limit.[17]

The NDB has pursued institutional integration by signing memoranda of understanding with other financial institutions. Partnerships with the Asian Development Bank (2022), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (2017), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (2017), and the World Bank Group (2016) underscore this collaborative approach.[18] The NDB's successful operation signaled a structural shift, demonstrating that emerging markets' aspirations for greater influence over global economic governance would no longer be marginalized or channeled exclusively through established institutions.[19]

The NDB's operations are governed by principles that prioritize sustainable development beyond purely economic measures. The Bank integrates social and environmental sustainability into its decision-making. Central to this agenda is inclusive development: ensuring that the benefits of economic growth reach disadvantaged groups, including low-income populations, women, children, and ethnic minorities. This commitment is linked to the Bank's recognition of gender equality as a prerequisite for sustained macroeconomic resilience.[20]

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[14] Bas Hooijmaaijers, "The New Development Bank and Its Role in Global Economic Governance," *Journal of Global Governance Studies* 29, no. 2 (2021): 75–92.

[15] BRICS, "Treaty for the Establishment of a BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement," Fortaleza, July 15, 2014, https://www.gov.br/mre/pt-br/canais_atendimento/imprensa/notas-a-imprensa/atos-assinados-por-ocasiao-da-vi-cupula-do-brics-fortaleza-15-de-julho-de-2014.

[16] BRICS, "Agreement on the New Development Bank," Fortaleza, July 15, 2014, art. 1, https://www.ndb.int/wp-content/themes/ndb/pdf/Agreement-on-the-New-Development-Bank.pdf.

[17] Stephany Griffith-Jones, "The BRICS Development Bank: Challenges and Opportunities," *Global Policy* 6, no. 3 (2015): 30.

[18] Hooijmaaijers, "New Development Bank and Its Role," 80.

[19] Gregory T. Chin, "The BRICS-Led Development Bank: Purpose and Politics beyond the G20," *Global Policy* 5, no. 3 (2014): 368, https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12167.

[20] New Development Bank, *Environment and Social Framework*, 5.

Alongside social inclusion, the NDB emphasizes ecological integrity. Its project financing frameworks address climate change mitigation and adaptation and promote the transition to a green economy. By conserving natural resources, such as water and energy, and advancing sustainable land and urban management, the Bank seeks to ensure that infrastructure investments remain climate-resilient and environmentally viable over the long term.[21] The NDB also distinguishes itself through its reliance on "country systems."[22] By using and strengthening borrowers' domestic regulatory frameworks and corporate governance structures, the Bank enhances local ownership, accountability, and institutional capacity. This decentralized approach is balanced by adherence to the precautionary principle, which requires proactive measures to prevent potential social and environmental harm.

The NDB also serves as a hub for knowledge exchange and collaboration. By harmonizing assessment protocols, monitoring standards, and environmental management requirements with partners in cofinanced projects, it improves capital efficiency and supports technical exchange and capacity building across the Global South.[23]

Strategic Mechanisms of NDB Climate Finance

The NDB's climate strategy relies on financial mechanisms designed to mobilize capital for sustainable development across BRICS member states. Green bonds are a key instrument for financing renewable energy generation, low-carbon infrastructure, and sustainable resource management. By allocating funds exclusively to projects that meet environmental criteria, the NDB ensures operational transparency. This approach strengthens investor confidence and diversifies climate finance by attracting institutional and international investors, encouraging private sector participation in sustainability initiatives.[24]

Alongside its capital market activities, the NDB uses project loans and blended finance to address funding gaps in large-scale climate adaptation and mitigation projects. Recognizing developing economies' budget constraints and risk profiles, the Bank provides project loans with flexible repayment terms and extended maturities. These funds support resilient infrastructure and energy-efficient technologies, reducing the burden on public finances while accelerating the transition to sustainable development.[25]

To amplify the impact of public resources, the NDB uses blended finance mechanisms. By assuming a share of project risks, the Bank de-risks climate in-

[21] T. Namwani, "The Role of BRICS Development Bank in Sustainable Financing," *Journal of International Economics and Development*, no. 2 (2023): 48.
[22] Sergio Gusmão Suchodolski and Julien Marcel Demeulemeester, "The BRICS Development Bank: An Alternative to the Bretton Woods Institutions?," *Review of International Political Economy* 25, no. 4 (2018): 618.
[23] Mzukisi Qobo and Mills Soko, "The Rise of Emerging Powers in the Global Development Finance Architecture: The Case of the BRICS and the New Development Bank," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 22, no. 3 (2015): 282, https://doi.org/10.1080/10220461.2015.1089785.
[24] Namwani, "Role of BRICS Development Bank," 50.
[25] William Daldegan and P. Carvalho, "The BRICS New Development Bank: Assessing Its Impact on Global Financial Governance," *International Journal of Economic Policy* 18, no. 3 (2022): 108.

vestments and makes them more attractive to private capital. Collaboration among states, multilateral organizations, and private investors has supported projects in energy grid modernization, carbon capture, and resilient transport, with socioeconomic benefits including job creation, economic growth, and improved living standards.[26]

These financial instruments are embedded in South–South cooperation. The NDB promotes mutually beneficial cooperation focused on the equitable distribution of resources and the exchange of technical expertise across the Global South. By responding to developing nations' needs, the Bank designs interventions in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and transport modernization that reduce carbon footprints and strengthen macroeconomic stability.[27]

Beyond providing capital, the NDB supports knowledge transfer through joint research and capacity-building platforms that disseminate climate solutions. This cooperation also promotes regional integration, enabling member states to pool resources for transboundary initiatives, such as joint energy grids and shared water resource management. Climate finance can thus support broader economic cohesion among emerging powers.

Empirical Evidence: Case Studies of NDB Climate Finance Projects

Examining projects across BRICS nations helps assess the operational impact of the NDB's climate finance mechanisms. These case studies illustrate the Bank's capacity to translate global climate objectives into infrastructure and energy solutions adapted to the socioeconomic conditions of the Global South.

Under the *General Strategy for 2022–2026*, the NDB committed to directing at least 40 percent of its total financing approvals toward climate mitigation and adaptation.[28] By the end of 2024, the Bank's approved project portfolio exceeded $34 billion and comprised more than 100 projects.[29] Evaluating these financing mechanisms requires distinguishing a project's intended strategic impact, expected *ex ante* results, and actual *ex post* outcomes. Strategic impacts involve broader goals such as fulfilling nationally determined contributions (NDCs), whereas *ex ante* results include emissions reductions projected during appraisal. Because many NDB-financed projects remain in implementation or early operation, reported climate metrics primarily reflect these forecasts. Anticipated generating capacity and estimated emissions reductions are projections; verifying environmental benefits will therefore require long-term post-completion audits.

India's transition to a low-carbon economy requires substantial capital, which the NDB has sought to provide. Its collaboration with Canara Bank and financing of the SAEL 300 MW solar project support renewable energy generation. Through targeted loans, the NDB facilitates the expansion of India's solar grid, contributing

[26] Shelepov, "Role of the NDB and AIIB," 660.
[27] Daldegan and de Borba, "Development Concept in BRICS."
[28] New Development Bank, *General Strategy for 2022–2026*, 4, 21.
[29] New Development Bank, *Annual Report 2024*, "Overview," accessed November 12, 2026, https://www.ndb.int/annual-report/2024/overview/.

to the country's NDCs on reducing carbon intensity. The SAEL solar project is expected to add 300 MW of capacity to the national grid and demonstrates the effectiveness of the NDB's blended finance models. By mitigating early-stage investment risks, the NDB attracts private sector participation, accelerating India's green energy transition while generating local employment and reducing reliance on fossil fuels.[30]

Beyond renewable energy, the NDB recognizes sustainable infrastructure's role in reducing emissions, as illustrated by its financing of Russia's Toll Roads Program. This initiative addresses traffic congestion and inefficient logistics as contributors to greenhouse gas emissions. Investment in these transport corridors incorporates sustainable construction technologies and aims to improve traffic flow. By reducing vehicle idling and improving logistical efficiency, the project is intended to reduce transport-related carbon dioxide emissions. Smart road technologies and environmentally resilient pavement materials also reflect the Bank's commitment to protecting infrastructure against extreme weather. Alongside energy and transport mitigation, the NDB addresses adaptation, particularly the disproportionate impact of climate change on water security.[31]

In Brazil, the NDB has prioritized water resource management, demonstrating a commitment to adaptation alongside mitigation. The Bank has financed projects to modernize sanitation infrastructure, improve water distribution networks, and strengthen drought resilience across vulnerable municipalities. These efforts are particularly important in regions facing prolonged dry spells and increasingly irregular rainfall. Through project loans for municipal water management, the NDB supports the preservation of ecosystems, public health, and agricultural productivity. This approach reflects its commitment to inclusive and sustainable development and addresses affected populations' immediate climate vulnerabilities.[32]

Contribution to Global Climate Governance: Alignment with International Frameworks

The New Development Bank operates within international climate and development frameworks, including the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aligning its activities with international standards and climate objectives. It directs resources toward projects that support BRICS member countries in adapting to climate change and fulfilling their emissions reduction commitments.

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[30] New Development Bank, "Canara Renewable Energy Financing Scheme Project," project summary for public disclosure, financing approved April 13, 2016, accessed November 8, 2026, https://www.ndb.int/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Canara-Cancelled.pdf; New Development Bank, "SAEL 300MW Renewable Energy Project," financing approved December 27, 2024, accessed November 8, 2026, https://www.ndb.int/project/sael-300mw-renewable-energy-project/.

[31] New Development Bank, "Ufa Eastern Exit Project," financing approved November 20, 2017, accessed November 8, 2026, https://www.ndb.int/project/ufa-eastern-exit/.

[32] New Development Bank, "SABESP Investment Program," project summary for public disclosure, financing approved July 18, 2022, accessed November 8, 2026, https://www.ndb.int/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/SABESP-Water-00085.pdf.

Under the Paris Agreement, which calls for keeping global warming well below 2°C above preindustrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5°C, the NDB supports emissions reduction and the transition to low-carbon economies. It finances renewable energy, energy-efficient technologies, and sustainable infrastructure, contributing to national commitments to climate neutrality.[33]

The NDB also supports the SDGs, particularly Goal 13 on combating climate change. It provides financial and technical support for projects that promote sustainable growth, protect ecosystems, and reduce vulnerability to climate risks. The Bank thus helps integrate climate objectives into national strategic planning.[34]

The NDB also facilitates member countries' implementation of their NDCs under the Paris Agreement, enabling each nation to adapt its strategies to its particular climate conditions. The Bank assists developing countries in attracting finance and taking a scientifically grounded approach to climate challenges.[35]

Partnerships with Multilateral Institutions

The NDB's collaboration with multilateral institutions, including the GCF and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), enhances its contribution to global climate governance and efforts to address climate challenges in developing countries.

The Green Climate Fund, a key financial mechanism of the Paris Agreement, mobilizes funds for countries most vulnerable to climate change. The NDB cooperates with the GCF to channel resources into mitigation and adaptation projects. This partnership combines their efforts to finance sustainable initiatives in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and water resource management, supporting international climate commitments.[36]

The UNFCCC, the primary framework for coordinating international efforts to combat climate change, is also an important partner for the NDB. Through this collaboration, the Bank supports projects aligned with the Paris Agreement's standards and objectives. This partnership connects national climate strategies with international efforts and strengthens the NDB's role in international climate finance.[37]

Cooperation with multilateral institutions promotes knowledge exchange and the sharing of best practices, helping the NDB improve its climate initiatives. It also opens access to additional funding and strengthens the Bank's capacity to implement ambitious climate projects in member countries.

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[33] United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), "Adoption of the Paris Agreement," decision 1/CP.21, annex, art. 2(1)(a), FCCC/CP/2015/10/Add.1, January 29, 2016, https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/10a01.pdf.

[34] New Development Bank, *General Strategy for 2022–2026*, 18.

[35] Adriana Erthal Abdenur, "Climate and Security: BRICS and the Global South," *SAGE Open* 7, no. 3 (2017): 5.

[36] Abdenur, "Climate and Security," 8.

[37] Hochstetler, "BRICS and Global Climate Governance," 140.

Promoting Equity and Accessibility

The NDB works to ensure equity and accessibility in climate finance for vulnerable countries. This involves providing resources and ensuring access for countries that suffer most from climate change but have limited capacity to mobilize financing.

The NDB supports Global South countries that face shortages of climate finance and technical expertise. It allocates funds to adaptation, ecosystem protection, and sustainable infrastructure projects. Reducing vulnerability to rising sea levels, droughts, floods, and other extreme weather events is particularly important.[38]

Equity and accessibility also inform the NDB's financial mechanisms, including project loans and grants. These resources are provided on terms suited to developing countries' economic capacities and climate risks, enabling them to implement large-scale climate projects without placing an excessive burden on public budgets.

The NDB also promotes public–private partnerships to increase the funding available to vulnerable countries. By attracting private investment, these partnerships help accelerate climate initiatives and support sustainable development where resources are limited.[39]

The NDB improves access to technical expertise, training, and knowledge exchange among member countries to increase the efficiency of climate resource use. These efforts include platforms for sharing best practices, joint research, and initiatives to implement innovative climate solutions.

Institutional Comparison and Critical Discourse

Assessing the NDB's approach to climate finance requires comparing it with established international financial institutions (IFIs), such as the World Bank, and newer institutions, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). This comparison examines shareholding, environmental safeguards, and lending currencies. The World Bank's voting system is tied to capital contributions, whereas the AIIB's structure gives China a *de facto* veto. At the NDB's founding, each founding member was allocated twenty percent of votes. The World Bank applies prescriptive environmental and social frameworks, while the NDB relies on "country systems," using national regulations to guide and accelerate project approvals. Finally, the NDB promotes local-currency lending to protect borrowers from exchange rate fluctuations, departing from the historical dominance of the dollar in the Bretton Woods system.[40]

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[38] New Development Bank, *Environment and Social Framework*, 8.
[39] Shelepov, "Role of the NDB and AIIB," 662.
[40] Hongying Wang, "The New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank: China's Ambiguous Approach to Global Financial Governance," *Development and Change* 50, no. 1 (2019): 221–44, https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12473.

Table 1 compares the institutional and climate finance governance frameworks of the NDB, World Bank, and AIIB.

