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TRIANGULAR DIPLOMACY: YESTERDAY AND TODAY

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“Karcsi”

A te che sei il mio angelo custode

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ABSTRACT

The following thesis examines the concept of Triangular Diplomacy, as conceptualized by Henry Kissinger, by comparing historical instances with its contemporary applications in American diplomacy and beyond. The study utilizes a comprehensive framework that takes into account the intricate interplay of diplomatic strategies within the triangular dynamic, covering both historical geopolitical contexts and contemporary challenges. The historical analysis delves into the Cold War triangular relations where Kissinger's strategic diplomacy played a pivotal role. The qualitative historical analysis begins with the definition of Triangular Diplomacy and through the analysis of a case study, that sheds light on the application of triangular diplomacy in the Asian-Pacific Region, the thesis scrutinizes how triangular dynamics manifest in the current geopolitical context, particularly considering the diplomatic and strategic considerations. By dissecting these instances, the study seeks to uncover the underlying principles, successes, and failures of Kissinger's approach. The contemporary exploration shifts focus to the application of triangular diplomacy in modern American foreign policy. Special emphasis is placed on understanding the evolution of Kissinger's principles in response to the complexities of the 21st-century global landscape. By offering insights into the nuances of both American and international applications, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of how triangular diplomacy, continues to influence, and shape diplomatic endeavors in the contemporary international arena. This study not only enriches academic understanding but also provides valuable perspectives for policymakers navigating the intricacies of diplomatic strategies in an ever-evolving global order.

INTRODUCTION

At the age of 100, Henry Kissinger, the most controversial American foreign policy advisor of the previous fifty years, departed from this life¹. He led the United States (U.S.) delegation during the protracted negotiations with North Vietnam that resulted in the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Indochina following America's longest foreign war, and he was the impetus behind Washington's opening to communist China and the U.S. detente with the Soviet Union (USSR). Together with President Richard Nixon, they saw that a carefully calibrated opening to China could turn the bilateral superpower system of the first half of the Cold War era into a "triangular" one, with the U.S. at the hub of a U.S.-China-Soviet triangle. The growing military aggression of the Soviet Union against China gave an opportunity to establish this new system. Kissinger explained the purpose of this coalition with a historical comparison: "The United States and China could envision a tacit alliance to block Soviet expansionism in Asia, similar to the Entente Cordiale between Great Britain and France in 1904, and between Great Britain and Russia in 1907, since the Soviet Union was the only nation capable of dominating Asia"².

The goal of this work is to examine the evolution of triangular diplomacy in light of Henry Kissinger's famous definition of the triangular relations between China, the U.S., and Russia, which appear to be the cornerstones of the international order more than ever.

The institutionalist paradigm's emphasis on great power dynamics has drawn a lot of scrutiny and criticism in recent years. In a lecture to National Defense University graduates on June 8, 2023, U.S. Army Gen. Mark A. Milley—a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—stated that the three major powers in the world are the United States, China, and Russia.³

Because of its strong military and Soviet heritage, Russia unquestionably has an asymmetrical influence in the international political sphere, even though its position may be debatable given its economic, social, and quality-of-life indicators⁴. The key

¹ WUNC. (2023). *Henry Kissinger, controversial diplomat, and foreign policy scholar, dies at 100*. [online].

² Sebenius, J.K., Burns, R.N. and Mnookin, R.H. (2018). *Kissinger the negotiator: lessons from dealmaking at the highest level*. First edition ed. New York, NY, HarperCollins Publishers, p.166.

³ Clark, J., *Milley Says Graduates Will Confront New Security Challenges*, US Department of Defense News, June 9, 2023.

⁴ vdoc.pub. (n.d.). *Sino-Russian Relations in the 21st Century* [PDF].

lenses that major nations use to observe world affairs include upholding the status quo, spotting asymmetric threats, and assessing rivalries. Instead of seeing conflicts as insurmountable challenges, they see them as tactical chances to realign power dynamics. This perspective has been applied in a number of hybrid conflicts and proxy wars that have defined the last thirty years.

It is clear from observing how Sino-Russian American ties developed at the beginning of the twenty-first century that the geopolitical earthquake of tragic 1989 represented a significant turning point. While on the one hand representing the "victory"⁵ of the United States, or rather the implosion of the Soviet colossus, the fall of the Wall and the abrupt process of disintegration of the USSR also permanently altered the balance of the global strategic landscape and, as a result, the relationship between the indispensable nation and the Celestial Empire.

The Cold War contingencies that Zhou Enlai's vision and Kissinger's pragmatism had relied upon to enable the reopening of diplomatic lines in 1971 and the eventual full diplomatic recognition in 1979, had vanished like snow in the sun. The new agreement took away the common enemy that had united the U.S. and the People's Republic of China (PRC), without resulting in a complete alignment of interests or a shared strategic outlook. Such a shake-up would have incited Chinese anxieties of being the next victim of U.S. messianic politics as well as a resurgence of the internal debate within the American establishment over the best course of action towards Beijing.

We shall revisit the basic steps that have shaped global balances and analyze their implications for both countries' geostrategic directives and bilateral relations. In fact, for the past 20 years, the People's Republic and the U.S. have both been at the forefront of significant changes. China has cemented the seeds of its resurgence within the system based on U.S. supremacy, of which it is now triumphantly reaping. Meanwhile, America bears the inevitable costs of over two decades as a lone superpower and of a poorly managed surplus of economic-political capital on which it could rely at the beginning of the new millennium, thus aiming to downsize its imperial overexposure. As a result, the international system will inevitably reorganize itself. It seems that multipolarity—while still asymmetric—is becoming more and more inclined,

⁵ Lucio, R., Candidato, C., Di, L., Correlatore, M. and Marchetti, R. (2014). FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE POLITICHE CORSO DI LAUREA IN RELAZIONI INTERNAZIONALI Tesi di Laurea in Studi Strategici Cina e Stati Uniti: la contesa del XXI secolo. [online].

symbolizing Beijing's comeback and requiring Washington to modify its exceptionalist posture.

The ideological fervor that permeates these two major nations and influences how they perceive each other will be highlighted in addition to the political-economic conditions that link their separate methods in the reconstruction of complicated relationships like the Sino-American ones. In the end, it will be outlined how we arrived at a situation that has been characterized by a number of credible voices as a new Cold War. This is distinct from the bipolar conflict because it is characterized by the "civilization of capital"⁶ on the one hand, and the simultaneous existence of unprecedented degrees of financial and economic interdependence on the one hand, and geostrategic confrontation on the other, which erodes national interest and makes it harder for a long-lasting order to crystallize.

In this research thesis, the adopted methodology is qualitative, as I analyzed monographic, digital, and archival material from the New York Public Library, collected during the research period conducted abroad.

The research stems from a deep curiosity about U.S foreign policy, a love for diplomacy and the history of international relations, accompanied by an interest in negotiation techniques, which I was able to deepen thanks to my experience at the American Embassy in Italy and the U.S. Consulate in New York, precisely during the celebration period of Kissinger's centenary.

⁶ Mazower, M., *Governing the World*, Penguin Books, New York, 2013, p 427.

CHAPTER 1

Historical Perspectives on Triangular Diplomacy

1.1 Historical context and how America used Triangular Diplomacy

Triangle diplomacy has its origins in the early stages of the Cold War, when the U.S. and the USSR were the main participants in the war for world dominance. When the Soviet Union and Communist China broke apart in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the balance of power changed, causing a schism between the two countries. Henry Kissinger, the National Security Advisor and then Secretary of State under Presidents Nixon and Ford, was acutely aware of the possibility for strategic realignment that this split afforded⁷.

Geopolitical strategy and realpolitik combined to motivate Kissinger's pursuit of triangle diplomacy. Kissinger tried to take advantage of the increasing rift between China and the Soviet Union because he realized that a united front against the Soviet Union could be helpful from a geopolitical standpoint⁸. In addition to providing a counterbalance to Soviet strength, the diplomatic advances towards China were also meant to provide Beijing more negotiating influence with Moscow.

A crucial point in the history of triangle diplomacy was Kissinger's covert trip to Beijing in 1971. The historic meeting between Chinese leader Mao Zedong and President Nixon in 1972 was made possible by this covert operation. Global alliances saw a dramatic shift with the restoration of relations between the U.S. and China.

Conversely, the triangle dynamic encompassed more than just diplomatic recognition and reached its zenith in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) negotiations with the Soviet Union. Better ties between the U.S. and China were used by the U.S. to put pressure on the USSR, resulting in accords meant to stop the nuclear arms race.