Table 1. Comparative Institutional and Climate Finance Governance Framework

Evaluation Criteria	World Bank (IBRD/IDA)	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)	New Development Bank (NDB)
Shareholding and Decision-Making	Weighted by capital subscription; asymmetric voting structure with US veto power over major charter amendments.	Weighted voting, but China holds effective *de facto* veto over major institutional resolutions (approximately 26.6% voting power).	Egalitarian parity at founding: equal shareholding and voting power (20% for each founding member); no single-state unilateral veto.
Membership Base	Universal global membership (189 countries), historically dominated by G7 donor nations.	Broad international membership (more than 100 members), encompassing developed and developing non-regional states.	Compact sovereign core (founding BRICS plus select expanded emerging market members).
Environmental and Social Safeguards	Top-down, prescriptive Environmental and Social Framework featuring strict *ex ante* conditionalities.	Hybrid framework heavily influenced by international best practices and multilateral cofinancing standards.	Relies on domestic "country systems," using the borrowing country's own environmental and social regulations to streamline project approvals.
Climate Targets and Strategic Focus	35% average climate finance target for 2021–2025; established carbon-pricing criteria; focus on governance conditionality.	Target of 50% climate financing by 2025; high volume of cofinancing with traditional Western MDBs.	Target of 40% of financing approvals for climate mitigation and adaptation (2022–2026); focus on national sovereignty.
Local Currency Lending	Historically dominated by USD/EUR sovereign borrowing facilities.	Primarily USD denominated, with cautious, incremental local currency expansion.	Target of 30% of total financing in members' national currencies over 2022–2026.

Source: Compiled by the author.

As Table 1 shows, the NDB's institutional distinctiveness lies in its rejection of policy conditionality and emphasis on borrower sovereignty, alongside its green debt instruments. Proponents argue that this approach respects sovereignty, reduces

bureaucratic delays, and accelerates climate finance disbursement. It embodies South–South cooperation free from the conditions historically imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions.[41] Critics, however, warn that reliance on national systems can dilute environmental safeguards where regulations or enforcement remain weak.[42] Western critics therefore raise concerns about "greenwashing": labeling projects sustainable without meeting the World Bank's environmental and social standards.[43]

The NDB's operational capacity must also be considered in its geopolitical context. Unlike the AIIB, which has more than 100 members, including major Western economies, the NDB's capital base is concentrated among the core BRICS nations. This concentration creates liquidity risks and increases its exposure to geopolitical shocks. Sanctions targeting member states, for example, can complicate the Bank's fundraising on international capital markets and its dollar-denominated transactions. This encourages a shift toward local-currency lending, consistent with the BRICS agenda of financial multipolarity, but also introduces exchange rate risks that the Bank must manage.[44]

To strengthen its position in global climate governance, the NDB must balance its noninterventionist, borrower-friendly approach with environmental safeguards that are robust, verifiable, and capable of delivering sustainable development.

Structural Challenges and Institutional Limitations

Despite its transformative potential, the New Development Bank faces interrelated financial, governance, and political limitations. Foremost is its restricted financial capacity. Although its objectives emphasize sustainable development and climate finance, its capital base remains constrained compared with established institutions such as the World Bank or specialized entities such as the Green Climate Fund. This limits the Bank's ability to expand sustainability initiatives and finance large-scale adaptation projects in highly vulnerable regions. Addressing this constraint requires diversifying funding sources through private institutional investment, international climate grants, and cofinancing with other multilateral development banks.[45]

The NDB's operational efficiency is also constrained by differences in policy, economic structures, and regional conditions among its members. BRICS countries have divergent macroeconomic structures, climate vulnerabilities, and environmen-

[41] Kevin P. Gallagher and Richard Kozul-Wright, *The Case for a New Bretton Woods* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022), 92.
[42] Peter Kragelund and Pádraig Carmody, "BRICS' New Development Bank and the 'New' Financial Architecture," *Review of African Political Economy* 43, no. 149 (2016): 492.
[43] Susan Park, "Institutionalizing Environmental Norms in the Multilateral Development Banks," *Global Environmental Politics* 14, no. 4 (2014): 125.
[44] Gallagher and Kozul-Wright, *Case for a New Bretton Woods*, 92.
[45] Stepanova, "Analysis and Prospects," 35.

tal priorities.[46] These differences complicate coordination and the formulation of a common climate strategy, slowing project implementation.[47]

Treating BRICS or the Global South as homogeneous overlooks important structural differences. China and India, for example, prioritize decarbonizing power grids and expanding renewable energy while balancing economic growth with emissions control. Brazil's priorities include sustainable land use, forest conservation, and adapting agriculture to changing water cycles. Resource exporters such as Russia and South Africa face the socioeconomic challenges of a "just transition," seeking to reduce reliance on fossil fuels without destabilizing industrial regions. This diversity requires the NDB to adapt its financing instruments to distinct national conditions.[48]

These differing national needs create strategic and logistical challenges for the NDB. The Bank can struggle to reconcile transnational priorities, distribute limited funds equitably, and establish common measures of project success. More flexible, regionally responsive management could address these problems. Closer operational ties with national and local governments could reduce administrative delays and improve decision-making.[49]

Unequal political influence compounds these financial and administrative challenges. Although equal voting shares were designed to prevent any single nation's dominance, differences in members' geopolitical and economic power can undermine this formal parity. More powerful members could direct climate finance toward projects serving their own national interests or geopolitical agendas, at the expense of less developed regions with acute climate vulnerabilities. Such an imbalance would undermine the goal of equitable, sustainable development. To reduce the risk of political capture, the NDB must strengthen democratic decision-making and broaden participation in strategy and capital allocation, safeguarding its integrity and ensuring a balanced, needs-based distribution of resources.[50]

Strategic Prospects and Policy Recommendations

To strengthen its contribution to global climate governance, the NDB must expand climate finance, improve institutional governance, and deepen cooperation across sectors. Diversifying capital sources is essential to increasing its climate impact. Private institutional investment can help finance large-scale climate infrastructure, but mobilizing it requires the Bank to refine and diversify its financial instruments. Expanding green bond issuance, tailoring concessional loans, and developing blended finance mechanisms could de-risk sustainable projects and attract investors. Integrating these mechanisms into long-term strategy would support sustained capital mobilization. Partnerships with the World Bank, Green Climate Fund, and

[46] Abdenur, "Climate and Security," 4–6.
[47] Brigitte Schulz, "BRICS and Global Climate Governance," *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning* 19, no. 5 (2017): 605–8.
[48] Abdenur, "Climate and Security," 4–6.
[49] Qobo and Soko, "Rise of Emerging Powers," 280–82.
[50] Hooijmaaijers, "New Development Bank and Its Role," 88.

regional development banks could also expand resources and improve coordination.[51]

The NDB's long-term effectiveness and legitimacy also depend on stronger internal governance. The Bank must prioritize transparent decision-making and rigorous, verifiable project monitoring. Transparency in resource allocation and disbursement is essential to maintaining trust among members, investors, and external partners. This must be accompanied by greater inclusion. Local communities, grassroots nongovernmental organizations, and private sector participants should be involved in designing and implementing climate projects. Institutionalizing their participation would make interventions more responsive to diverse interests, strengthen legitimacy, and reduce socioeconomic tensions associated with large development projects.[52]

The NDB can increase its global influence by expanding cooperation with international and local partners. Closer ties with the UN, World Bank Group, and Green Climate Fund would help integrate its initiatives into the global climate agenda, widen access to finance, and improve coordination of mitigation and adaptation. Partnerships with subnational governments, domestic enterprises, and local academic institutions are equally important for implementation suited to regional vulnerabilities. Connecting international climate objectives with local action can help expand climate initiatives and support sustainable development in the regions most exposed to the climate crisis.

Conclusion

The New Development Bank has emerged as a transformative institution in global climate finance, addressing deficiencies in traditional global governance. Its polycentric model challenges the dominance of the Bretton Woods institutions and redefines South–South cooperation. The Bank advances a mutually beneficial partnership model that prioritizes the Global South's socioeconomic conditions and development needs. It thus offers a model for more equitable, inclusive, and democratic international climate governance.

The Bank's use of green bonds, tailored project loans, and blended finance provides a pragmatic response to the climate finance gap. Its investments in India's renewable energy grids, Russia's sustainable transport infrastructure, and Brazil's water management systems translate multilateral commitments into local ecological resilience. These interventions highlight its capacity to balance climate mitigation and adaptation with economic stability and inclusive growth across developing nations.

The NDB's future and legitimacy will depend on its ability to address its structural, financial, and geopolitical limitations. Priorities include mobilizing private institutional investment, strengthening transparency, and deepening partner-

[51] New Development Bank, *General Strategy for 2022–2026*, 22.
[52] Daldegan and Carvalho, "BRICS New Development Bank," 112; Oliver Stuenkel, *The BRICS and the Future of Global Order* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 115.

ships with international institutions and local stakeholders. Reconciling its noninterventionist, borrower-centered approach with verifiable environmental safeguards would enable the Bank to reshape development finance and advance a sustainable, equitable climate future for vulnerable nations.

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The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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THE CONCEPT OF SHARP POWER IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS: BEYOND THE AUTOCRACY–DEMOCRACY DIVIDE

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Abstract

This article examines power in international relations through realist constructivism, focusing on conceptual boundaries between soft, smart, hard, and sharp power. While sharp power has often been associated with authoritarian regimes, this article questions whether regime type alone suffices to identify and explain its use. It argues that sharp power should instead be assessed through the contexts of informational influence, particularly where manipulation, concealment, or the exploitation of informational and institutional vulnerabilities may undermine autonomous political judgment. Such influence remains defensive sharp power unless it evolves into offensive sharp power, which seeks to undermine a target state's internal stability and influence its decision-making through disinformation, cyberattacks, the deliberate exacerbation of internal divisions, and manipulation disguised as soft-power initiatives. The article applies this framework to a comparative analysis of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, examining how their geopolitical positions and domestic political environments shape their approaches to information, strategic communication, and external influence. It considers the relationship between institutional trust, media environments, and information vulnerability, proposing an exploratory framework for assessing these factors. The article contributes to debates on sharp power by offering a differentiated framework for analyzing informational influence in the geopolitically contested South Caucasus.

Keywords: *sharp power, hard power, soft power, smart power, defensive sharp power, offensive sharp power.*

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Introduction

Although conventional constructivism often emphasizes the role of transnational norms and universal morality,[1] this study relies on the realist-constructivist approach put forward by Jennifer Sterling-Folker.[2] Accordingly, power is understood as a combination of material and non-material resources, including morality and ideology, that contribute to state survival and internal cohesion within an anarchic international system shaped by the balance of power.

Drawing on various theories of power, the article proposes a functional model that makes Walker and Ludwig's regime-centric conceptualization of sharp power more measurable and objective by defining it by its intended purpose and operational nature rather than by the state's political regime. The crisis of the global order and power transitions compel a reassessment of classical power concepts and their application by modern states.[3] Competition between democratic and authoritarian states has, in turn, led to an erosion of power concepts, giving rise to issues that demand in-depth study.[4] Specifically, the use of soft power resources, as an acceptable form of influence and interaction among states, can be associated with practices whose goal is to carry out disruptive activities disguised as soft power initiatives.[5]

Walker and Ludwig termed this form of influence "sharp power."[6] Although they characterized sharp power as an influence deployed by authoritarian states, in the context of global ideational and cultural transformations, we argue that sharp power can be exerted regardless of whether a state is authoritarian or non-authoritarian. As a result, states, regardless of regime type, use sharp power tools; however, in democratic systems, their use is statistically linked to a decline in institutional trust. This circumstance also reflects the increasingly blurred boundaries between foreign and domestic policy, a development that affects the effectiveness of the soft power toolkit.

The central argument of this article is that the conventional association of sharp power with authoritarian regimes, although analytically useful, risks obscuring the complex relationship between political systems and the practices of informational influence. Regime type alone cannot establish whether a particular instrument of influence constitutes sharp power; nor does the pursuit of geopolitical interests automatically transform public diplomacy, strategic communication, or

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[1] Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 135.
[2] Jennifer Sterling-Folker, "Realist-Constructivism and Morality," *International Studies Review* 6, no. 2 (2004): 341–43, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1521-9488.2004.419_3.x.
[3] A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
[4] Henry Farrell and Abraham L. Newman, "Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion," *International Security* 44, no. 1 (2019): 42–79, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00351.
[5] Joseph S. Nye Jr., "How Sharp Power Threatens Soft Power: The Right and Wrong Ways to Respond to Authoritarian Influence," *Foreign Affairs*, January 24, 2018, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-01-24/how-sharp-power-threatens-soft-power.
[6] National Endowment for Democracy, *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for Democracy, 2017), https://www.ned.org/sharp-power-rising-authoritarian-influence-forum-report/.

political persuasion into sharp power. The decisive distinction lies in the mechanisms through which influence is exercised: whether it relies on open persuasion and voluntary attraction or on manipulation, concealment, and the exploitation of informational and institutional vulnerabilities in ways that may distort the target's autonomous political judgment. This distinction is particularly important in the South Caucasus, where Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia operate within an intensely contested geopolitical environment shaped by competing external actors, divergent political trajectories, and struggles over political narratives and international legitimacy. By comparing these three cases, the article examines whether the analytical boundaries between soft, smart, and sharp power remain meaningful across different political contexts and whether sharp power can be adequately understood through a binary opposition between autocracy and democracy. It argues that a mechanism-based and context-sensitive approach offers a more precise framework for identifying and comparing contemporary practices of informational influence.

Classical and Contemporary Concepts of Power

In international relations (IR) theory, the definition and role of power lie at the core of fundamental scholarly debates. Technological advancements and the emergence of the information society have prompted a reexamination of classical, material views of power, encouraging greater attention to its more flexible, non-material manifestations.

In classical IR theories, particularly within realism and neorealism (H. Morgenthau, K. Waltz, J. Mearsheimer), power is often assessed in terms of a state's material capabilities (military and economic strength).[7] In this context, hard power refers to the ability to alter the behavior of actors through direct coercion, threats, or material incentives. As Dahl classically put it, "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do."[8] Although hard power continues to be the cornerstone of state security, in the information age, material factors alone cannot explain the full dynamics of international influence.

In contrast to hard power and coercion, Joseph S. Nye defines soft power as the ability to attract others and shape their preferences through the appeal of one's values, culture, and foreign policy without relying on direct force or economic dependence.[9] Soft power highlights culture (both its material and non-material components), a consistent foreign policy image, and the presence of moral principles and values in international relations as its primary tools of influence. At the same

[7] Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978); Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979); John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001).

[8] Robert A. Dahl, "The Concept of Power," *Behavioral Science* 2, no. 3 (1957): 202–3, https://doi.org/10.1002/bs.3830020303.

[9] Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), 5–11.

time, soft power operates both between and within states, influencing the formation of preferences in both contexts.[10]

Because relying solely on a soft or hard toolkit often leads to foreign policy failures in practice, the concept of smart power emerged.[11] It involves a strategic and dynamic combination of hard and soft power tools, in which military strength and diplomacy complement each other to enhance foreign policy effectiveness. The concept of smart power offers a more integrated understanding of international influence by combining different instruments of power. However, shifts in the global order and the emergence of new arenas of geopolitical competition, including cyberspace, biopolitics, and identity politics, have created greater opportunities for covert and manipulative forms of influence.

The intensity of sharp power deployment, meanwhile, depends on geopolitical competition and the vulnerability of the information environment. Furthermore, greater secrecy surrounding sharp power operations amplifies their destructive consequences for the information environment and related domains. In practice, sharp power can involve spreading disinformation, creating fake agendas, provoking internal divisions, using covert networks and agents of influence, and undermining institutional trust in target societies.[12] In general, both authoritarian and democratic regimes can employ such measures, with various justifications for policies directed at external and internal audiences. Thus, sharp power does not seek to attract or persuade; it aims to manipulate the perceptions of the target state's domestic audience (and in some cases, its own) and disrupt its decision-making system. A comparative analysis of these forms of power demonstrates a dynamic shift in "influence-response" relations, which evolve alongside broader developments in international relations (Table 1). For this reason, the modern understanding of power requires a comprehensive approach in which traditional military-political strength must be coupled with effective defensive and countermeasure mechanisms in the information-psychological domain.

Table 1. Comparative Overview of Power Concepts

Power Type	Main Instruments	Nature of Impact	Objective
Hard Power	Military power, economic sanctions	Coercion, compulsion	Forced behavioral change
Soft Power	Culture, values, diplomacy	Attraction, persuasion	Agenda-setting, creation of sympathy
Smart Power	Synergy of hard and soft instruments	Strategic combination	Effective realization of foreign policy goals
Sharp Power	Disinformation, censorship, sabotage	Manipulation, penetration	Internal weakening of the target society

[10] Edmarverson A. Santos, "The Concept of Soft Power in International Relations," *Diplomacy and Law*, November 30, 2023, https://www.diplomacyandlaw.com/post/the-concept-of-soft-power-in-international-relations.
[11] Nye, *Soft Power*, x.
[12] Christopher Walker, "What Is 'Sharp Power'?" *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 3 (2018): 9–23, https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/what-is-sharp-power/.

Although information influence, propaganda, and psychological operations have deep historical roots (having been actively employed during the Cold War by both Western and Soviet actors, including covert intelligence operations and ideological campaigns), the conceptual distinctiveness of contemporary sharp power lies not in the novelty of its manipulative instruments, but in its targeted mechanics and operational nature. Unlike classical soft power, which aims to build long-term attractiveness and open dialogue based on shared values, sharp power is directed at the penetration and internal erosion of a target society's information space. One of its distinguishing features is the secrecy surrounding its true sources of funding and the identities of its agents of influence, who may operate through seemingly independent institutions.

At the same time, it is necessary to distinguish sharp power from hybrid[13] or information[14] warfare. Although they have some similarities, hybrid and information warfare often pursue explicit military or geopolitical objectives and may include elements of hard power, while sharp power operates primarily in the non-military domain, aiming to exploit the institutional weaknesses of an adversary or ally and the openness of its society without the direct use of physical aggression. Information and hybrid warfare may also incorporate sharp power as part of a broader strategy. In this case, the aim is to undermine target societies, their state and social institutions, and public trust in the authorities through sharp penetration, potentially alongside other tools of hybrid or information warfare as part of a broader strategy.

The paradox of sharp power deployment by democratic regimes (as evidenced by defensive economic pressures, covert digital networks, or geopolitical campaigns) lies in the fact that democracies instrumentalize their own open institutions (media, NGOs, digital algorithms) in foreign policy. This blurs the boundary between domestic and foreign policies, fundamentally distinguishing these practices from classical soft power and shifting them into the realm of covert coercion.

The Use of Sharp Power by Democratic States

Although Walker and Ludwig introduced the concept of sharp power in relation to authoritarian regimes, there is a conceptual limitation in this approach. The authors note that authoritarian states use economic activity to advance political goals in the ideological domain. However, economic coercion is a manifestation of hard power, and democratic states also actively resort to such methods. Disinformation techniques are global in nature, but their purposes differ depending on the political system: in democratic countries (for example, the United Kingdom, the United States,

[13] Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars* (Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007), https://www.potomacinstitute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac_hybridwar_0108.pdf.

[14] Robert Białoskórski, "The Theoretical Concept of Information Warfare: A General Outline," *Humanities and Social Sciences* 30, no. 4, part 1 (2023): 7–24, https://doi.org/10.7862/rz.2023.hss.39.

and Poland), they can be used in political struggles, with potential strategic geopolitical consequences and implications for the stability of the international order.[15]

A notable example is the covert creation of ZunZuneo (the so-called "Cuban Twitter") in Cuba by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).[16] The purpose of this project initially was to attract young users with nonpolitical content, such as sports and music. Subsequently, it entailed introducing political messages intended to encourage anti-government mobilization. France, while publicly presenting itself as a defender of democracy and human rights, has for decades maintained extensive political and economic influence in West and Central Africa. This influence has operated through arrangements such as the CFA franc monetary system and political support for pro-French elites, raising concerns about local sovereignty and the persistence of neocolonial relationships.[17]

Furthermore, contemporary international relations are marked by perceived double standards: while officially declaring adherence to human rights and democratic values, leading democracies may often overlook violations and maintain strategic partnerships with openly authoritarian regimes (such as Saudi Arabia or Azerbaijan) when such partnerships serve their geopolitical or energy interests. Such policies can erode confidence and discredit the democratic institutions in developing countries, creating a persistent perception within local societies of "democracy" merely as a tool of external manipulation and double standards. These perceptions may facilitate external sharp power penetration and weaken the international appeal of Western democracies' soft power.

A more contested example concerns the Integrity Initiative. Operated by the independent British charity Institute for Statecraft, the Integrity Initiative received funding from the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, with the stated goal of countering Russian disinformation. However, following a data leak in 2018, allegations emerged that the network conducted coordinated campaigns to influence public opinion and interfere with political appointments, including the proposed appointment of Pedro Baños in Spain.[18] This particular instance illustrates the application of sharp power, where covert actions were directed inward within the system, targeting the domestic policy of allies rather than a rival state.

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[15] Daria Szafarczyk, "Between Soft and Sharp Power: The Role of Disinformation in International Politics on Selected Case Studies," in *Disinformation, Security, and Social Resilience*, ed. Marietta Gieroń and Duncan Thomson (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2025), 43–44, 47, https://doi.org/10.3233/NICSP250036.

[16] Associated Press, "US Secretly Created 'Cuban Twitter' to Stir Unrest and Undermine Government," *The Guardian*, April 3, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/03/us-cuban-twitter-zunzuneo-stir-unrest.

[17] Tony Chafer, review of *Colonialism Devours Itself: The Waning of Françafrique*, by Gérard Prunier, *Modern & Contemporary France* 34, no. 2 (2026): 281–82, https://doi.org/10.1080/09639489.2025.2595059.

[18] Paul McKeigue, David Miller, Jake Mason, and Piers Robinson, "Briefing Note on the Integrity Initiative," Working Group on Syria, Propaganda and Media, December 21, 2018, https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/publications/briefing-note-on-the-integrity-initiative.

All these examples prove that the use of sharp power is not solely determined by the nature of the regime. Sharp power essentially operates on the logic of hard power influence, but under the guise of soft power and using its resources; it does not seek to win "hearts and minds," but is purposefully aimed at causing destructive consequences in target societies.[19] As J. Nye notes, the best defense against this is the publicity of such attempts, where democracies have a clear advantage.[20] Pomerantsev notes that information manipulation, dark ads, psychological operations, and deepfakes are used today by actors in both authoritarian and democratic countries. Secret funding of European cultural and literary magazines by the US CIA during the Cold War (to counter communist propaganda) and the USSR KGB's Operation INFEKTION (presenting AIDS as an American biological weapon) demonstrate historical precedents for the use of sharp power by both sides.[21] In the modern digital era, sharp power manifests through "algorithm wars" designed to make people "believe in nothing," thereby eroding institutional trust. However, while exposure of sharp power in authoritarian systems may face limited public scrutiny due to information monopolies, the exposure of a democracy's own sharp power can lead to a crisis of legitimacy. To counter these challenges, democratic states often deploy defensive sharp power, which involves anti-manipulation algorithms, targeted restrictions, or secret information countermeasures without projecting influence into an adversary's information space (Table 2).

Table 2. Forms of Sharp Power Manifestation: Defensive vs. Offensive

Feature	**Defensive Sharp Power**	**Offensive Sharp Power**
Main Goal	Protection of domestic information space and reactive countermeasures	Proactive undermining of the target state's internal stability
Target Audience	Internal audience (building trust and vigilance)	External audience (society and elites of the target country)
Toolbox	Fact-checking, transparency laws, anti-manipulation algorithms, targeted restrictions	Disinformation, fake news, cyberattacks, stoking internal divisions
Nature of Impact	**Constructive:** strengthens internal resilience	**Destructive:** creates chaos, distrust, and doubt
Legitimacy	**Context-dependent** (associated with national security)	**Absent** (viewed as interference in internal affairs)

[19] Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig, "From 'Soft Power' to 'Sharp Power': Rising Authoritarian Influence in the Democratic World," in *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence* (Washington, DC: National Endowment for Democracy, 2017), 8–25, https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Sharp-Power-Rising-Authoritarian-Influence-Full-Report.pdf.

[20] Joseph S. Nye Jr., "China's Soft and Sharp Power," *Project Syndicate*, January 4, 2018, https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-soft-and-sharp-power-by-joseph-s--nye-2018-01.

[21] Peter Pomerantsev, *This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War against Reality* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019), 8; Elad Simchayoff, "Operation Infektion," *Lessons from History* (blog), Medium, July 30, 2020, https://medium.com/lessons-from-history/operation-infektion-a1485fe85443.

Thus, the definition of sharp power should extend beyond the actions of authoritarian states; it must include manipulative and destructive forms of influence disguised as soft power resources. At the core of the analysis must lie the nature of the impact: is it constructive or destructive? Conditioning the distinction between soft and sharp power exclusively on political regimes calls into question the principle of scientific objectivity.[22] Consequently, defining a country's application of soft power as soft or sharp may depend on the researcher's perspective, the objectives of the study, and the proposed hypothesis.

The use of sharp power by democratic regimes can negatively affect their international reputation, internal stability, and institutional legitimacy. Unlike in authoritarian systems, the exposure of covert manipulation in democracies can lead to a crisis of institutional trust, creating fertile ground for external sharp power penetration.

The main advantage of open societies is the transparency of state institutions and public trust. Therefore, the best approach for countering external sharp power is not the use of counter-manipulative methods, but the mobilization of domestic legitimacy, social solidarity, and comprehensive state power.[23]

Sharp Power, Institutional Trust, and Internal Legitimacy

The study of sharp power shows that high levels of government legitimacy and governance transparency can reduce the effectiveness of external influence. Conversely, institutional distrust and a legitimacy deficit create fertile ground for sharp penetration. External sharp power cannot effectively destabilize a resilient society "from scratch." Instead, it acts as a catalyst that exploits pre-existing internal fractures and a deficit of legitimacy. A low level of institutional trust serves as a key indicator of a state's internal vulnerability, creating fertile ground for information chaos and foreign interference.[24] This pattern is examined through an analysis of comparative data from three democratic states: the US, the United Kingdom, and Germany.

To operationalize the variables identified in this study, internationally recognized indices and databases were used as the conceptual and empirical basis. Below are the definitions of the concepts formulated on the basis of these indices, which directly reflect the variables in our model.

1. **Institutional Gap:** The systemic divergence between formal democratic rules and actual informal practices, accompanied by public alienation from decision-making processes.[25]

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[22] Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, new ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvc77bx3.

[23] Comprehensive state power is the systematic, integrated, and interconnected application of its material and non-material resources as a unified concept.

[24] Nye, "How Sharp Power Threatens Soft Power."

[25] Our World in Data, "Trust in Government," accessed August 11, 2026, https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/oecd-average-trust-in-governments.

2. **Media Polarization:** A persistent division of the information landscape into isolated segments, characterized by biased news coverage, a decline in viewpoint pluralism, and the formation of closed "filter bubbles" that create social antagonism and diminish verifiable objective information.[26]
3. **Institutional Resilience:** The systemic capacity of state and societal institutions to absorb shocks, crises, and external information attacks without losing basic functionality.[27]

According to the 2026 Edelman Trust Barometer, the United Kingdom remains within the distrust category, recording a Trust Index of 44 points.[28] Attempts at external interference in electoral processes and the authorities' insufficiently transparent response may have contributed to declining public trust in state institutions. Global Disinformation Index (GDI) reports also identify disinformation risks within the US online media landscape.[29] Since Brexit, the country has faced covert information influences. According to the 2026 Edelman Trust Barometer, widespread distrust, including distrust of official statistics, has emerged in British society, potentially undermining public confidence in government institutions.

Germany's Trust Index increased from 41 points in 2025 to 44 points in 2026, although both scores remained within the distrust category.[30] We contend that this was driven by the energy crisis and the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. According to GDI, although the German media landscape is transparent, it becomes vulnerable through far-right and far-left media outlets, which serve as channels for external sharp power.

Relying on research from the Global Disinformation Index[31] and the Edelman Trust Barometer 2026,[32] we find evidence consistent with our hypothesis that institutional distrust increases external information vulnerability. The analysis examines the relationship between three main variables: media polarization, institutional gap (distrust), and institutional resilience. Specifically, information vulnerability, associated with heightened media polarization, can be mitigated by strengthening public trust in government and enhancing institutional resilience.

Within the framework of the proposed analytical approach, sharp power is viewed not as an autonomous instrument of direct coercion, but rather as an exter-

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[26] Michael Coppedge et al., *V-Dem Codebook v16* (Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute, 2026), 230, https://www.v-dem.net/documents/70/codebook_v16.pdf.

[27] The Fund for Peace, "About SRI," *State Resilience Index*, accessed October 11, 2026, https://fundforpeace.org/SRI/about.html.