Diplomacy is not an alternative to conflict; rather, it is its complement⁹. Maintaining international stability is crucial because atomic weapons are

⁷ Berridge, G., Keens-Soper, M. and Otte, T. (2001). *Diplomatic Theory from Machiavelli to Kissinger*. [online].

⁸ *Is Kissinger's Triangular Diplomacy the Answer to Sino-Russian Rapprochement?* thediplomat.com. (n.d.). [online].

⁹ Kissinger, *nuclear weapons and Foreign Policy*, pp. 4-5, 191; Kissinger, *Force, and diplomacy in the nuclear age*, in *Foreign Affairs*, vol. XXXIV, no. 3 (1956), pp. 352-4; *NATO: evolution or decline*, in

incommensurable with political goals, and instability increases the chance of nuclear destruction.

It was hardly surprising to Kissinger that in the context of the nuclear era, achieving peace became the primary goal of world politics. He did, however, caution against making easy decisions in international relations.

The premise that international stability is based on "legitimacy" and "the balance of forces and its expression, the equilibrium" is fundamental to Kissinger's conception of it.¹⁰

According to Kissinger's assessment, the international system during the Cold War was a 'revolutionary time' rather than a 'legitimate' structure. There are political or ideological reasons why international order might not be legitimate. When a state, like Germany following the 1919 Versailles Treaty, views the status quo and its legitimizing framework as repressive and unjust, it will seek to undermine the international order because it is unable to achieve its objectives within the existing framework. It'll develop into a revolutionary power.¹¹ Ideologically speaking, "revolutionary fervor" disregards the needs of international concord and prioritizes change over other member nations' domestic structures. Therefore, a major factor in maintaining international order is the reconciliation of disparate accounts.¹²

When every major power acknowledges the validity of the other's existence, it operates most effectively within a legitimate world order. Its main purpose in a valid order is "to resolve differences so as to maintain the international system".¹³ It might be argued that Kissinger's well-known diplomatic tactic of linkage was intended to do just that. A key component of Nixon and Kissinger's geopolitical and strategic approach to foreign policy, the concept of linkage was essential to their attempts at superpower détente.

Kissinger saw talks with the Soviet Union as a tool to strengthen American strategic standing rather than as a show of weakness.

The goal of diplomatic negotiations was to establish a connection between seemingly unrelated policy matters to promote advancement on a wide scale. "To

Hancock, M. D., and Rustow, D. A. (eds), *American Foreign Policy in International Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1971), p. 264.

¹⁰ 'The Congress of Vienna: a reappraisal', in *World Politics*, vol. VIII, no. 2 (1956), p. 265.

¹¹ Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, pp. 241-245; *World Restored*, pp. 1-2.

¹² *Congress of Vienna*, p. 264; Kissinger, *nuclear weapons and Foreign Policy*, pp. 5, 317.

¹³ Kissinger, *Congress of Vienna*, p.279; *Foreign Affairs*, vol. XXXV, no. 1 (1956), pp. 45-6.

separate issues into distinct compartments would encourage the Soviet leaders to believe that they could use cooperation in one area as a safety valve while striving for unilateral advantages elsewhere", Kissinger said in defense of linkage, arguing that the alternative was impractical¹⁴.

Therefore, the goal of the promised increased trade and scientific cooperation with the U.S. was to act as "a carrot for restrained Soviet political behavior"¹⁵. Thus, détente embodied the fundamental components of "containment" by fusing rigidity and flexibility.

The North Vietnamese were completely bewildered by the "carrot" of economic aid, which disappeared into a cultural chasm.¹⁶ Linkage diplomacy was Kissinger's attempt to address the threat to global stability that Soviet foreign policy's revolutionary nature posed in a positive way. Therefore, diplomacy may work best in a legitimate order, but even in the absence of a consensus on what constitutes legitimacy, it can be used to promote legitimate behavior.

It is not without interest that Kissinger followed exactly the kind of policy for which he had admired Metternich and Bismarck in his earlier academic publications, attempting to position the United States as the central player in the new geostrategic triangle¹⁷.

Diplomacy, according to Kissinger, is the management of relations between governments in the absence of war. This does not imply, however, that military affairs and diplomacy are entirely separate from one another. As a historian, Kissinger did, in fact, contend that historically, a country's military might have always had a direct bearing on its political influence. As a result, the balance of power not only illustrates the relative strength of the main powers but also limits the diplomatic options available to them.

Thus, he contended, military strategy and diplomacy had to complement one another. However, diplomacy can also use military force to further its goals, even though it depends on military might to some extent. For example, Kissinger rationalized U.S. bombing operations against Hanoi as a tacit warning to the Viet-Cong leadership that terminating the talks would have consequences. At that point, it was abundantly

¹⁴ Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 1302 and 129, Kissinger, *Force and Diplomacy*, p. 363.

¹⁵ *Ivi.* p. 1250.

¹⁶ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 37.

¹⁷ Kissinger, *World Restored*, p. 247; Fineman, *Clinton and the World*, Newsweek (1 Feb.1993), pp. 12-14.

evident that using military force would strengthen American bargaining power with the North Vietnamese¹⁸.

However, Kissinger insisted that the primary tool of diplomacy was negotiation. He described diplomacy as a sequence of actions that combine to form a continuum. Thus, incremental diplomacy advances through a sequence of provisional accords.

Kissinger pushed diplomats to be pragmatic and moderate on several occasions. This was true of both the overarching goals and the methods used: "Those who grasp at everything, forgetting that politics is the art of the possible, may lose everything in the end"¹⁹. Similar to the great writers on diplomacy, he advised against giving in to the desire for a "diplomatic victory" since it would be ineffective. He contended that no nation would stick to an accord that is against its interests for an extended length of time, therefore a unilateral "victory" could not be sustained indefinitely.

Ultimately, diplomatic triumphs should be avoided in favor of "quiet diplomacy" since they "mortgage the future". It should come as no surprise that he also stressed the value of projecting dependability in diplomatic talks as a crucial foreign policy advantage. Reiterating Colliers's call for integrity in diplomatic interactions, Kissinger noted that "crude tactics in foreign policy are nearly always counterproductive"²⁰.

In multi-party, multi-level settings, Kissinger the negotiator was also known as Kissinger the analyst and builder of coalition dynamics and structure. He carefully considered which parties would have to come to an agreement in order to create a coalition that would be able to support him and forward with his goals. In the Rhodesian and Vietnam examples, he developed such coalitions both explicitly and strategically through carefully planned negotiating campaigns. Throughout this process, he kept in mind the various ways that opposing and blocking coalitions could be mobilized to thwart his goals. He changed the U.S. focus from being bilateral with China and the Soviet Union to being triangular, with America as the beneficial pivot point.

¹⁸ Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 195, 1037-8; "Current Problems in Anglo-American Military Relations", unpublished speech, Oct. 1960, Nitze Mss, Library of Congress, Washington, box 47, folder 2.

¹⁹ *Ivi.*, pp. 701, 1293, also 1280-1 and 1302.

²⁰ *Ivi.*, pp. 635, 140.

1.1.1 Definition of Triangular Diplomacy

The U.S.-Soviet superpower relationship was mostly hostile and stuck along a bilateral U.S.-Soviet axis for two decades of the Cold War when the United States had no official contact with China. Along with Richard Nixon, Kissinger recognized the potential to turn this bilateral superpower system into a "triangular" one, with the U.S. at the apex of the America, China, and Soviet Triangle²¹. This could be accomplished through a meticulously planned opening to China. The possibility of creating this new structure was presented by the Soviet Union's escalating military aggression against China.

According to Kissinger: "Since the Soviet Union was the only country capable of dominating Asia, a tacit alliance to block Soviet expansionism in Asia could be envisioned between the United States and China (not unlike the Entente Cordiale between Great Britain and France in 1904, and between Great Britain and Russia in 1907)"²².

Kissinger and Nixon were unequivocal about the justification for practical "triangular" initiatives in terms of American national interests at the time, even though historical perspective provided some guidance²³. Therefore, in general, triangular diplomacy potentially has been significantly more advantageous than the bilateral superpower relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States.

What did this entail in terms of an objective? "As China had more to fear from the Soviet Union than it did from the United States, China's self-interest would impel it to cooperate with the United States"²⁴.

Nixon was impressed by the Chinese leaders' clarity of thinking, particularly that of Premier Zhou Enlai since he had no plausible motivation in explicitly siding with the United States in the dispute between China and the Soviet Union.