[28] Edelman Trust Institute, *2026 Edelman Trust Barometer: Global Report* (Edelman, January 21, 2026), 5, https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2026-01/2026%20Edelman%20Trust%20Barometer%20Global%20Report_01.21.26_0.pdf.

[29] Global Disinformation Index, *Disinformation Risk Assessment: The Online News Market in the United States* (London: Global Disinformation Index, December 2022), https://reason.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/gdi_us-mmr-22.pdf.

[30] Edelman Trust Institute, *2026 Edelman Trust Barometer*, 5; Global Disinformation Index, *Media Market Risk Ratings: Germany* (London: Global Disinformation Index, 2020), https://www.disinformationindex.org/files/Germany-Risk-Ratings-Report_ENGLISH.pdf.

[31] Global Disinformation Index, accessed August 11, 2026, https://www.disinformationindex.org/.

[32] Edelman Trust Institute, *2026 Edelman Trust Barometer*.

nal catalyst that exploits and amplifies pre-existing internal crises of legitimacy and deficits in institutional trust. Empirical and theoretical analysis suggests that external destructive influence is less likely to destabilize resilient political systems in the absence of pre-existing vulnerabilities. Instead, it purposefully targets structural fissures already present within society. Manipulative technologies and covert information flows act as a trigger mechanism, accelerating the erosion of institutions where the level of citizens' trust in government is initially undermined. Conversely, societies with high levels of polarization and persistent crises of legitimacy possess greater vulnerability to sharp power. The deficit of trust in key state and public institutions translates into information vulnerability, as citizens cease to rely on official sources for factual verification. As examples demonstrate, the deepening of socio-political division and the decline of trust in institutions create a favorable environment for the formation of closed "information bubbles." In such conditions, external actors gain the ability to effectively project destructive influence, using the system's own internal contradictions as a lever of pressure.[33]

To measure information vulnerability, we developed a preliminary weighted additive composite index incorporating the selected variables.

$$\text{IVI} = w_1 \cdot \tilde{P} + w_2 \cdot \left(1 - \tilde{R}\right) + w_3 \cdot \left(1 - \tilde{T}\right)$$

This mathematical construction reflects the combined effects of the selected variables: while the normalized media polarization index ($\tilde{P}$) directly increases risks, the inverted indicators of institutional resilience ($1 - \tilde{R}$) and trust deficit $\left(1 - \tilde{T}\right)$ demonstrate that a shortage of internal protective mechanisms exponentially amplifies the destructive impact of external information pressure. All variables are assigned equal weights and scaled to the [0, 1] range.

All parameters are scaled to the range [0, 1] using min–max normalization, and the normalized formula for information vulnerability is expressed as follows:

$$\text{IVI} = \frac{P + (1 - R) + (1 - T)}{3}$$

As the Media Polarization Index in the formula, we consider the 2022 results for media polarization from Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) to be the most suitable. To reflect the institutional gap, we have taken the 2022 data for Trust in government[34] from Our World in Data as the closest variable, where the level of public trust in the government across states is measured. We propose converting the obtained results by applying a measurement scale from 0 (lowest) to 1 (highest), allowing the percentage-based trust indicator to be incorporated into the composite

[33] Justin Kempf, host, "Christopher Walker Revisits Sharp Power," *Democracy Paradox* (podcast episode), April 15, 2026, https://democracyparadox.com/2026/04/15/christopher-walker-revisits-sharp-power/.

[34] Our World in Data, "Trust in Government," https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/oecd-average-trust-in-governments?time=earliest..2024&country=GBR~DEU~USA.

index. To measure state resilience, we have used the State Resilience Index (SRI) developed by the Fund for Peace.[35]

According to the 2022 trust in government data from Our World in Data, the United States recorded a trust level of 39%, the United Kingdom 36%, and Germany 62%. According to our proposed scale, Germany stands at 0.62 (high), the United Kingdom at 0.36 (low), and the US at 0.39 (low).

Table 3. Application of the Information Vulnerability Measurement Formula for the US, UK, and Germany

State	Media polarization (V-Dem) (P)	Trust in government (Our World in Data)[36] (T)	Institutional Resilience (SRI)[37] (R)	Information vulnerability
US	0.717	0.39	0.74	0.529
UK	0.742	0.36	0.77	0.537
Germany	0.712	0.62	0.79	0.434

Thus, the obtained results demonstrate that high media polarization and low trust reduce institutional resilience, thereby increasing information vulnerability and the destructive impact of sharp power. Comparing the US (0.717) and the United Kingdom (0.742) reveals distinct structural dynamics. The US exhibits high media polarization driven by partisan antagonisms and algorithmic "filter bubbles,"[38] leading to low government trust (39%). However, American society possesses a degree of institutional resilience shaped by its long-standing polarized media environment, potentially limiting the risk of rapid systemic destabilization. In contrast, the UK displays even higher media polarization—exacerbated by post-Brexit societal divisions—making its public highly susceptible to disinformation and resulting in the lowest government trust (36%). Germany records the lowest information vulnerability score among the three states, having higher institutional resilience and government trust. Public trust in the government serves as an "armor," which does not allow media polarization to turn into information chaos.

Comparative Analysis of the Application of Sharp Power by the States of the South Caucasus

The analysis of information vulnerability in the US, Germany, and the UK made it possible to formulate a comparable measurement framework for states with different governance systems. The selected cases of the South Caucasus countries, as states in the same region with different governance systems, are important to understanding whether patterns of information vulnerability in different regimes are

[35] The Fund for Peace, "About SRI."
[36] Our World in Data, "Trust in Government."
[37] The Fund for Peace, "About SRI."
[38] Eli Pariser, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011); Amy Ross Arguedas, Craig T. Robertson, Richard Fletcher, and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, *Echo Chambers, Filter Bubbles, and Polarisation: A Literature Review* (Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022), https://doi.org/10.60625/risj-etxj-7k60.

comparable to those of developed democracies. As an empirical basis, data from the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Index for 2023–2025 were considered, allowing for a more systematic examination of the relationship between sharp power and the nature of the regime. The three states of the South Caucasus, shaped by security priorities and regime characteristics, exhibit different patterns of response to sharp power. In the case of Azerbaijan, sharp power is aimed at the external legitimization of the authoritarian regime; in the case of Armenia and Georgia, it frequently turns into a core factor of internal political struggle and external confrontation.

Table 4. Comparison of the Regimes of the Three South Caucasus States According to the Years 2023–2025[39]

Country	2023 (Unit/Type)	2024 (Unit/Type)	2025 (Unit/Type)
Armenia	5.42 / Hybrid	5.35 / Hybrid	5.58 / Hybrid
Georgia	5.20 / Hybrid	4.70 / Hybrid	4.85 / Hybrid
Azerbaijan	2.80 / Authoritarian	2.80 / Authoritarian	2.82 / Authoritarian

According to 2023–2025 data from the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), the democratic picture of the South Caucasus is as follows: Armenia remains near the upper threshold of the "hybrid regime" category (5.58 points), Georgia is seeing democratic backsliding (4.85 points) with tendencies moving toward authoritarianism, while Azerbaijan maintains characteristics of a stable authoritarian system (2.82 points).

In our proposed model to measure informational vulnerability, the variable "Trust in government" is pivotal, for which comparable empirical data remain limited. Since the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) ceased operations in Azerbaijan in 2013, recent comparable data have been unavailable from publicly accessible sources. Therefore, to apply the proposed model, the method of extrapolation was applied by choosing a proxy variable.

Given the central role of political leaders in authoritarian systems and the possibility that response bias may affect the accuracy of public opinion surveys, the results of Azerbaijan's 2024 presidential election were used as the basis for the analysis. To ensure the model's comparability, the corresponding indicators for 2024 were also used for Armenia and Georgia.

In the October 9, 2013, presidential elections, incumbent Ilham Aliyev received 84.54% of the vote,[40] closely aligning with the 84% trust rating reported by

[39] Economist Intelligence Unit, *Democracy Index 2025: Democracy Stabilises after Eight Years of Decline* (London: Economist Intelligence Unit, 2026), https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2025/.

[40] European Parliament, *Election Observation Delegation to the Presidential Elections in Azerbaijan (9 October 2013)*, report by Pino Arlacchi (Brussels: European Parliament, 2013), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/212630/Azerbaijan-presidential-elections_09-October-2013_European-Parliament-report.pdf; OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), *Republic of Azerbaijan, Presidential Election, 9 October 2013: ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report* (Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 2013), 29, https://www.osce.org/institutions/110015.

the CRRC that same year (a 0.54% deviation).[41] Following 86.02% in 2018,[42] Aliyev received 92.12% in the February 7, 2024 snap elections.[43] Factoring in the historical 0.54% survey deviation, this reflects an adjusted trust index of ~91.58% following the 2020 Karabakh war, capturing an approximate ten percent post-war rally associated with the incumbent regime's victory.

Thus, for 2024, the estimated value of the extrapolated variable used as a proxy for trust in government is 91.58%. According to the 2024 results of CRRC,[44] the trust in government indicator stands at 28% in Armenia and 31% in Georgia. By applying our proposed information vulnerability measurement formula, let us now understand what level of information vulnerability states with three different regimes and regional problems have:

Table 5. Application of the Information Vulnerability Measurement Formula for Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan

State	Media bias (V-Dem: v2mebias, 2024)	Trust in government (CRRC)	Institutional Resilience 2022 (SRI)[45]	Information vulnerability
Armenia	0.608	0.28	0.60	0.576
Georgia	0.571	0.31	0.60	0.554
Azerbaijan	0.305	0.92	0.50	0.295

Applying the formula creates an interesting picture using the example of the South Caucasus, where three states in the same region with different regimes are compared (Table 5). According to the V-Dem methodology, Azerbaijan's low media polarization score means that in the country "print and broadcast media cover not only the official party or candidates, but all opposition parties or candidates receive only negative coverage."[46] This suggests that conventional patterns of media polarization are less visible in this case, since the official narrative dominates the information landscape due to restrictions on media freedom and extensive state control over information channels.

In authoritarian systems, the maximum indicator of trust in the government creates a paradox at first glance. It reflects restrictions on media freedom, the sup-

[41] Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC), "Caucasus Barometer 2013 Azerbaijan: Trust in President (TRUPRES)," accessed August 11, 2026, https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2013az/TRUPRES/.
[42] OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), *Republic of Azerbaijan, Early Presidential Election, 11 April 2018: ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report* (Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 2018), 26, https://odihr.osce.org/odihr/elections/azerbaijan/388580.
[43] OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), *Republic of Azerbaijan, Early Presidential Election, 7 February 2024: ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report* (Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR, 2025), https://odihr.osce.org/sites/default/files/f/documents/0/6/586281_0.pdf.
[44] Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC), "Caucasus Barometer 2024 Regional Dataset: Trust – Executive Government (TRUEXEC)," accessed August 11, 2026, https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2024/TRUEXEC/.
[45] The Fund for Peace, "About SRI." The 2022 State Resilience Index dataset is used in this study because it is the most recent dataset listed for download by the Fund for Peace.
[46] Coppedge et al., *V-Dem Codebook v16*, 230.

pression of alternative viewpoints, and state control over information, rather than the actual distribution of public attitudes. The model's low vulnerability score may therefore underestimate the country's vulnerabilities, as the selected indicators capture only part of their complexity. To neutralize the concealed vulnerability of their own information domain, authoritarian states tend to transfer information attacks to the field of other countries. This may help explain why authoritarian systems resort to offensive sharp power. In the South Caucasus, Armenia is the most vulnerable in the information domain, which is conditioned by the offensive sharp power policy pursued by Azerbaijan, Turkey, and other external actors, as well as other internal and external factors. Azerbaijan's sharp power policy includes two main components: information aggression (targeted disinformation, psychological pressure) and corruption penetration (known as "caviar diplomacy").[47]

International research and legal cases indicate that "caviar diplomacy," presented outwardly as hospitality or an expression of soft power, constitutes an elaborate corruption scheme aimed at advancing Azerbaijan's political interests through bribery involving international officials and influential figures.[48] Information aggression is directed specifically against Armenia, where historical revisionism, applied as sharp power against Armenia, has become one of the main directions of Azerbaijan's foreign policy after 2020–2023. A vivid expression of this is the state-sponsored "Western Azerbaijan" concept,[49] which includes all the characteristics of sharp power described by Walker and Ludwig.

The key purpose of this concept is to sideline the rights and potential claims of Armenians forcibly displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh by contrasting them with a corresponding set of counterclaims. In the context of sharp power, this can be characterized as "agenda hijacking."[50] Azerbaijan attempts to neutralize the natural and inalienable right of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh to live in their homeland through an artificially created antithesis and the opportunities provided by "caviar diplomacy."

Thus, through manipulative tactics and the practice of "agenda hijacking," Azerbaijan carries out a "sharp" infiltration into areas of concern to the international community, aiming to call into question the legitimacy of the Armenian side's rights. Furthermore, the widespread rewriting of historical facts and the systematic destruction or appropriation of Armenian cultural heritage are often presented as cultural diplomacy. In practice, however, these activities aim to undermine ownership rights and the legitimacy of claims to Armenian cultural heritage.[51] This is precisely the form of sharp power that we have termed offensive sharp power.

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[47] European Stability Initiative (ESI), "Caviar Diplomacy: Why Every European Should Care," accessed March 9, 2026, https://www.esiweb.org/proposals/caviar-diplomacy.

[48] European Stability Initiative, "Caviar Diplomacy."

[49] "The Western Azerbaijan Community," *Virtual Western Azerbaijan*, accessed June 2, 2026, https://qerbiazerbaycan.com/en/the-western-azerbaijan-community/.

[50] Christopher Witko, Jana Morgan, Nathan J. Kelly, and Peter K. Enns, *Hijacking the Agenda: Economic Power and Political Influence* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2021), https://www.russellsage.org/publications/book/hijacking-agenda.

[51] Hayastan A. Martirosyan, "Azerbaijan's Policy of Forced Cultural Appropriation after the Second Artsakh War: The Case of Dadivank Monastery," *International Journal of Armenian Genocide Studies* 7, no. 2 (2022): 91–135, https://doi.org/10.51442/ijags.0035.