When America was closer to two largest communist countries, then America would have the greatest negotiating position²⁵.

²¹ Sebenius, Burns, Mnookin, *Kissinger the negotiator: lessons from dealmaking at the highest level*, p. 166.

²² Ibidem.

²³ Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 764-5.

²⁴ Sebenius, Burns, Mnookin, *Kissinger the negotiator: lessons from dealmaking at the highest level*, p. 166.

²⁵ Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, p. 729.

It would be difficult to negotiate the complexities of making this happen. Kissinger put it this way: "Clearly, agility was necessary for triangular diplomacy." Somehow, instead of using our own strength, we had to use the opponent's weight to move him in the proper way, just as in judo²⁶.

The U.S. foreign policy consensus of the 1950s and 60s saw China and the USSR as part of a monolithic communist bloc that opposed Western democracies. By the early 1960s, ties between the USSR and the People's Republic of China had deteriorated. The Soviet Union invasion of Czechoslovakia, in August 1968, raised serious concerns among the Americans, and not only, but also infuriated the PRC, which saw it as a sign of Soviet aggression against other communist countries.

Kissinger and Nixon, pressured to take position on the Sino-Soviet division, evaluated what the best course of action might be when hostilities between the two nations intensified.

One of their main goals was to stop the Soviet Union from becoming more and more powerful. In light of this, Kissinger and Nixon were in favor of tilting toward the Chinese, something Nixon had been doing for the most part by 1969. Kissinger said, "Nixon took perhaps the most daring step of his presidency by warning the Soviet Union that the United States would not remain indifferent if it were to attack China"²⁷. Kissinger was worried about Soviet dominance of China and conveyed this to Mao. This was a startling development considering that there was no official Sino-American interaction or communication at the time.

Mao was concurrently trying to indicate that he was willing to negotiate a major thaw in the U.S.-China relationship, something that Nixon and Kissinger hardly realized since, previously, exchanges of words had frequently involved derogatory remarks such as "running dogs," "imperialists," "lackeys," "ideological fanatics," etc.²⁸.

Mao surveyed the geopolitical landscape with cold calculation and feared a Soviet war. He saw the United States as a possible ally in a triangle of alliances. Similar to his American counterparts, Mao thought that considerable pressure on his regime, particularly from the Soviets, would be relieved by a meaningful, public agreement.

²⁶ Sebenius, Burns, Mnookin, *Kissinger the negotiator: lessons from dealmaking at the highest level*, p. 167.

²⁷ *Ivi.*, p. 171.

²⁸ *Ibidem.*

They had been apart from each other for such a long time that, in the various preliminary attempts by U.S. officials to arrange a high-level communication, the results were almost comic.

Kissinger was less concerned about the potential that improving relations with China could negatively impact Soviet-American relations, even though the majority of Soviet experts had warned Nixon of this risk. Based on Soviet concerns about acting in a way that would strengthen a potential American Chinese alignment, and the potential benefits of improved relations between the USSR and the U.S., were taken into consideration.

Kissinger's China initiative was quickly seen by observers of U.S. foreign policy toward China as "playing the China card"²⁹ against the Soviet Union. "It was clear to Beijing that the American opening to China was motivated by its desire to play this card in order to motivate the Soviet Union to negotiate detente with the United States,"³⁰ said strategy expert Evelyn Goh.³¹

The United States was supporting China, the weaker of two opposing parties, to counterbalance the Soviet Union, the more aggressive one. This may seem like a sensible move, but the coalitional justification for American policy toward China was far more nuanced.

Indeed, Kissinger delivered a scathing critique of people who expressed inaccurate opinions regarding the "China card": "The China card, as it was commonly portrayed, was about doing something with China that would irritate Russia and for which we can bargain."³²

The outcome was that the triangle relationship itself was a source of pressure on each of them, and they moved with great care to attempt to get closer to each other. A way to accomplish that was by informing each side about the game that was played with the other counterpart.

Kissinger clarified "Because we were also pursuing a détente policy with the Soviet Union and wanted to give them a real chance to improve their relations with us, I was

²⁹ Ivi., p. 177.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ Evelyn Goh, *Constructing the U.S.: Rapprochement with China*, p. 231.

³² Sebenius, Burns, Mnookin, *Kissinger the negotiator: lessons from dealmaking at the highest level*, p. 178.

always afraid that if we stated that China was a weapon against Russia, then it would turn into a deadly conflict".³³

It is simple to overlook the larger strategic picture when examining the triangle diplomacy at the tactical level—how to play A against B and vice versa is a useful exercise.

The "structural improvement" that Kissinger and Nixon worked to achieve in the triangle U.S.-Soviet-Chinese relationship was beneficial in and of itself, but it also worked well for advancing other important foreign policy goals.

Despite the complexity of multiparty moves and countermoves, the process is often guided by two fundamental bargaining tasks. A "winning coalition," or adequate support from the relevant parties, must be formed by the advocate before the target agreement can be adopted and put into action. On the other hand, opponents of a target agreement typically seek to obstruct its ratification or execution; we refer to a group of opponents who are able to accomplish this unfavorable objective as a "blocking coalition." The agreement's advocate must also thwart potential opponents in order to forge a winning alliance³⁴.

The majority of the noncommunist world was naturally terrified by the pursuit of strength for its own sake, which led to the formation of an unofficial alliance between China and all industrialized nations against the Soviet Union and ultimately ensured its downfall"³⁵.

China's assertive moves in the South and East China Seas have caused concern and have tended to draw neighboring countries closer together. This has occurred more recently. The Russian invasions of Georgia and Ukraine had a comparable impact on European nations, causing them to start increasing their defense budgets.

By carefully evaluating all the pertinent parties, Kissinger became acutely aware of the ways in which possible opposition could be provoked.

³³ Kissinger, *Transcript of the American Secretaries of State Project: Henry A. Kissinger*.

³⁴ Sebenius, Burns, Mnookin, *Kissinger the negotiator: lessons from dealmaking at the highest level*, p. 180.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

1.1.2 U.S.-Soviet Relations

The development of diplomatic relations between the United States and the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War was primarily conditioned by the bipolar international system itself, which guaranteed both countries a status of global superpower. In light of this simple yet not obvious consideration, it becomes evident that the antithetical nature of relations between Moscow and Washington was not solely based on ideological motivations - which indeed played a fundamental role in shaping the entire global geopolitical space in the aftermath of the Second World War - but primarily stemmed from the dilemma of security. In this context, actions taken by one actor to ensure its own defense generate fear in other actors, who - perceiving them as threatening or aggressive - adopt a series of countermeasures: thus, a vicious circle is created that is difficult to break.³⁶

The type of relationship between the two countries never changed during the years of the Cold War, but the balance of power between them underwent numerous changes over the decades. Between the late 1940s and the early 1950s, the United States was clearly superior to the USSR both economically and militarily. However, the second half of the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s saw a progressive strengthening of the Soviet Union's position, partly due to successes in the space race, which led - by the late 1960s - to achieving strategic parity with Washington. However, all this does not automatically imply that the United States and the Soviet Union did not attempt in any way to improve their diplomatic relations: already following the Cuban Missile Crisis, some timid signs of détente had emerged, but they did not fully develop.

A similar situation occurred again in the early 1970s: it arose primarily from numerous political, social, and economic problems afflicting both countries. In this context, détente could have played a significant role in diverting public attention from the difficulties both nations were facing. Moscow had been severely affected by serious disagreements with China and, at the same time, found itself in less than favorable economic conditions. A policy of détente would certainly have benefited the Soviet Union, as it would have allowed it to focus more efforts on the Asian front and, at the same time, could have laid the groundwork for improvements in trade and technology, also exploiting the new condition of strategic parity with the United States and the

³⁶ Williams, *US-Soviet Relations: Beyond the Cold War?* in *International Affairs*, 1989, Vol. 65, No. 2, pp. 274-5.

opportunities offered by decolonization to exert influence in increasingly vast areas of the globe. In essence, for the USSR, détente constituted a moment to alleviate tension on the historically problematic diplomatic front - that of relations with the West - and channel efforts towards other objectives that had been little explored until then, but which could have greatly benefited the country. On the other hand, the U.S. government was facing heavy criticism - both domestically and internationally - regarding the Vietnam War; furthermore, in Europe, signals of détente were very clear, as evidenced by the Ostpolitik pursued in those years by West Germany under Willy Brandt. For Washington, it was therefore necessary to follow a policy of openness towards the East for two reasons: firstly, the USA could not fail to support the moves of one of its most strategic allies in Europe, and secondly, this would have allowed them to closely monitor Soviet actions towards all NATO members. Essentially, the United States had to rethink the containment policy as it had been conceived up to that point, without completely abandoning it. From their perspective, détente was nothing but an act of nudging towards the USSR to lead it towards what some scholars have termed "self-containment".³⁷ It is therefore evident that the concept of détente was understood very differently in Washington and Moscow. However, both countries found in strategic parity a sufficient condition to inaugurate a period of actual lower tension in their diplomatic relations - although there still remained mutual suspicion of seeking military advantage over the adversary.³⁸

1.1.3 China's Role in Cold War Triangular Diplomacy

If the relations between the United States and the Soviet Union - despite numerous ups and downs - were characterized by intense diplomatic activity both in bilateral and multilateral contexts, the same cannot be said for relations between Washington and Beijing: as is known, the USA - following Mao Tse-tung's victory in the civil war for control of Chinese territory - refused to recognize the existence of the People's Republic of China and pressured their allies to do the same, considering only

³⁷ Williams, *Soviet-American Relations*, in *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, Vol. 36, No. 4, Soviet Foreign Policy (1987), pp. 54-6.