The establishment of the Baku Initiative Group (BIG) serves as a classic example of Azerbaijan deploying sharp power under the guise of soft power, targeting France rather than Armenia. Cloaking itself in the rhetoric of "anti-colonial struggle" and "human rights protection," Azerbaijan utilizes disinformation and manipulation to target French overseas territories (Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana, New Caledonia, and French Polynesia).[52] From 2020 on, alongside the strategic deepening of Armenian-French relations, Azerbaijan launched an offensive sharp power policy against France. According to a report by the French governmental agency VIGINUM (France's service for countering foreign digital interference), the Azerbaijani side targeted France's pro-Armenian policy on the X (formerly Twitter) platform through a network of bots and fake accounts.[53]

Through this agenda-hijacking tactic, Azerbaijan has sought to disrupt public discourse surrounding the 2024 Paris Olympic Games, undermine confidence in the French authorities, and damage France's international reputation as a democratic state. This illustrates Azerbaijan's use of offensive sharp power.

Since 2020, Armenia has faced the active deployment of sharp power by external actors as a means of "non-violent" influence. While Azerbaijan acts as an exporter of offensive sharp power, Armenia simultaneously bears its impact and, as a defensive countermeasure, employs defensive sharp power. The latter implies using counter-manipulative algorithms, targeted blocking measures, or covert informational counterstrikes. The primary goal of external sharp power is to deepen domestic polarization through social media and mass media, reduce the state's resilience, and increase informational vulnerability.

Under conditions of an asymmetric regional balance, external pressure, specifically demands to revise constitutional foundations and institutional markers of identity, acts as a powerful catalyst for internal political fragmentation.[54] The leadership of the target state faces a systemic dilemma: adapting the legal framework to meet the demands of an external actor reduces the risks of escalation, yet simultaneously deepens the domestic crisis of legitimacy, as society may perceive such changes as the result of external pressure.[55]

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[52] Damien Leloup and Florian Reynaud, "Azerbaijan's Interference Operations in New Caledonia Are Only Part of the Story," *Le Monde*, May 17, 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/pixels/article/2024/05/17/azerbaijan-s-interference-operations-in-new-caledonia-is-only-part-of-the-story_6671708_13.html.

[53] VIGINUM, *UN-notorious BIG: A Digital Information Manipulation Campaign Targeting French Overseas Departments, Regions, Territories and Corsica* (Paris: Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale, December 2, 2024), in French: [VIGINUM, *UN-notorious BIG : une campagne numérique de manipulation de l'information ciblant les DROM-COM et la Corse* (Paris: Secrétariat général de la défense et de la sécurité nationale, 2 décembre 2024)], https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/publications/un-notorious-big-une-campagne-numerique-de-manipulation-de-linformation-ciblant-les.

[54] Nailia Bagirova, "Azerbaijan at 'Real Peace' with Armenia but Wants It to Change Constitution," *Reuters*, July 16, 2026, https://www.reuters.com/world/azerbaijan-real-peace-with-armenia-wants-it-change-constitution-2026-07-16/.

[55] Alexander Shpunt, *Conflict between the Authorities of Armenia and the Armenian Apostolic Church: Causes, Participants, Chronology and Development Scenarios*, PSCRP-BESA Reports, no. 202 (Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, May 12, 2026), https://besacenter.org/conflict-between-the-authorities-of-armenia-and-the-armenian-apostolic-church-causes-participants-chronology-and-development-scenarios/.

Hybrid regimes face a "resilience dilemma": whether to respond with similar manipulative tools, thereby risking their own democratic image, or to adopt a defensive sharp power strategy. Nevertheless, defensive sharp power also has limitations. A more stable foundation for resilience can be built by strengthening government legitimacy, increasing institutional transparency, and fostering public trust.

In the case of Georgia, the deployment of sharp power has a pronounced geopolitical dimension. The Russo-Georgian conflict, European integration, and the Russia–Ukraine war have deepened societal divisions, as competing narratives of "traditional values" and a "European future" have become subjects of political manipulation. In the 2024 parliamentary elections, offensive sharp power was deployed by several geopolitical poles: the ruling force was characterized as pro-Russian, the opposition was accused of trying to drag the country into war, and statements by high-ranking EU officials (describing the elections as a "referendum between Europe and Russia")[56] contributed to an atmosphere of an "existential dilemma" aimed at reorienting voters.

Table 6. Comparison of Sharp Power Resources of the South Caucasus States

Indicator	Azerbaijan	Armenia	Georgia
Type of Sharp Power	Offensive	Defensive	Mixed
Main Resource	Petrodollars, energy statecraft, external lobbying	Global diaspora networks, image of democratic reform	Strategic geographic transit location, values-based and pro-EU discourse
Target	International community, Western political institutions, regional rivals	International public opinion, foreign governments, diaspora communities	Euro-Atlantic structures, domestic electorate, regional trade partners
Toolbox	Caviar diplomacy, media influence, targeted lobbying campaigns	Public diplomacy, narrative leveraging, institutional appeals	Political polarization, contested NGO laws, strategic legislative alignment
Primary Objective	Legitimizing the state narrative, capturing elites, and suppressing external pressure	Securing diplomatic backing, countering isolation, and raising the costs of aggression	Navigating domestic power dynamics and balancing pro-EU and regional influences

The experience of the South Caucasus states demonstrates (Table 6) that authoritarian systems are more prone to the deployment of offensive sharp power, whereas hybrid regimes (Armenia, Georgia) resort to sharp power primarily in the course of responding to external and internal influences. Our proposed information

[56] Josep Borrell, "Georgia: Statement by the High Representative Josep Borrell on the Latest Developments Following the Parliamentary Elections," European External Action Service, October 29, 2024, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/georgia-statement-high-representative-josep-borrell-latest-developments-following-parliamentary_en.

vulnerability index suggests a relationship between media freedom and information vulnerability. Although Azerbaijan had the highest indicator of trust in the government, the lack of free media renders the reliability of the information vulnerability indicator ambiguous, which in turn compels authoritarian states to conceal their own internal vulnerability. Sharp power applied against external threats is predominantly defensive in nature (defensive sharp power). However, in domestic politics, regardless of the nature of the regime, sharp power is utilized by both authorities and the opposition for both offensive and defensive purposes.

Conclusion

The synthesis of classical and modern concepts of power allows us to state that power involves the use of behavioral and material resources to influence a target's behavior in ways desired by the influencing party. The analysis suggests that the examined theories of power are interconnected, and their application is determined by the goals and tools of influence rather than solely by the type of political regime. This analysis confirms one of the article's core theses: the boundary between sharp and soft powers is extremely subtle. If a state-sponsored ideology (e.g., the "anti-colonial" struggle) relies on the freedom of peoples and voluntary attraction, it is soft power. However, when the same rhetoric advances one's own geopolitical interests and trade, as in Azerbaijan's case, it becomes sharp power. Therefore, the watershed between sharp power and soft power passes where voluntary attraction ends and covert coercion begins. In the region, information flows and seemingly "soft" tools (culture, media, and religion) have turned into weapons, serving hard political goals through sharp penetration.

The comparative analysis of the South Caucasus reveals how sharp power assumes different forms according to the political objectives, institutional conditions, and resources of the states involved. Azerbaijan's external lobbying networks, information campaigns, and manipulation of international agendas illustrate the offensive application of sharp power, particularly in efforts to shape foreign perceptions and weaken competing political claims. Armenia's experience highlights the challenges of responding to such pressure while maintaining institutional legitimacy and public trust. Georgia, in turn, demonstrates how competing geopolitical narratives and domestic polarization create opportunities for both external influence and internal political manipulation. These differences suggest that the effectiveness of sharp power depends as much on the vulnerabilities of the target as on the capabilities of the actor exercising influence. The proposed information vulnerability index offers an initial framework for examining this relationship, while the comparative findings underscore the importance of media freedom, institutional resilience, and public trust in assessing states' exposure to manipulative influence.

Research Limitations and Future Directions: One of the main methodological limitations of this study is that the proposed Information Vulnerability Index (IVI) is based on a weighted additive composite model. As a preliminary attempt to integrate the selected variables into a common measurement framework, this model has certain limitations arising from its linear structure and may not fully capture the

nonlinear and complex interactions among the variables. In addition, the weights assigned to each indicator (w_1, w_2, w_3) in the current model involve a degree of subjectivity and require further empirical validation.

Given these limitations, future research can proceed in the following directions:

1. Move from an additive model toward constructing more complex, multiplicative, or hierarchical indexes, which will allow capturing the mutual influence of information vulnerability components more accurately.
2. Apply expert survey (Delphi method, analytic hierarchy process) or data-driven (for example, factor analysis) approaches to define the weights of variables more objectively.
3. Apply the index to different regional or temporal data to test its stability and predictive power.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The authors affirm this research did not involve human subjects.

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GABON AND FRANCO-BRITISH DIPLOMACY DURING THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR, 1967–1970

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Abstract

This paper examines Gabonese and Franco-British diplomacy during the Nigerian Civil War. The study adopts a historical narrative approach and uses primary sources, including archival materials and newspapers from The National Archives, Kew, London, and secondary sources, including books and journal articles for data analysis. The recognition of the Republic of Biafra marked Gabon's entry into the diplomatic arena of the civil war. Gabon actively participated in the Anglo-French-inspired diplomatic initiative to resolve the civil war, even though it was designated as the international *entrepôt* for arms exports to Biafra. The paper argues that, while Gabon was guided by its national interests during the civil war, particularly its desire to be heard globally, it considered the Biafran drama a global issue on which African countries ought to have taken an uncompromising stand. Gabon served as a channel through which the great powers maintained diplomatic contact with the Biafran authorities. The Gabonese episode in the Nigerian Civil War brought Africa more closely into the geopolitics of the 1960s. Biafra was regarded as a security issue that required a peaceful diplomatic settlement, which never materialized because of the overbearing influence of the great powers during the civil war.

Keywords: *Nigerian Civil War, Gabon, France, Britain, diplomacy, Nigeria.*

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Introduction

In the 1960s, African states became sites of civil conflict, including the Nigerian Civil War.[1] The early internationalization of the civil war was shaped by the recognition of Biafra[2] and the diplomatic support it received from some African states, namely, Gabon,[3] Tanzania, Ivory Coast, and Zambia.[4] Gilbert Onuaguluchi argues that the diplomatic recognition Biafra received from these states was the turning point in the international politics of the civil war. These countries used their international influence as extensively as possible in support of the Biafran cause. Military assistance to Biafra became easier after these African states accorded it diplomatic recognition. Biafra was able to resist more effectively the siege by the federal armed forces.[5]

One of the features of the Nigerian Civil War was the approach taken by great powers such as Britain toward African countries that had recognized Biafra, especially Gabon. Britain requested that these countries use their good offices or diplomatic influence with the Biafran government to persuade it to renounce secession and return to membership in the Nigerian federation on equal terms with the other states created by Head of State Major-General Yakubu Gowon before the outbreak of the war.

This paper examines Gabonese diplomacy during the Nigerian Civil War. More specifically, it focuses on the influence of Franco-British diplomacy on Gabonese actions during the conflict. Methodologically, the article relies primarily on archival evidence from the National Archives, Kew, London, supplemented by relevant books and journal articles. Indeed, an account of post-independence African history is incomplete without examining how the Biafran episode shaped African and great-power politics in the twentieth century.

This paper argues that Gabon exercised a form of constrained diplomatic agency within the asymmetric postcolonial order of 1960s Africa. By recognizing Biafra, maintaining close relations with the Biafran leadership, and subsequently offering its "good offices" for contacts between the warring parties, Gabon sought to transform its position from that of a small postcolonial state into a consequential diplomatic intermediary. Gabon was deeply concerned about the conditions of the war, particularly its horrific effects on the civilians in Biafra, and therefore opted to

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[1] Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945–1984*, 5th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985), 1–3.

[2] Confidential: Minute on the Nigerian Civil War and Recognition of Biafra, from the Commonwealth Office to Ottawa, Telegram No. 169, June 2, 1967, File No. TX 3/28/Part A/West and General African Dept., "Nigeria, Political Affairs, External, Bilateral, Eastern Secession, Recognition Countries, and Others than United Kingdom, 30 May 1967 to 31 December 1970," FCO 38/249, The National Archives, Kew, London (hereafter TNA).

[3] John J. Stremlau, *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 109–10.

[4] Ade Adefuye, *Culture and Foreign Policy: The Nigerian Experience* (Lagos: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, 1992), 57.

[5] Gilbert Onuaguluchi, *The Giant in Turbulent Storms: The Story of Nigeria, 1944–1987* (New York and Los Angeles: Vantage Press, 1990), 122.

recognize Biafra along with Tanzania, Ivory Coast, and Zambia. Gabon was highly active in the regional politics and international diplomacy of the war and maintained close diplomatic contacts with the Biafran leadership. In the process, it served as a channel of communication between Biafra and state actors, especially Britain. Accordingly, Gabon used its influence with the Biafran authorities to facilitate contacts with the great powers and support diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict. More importantly, during the civil war, Gabon was guided by its national interests, including its desire to make its voice heard on the global stage and become the economic powerhouse of West Africa. Gabon did not consider the Biafran issue an internal Nigerian problem, but rather a global issue on which African countries ought to have taken an uncompromising stand. Gabon supported the French-inspired diplomatic initiative aimed at resolving the civil war, which in turn influenced its decisions during the conflict.

The first section of the study examines Gabon's activities during and after its recognition of Biafra, while the second section examines Franco-British diplomatic efforts to influence Gabon to engage with the Biafran leadership in pursuit of a peaceful settlement of the civil war. The Gabonese episode in the Nigerian Civil War was one of the major developments that brought Africa more closely to the forefront of global politics in the 1960s. The great powers exploited the security issues generated by the conflict in their rivalry with one another, thereby contributing to peace and security challenges in Africa.

The Nigerian Civil War: Background and Origins

The Nigerian Civil War, a tragic African conflict that occurred during decolonization, was precipitated by the fragile political conditions and constitutional problems that beset the Nigerian state.[6] The 30-month-long war, fought between the Federal Military Government (FMG) of Nigeria, led by Major-General Yakubu Gowon, and Eastern Nigeria, under Lieutenant-Colonel Ojukwu, from July 6, 1967, to January 15, 1970, was one of the most turbulent conflicts of the twentieth century.[7] Numerous factors contributed to the outbreak of the civil war. The first was the failure of the British colonial administration to take into consideration Nigeria's ethnic and cultural diversity when formulating colonial policies. Nigeria is home to numerous ethnic groups, including the Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, and Fulani.[8] By the early twentieth century, these ethnic groups had come under British colonial rule. The creation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates of Nigeria and their subsequent amalgamation on January 1, 1914, under Governor-General Sir Frederick

[6] Richard Akresh, Sonia R. Bhalotra, Marinella Leone, and Una O. Osili, "War and Stature: Growing Up during the Nigerian Civil War," IZA Discussion Paper No. 6194 (Bonn: Institute for the Study of Labor, 2011), 1–11.