³⁸ Garthoff, *Détente and confrontation: American-Soviet relations from Nixon to Reagan*, Brookings Institution, 1985, p. 68.

the government led by Chiang Kai-shek, which was based on the island of Taiwan, as legitimate.

In January 1969, Kissinger was appointed as Richard Nixon's national security advisor. For several years prior, the U.S. and the People's Republic of China had been having mainly routine discussions. During the course sessions that were periodically held in Warsaw, the United States' support for an independent Taiwan, which China vehemently opposes, was openly declared to be the cause of both sides' entrenchment. The talks ultimately devolved into the sterile stating and restating of both sides' incompatible, unchanging positions.

There were several factors that made one country's isolation from another worse. The PRC was thought to be attempting to impose communism on the entire area, and the United States held an ideological disagreement with China's Communist leadership. This notion was verified by China's support for the regime in North Vietnam. The People's Republic of China's chairman, Mao Zedong, generated fears in the United States that his government would sacrifice millions of its own citizens and, by extension, citizens of other countries, in order to impose its brutal social and political policies known as the Cultural Revolution.

Beijing perceived in the Americans a rival with similar ideological motivations who was prepared to employ harsh tactics to further its goals³⁹.

Support for the views of Mao, Zhou, and other PRC officials came from the American intervention in Vietnam, which the Chinese leadership compared to the U.S. involvement in the Korean War.

Of course, the United States and China's diplomatic relations were severed in the early 1950s as a result of China's heavy involvement in that war⁴⁰.

However, by the late 1960s, the United States deemed it appropriate to open a window for dialogue with Beijing. There were numerous circumstances that prompted Washington in this direction: first and foremost, the border clashes that occurred between March and September 1969 along the Sino-Soviet border. They clearly highlighted the strong crisis in the relations between the two communist powers, and the United States saw the possibility of exploiting this situation to its advantage. However, this was not the only factor favoring an American opening: as early as August 1968, with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Washington had observed with great

³⁹ Sebenius, and Green, Henry A. *Kissinger as Negotiator: Background and Key Accomplishments*.

⁴⁰ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 685.

interest Beijing's agitation, which was also interested in countering Moscow's expansionist policy albeit for diametrically opposed reasons.⁴¹

The Soviet Union justified the invasion in November 1968 with the "rats nest doctrine,"⁴² which further confirmed Chinese suspicions by formally examining the Soviet Union's right to intervene in communist countries, potentially including China, in order to suppress opposition movements.⁴³

Mutual mistrust between Chinese and Soviet forces in Siberia, along the Usuri, the river that separates the two countries, erupted into open warfare in March 1969. When China launched a counterattack to demonstrate that it would protect its borders, tensions escalated substantially. The move, meant as a warning to the Soviets, had the opposite effect. The world's two biggest communist nations were currently engaged in a military confrontation where 814,000 Chinese forces and 658,000 Soviet troops were positioned against each other along their shared border. "This tense standoff often erupted in military clashes, with significant casualties on both sides"^{44 45}.

Subsequently, it was revealed that Chairman Mao had covertly moved the majority of the Chinese government ministries out of Beijing, because he was concerned about the Soviet military threat.⁴⁶

The United States initiated dialogue with China through the mediation of three nations, all of which maintained good relations with Beijing - Pakistan (which immediately proved to be the most fruitful and effective channel), Romania, and, to a lesser extent, France. As was to be expected, this was not immediately welcomed by Moscow, so much so that the Soviet ambassador to Washington, Dobrynin, warned the United States in October 1969 not to take advantage of the tensions between the Soviet Union and China just as negotiations for SALT were about to begin: "If someone in the United States is tempted to make profit from Soviet-Chinese relations at the Soviet Union's expense, and there are some signs of that, then we would like to frankly warn in advance that such line of conduct, if pursued, can lead to a very grave miscalculation

⁴¹ Garthoff, *Détente and confrontation: American-Soviet relations from Nixon to Reagan*, Brookings Institution, 1985, pp. 199-20.

⁴² Sebenius, Burns, Mnookin, *Kissinger the negotiator: lessons from dealmaking at the highest level*, p. 167.

⁴³ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 166.

⁴⁴ Sebenius, Green, *Strategic Survey: The Sino-Soviet Dispute*.

⁴⁵ Sebenius, Burns, Mnookin, *Kissinger the negotiator: lessons from dealmaking at the highest level*, p. 171.

⁴⁶ Kissinger, "Transcript of the American Secretaries of State Project: Henry A. Kissinger"; Kissinger, *On China*, p.220.

and is in no way consistent with the goal of better relations between the U.S. and the USSR." ⁴⁷

Undersecretary of State Elliot L. Richardson, to dispel any ambiguity, publicly declared that "we do not seek to exploit for our own advantage the hostility between the Soviet Union and the People's Republic [of China] ... [but] to pursue a long-term course of progressively developing better relations with both". ⁴⁸

Sino-American relations, therefore, continued to deepen - not only thanks to the good offices of Islamabad - but also due to a direct diplomatic channel passing through Warsaw, where both the United States and China had diplomatic missions. Moscow immediately became alarmed, despite reassurances from Washington, and asked the White House for more information on what was happening in the Polish capital: in the eyes of the USA, this fear appeared from the outset as a clear demonstration of vulnerability. ⁴⁹

The Warsaw Channel was interrupted following the expansion of the conflict from Vietnam to Cambodia (May 1970), which constituted a setback in diplomatic progress between Washington and Beijing. However, the continuation of relations between the two countries took place through the Pakistani channel: the United States also initiated acts of openness on a concrete level, including some trade liberalizations. China was no exception, and in April 1971, it invited the American ping-pong team to its territory: hence the name "ping-pong diplomacy" by which this phase of bilateral relations between China and the United States is known in popular culture, immortalized also by a famous scene in the movie *Forrest Gump*. In the same month, Zhou Enlai expressed readiness to carry out "direct discussions between high-level responsible persons of the two countries," specifically mentioning Nixon or his delegate, explicitly citing the name of Kissinger⁵⁰: it was indeed the National Security Advisor who, on July 9, 1971, secretly met Zhou in Beijing, taking advantage of an already planned trip to Asia. On July 15, President Nixon made public the conversation that had taken place the previous week and announced the normalization of relations between the two countries.

⁴⁷ history.state.gov. (n.d.). *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972 - Office of the Historian*. [online].

⁴⁸ Richardson 1969, in Garthoff 1985, p. 220.

⁴⁹ Sergi, *Diplomazie triangolari a confronto: Metternich/Kissinger*, in *Eunomia. Rivista di Studi su Pace e Diritti Umani*, 2014, p. 183.

⁵⁰ history.state.gov. (n.d.). *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969–1972 - Office of the Historian*. [online].

As is known, the United States and China necessarily had to set their diplomatic relations from scratch and given the great political and ideological distance between the two nations, it would not have been an easy task. However, both countries shared the view of the Soviet Union as an enemy power, and this considerably helped the development of institutional relations. In particular, Washington utilized the "Soviet card" in two ways in negotiations with Beijing. On one hand, the United States did not hesitate to emphasize that Moscow still played a very important role in U.S. international relations, and that the latter would not in any way slow down or suspend the ongoing process of détente: the U.S. objective, after all, was to improve its relations with both countries without any special alliances or favoritism. On the other hand, however, Washington used a possible Soviet threat against China as the main driver for renewed cooperation with Beijing. According to Kissinger's model of triangular diplomacy, in fact, it was necessary for relations between the USSR and PRC not to evolve too positively: the central role of the USA, indeed, would have been fully realized only as long as the two communist powers considered each other a greater threat than the United States.⁵¹

From the Soviet side, there had nevertheless been an intuition in this sense already in the wake of Nixon's announcement regarding the normalization of relations between Washington and Beijing. Ambassador Dobrynin, in fact, in a cablegram sent to his own Foreign Minister, emphasized that "We must continue [...] to use all the objective and subjective factors that determine the American interest in developing relations with the Soviet Union, keeping in check the possibility that the construction of relations with Beijing by the United States does not slide towards the common sentiment of anti-Sovietism."⁵²

1.2. Regional impacts and global ramifications

When President Nixon visited Guam in July 1969 to celebrate the return of the Apollo 11 astronauts from the Moon, he presented the concept of the Nixon Doctrine at an unplanned news conference. Nixon declared that "Asian hands must shape the Asian

⁵¹ Goh, *Nixon, Kissinger, and the "Soviet Card" in the U.S. Opening to China, 1971–1974*, in *Diplomatic History*, 2005, Vol. 29, No. 3, *Diplomatic History Roundtable: The Bush Administration's Foreign Policy in Historical Perspective* pp. 477-480.

⁵² Sergi, *Diplomazie triangolari a confronto: Metternich/Kissinger*, in *Eunomia. Rivista di Studi su Pace e Diritti Umani*, 2014, pp. 169-191.

future"⁵³ and that the U.S. would not deploy soldiers to fight for Asian countries, only provide financial and logistical support. Nixon aimed to give more of the containment responsibility to the threatened populations by arming pro-Western nations like Iran with cutting-edge American weapons. However, the U.S. had to pull out of Vietnam before the Nixon Doctrine could be given any real consideration. He launched his "Vietnamization" approach in March 1969, calling for increased material and advising support along with a phased withdrawal of U.S. ground soldiers. Nixon also wanted to include the Soviet Union in the peace process, but Moscow was not as powerful in Hanoi as he had thought, and he could not afford to appear to be resenting the U.S. Nixon then adopted a more measured strategy, combining continued pressure on Hanoi with improved ties to both Communist heavyweights. Prior to taking office, he had moderated his position against mainland China, despite his reputation as a staunch ally of Taiwan's Nationalist government. Using de Gaulle's and Pakistan's Yahya Khan's good graces, he proceeded to notify Beijing in 1969. Nixon and Kissinger maintained hope despite the termination of direct communications, which were carried out through the Chinese embassy in Warsaw, following the 1970 U.S.-ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) airstrikes on Cambodia. When Yahya Khan returned from Peking in December 1970, the Pakistani route paid off as he invited an American envoy to discuss Taiwan. As Henry Kissinger stepped off a plane that the Pakistani president had lent him onto the Beijing airstrip on July 9, 1971, the U.S.-Soviet discussions were either at a standstill or progressing slowly. In order to conceal his travel plans from Pakistani media, Kissinger (the real one) was dressed as a woman in a dark raincoat, shades, and a black hat. Being the first high-ranking American official to hold negotiations with the Chinese leadership in twenty years, he was treated kindly and generously and brought to the State Guesthouse to await Premier Zhou Enlai's arrival⁵⁴. The PRC responded through Norway and Afghanistan to a series of preliminary communications from the United States via Romania and Pakistan⁵⁵. Kissinger, along with a few Secret Service agents and advisers, boarded an aircraft early in July with the intention of conducting a "routine diplomatic mission" that would culminate in

⁵³ McDougall, W. (2019). 20th-century international relations | Britannica. In: *Encyclopedia Britannica*. [online]

⁵⁴ Sebenius, Burns, Mnookin, *Kissinger the negotiator: lessons from dealmaking at the highest level*, p. 172.

⁵⁵ Kissinger, *On China*, pp. 225-6.

Pakistan⁵⁶. Following, formal negotiations, Kissinger and Zhou talked about the two most important concerns, Vietnam, and Taiwan, in an attempt to determine whether further conversations would be beneficial. Zhou proved to be an easy match for Kissinger. They both mainly avoided their most pressing problems by relating them to other vital concerns that they both understood to be of utmost importance. Kissinger put Zhou to the test on his willingness to compromise on issues other than Taiwan, and he answered well. Zhou was willing to negotiate Taiwan, but he was not concerned about the order in which other concerns would be discussed or resolved before Taiwan. Kissinger recognized an opportunity to reverse Zhou's position linkage by connecting possible Chinese concessions on Vietnam to prospective U.S. concessions in Taiwan⁵⁷.

"The Chinese want to relieve themselves of the threat of a two-front war, introduce new calculations in Moscow about attacking or leaning on the PRC, and perhaps make the USSR more pliable in its dealing with Peking"⁵⁸. In a more upbeat phrasing, Kissinger emphasized Mao's "commitment to the creation of a de facto anti-Soviet coalition"⁵⁹. Kissinger covert visit to Beijing, followed the instance of "Ping-Pong diplomacy", after, the Chinese surprised everyone by inviting an American table tennis team to the championship competition in Peking the following April. In February 1972, the Chinese also consented to a presidential visit. Nixon's visit caused a stir as the long-dormant fascination of the American people with China was rekindled. By their own admission, the nine American table tennis players who entered China from Hong Kong in April 1971 had no idea what was going on. They viewed the offer as a chance to learn from their more skilled Chinese competitors. Since 1949, Americans have not been permitted entry into China until this tour. However, its true significance lay in revealing the months-long covert detente that had been fostered through communications between Mao Zedong and Richard Nixon. The trip cleared the path for Nixon's 1972 visit to Beijing⁶⁰.

⁵⁶ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p.765.

⁵⁷ Kissinger, *On China*, p. 249.

⁵⁸ Kissinger, *White House Years*, p.765.

⁵⁹ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 150.

⁶⁰ Pilkington, E. (2008). New round of ping pong diplomacy. *The Guardian*.



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This was the first-ever visit of the U.S. ping-pong team to Beijing, which happened as a result of an invitation that their Chinese colleagues seemingly extended on the spur of the moment when American player Cowan boarded the Chinese team bus during the World Table Tennis Championship in Japan. After a 22-year standoff, China came back into the world following decades of exclusion. Zhou Enlai had similarly conflicting motivations. He saw ping-pong as a non-violent approach to break China's isolation and build relations with the U.S. The invitation that seemed "impromptu" was just as well-planned as the visits that followed.

By April 1972, Washington faced limited military options in response to the escalating conflict in Vietnam. With only a small number of combat troops remaining among the American forces, the ARVN was unable to withstand the advancing North Vietnamese despite American equipment support. Ambassador Bunker's cable from Saigon indicated that ARVN forces were nearing collapse. With the re-deployment of American troops ruled out, President Nixon authorized heavy bombing as a last resort. The bombing began north of the DMZ on April 6, followed by B-52 raids reaching the nineteenth parallel on April 10. Nixon viewed the situation as a critical juncture, calling for an all-out effort to turn the tide of the conflict. Despite General Abrams' recommendation to focus bombing on southern areas, Nixon decided to target Hanoi directly, believing it to be the source of the problem. Confident in the effectiveness of the strikes, Nixon considered implementing a blockade around North Vietnam and emphasized the importance of managing public perception. Reports of successful

⁶¹ AFP/ Getty Images. (1971), Chinese premier Zhou Enlai (center front, right) with members of the American table tennis team. Ivor Montagu is to his right, Beijing. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/jun/10/china.usa>.

strikes bolstered Nixon's confidence, and he remained steadfast in his commitment to continue bombing until the North Vietnamese retreated. His determination to escalate the bombing campaign reflected his resolve to achieve a favorable outcome in the conflict⁶². Kissinger felt little hesitation in launching the massive bombing assault. It was a military requirement as well as a somewhat diplomatic one. It was certainly not the best course of action to let South Vietnam fall apart under military pressure if he was ever to bring about that peace with honor, or even a respectable break. Prior to this, he had supported the bombing and invasions of Cambodia and Laos because he thought the U.S. must not let Hanoi have the upper hand militarily. However, Kissinger was far more eager to utilize the new triangular framework than Nixon was. In reality, though, that meant applying pressure to Moscow as opposed to Beijing.