[7] Rantimi Jays Julius-Adeoye, "The Nigerian-Biafran War," African Studies Centre Leiden, 2017, accessed March 11, 2024, https://www.ascleiden.nl/content/webdossiers/nigerian-biafran-war.

[8] Central Intelligence Agency, *National Intelligence Survey: Nigeria—The Society*, 50B/GS/S (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1973), CIA-RDP01-00707R000200100006-9.

Lugard, changed the political landscape of Nigeria.[9] An indirect-rule system of governance that relied on Native Authorities and traditional rulers, such as emirs, obas, chiefs, and warrant chiefs, was introduced and implemented.[10] The emergence of colonial administration in Nigeria was accompanied by the drafting of constitutions that provided guiding principles for the effective governance and administration of colonial Nigeria.[11] The following constitutions were introduced during colonial rule in Nigeria: the 1922 Clifford Constitution;[12] the 1944 Sir Arthur Richards Constitution;[13] and the 1954 Lyttleton Constitution. The colonial constitutions contained significant flaws, as they created conditions for political domination, tribalism, and favoritism in Nigeria.[14]

The British colonization of Nigeria primarily sought to protect the investments and interests of British traders and merchants rather than foster political cohesion. This contributed to North and South divisions, tribalism and ethnic jingoism, party politics, and the struggle to gain control of the central government.[15]

At independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited a weak political structure and an unbalanced federation. Nationalist leaders from various regions emerged to lead the country during the First Republic (1960–1966). They included Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who served as prime minister, and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, who served as governor-general and later became ceremonial president in 1963, when Nigeria became a republic. Political parties were largely organized along regional lines. Among them was the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), founded by Azikiwe in 1944 and later renamed the National Council of Nigerian Citizens. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) was formed by Sir Ahmadu Bello. The Action Group (AG) was founded by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who served as general secretary of Egbe Omo Oduduwa and leader of the Nigerian Produce and Traders' Association (NPTA). These regionally based parties shaped the character of the post-independence political crisis, as each region increasingly feared that rival parties would use political power to advance their own interests.[16]

One major post-independence crisis that contributed to the outbreak of the civil war was the rift within the Action Group between Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the leader of the opposition party, and Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola, premier of

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[9] Raph Uwechue, *Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War: Facing the Future* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1971), 4–5.

[10] O. A. Lawal, *"*Britain and Decolonization in Nigeria, 1945–1960*"* (PhD diss., University of Ibadan, 1991), 250; E. C. Amucheazi, ed., *Readings in Social Sciences: Issues in National Development* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980), 14.

[11] Kunle Amuwo, "The Historical Roots of the Nigerian Civil War," in *Perspectives on the Nigerian Civil War*, ed. Siyan Oyeweso (Lagos: OAP Publications, 1992), 10–11.

[12] Gabriel Olakunle Olusanya, "Constitutional Development 1861–1960," in *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, ed. Obaro Ikime (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1980), 17.

[13] Efiong Isaac Utuk, "Britain's Colonial Administrations and Developments, 1861–1960: An Analysis of Britain's Colonial Administrations and Developments in Nigeria" (master's thesis, Portland State University, 1975), https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.2521.

[14] Amuwo, "The Historical Roots of the Nigerian Civil War," 10–11.

[15] Amuwo, "The Historical Roots of the Nigerian Civil War," 1.

[16] Amuwo, "The Historical Roots of the Nigerian Civil War," 1.

Western Nigeria. The two politicians struggled for control of the Western Region.[17] While the nation was still recovering from the internal crisis within the AG, another controversy arose over the 1962 census, fueling anger and hostility within the Nigerian polity.[18] The 1964 federal elections and the 1965 Western Regional electoral crisis were significant events that contributed to the atmosphere of political instability in Nigeria.[19] The crisis intensified the political instability in Nigeria.[20] These events had a damaging effect on Nigeria's political system. Together, these developments intensified political instability in the country and set forces of disintegration in motion.

By January 1966, many Nigerians had become highly dissatisfied with the state of affairs in the country.[21] A military *coup d'état* led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu further deepened the national crisis.[22] The inner caucus that planned the coup consisted of Ifeajuna, Nzeogwu, and Ademoyega.[23] The coup succeeded in the North, where Sir Ahmadu Bello, premier of Northern Nigeria and Sardauna of Sokoto, was assassinated. It succeeded in the West with the killing of Chief S. A. Akintola and the arrest of his deputy, Chief Fani Kayode. The coup failed in the East, a development that contributed to its subsequent characterization as an Igbo coup.[24] After the coup, Major-General Aguiyi Ironsi became head of state. A few months after assuming office, he abolished the federal system of government and introduced a unitary system through the promulgation of the Unification Decree No. 34 of May 24, 1966, which unified all the government institutions in the country[25] and contributed to intense riots in several parts of Northern Nigeria. A major feature of the riots was the massacre of Eastern Nigerians and the destruction of their property in northern towns such as Katsina, Gusau, Bauchi, Zaria, Maiduguri, Gombe, and Kaura Namoda. On July 28, 1966, while Ironsi was visiting the North and other parts of the country to campaign for peace and calm, he attended a meeting of traditional rulers in Ibadan, the capital of the Western Region. On July 29, 1966, a group of Northern soldiers seized Ironsi and his host, Lieutenant-Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi, the military governor of the Western Region, and murdered them.[26] The July coup was described as northern retaliation for the coup of January 15, 1966.[27]

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[17] Arthur Agwuncha Nwankwo and Samuel Udochukwu Ifejika, *The Making of a Nation: Biafra* (London: C. Hurst, 1969), 42.
[18] Nwankwo and Ifejika, *The Making of a Nation*, 46.
[19] Nwankwo and Ifejika, *The Making of a Nation*, 92.
[20] Anthony Hamilton Millard Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook, 1966–1969*, vol. 1, *January 1966–July 1967* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 24.
[21] Eastern Nigeria, Ministry of Information, *January 15: Before and After*, Nigerian Crisis 1966, vol. 7 (Enugu: Government Printer, 1966), 4.
[22] Nwankwo and Ifejika, *The Making of a Nation*, 29.
[23] Siyan Oyeweso, "Kaduna Nzeogwu, the Coup and Prelude to the Nigerian Civil War," in *Perspectives on the Nigerian Civil War*, ed. Siyan Oyeweso (Lagos: OAP Publications, 1992), 30.
[24] Nwankwo and Ifejika, *The Making of a Nation*, 130.
[25] Amuwo, "The Historical Roots of the Nigerian Civil War," 12.
[26] Eastern Nigeria, Ministry of Information, *January 15: Before and After*, 31–38.
[27] Amuwo, "The Historical Roots of the Nigerian Civil War," 12–13.

In August 1966, Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon became head of state rather than Brigadier Ogundipe, who was the more senior officer in the army hierarchy. Although other military officers supported the decision, the military governor of Eastern Nigeria, Lieutenant-Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, refused to accept the arrangement.[28] The killings that had begun in May 1966 continued even after the coup. On September 12, 1966, peace delegates assembled in Lagos for talks concerning the country's future constitutional arrangements. The conference was still in session on September 29, 1966, when people of Northern Nigerian origin launched another violent attack on Eastern Nigerians residing in the North.[29] At this point, Nigeria's political situation deteriorated further. As a result, a series of peace meetings was convened in an effort to resolve the crisis.[30]

On January 5, 1967, the Supreme Military Council of Nigeria continued its meeting in Ghana. The council reached agreement on a number of issues. On the power and functions of the FMG, the Council reaffirmed its belief in the workability of the existing institutions, subject to necessary safeguards. According to Suzanne Cronjé, "the Aburi conference achieved a remarkable amount of agreement. But the agreement was not executed."[31]

At this point, the crisis between the Federal Military Government and Eastern Nigeria intensified, with the two parties taking divergent actions that threatened the peace and stability of the country. For instance, on February 21, 1967, Law and Order (Maintenance) Edict No. 2 of 1967 was promulgated by Ojukwu, which signaled the declaration of any part of Eastern Nigeria as a disturbed area. In March 1967, Ojukwu announced that, from April 1, 1967, he would take over all federal departments and assume control of federal taxes and other revenues.[32] However, the Federal Government declared the Revenue Collection Edicts illegal and unconstitutional.[33] Nevertheless, Ojukwu proceeded to promulgate further edicts, including the Contingency Fund Amendment Edict No. 25 of May 11, 1967, which formally established the Eastern Rehabilitation Commission and a Rehabilitation Fund to address the needs of the large number of refugees who returned to Eastern Nigeria following the disturbances that began on May 29, 1966.[34] The Eastern Region's Consultative Assembly met jointly with the Advisory Committee of Chiefs

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[28] *Report of the Tribunal of Inquiry into the Atrocities and Other Inhuman Acts Committed against Persons of Eastern Nigeria Origin in 1966* (Enugu: Eastern Nigeria Ministry of Information, 1967), 3–146.

[29] Eastern Nigerian Government, *Nigerian Crisis 1966* (Enugu: Ministry of Information, Eastern Nigeria Government Printer, 1966), 8.

[30] Confidential: Minute on the Nigerian Internal Situation, 1966–1967, from F. Cumming-Bruce to M. James, October 1, 1966, PREM 13/1041, File No. 7175895/4S/1848/27G, The National Archives (TNA).

[31] Suzanne Cronjé, *The World and Nigeria: The Diplomatic History of the Biafran War, 1967–1970* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1972), 18.

[32] Nigerian Army Education Corps and School, *History of the Nigerian Army, 1863–1992* (Abuja: Nigerian Army Headquarters, 1992), 1–10.

[33] Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Origins of the Nigerian Civil War* (Apapa: Nigerian National Press, 1969), 13.

[34] G. D. Anderson, *Report on Decrees, Gazette Notifications of Appointments from the Eastern Nigerian Government* (United Kingdom: British Government Printer, 1967), 1–2.

and Elders on May 26, 1967, to discuss the future of the region within the Nigerian Federation. In retaliation for Eastern Nigeria's actions, on May 27, 1967, Gowon declared a state of emergency throughout the Federation[35] and imposed a blockade on the Eastern Nigerian coast as well as economic sanctions against the region.[36]

General Gowon subsequently divided the country into twelve states on May 27, 1967, replacing the former four regions, and appointed governors for each of them. Angered by General Yakubu Gowon's decision, the joint meeting of the Eastern Consultative Assembly in Enugu mandated Ojukwu to declare the region independent. Therefore, on May 30, 1967, after summoning the United Kingdom and United States *chargés d'affaires* at 3 a.m. to inform them of his plans, Ojukwu broadcast over Eastern Nigerian radio, declaring Eastern Nigeria a sovereign independent state known as the Republic of Biafra. After the declaration of the Republic of Biafra, Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu sent a letter to British Prime Minister Harold Wilson on May 30, 1967. He told the prime minister that all efforts to resolve the Nigerian crisis had failed, and that the two sides had reached a parting of the ways. Similarly, Gowon sent the text of the message to heads of state and government both within the Commonwealth and elsewhere in the world. He appealed to them to refrain from doing anything that would impair the cooperative existence, sovereignty, and integrity of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Any attempt to recognize and assist the Republic of Biafra would amount to interference in the internal affairs of Nigeria.[37] As the civil war unfolded, Gowon's appeal proved ineffective in preventing further international recognition of Biafra or engagement with the breakaway region by several Western and African countries during the conflict.

Gabon and the Nigerian Civil War

Gabon entered the diplomatic arena of the Nigerian Civil War following its official recognition of the Republic of Biafra. At a cabinet meeting held in Libreville on May 10, 1968, the Gabonese government, led by President Albert-Bernard Bongo, announced its recognition of the Republic of Biafra. In a *communiqué* published by Markpress News Feature Services in Switzerland on May 10, 1968, the government of Gabon expressed its deep sympathy for Biafra and decided to recognize it as an independent state entitled to exercise international sovereignty.[38] The government of Gabon reaffirmed its commitment to African unity, while expressing concern that the war being waged against Biafra risked undermining that unity.[39]

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[35] Bola Ige, "Civil War in Nigeria," *The Multi-Media Album* 4, no. 3 (1969): 6.

[36] Central Intelligence Agency, Office of National Estimates, *The Outlook for Nigeria*, Special Memorandum No. 2-68, January 26, 1968, CIA-RDP79R00967A000800010018-4.

[37] Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Text of a Message Sent to All Heads of States and Government* (Lagos: Ministry of Information, 1967), 1–2.

[38] Confidential: Statement Made by President Albert Bongo of Gabon in the Course of a Press Conference in Paris on May 3, 1968, from Paris to the Foreign Office, Telegram No. 387, FCO 25/234, TNA.

[39] From Paris to the Foreign Office, May 3, 1968, FCO 25/234, TNA.

The Gabonese Council of Ministers supported the government's official recognition of Biafra, declaring that the federal arrangements inherited from colonial rule, as they existed in Nigeria, had not proved viable in practice.[40] This suggests that Gabon was more inclined to recognize Biafra because of its skepticism toward the cohesion of federations established under British colonial rule in Nigeria.[41]

Gabon was inspired by the diplomatic positions on Biafra adopted by Ivory Coast under Houphouët-Boigny and Tanzania under President Julius Nyerere, whose policies toward Biafra were themselves influenced by France. Both countries were highly sympathetic to the Biafran cause.[42] Bongo stated that he had held several discussions in Paris with Houphouët-Boigny concerning Biafra and that the two countries' positions on the matter were close.[43] Houphouët-Boigny had hoped that if the peace negotiations between Biafra and Nigeria failed and more African countries recognized Biafra, other regions of Nigeria would attempt to revolt against the central government of the Federation.[44] Within diplomatic circles in Abidjan, it was believed that French President de Gaulle might have influenced Gabon's recognition of Biafra and was exerting pressure on Houphouët-Boigny for the same purpose.[45]

French officials believed that the Nigerian Federation might prove unworkable and viewed the recognition of Biafra by these countries sympathetically.[46] France had strategic ambitions across West Africa. It regarded the Nigerian conflict as an opportunity to pursue its long-term plans to expand military and economic cooperation with West African states.[47] Ediagbonya et al. argued that President Charles de Gaulle was not eager to see the British-inspired federal system in Nigeria become a reality. According to this interpretation, he influenced Gabon's recognition of Biafra and even pressured Portugal and South Africa to assist Biafra to the detriment of the Federal Military Government of Nigeria.[48]

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[40] Markpress News Feature Services, *Statement on the Recognition of the Republic of Biafra by Gabon Following a Cabinet Meeting under the Presidency of the Head of State Albert Bongo* (Geneva: Biafran Overseas Press Division, 1968), 1.

[41] Uwechue, *Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War*, 97.

[42] Chediel Yohane Mgonja, *Press Statement: Statement by the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs at State House on Tanzania's Recognition of Biafra, Saturday, 13 April 1968* (Dar es Salaam: Information Service Division, Ministry of Information and Tourism, 1968), 64/68/IT/I.301.

[43] From Sir Patrick Reilly at the British Embassy in Paris, France, to the Foreign Office, May 3, 1968, FCO 25/234, TNA.

[44] Minute on the Recognition of Biafra, from Peter Mennell at the British Embassy in Kinshasa to C. L. Booth in the West and General African Department, Foreign Office, London, June 5, 1968, Despatch No. 1/6/16, FCO 38/350, TNA.

[45] Minute on the Recognition of Biafra, from I. J. Cheke at the British Embassy in Abidjan to C. M. Le Quesne in the West and General African Department, Foreign Office, Despatch No. 2/8, April 20, 1968, FCO 38/249, TNA.

[46] Minute on Nigeria and France, from Patrick Reilly to the Foreign Office, Telegram No. 368, April 25, 1968, FCO 38/245, TNA.

[47] Uwechue, *Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War*, 95.

[48] Michael Ediagbonya, John Uzoma Nwachukwu, William Abiodun Duyile, and Buhari Lateef Oluwafemi, "The Organisation of African Unity: The Dilemma of Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970," *International Journal of Innovative Research and Knowledge* 5, no. 4 (2020): 38–49.

Gabon's recognition of Biafra was guided by its strategic national interests, including economic and political considerations. As a country endowed with substantial natural and mineral resources, including columbite, uranium, coal, tin, petroleum, and gold,[49] Gabon believed that relations with an independent Biafra could benefit its economy, financial sector, technological development, tourism, education, and manufacturing, while deepening its diplomatic engagement at the regional and continental levels.

Growing concern over allegations of genocide during the civil war was another factor behind Gabon's recognition of Biafra. During the civil war,[50] Biafran authorities accused the Nigerian government and armed forces of deliberately killing civilians since the military coup of 1966 and throughout the civil war.[51] Biafran authorities alleged that the Federal Military Government of Nigeria was pursuing a military solution and intended to commit genocide against them.[52] In response to Biafran allegations of genocide, President Albert Bongo of Gabon declared at a press conference in Paris on May 3, 1968, that Gabon would not remain a passive onlooker in the face of what he described as genocide in Biafra and the threatened massacre of ten million people.[53] This indicated that Gabon was unwilling to remain among those African countries that were silent in the face of the ongoing civil war. Hence, the Gabonese government viewed recognition of Biafra as a means of helping the secessionist state secure international support and strengthen its position on the world stage.

Gabon's intention was to work toward a peaceful resolution of the civil war. Gabon was concerned that the parties were more committed to military action than to peaceful mediation in the civil war. As Chinua Achebe wrote:

> Some of Ojukwu's and Gowon's civilian advisers aggravated the crisis by transforming themselves into sycophants. Rather than encourage their respective leader on each side of the conflict to consider a cease-fire, they massaged their egos and spurred them on to ever-escalating hostility. The longer the war dragged on, the more difficult it was for both sides to give in to anything that might lead to a peaceful resolution.[54]

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[49] Government of the Republic of Biafra, *From the Military Governor: Grant of Exploitation* (Enugu: Ministry of Information, Government of the Republic of Biafra, 1967).

[50] Emefiena Ezeani, *In Biafra Africa Died: The Diplomatic Plot*, 3rd ed. (London: Veritas Lumen Publishers, 2013), 61.

[51] Frederick Forsyth, *The Biafra Story* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), 257–59.

[52] Roy Samuel Doron, "Forging a Nation While Losing a Country: Igbo Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Propaganda in the Nigerian Civil War 1968–1970" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2011), 84–112.

[53] Statement by Albert Bongo, President of Gabon, at a Press Conference in Paris on May 3, 1968, from Sir Patrick Reilly at the British Embassy in Paris, France, to the Foreign Office, Telegram No. 367, File No. JM 2/2/West and General African Dept., "Nigeria, Political Affairs, Multilateral, Eastern Region and Recognition of Biafra, 21 April 1967–20 November 1968," FCO 25/234, TNA.

[54] Chinua Achebe, *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (London: Allen Lane, 2012), 124.

There was concern that, if efforts toward a peace settlement were not taken seriously, the already entrenched military action could result in further loss of innocent lives in the civil war. At this juncture, Gabon recognized Biafra partly out of sympathy for the victims of the war who were experiencing severe human suffering.[55] The recognition was intended to discourage military action by both sides and shift their focus toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The need to assume humanitarian responsibilities was another important consideration for Gabon in the civil war. An investigation conducted in 1968 by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and led by Dr. Edwin Spirgi indicated that at least 300,000 children were suffering from kwashiorkor and related ailments. By the summer of 1968, the report revealed that three million children were near death in Biafra.[56] According to Thomas J. Hamilton, about 5,000 children were evacuated from Biafra to refugee centers in Gabon and Ivory Coast at the height of the civil war, with approximately 4,000 of them taken to Gabon on return flights operated by a French Red Cross aircraft conducting daily relief flights to Biafra.[57] Because many children in Biafra lacked basic necessities, the Gabonese government adopted a humanitarian policy that allowed international relief organizations to transport Biafran children to Gabon for medical treatment and care.

In supporting Biafra, Gabon adopted measures that were criticized as contrary to African solidarity,[58] including the decision to expel Nigerian citizens living in Gabon, an action described as a security measure.[59] In a telegram dated November 12, 1968, a US Embassy official in Libreville, N. Steam, reported that over 100 Federal Nigerians were expelled from Gabon and given tickets for a passenger boat from Libreville to Lagos.[60] In November 1968, President Bongo expelled about 200 Nigerians to Lagos for refusing to sign a statement of support for the Republic of Biafra.[61] Another important episode in Gabon's involvement in the conflict was the allegation that the Gabonese government supported the idea of establishing a Biafran government-in-exile in Libreville. However, the Gabonese government denied the claim, stating that Gabon had no wish to interfere in another state's affairs.[62] In the meantime, John Taylor, a special correspondent for the *Sunday Telegraph,* argued that the information about the eventual creation of a Biafran gov-

[55] Forsyth, *The Biafra Story*, 242.
[56] Nathaniel H. Goetz, "Humanitarian Issues in the Biafra Conflict," *New Issues in Refugee Research*, Working Paper No. 36 (Geneva: UNHCR, April 2001), 4.
[57] Thomas J. Hamilton, "5,000 Children Evacuated from Biafra in Civil War Will Be Repatriated from Gabon and Ivory Coast," *The New York Times*, October 11, 1970, https://www.nytimes.com/1970/10/11/archives/5000-children-evacuated-from-biafra-in-civil-war-will-be.html.
[58] Achebe, *There Was a Country*, 98.
[59] United States Telegram on Biafra and Ojukwu's Stop in Gabon, July 24, 1968, FCO 38/233, TNA.
[60] Confidential: Minute on the Gabonese Expulsion of Nigerian Citizens, from Leslie Fielding at the British Embassy in Paris to P. H. Moberly in the West African Department, November 18, 1968, FCO 65/306, TNA.
[61] "Gabonese President Sees Couve de Murville: Not Afraid of Nigerian Threats," BBC, November 14, 1968, 1355/CDF/UPI.
[62] "Gabon Denial on Biafra-Exile Government," *Daily Telegraph*, September 17, 1968, 1.

ernment-in-exile came from the most reliable sources. The moral and material assistance given to Biafra by Gabon and its other partners could not be ignored as it had received worldwide publicity.[63]

Gabon served as a diplomatic channel of communication between the great powers and the main combatants in the civil war, particularly Biafra. Gabon's considerable influence during the civil war, particularly through its role as a key diplomatic intermediary with the Biafran government, prompted Britain to approach President Albert Bongo in an effort to facilitate a peaceful settlement. As Pierre Carraud, the French Deputy Director responsible for non-Francophone African countries, argued, the importance of intermediaries, particularly African states, in preparing the ground for peace negotiations and facilitating a settlement of the war could hardly be overstated.[64]

Peace for Britain meant restoring a united Nigeria, whether through a change in position among the Biafran leadership or their defeat. In this sense, British influence was invariably exerted to secure peace.[65] Britain chose to operate through countries such as Gabon[66] in pursuit of a peaceful settlement of the conflict. On December 27, 1968, the British Ambassador to Cameroun, A. J. Edden, considered ways of persuading Gabon to abandon its pro-Biafran policy during a conversation with President Bongo.[67,68] Furthermore, during another round of conversations with Ambassador Edden on January 8, 1969, President Bongo asked whether the British government would like him to use his good offices to broker peace between Gowon and Ojukwu.[69] Bongo had mentioned Libreville as one of the possible venues for talks between the two parties.[70]

The subsequent Anglo-Gabonese discussions between President Bongo and the British Ambassador to Cameroun were very productive. Consequently, the ambassador was instructed to send a letter to Bongo asking him to use his good offices

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[63] "Aid to Rebels: Flagrant Contradiction," *Daily Telegraph*, September 1968.

[64] Confidential: Minute on France and Nigeria, from Michael Simpson-Orlebar at the British Embassy in Paris to the Honourable R. J. McM. Wilson in the West African Department, Foreign Office, Despatch No. N1/2, October 15, 1969, FCO 65/272, TNA.

[65] Auberon Waugh and Suzanne Cronjé, *Biafra: Britain's Shame* (London: Michael Joseph, 1969), 60.

[66] Oladapo Olusola Fafowora, *Pressure Groups and Foreign Policy: A Comparative Study of British Attitudes and Policy towards Secessionist Moves in the Congo (1960–1963) and in Nigeria (1966–1969)* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Ltd., 1990), 100–10.

[67] Meeting between US Embassy officials in Paris and Jean Gueury, Quai Deputy Director for Non-French Africa, February 26, 1969, File No. JWN 3/312/1/Part D/5A368/West African Dept., "Nigeria: Political Affairs, External, Bilateral, French Attitude towards the Nigerian Civil War, 1 January 1968–31 December 1969," FCO 65/269, TNA.

[68] Discussions on the Nigerian Civil War and the OCAM initiative between a US Embassy official in Paris and Jean Gueury, June 7, 1969, FCO 65/269, TNA.

[69] Confidential: British Foreign Secretary's Reaction to the Meeting between Bongo and Edden on Peace Settlement and Diplomacy, from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to Yaoundé, Telegram No. 1, January 7, 1969, FCO 65/306, TNA.

[70] Confidential: Minute on Reactions to the Meeting between Edden and Bongo, from British High Commissioner in Lagos Sir David Hunt to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Telegram No. 80, January 10, 1969, FCO 65/306, TNA.

in support of a settlement.[71] According to British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart, "it now appeared that Bongo might have been given some role to play in connection with current French initiatives and the OCAM's conference…"[72] The British Embassy in Paris suggested that an oral rather than a written message should be delivered to President Bongo. Such an approach was considered more informal than sending a letter on instructions from London. Later, an *aide-mémoire* was sent to Bongo, detailing the British response to his offer to help facilitate a peace settlement between Ojukwu and Gowon. The ambassador reminded Bongo of the British government's view that a solution to the Nigerian problem should be sought in an African context. He also stated that Ojukwu should make his position clear at any meeting arranged under the auspices of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) or Organisation Commune Africaine et Malgache (OCAM).[73]

British efforts to pursue a peace settlement through Gabon under OCAM were unlikely to succeed because Britain consistently supported the Nigerian government's position that the war was an internal affair that required no international intervention and that only the OAU had jurisdiction to resolve the conflict. Britain's support for OCAM peace initiatives was also difficult to reconcile with several of its actions during the civil war. First, it resisted efforts to place the civil war on the agenda of the United Nations Security Council or General Assembly. Second, it was at loggerheads with France, the principal sponsor of an OCAM-backed peace settlement based on Biafra's right to self-determination, while also maintaining a cautious stance toward Ivory Coast, Tanzania, and Zambia. The paper argues that Britain's ultimate objective in engaging with OCAM was to gain a better understanding of the organization's diplomatic activities regarding the civil war and to develop a strong counter-diplomatic strategy capable of offsetting the collective actions of OCAM member states working in favor of Biafra.

Gabon and Anglo-French Rivalry During the Civil War

The Anglo-French rivalry was one of the most complex dimensions of the international politics surrounding the Nigerian Civil War. Britain and France adopted sharply divergent positions on the conflict. The British position centered on preserving Nigeria's unity, whereas the French position increasingly emphasized Biafra's claim to self-determination. These divergent positions produced a diplomatic rift between the two countries during the conflict. Before the war began, France had maintained a policy of strict neutrality, regarding the political upheavals in Nigeria as an internal affair.[74] Evidence of a shift in French policy began to emerge in

[71] From Yaoundé to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, January 9, 1969, FCO 65/306, TNA.
[72] Confidential: Minute on Bongo and Nigeria, from Lagos to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Telegram No. 93, January 13, 1969, FCO 65/306, TNA.
[73] Confidential: An Aide-Mémoire Sent to President Albert Bongo on the Nigerian Civil War, from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to British Ambassador Alan John Edden, March 17, 1969, FCO 65/306, TNA.
[74] Confidential: Minute on France and Nigeria, from the British Embassy in Paris to the Foreign Office, May 12, 1967, File No. TX 8/27/Part A/6C/1068/West and General African Dept., "Nigeria: Political Affairs, External, Bilateral, French Policy towards Nigeria, 1 January 1967–31 December 1969," FCO 38/244, TNA.