The connection between Vietnam and triangular diplomacy became apparent very quickly. These moves put the back then planned trip to Moscow in jeopardy: how could the Soviets host Nixon and Kissinger while they were also leading a large bombing campaign against Hanoi? Would the opening to China lose its meaning if the summit was called off? Could the Chinese possibly change their strategy to protect their ties with the North Vietnamese? Ultimately, the Chinese would exercise moderation and Brezhnev and other Soviet officials would not call off the summit. However, the triangular diplomacy's fundamental limitations and shortcomings were made clear by the North Vietnamese Spring Offensive. Simply put, no matter how skillfully Kissinger maneuvered with the Chinese and Soviets, this did not lead to the leaders of Beijing or Moscow pulling back from their regional friends⁶³. From the Chinese point of view, the timing of the Spring Offensive was rather favorable. China had held their summit, after all, and Nixon had implicitly, if not outright, acknowledged China's claim that it would exert no pressure whatsoever on Hanoi. Beijing also couldn't have missed Nixon's attempt to show that China's initiative was on track when he officially met with a Chinese ping-pong team in the White House on April 18, 1972, following the start of the bombing of Hanoi.

⁶² *20th-century international relations - Disengagement, Third World, Cold War* | Britannica

⁶³ Moscoe, *Rhetoric, Perspectives, and Reactions of the Soviet Union to US-China Relations*.

1.3 Post-Cold War Period

The U.S. won the Cold War when the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe fell, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The importance of "strategic triangle" concerns decreased significantly as the United States became the only superpower. Chinese authorities, on the other hand, insisted that a multipolar world would be the best course of action, and that a unipolar state would only be temporary. The main plan was to fortify China's connections with the Third World and make an effort to build cordial ties with Russia and the emerging Central Asian republics. Russia has had a "leaning-to-one-side" pro-Western policy agenda since when the Soviet Union broke apart. Nonetheless, the Russian reform initiatives were harmed by inadequate support from the West. This led to the emergence of Russian nationalism and undermined Boris Yeltsin's authority. China's Russia experts and Yeltsin's detractors both agreed that the West did not want Russia to rapidly revive, nor did it want to treat it as an equal partner, simply to keep it from descending into full chaos. Russia's people felt alone and marginalized in the international community as a result of their country's inability to merge with the West and its rapid economic downturn. This stood in stark contrast to the circumstances of the preceding ten years, when the Soviet Union and the United States shared equal ground in the bipolar world. Ultimately, it conceded that there might be discrepancies, if not outright conflicts, between Russia and the West, and it denounced the United States' view of itself as the "sole superpower" as an indication of imperialism⁶⁴.

Determining the definition of strategic triangularism is crucial. In this context, "strategic" refers to more than just nuclear weapons' capacities and attributes (such as deterrence, stance, and so forth). It initially refers to the total influence of a nation, which has several facets. While having a nuclear weapon is undoubtedly useful, other strategic assets include economic might, cultural and moral influence, technological superiority, and international political clout.

According to some observers, the end of the Cold War sounded the death knell for triangularism and even for realism as a whole⁶⁵. The emergence of a weak but

⁶⁴ Cheng, J.Y.S. (2009). *Chinese Perceptions of Russian Foreign Policy during the Putin Administration: U.S.-Russia Relations and 'Strategic Triangle' Considerations*. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 38(2), pp.145–168.

⁶⁵ Fukuyama, *The End of History and The Last Man*, pp. 252-253.

democratic Russia, the United States' seeming invincible dominance, and China's emphasis on internal development all signalled that international politics would become less competitive and more cooperative in the future.

The idea of a multipolar global order gained traction during this decade. Three premise forms the basis of this. Firstly, a world dominated by the United States was not only offensive to Russia, but it also hindered the country's ability to effectively pursue its interests. Second, Russia had to find allies since it was too weak to oppose American "hegemony" on its own. Third, Russia's best chance of securing a prominent place in global decision-making was to act as both a counterweight and a bridge between the West and the East, particularly between the United States and China.

Moscow's attempts to bring back triangularism and play the China card were a complete disaster. Even while ties between China and Russia did improve, Beijing declined to participate in the Great Game being played by the Yeltsin administration as a cooperative partner. Conversely, during this decade Beijing and Moscow's still-modest economic ties were greatly outmatched by China's commercial links with the United States⁶⁶.

Similar to why triangularism failed in the 1970s and 1980s, it failed in the 1990s for the same reason: the three parties' blatantly unequal relationships. Although the least powerful player may now be Russia rather than China, the fundamental defect remained the same. By the close of the twentieth century, the strategic triangle appeared to be extinct for all intents and purposes due to the overwhelming strength of the United States, Russia's strategic and economic decline, and China's pragmatic focus on growth rather than geopolitical balance.

Similar to Yeltsin, Putin has determined that China is the most promising partner⁶⁷. This is the case for a number of reasons. The first is that, when it will complete its modernization and will become a global power, China will be the most potent and influential of all potential partners.

On the other hand, Moscow's support for triangularism and a multipolar world order was driven by strategic self-interest rather than a deep affinity for China. While relations between Russia and China have improved under Putin's leadership, Moscow still perceived China as largely unchanged since the 1990s. Russia saw China as a tool to balance American dominance and enhance its influence in its key alliances with the

⁶⁶ Shirk, *China: Fragile Superpower*, p. 239.

United States and Europe. Moscow's goal was not to abandon the West entirely but to reinvent it, moving away from post-modern, legal, and institutionalized models toward more flexible notions such as a "common European civilization" and a Concert of Great Powers.

Despite its engagement with China, Russia continued to view the West as the primary reference point in terms of strategy, politics, economy, technology, and civilization. Putin envisioned Russia emerging as the third pole in a multipolar, or tripolar, international system, where it would be a significant and equal partner to both the United States and China while maintaining its strategic independence. This vision entailed completing the strategic triangle, with Russia occupying a central position alongside the United States and China.

While, Beijing had good reasons for not being interested in triangularism. The conviction that a new global order was an elusive objective is the most significant. It was possible that America's standing had declined and that more people questioned its authority now more than ever.

As a result, Chinese policymakers did not see any advantages in going up against the United States or letting their alliance with Russia jeopardize their standing with Washington. Any other course of action would restrict rather than increase their options. Jiang Zemin's statement during the 16th Communist Party Congress in November 2002, referring to China's 20-year window of "strategic opportunities," perfectly captures the Chinese stance.⁶⁸

The Chinese approach to international relations can be characterized as "going with strength"⁶⁹. Despite concerns in Beijing about the United States' intentions to contain China, they recognized the U.S. as their most crucial ally. The U.S. provided cutting-edge technology, hosted a significant portion of China's financial assets, engaged in substantial trade, and indirectly ensured the security of vital sea lanes for China's oil imports. China acknowledges the role of a robust U.S. in maintaining global peace, particularly in Northeast Asia where it served as a check on potential threats from Japan and North Korea.

⁶⁸ Xinhuanet, *Full text of Jiang Zemin's report at 16th Party congress*, 17 November 2002, available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2002-11/17/content_632330.htm.

⁶⁹ Lo, B. (n.d.). *Russia, China and the United States from Strategic Triangularism to the Post-modern Triangle In collaboration with the Atomic Energy Commission (CEA) Security Studies Center In cooperation with the Russia/NIS Center*, Ifri.

Rather than pursuing a strategy of strategic balancing, China opted for strategic inclusion, seeking friendships with a wide range of nations to achieve a "harmonious world." Beijing engaged with both developed and developing countries, as well as non-Western cultures, recognizing that many are wary of China's rise. However, the strategic triangle framework was considered too limited for China's multifaceted approach to international interactions, especially in a time of flux in the global order.

Furthermore, there has been a strong belief in America throughout the post-cold war era that traditional strategic balance is no longer relevant. Francis Fukuyama contended in his landmark essay "The End of History" (1989) that the increasing acceptance of Western democratic norms and values marked the end of world growth⁷⁰. Even though Fukuyama's initial triumphalism has suffered in the years that have followed, most people still agree that the world has moved past the overt great power rivalry that defined the Cold War era. Simplistic geopolitical theories like classic bipolarity and strategic triangularism are seen as outdated because the global system is now far more varied and complicated.

However, the most obvious and convincing explanation for the fall of triangularism in the United States may be America's dominance in world affairs following the conclusion of the Cold War. Effective triangularism, as previously said, presupposes a rough parity between the three sides, at least to the extent that each can reasonably hope to affect the actions of the other two. Since the fall of the USSR, these conditions have virtually never existed. Triangular diplomacy in Washington has been severely hindered by the level of U.S. domination (and confidence). When America has wanted to use other people to further its goals, it has turned to the NATO alliance or the larger international community⁷¹.

There are two tendencies that are in direct opposition to triangularism. The first is toward a new bipolarity, however it differs greatly from the cold war antagonistic model. Multilateralism is the second, reflecting a world that is more interconnected, complex, and democratic than it has ever been⁷². Not just the United States of America has seen a significant drop in relative, if not absolute, dominance. Generally speaking,

⁷⁰ Fukuyama, *The End of History?* The National Interest, No. 16, Summer 1989, p.4., Gaddis, *The Cold War*, p. 264.

⁷¹ Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, pp. 208-209.

⁷² Lo, B. (n.d.). *Russia, China and the United States from Strategic Triangularism to the Post-modern Triangle In collaboration with the Atomic Energy Commission (CEA) Security Studies Center In cooperation with the Russia/NIS Center*, Ifri. [online].

the same is true of the traditional great powers. The days of a few empires managing the world in "concert," so to speak, are long gone. Even though the superpowers will always have prominent positions, their ability to sway others is becoming more limited. The strategic triangle, as it has been understood, has vanished from such an environment.

1.3.1 Changing Dynamics and Emergence of New Triangular Relationship

In the new world order that followed the Cold War, Russia, China, and the United States may seem like the perfect components to create a revival of triangular diplomacy. However, it's not the case, especially regarding strategic and nuclear armaments.

A new form of triangular diplomacy that has frequently emerged in the aftermath of the Cold War is known as trilateral cooperation, wherein all three involved countries strengthen their relations to defend at least one common interest related to national security, commercial motives, or a shared identity.

The resources mobilized through such collaboration enable the advancement of projects that are particularly challenging to undertake individually or within a traditional bilateral relationship, especially in the realms of military and security, either due to their high technological sophistication or their significant costs. Additionally, any potential conflicts that may arise between two of the involved states can be more easily overcome, as trilateral cooperation focuses on a priority element for all three nations.

In the Asian regional context, a model of trilateral cooperation is that established between the United States, Japan, and South Korea, which originated in 1993 following North Korea's withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The regional security threat posed by Pyongyang has led these countries to increasingly frequent and close cooperation; to this day, the primary factor consolidating relations between Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul is indeed the presence of a common threat⁷³. Following World War II, the United States established security alliances with both Japan and South Korea. This trilateral cooperation among the United States, Japan, and South Korea in the Asia-Pacific region focuses on several key objectives. These objectives include enhancing deterrence capabilities, strengthening defence cooperation, and promoting regional stability. The partnership addresses common security challenges such as North

⁷³ Szalwinski and Cho 2018, pp. 2-3.

Korean provocations, maritime security threats, and ballistic missile proliferation through joint military exercises, intelligence-sharing arrangements, and diplomatic coordination.

A significant security challenge facing the trilateral partnership is the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. The regime in Pyongyang's repeated missile tests and nuclear detonations directly endanger regional security. In response, the three countries have enhanced their cooperation in monitoring and countering North Korean provocations through military capabilities, missile defence systems, and diplomatic pressure.

Maritime security is another critical focus area for trilateral cooperation, given China's increasing assertiveness in the South China Sea and East China Sea. Concerns about freedom of navigation, territorial disputes, and potential conflict escalation have led to joint naval exercises, patrols, and surveillance operations to maintain stability and uphold international maritime laws.

Territorial disputes involving China and neighbouring countries also pose challenges to regional security and stability. The trilateral partnership aims to support peaceful dispute resolution through diplomatic channels, adherence to international law, and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. Coordinated efforts seek to prevent tensions from escalating and promote confidence-building measures among regional stakeholders.

During the Clinton administration, the North Korean nuclear crisis presented a significant challenge, as the regime of Kim Il-Sung pursued the development of nuclear weapons and missiles. Initially, North Korea signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1985, but later showed indications of violating it by using enriched uranium for military purposes and obstructing inspections. Experts speculated on Kim's intentions: whether he aimed to use nuclear weapons for regime survival, economic gain, or as a bargaining tool for financial assistance. The Clinton administration faced a dilemma, as the situation could potentially lead to conflict or nuclear proliferation.

Efforts to address the crisis included intermittent use of carrots and sticks by the United States, met with a confusing response from North Korea. Tensions escalated, with North Korea threatening war against South Korea in June 1994. Former President Carter's intervention led to provisional agreements, culminating in a nuclear framework agreement on August 13. Under the agreement, North Korea agreed to remain in the NPT, cease plutonium production, and accept light-water reactors from South Korea

and Japan in exchange for security guarantees and energy assistance from the United States.

Despite opposition from Congress, Carter's actions temporarily resolved the crisis, demonstrating the complexity and challenges of dealing with North Korea's nuclear ambitions⁷⁴.

Another shared concern was NATO's military intervention in Kosovo, which began in March 1999. China and Russia saw this as a betrayal of UN principles and a potential pretext for U.S. intervention in their own internal issues, such as the Taiwan and Chechnya crises. The U.S. Defense Department advocated for Taiwan's participation in the Asia-Pacific TMD system and the provision of advanced military hardware to Taiwan, leading to sharp criticism from China following the release of the Cox report in 1999. Meanwhile, Chechen rebels conducted terrorist attacks in Russian cities, with Moscow viewing Western criticism as an attempt to "internationalize" the Chechen conflict.

Beijing and Moscow were aligned in their commitment to maintaining the U.S.-Soviet Union Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty of 1972, advocating for further reductions in offensive strategic weapons to uphold the treaty. They opposed Taiwan's participation in missile defence systems and the installation of non-strategic ballistic missile defence systems in the Asia-Pacific region. In April 1999, China and Russia initiated biannual strategic stability consultations at the vice-foreign minister level, and the United Nations General Assembly annually adopted their joint resolution on upholding and observing the ABM Treaty from 1999 to 2001.

March 1999 is frequently cited as the turning point in Sino-Russian ties precisely because it was seen as a turning point in American unilateralism as well. According to certain theories, China and Russia faced significant difficulties in the global arena between March 1999 and September 2001. As a result, during that time, their shared interests and the necessity of their cooperation were at their highest. The establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) on June 15, 2001, marked a significant milestone in China-Russia strategic cooperation. Despite past rivalry, their collaboration in the Eurasian landmass, focusing on economic growth and security, had surpassed competition. Both countries recognized the need for strategic collaboration to counter American unilateralism, though they maintained open communication and

⁷⁴ www.britannica.com. (n.d.). *20th-century international relations - Assertive multilateralism in theory and practice* | Britannica.

positive relations with the United States. Chinese experts emphasized the signing of the Treaty of Good Neighbourliness, Friendship, and Cooperation between China and Russia in July 2001 as a notable achievement, suggesting that leadership changes in Russia had minimal impact on bilateral ties.

The Chinese leadership has given much thought to promoting multipolarity and acting as checks and balances against U.S. unilateralism in the post-Cold War era. Changes in U.S.-Russian ties have likely become the most significant factor in Beijing's push for multipolarity, given the relative stability of U.S. relations with Japan and the EU. China's leaders believe that relations with the United States will stay mostly stable because they will work hard to accomplish this goal and because the United States recognizes China's status as "a responsible stakeholder" in world affairs.

They also think that Russia shares China's interests in fostering multipolarity and acting as a check and balance against U.S. unilateralism. Finally, they think that Russia will expand and re-establish itself as a major power.

Compared to the beginning of this century, these analysts were far less concerned about the Bush administration's development of relations with Russia in order to restrain China. Evidently, in their different foreign policy frameworks, China, and Russia both viewed their bilateral relations with the United States as the most significant, and both did their best to avoid confrontation with the country due to its shortcomings⁷⁵. But since Japan and the EU were less likely to challenge the U.S., China and Russia had to rely on one another to counterbalance U.S. unilateralism. Thus, a key component of the multipolarity that the two nations wish to advance was the "strategic triangle"⁷⁶.

⁷⁵ Scognamiglio, B., Patrignani and Gilli, A. (n.d.). Chair of Geopolitical Scenarios and Political Risk the Ukraine war: from the special operation to the risk of a 'great war'. *Can the outcome of the conflict affect China-Taiwan relations?*

⁷⁶ Cheng, J.Y.S. (2009). *Chinese Perceptions of Russian Foreign Policy during the Putin Administration: U.S.-Russia Relations and 'Strategic Triangle' Considerations*. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 38(2), pp.145–168.