1968, when the conflict was at its peak, through a series of statements by French officials. For instance, following a meeting of the French Cabinet on July 31, 1968, Secretary of State for Information M. Joël Le Theule declared that the human drama unfolding in the Republic of Biafra deeply concerned the French government. It maintained that the conflict should be resolved based on the people's right to self-determination and through appropriate international procedures.[75]

The French statement on Biafra publicly exposed the divergence between Britain and France and disrupted expectations of a common Western European position on the conflict. France's support for Biafra also appeared to have been shaped by earlier diplomatic tensions with Nigeria following French nuclear tests in the Sahara, which Nigeria had protested. However, in August 1965, negotiations were held to restore Franco-Nigerian diplomatic relations.[76] British officials nevertheless believed that France remained dissatisfied with Nigeria even after diplomatic relations had been restored. Against the background of the Sahara dispute and France's close ties with Gabon, British officials believed that Nigeria might have more to lose than France if relations deteriorated again or if it took action against French firms or individuals over their support for Biafra. France's open support for Biafra brought it into direct conflict with Britain, which increasingly viewed French involvement as a security concern in West Africa and, more broadly, across the continent. British officials therefore considered whether to protest formally against French actions in the conflict.[77]

British officials considered public and collective African pressure the most promising way to constrain French support for Biafra. They proposed that the Nigerian government issue a factual account of French involvement and invoke the Algiers OAU resolution condemning Biafran secession, in the hope of influencing both French public opinion and the government.[78] They also believed that a collective OAU intervention, perhaps a letter from Emperor Haile Selassie to President de Gaulle on behalf of the organization or its Consultative Committee on Nigeria, would carry greater weight in Paris.[79] This approach complemented Britain's

[75] Confidential: Official Statement Issued on the Nigerian Civil War by the French Government, July 31, 1968, FCO 38/245, TNA.

[76] Segun Johnson, "Franco-Nigerian Relations during the War Years, 1967–1970," in *Perspectives on the Nigerian Civil War*, ed. Siyan Oyeweso (Lagos: OAP Publications, 1992), 132–33.

[77] Confidential: Note on the Meeting of Foreign Office Under-Secretaries concerning the French Attitude toward the Nigerian Civil War, from C. L. Booth to Donald Claude Tebbit, August 5, 1968, FCO 38/245, TNA.

[78] Confidential: Minute on French Arms Supply to Nigeria, from the Foreign Office to Lagos, Telegram No. 1504, September 17, 1968, File No. TX 3/27/Part D/6C/1066/West and General African Dept., "Nigeria: Political Affairs, External, Bilateral, French Attitude in the Nigerian Civil War, 1 January 1968–31 December 1969," FCO 38/247, TNA.

[79] Confidential: Note of Conversation between the United States Assistant Secretary for African Affairs and British Officials at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London, from Donald Claude Tebbit to British High Commissioner in Lagos Sir David Hunt, November 5, 1968, File No. JWN 10/1/8/5A/368/West African Dept., "Nigeria: Defence, French Arms Supply, 1 January 1968–31 December 1969," FCO 65/347, TNA.

broader diplomatic effort to frame the conflict as an African matter to be resolved by Africans, thereby limiting the scope for French initiatives on Biafra's behalf.

Gabon used the diplomatic space created by Franco-British rivalry to pursue its own interests and increase its diplomatic relevance, while its agency remained constrained by its asymmetric relationship with France and the wider international structure of the Nigerian Civil War. Gabon's recognition of Biafra was converted into diplomatic leverage, while simultaneously making it an object of competing British and French diplomatic efforts.

Conclusion

The Nigerian Civil War was a significant postcolonial conflict that brought Africa more closely into the arena of international politics. The conflict generated new patterns of diplomatic engagement between African states and external powers. African diplomacy became increasingly prominent in global affairs. It also expanded Africa's participation in international efforts to address peace and security and the export and import of arms.

Meanwhile, Gabon took a pro-Biafran stance in the civil war. Gabon's open diplomatic support gave renewed hope to the Biafran cause at a time of serious military reverses. More importantly, the recognition strengthened Biafra's claim to independent existence and its demand to be treated on an equal basis with the federal government at the peace talks.[80] Thus, Biafran authorities vigorously pursued their cause in the global diplomatic arena with the expectation that more countries would follow Gabon's example. Gabon acted on its own initiative, without dictation from any external power. Even under intense pressure to abandon its pro-Biafran policy, Gabon never rescinded its position, which it believed to be justified. Although Gabon was not free from external pressure, given its constant diplomatic contact with the French government during the conflict, it maintained its position in defense of interests that it believed were threatened by opposition to the use of its territory as a route for arms deliveries to Biafra. Gabon was guided by its national interests during the civil war, including the desire to make its voice heard on the global stage and to become the economic powerhouse of West and Central Africa. Gabon considered the Biafran drama not as an internal Nigerian problem but as a global issue on which African countries ought to have taken an uncompromising stand. Gabon served as a diplomatic channel through which the great powers maintained close contact with Biafran authorities.

The Gabonese episode in the Nigerian Civil War was one of the major affairs that brought Africa more closely to the front line of the global politics of the 1960s. The conflict also became an arena for great-power rivalry, further complicating peace and security in Africa. Britain never severed its diplomatic ties with Gabon, despite the latter's strong support for Biafra, which British officials regarded as a

[80] Alore Preye Posibi and Anna Canale, "Historical Analysis of the Position of African Countries in the Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970," *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. Asian and African Studies* 12, no. 2 (2020): 302–11, https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu13.2020.210.

threat to the Anglo-American interests in Nigeria. Instead, Britain sought to influence President Albert Bongo and make clear its objections to Gabon's policy in the civil war.

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The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.
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PETER J. KATZENSTEIN, *ENTANGLEMENTS IN WORLD POLITICS: THE POWER OF UNCERTAINTY* (CAMBRIDGE: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2026).

Review By:

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International relations has learned to speak fluently about surprise. It has had less success explaining why yesterday's surprises so often appeared, the day before, as manageable risks. A model assigns probabilities, a doctrine sets out choices, a policy names its likely effects. Each makes a crowded political situation easier to grasp. Some of these simplifications work. Others acquire authority just as the conditions that made them plausible begin to disappear. Peter J. Katzenstein's *Entanglements in World Politics* asks what happens when scholars mistake the first achievement for a general property of the world. Its most searching implication goes further. To describe an uncertain future as a risk is also to intervene in that future, often with consequences for people who had little say in the description. Katzenstein starts with a distinction familiar from Frank Knight and John Maynard Keynes. Risk permits calculation over known or knowable possibilities; uncertainty confronts us with probabilities that resist calculation, or with possibilities we have yet to imagine. He calls the former a "small world" and the latter a "large world," borrowing Leonard Savage's terms while refusing to keep their domains apart. The small world does useful work. Actuarial estimates and short-range forecasts deserve their place. The difficulty begins when its limited success licenses a wider faith in predictability. For Katzenstein, risk and uncertainty remain entangled. Contexts vary, processes change, and language sometimes helps make the reality it

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purports to describe. Those three continua, set out most clearly in chapter 2, offer a way of asking how far any particular simplification can travel (pp. 64–65).

"Entanglement" consequently carries more weight than a synonym for interdependence. Katzenstein distinguishes relatively thin relations among identifiable actors from thicker relations in which agency itself becomes distributed (pp. 5–9). He joins this account of relations to a critique of what he calls Newtonian humanism: an inherited confidence in separable objects, stable causes, human mastery, and an observer who stands outside the processes under investigation. Post-Newtonian science and para-humanist thinking give him alternative vocabularies for processes in which observers, instruments, humans, and nonhuman beings participate. This is a large intellectual itinerary, occasionally a dizzying one. Its ambition should be judged accurately. Katzenstein says that he wants to create "a conceptual space for incessant conversations," not a predictive research program (p. 9). The test is whether those conversations enable explanations that an account built from self-contained actors and external shocks would miss. Finance gives the book its strongest answer. Before the crash of 2007–08, mortgage ratings and risk models helped turn heterogeneous loans into apparently comparable securities. The calculations rested on short series drawn from rising house prices and assumptions about correlations that could fail across a whole market (pp. 144–45). Katzenstein does more than point out a bad forecast. Ratings conferred authority, securitization coordinated conduct, and conventions helped sustain the very market whose safety the models claimed to measure. Here the analyst cannot place a model on one side and an untouched economy on the other. A simplified account becomes part of the causal history of its object. Even after the crash, the lesson is subtler than a ban on models. Central bankers use public language to shape expectations, at times steering markets away from paralyzing uncertainty toward more settled patterns of action (pp. 161–67). That capacity makes calculation politically necessary and potentially dangerous.

The missiles of October 1962 put pressure on a different simplification. Katzenstein treats Thomas Schelling with more care than a quick attack on rational deterrence would allow. Schelling's "threat that leaves something to chance" gives uncertainty a strategic role; his account depends in part on imagination, not just formal logic (pp. 181–82). Subsequent readings can turn that opening into an apparently calculable risk of escalation. The historical record resists such tidiness. Fear shaped the judgments of Kennedy and McNamara. Organizational routines and technical devices carried consequences that neither leader could fully direct. Soviet officers near Cuba faced danger whose significance the American side did not control. Katzenstein draws on studies of these relations to ask whether a president who sought to command events could, in fact, do so. Different descriptions of the crisis in Washington, Moscow, and Havana also made different interests and responsibilities visible (pp. 188–204). The point is not that deliberate choice vanished. Kennedy's willingness to gain time mattered precisely because he understood the limits of his command.

Climate politics extends the argument from a crisis lasting days to transformations measured across generations. Geoengineering can isolate particular mechanisms and permit useful experiments. Scale changes the question. Altering a planetary system may create effects that no local trial or cost-benefit estimate could settle in advance (pp. 229–32).

Katzenstein's discussion of the Anthropocene places human action inside ecological processes that action itself has changed; his term "intravention" captures this refusal of an external vantage point (p. 222). This case is less a demonstration of one mechanism called entanglement than a change in what counts as the relevant object of inquiry. Finance concerns reflexive conventions, nuclear politics distributed technical and political action, and climate a coupled biosphere with long temporal horizons. The same word travels across them. The gain is a discipline of looking for relationships an artificially bounded object would hide. The cost is that the concept cannot, by itself, tell us which relationships will prove decisive.

None of these insights requires claiming that earlier scholarship overlooked relationships altogether. Katzenstein draws openly on historical sociology, constructivist work on language, studies of complex systems, and science and technology studies. Their presence raises a harder question than terminological novelty: what does entanglement allow him to do with them? It brings their separate cautions against premature closure into an account of how closure is nevertheless achieved, used, and sometimes undone. A rating, a deterrent posture, and a climate model each select certain relations as stable enough to act upon. Their selections can change the relations. The book is most original when it treats that movement as an object of inquiry, not when it borrows an image of connectedness from physics. This reading also explains why a demand for a single entanglement variable would miss the purpose of the project.

That cost points toward the book's central unfinished question. Its three continua help an investigator notice heterogeneous settings, changing processes, and productive language. They offer no threshold at which a calculation becomes reliable enough to organize policy. Katzenstein knows that the line between risk and uncertainty may become clear only after an event has passed (p. 19). Yet the analyst and the policymaker must decide before then. When central-bank language steadies a market, has it established a more tractable world, or secured temporary agreement on a fragile story? The mortgage market did both for a time. In another domain, a locally promising climate intervention might reduce one exposure while producing others at a scale beyond the trial. More humility is warranted, but humility alone cannot identify which simplification is defensible, how long to trust it, and what signs should prompt revision.

The framework has its clearest purchase where interventions alter the conditions they presume: reflexive markets, escalating crises, and technological projects that cross ecological scales. It has less to add when a bounded practice genuinely preserves stable relations and a limited forecast suffices. Katzenstein accepts such pockets of order. The difficulty is recognizing their boundaries in time for a consequential decision.

This is also a question about power. Katzenstein does not ignore it. His distinction between control power and protean power tracks the improvisations through which actors respond to openings they could not foresee; the effects of those actions may alter the conditions of control (pp. 274–86). His shorter cases consider anti-imperial movements, financial actors, rights campaigns, and migrants. He observes that weak actors can find room for action within uncertainty without implying that improvisation dissolves domination (pp. 287–92). The remaining issue concerns authority over the initial simplification. A bank, a state, and a displaced person can inhabit the same set of relations under very different conditions. Institutions with the power to certify a risk, promulgate a security doctrine, or authorize a technological trial may also determine whose uncertainty counts as an acceptable remainder. A useful theory of entanglement must keep that unequal distribution visible even when every actor is, in some sense, implicated in the same process. Katzenstein has a serious answer to the demand for action. His conclusion favors experimentation over a single decisive intervention, robust policies across several possible futures, attention to stakeholders' tacit knowledge, and readiness to revise a provisional judgment (pp. 339, 343–49). These commitments make more sense than demanding a formula for the incalculable. They also shift the question. If a small world is a situated achievement rather than a natural container, explanation should trace who built it, how its apparent stability was maintained, which observations could unsettle it, and where its uncounted consequences went. Such an inquiry can discriminate among entanglements without claiming to predict every outcome. It can also distinguish a prudent approximation from an institutionally powerful fiction before catastrophe supplies the answer, though never with certainty.

Quantum analogies, historical interpretation, market conventions, and planetary ecology do not all establish the same kind of claim. The book's reach occasionally makes its distinctions work harder than they can bear. Katzenstein's insistence on the coexistence of risk and uncertainty nevertheless changes the terms of an old disciplinary quarrel. A causal account draws boundaries in an open world; people act on those boundaries, sometimes making them briefly real. *Entanglements in World Politics* gives scholars a reason to inspect the construction of calculable spaces as closely as they inspect the events occurring inside them. Its next step lies in the politics of their edges: who may declare the future governable, who can contest that declaration, and who must live with the uncertainty that escapes it.

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The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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YSUJIA **Volume 2 Issue 2 November 2026**

CONTENTS

Editorial Foreword

Tigran Yepremyan, Suren Tadevosyan
Reimagining International Order: What History Leaves Unfinished 7

Discussion Article

Raoul Delcorde
In a World in Upheaval, Can Europe Emerge as a Global Leader?.....12

Articles

Marcin Składanowski
Strategic Autonomy of the European Union:
The Resource-Conversion Deficit and a Value-Based Model of Security Provision 21

Tadashi Iwami, Rouben Azizian
Japan's Engagement with the South Caucasus 40

Roman Melikyan
The New Strategic Priorities of the US in a Changing World Order:
The Diplomacy of War and Peace 61

Anastasia Eganova
The Role of the BRICS New Development Bank in Promoting Climate Governance:
A Sustainable Financing Mechanism 82

Ara Poghosyan, Norayr Dunamalyan
The Concept of Sharp Power in the South Caucasus: Beyond the
Autocracy–Democracy Divide 101

Oluchukwu Ignatus Onianwa
Gabon and Franco-British Diplomacy During the Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970 ...123

Book Review

Bagrat Vardanyan
Peter J. Katzenstein, *Entanglements In World Politics: The Power Of Uncertainty*
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2026).....140

YEREVAN STATE UNIVERSITY
PUBLISHING HOUSE