CHAPTER 2

Contemporary Trends in Triangular Diplomacy

2.1 Understanding the evolution of Triangular Diplomacy

The conventional domination of Western countries, especially the U.S. and Europe, has been put to the test by the emergence of developing nations like China, India, and Brazil. As a result of this change, new triangular alliances have emerged as developing countries look to forge strategic alliances with both conventional and unconventional allies in order to increase their influence on the international scene.

For instance, China's Belt and Road Initiative has reshaped the geopolitical and economic landscape of Eurasia by promoting triangular collaboration between China, its allies in Central Asia, and Europe.

Additionally, triangle diplomacy has been fostered in places like the Indo-Pacific and Eastern Europe by the rise of geopolitical competition and strategic rivalry among major countries. As the rivalry between China and the United States for influence in the Indo-Pacific region heats up, states including Japan, Australia, India, and the ASEAN have formed strategic alliances and partnerships.

Similar to this, in Eastern Europe, NATO's expansion and Russia's strong foreign policy have created triangle dynamics that affect Russia, NATO members, and neighboring nations, influencing the security dynamics of the area.

Triangular collaboration between states, international organizations, and non-state actors has also been prompted by the rise of non-traditional security concerns such as cyberattacks, pandemics, and transnational terrorism. In order to address these intricate security issues, triangular diplomacy has been crucial in promoting coordinated responses, capacity building, and information sharing. Furthermore, triangular economic cooperation between regional blocs, emerging nations, and great powers has been encouraged by economic interdependence and globalization. Infrastructure projects, investment programs, and triangular trade agreements have aided in the economic integration and growth of various regions, fostering stability and prosperity for all.

The emergence of the unipolar moment deprived the USA and the PRC of what had served as a bond, forcing Washington and Beijing to reinvent their bilateral

relations on completely new grounds. The disappearance of the common enemy, in fact, did not result in a real convergence of long-term interests or strategic vision. Such a seismic shift could only lead to the resurgence of the never-dormant dilemma in Washington regarding the grand strategy to adopt towards communist China, a friction that cut across the American political spectrum. While, on one hand, China had contributed to making détente possible, on the other hand, it remained a giant firmly led by a communist party jealous of its sovereignty and with decidedly non-negligible potential.

In this context, George H. Bush's China policy and more broadly his foreign policy, always characterized by pragmatism and aimed at strengthening cooperation on crucial geostrategic issues such as international security and commercial-financial exchanges, rather than on secondary issues such as human rights, saw the prospect of losing many of the achievements and the climate of collaboration established with Beijing's leadership. As reported by Kissinger himself, Sino-American relations after the events of Tiananmen Square in 1989 practically returned to the starting level, with a substantial and growing portion of the U.S. political world, emboldened by the triumph over the Soviet threat, perceiving the role of the United States as a bearer of purportedly universal democratic values and deploring the Chinese regime, advocating for its democratization⁷⁷.

Following the disappearance of the sole major rival, therefore, the fundamental precept of American grand strategy became the preservation and extension of its hegemony within the framework of the USA-made unipolar international political-economic system. A corollary of this solitary supremacy would be the ability to maintain intact the balance-of-power in all quadrants of the globe and to expand the pervasiveness of its financial-commercial ties worldwide, while the role of ultimate guardian of the prevailing order would continue to fall on Washington and its global power projection capability⁷⁸.

To achieve the primary goal of preventing the re-emergence of a new rival, it was necessary to maintain the mechanisms that deter potential competitors from even

⁷⁷ Kissinger, *Cina*, Mondadori, Milano, 2011, p 204.

⁷⁸ Lucio, R., Candidato, C., Di, L., Correlatore, M. and Marchetti, R. (2014). *FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE POLITICHE CORSO DI LAUREA IN RELAZIONI INTERNAZIONALI Tesi di Laurea in Studi Strategici Cina e Stati Uniti: la contesa del XXI secolo*. [online]

aspiring to a larger regional or global role, from challenging our leadership, or from seeking to overturn the established political and economic order.

The policy that was adopted was therefore one of engagement rather than pure containment, involving participation in the international arena in various areas that the American Presidency considered strategic. The underlying idea was summarized by Clinton himself, according to whom the liberalization of trade and financial relations, as well as the assumption by the PRC of international commitments, would assist in its transition towards democracy. This was referred to as "market democracy". In June 1993, in line with electoral promises, the Most Favored Nation (MFN) treatment granted to the PRC, whose confirmation was reconsidered and voted on annually in Congress, was initially linked to respect for human rights. At the same time, not coincidentally, an increasingly fierce anti-Chinese majority was emerging in Congress, also as a result of the Republican victory in the 1994 midterm elections, which produced a "plethora of bills"⁷⁹ in the following two years for China's failure to respect human rights and civil liberties. Such an approach, along with the renewal of the defensive treaty with Japan in 1995 and the repeated sale of arms to the rebels in Taiwan, could only be perceived by China as the arrogance of a country whose unipolar conception of the world, hostile and in contrast with long-term Chinese national interests, exacerbated strategic divergences between Beijing and Washington. The stalemate that ensued demonstrated the firmness of Chinese convictions and the extent to which they were willing to defend their internal sovereignty and national identity against any external interference.

The Taiwan crisis between 1995 and 1996 was due to the new direction taken by Taiwanese foreign policy under then-President Lee Teng-hui and his "holiday diplomacy". Formosa's envoys were sent to major capitals around the world to gauge the potential for international recognition of the island claimed by the PRC. In anticipation of the first free elections to be held in 1996, the approval of a visa for a visit to the U.S., strongly requested by Congress and reluctantly accepted by the White House, was interpreted by Beijing as a betrayal of the *three communiqués* on which the agreement for the Taiwan issue was based. The PRC immediately initiated military exercises and missile tests in the waters adjacent to the northwestern maritime space of

⁷⁹ Shambaugh D., *Making China Policy, Lessons from the Bush and Clinton Administrations*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2001, p. 68.

Formosa, prompting the U.S. to react, after weeks of fruitless attempts at agreement and mutual accusations, by sending two aircraft carrier battle groups (CVBG).

After the stalemate resulting from Beijing's gunboat diplomacy, a sort of state terrorism⁸⁰ - according to the Taiwanese leader - the geopolitical landscape, marked by increasing globalization in all dimensions and the shift of the world's business focus from the Atlantic to the Pacific, required a shift in relations with the PRC. This led to a strategic ambiguity whereby, on one hand, China was reassured through the three-no policy⁸¹, and on the other hand, military ties with Taipei were strengthened - leaving both parties uncertain about the U.S. stance in the event of military conflict - as well as with Tokyo and Canberra.

The underlying design of the president was therefore consistently pursued, to the extent that during the reciprocal exchange of official visits in the 1997-1998 biennium, in addition to another confirmation of the "three-no policy", through a joint declaration, the heads of state informed the press and the world that they were working towards the construction of a "constructive strategic partnership towards the XXI century"⁸². This orientation of both parties was confirmed in the following years, which were indeed marked by highly destabilizing controversies such as the NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999 - which sparked anti-American protests in major Chinese cities and harsh statements from the Beijing establishment, which had already expressed obvious concerns about Operation Allied Force - but always overcome, through official apologies and the payment of a generous compensation by the White House, demonstrating the prevalence of realpolitik and the consideration attributed to the mutual relationship in maintaining stability, despite the awareness of inevitable long-term strategic divergences.

Confirming the cyclical nature of history, at least in American electoral history, the November 2000 elections also saw the then-elected candidate George W. Bush criticize his predecessor's China policy. Despite his lack of familiarity with foreign policy issues, the future President used strong language, describing Clinton's acquiescence and the PRC as a "strategic competitor and key challenge of the U.S. in

⁸⁰ Shambaugh D., *Making China Policy, Lessons from the Bush and Clinton Administrations*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, 2001, p. 73.

⁸¹ "The US does not support the independence for Taiwan, or One China-One Taiwan, or its membership in any international bodies whose members are sovereign states". Available at: www.china-embassy.org/eng/zmgx/zysj/kldfh/t36241.htm.

⁸² Lampton D., *The Making of Chinese Foreign Policy in the Era of Reform*, Stanford Press, Redwood, 2001, p. 47.

Asia"⁸³, emphasizing the need to reinvigorate military relations bilaterally with long-standing allies such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Australia. This approach appeared in line with the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) of 2001, which highlighted the need to avoid a "hostile domination of critical areas, particularly Europe, Northeast Asia, the East Asian littoral, the Middle East, and Southwest Asia" - in response to the possibility of an emerging military competitor with a formidable resource base in the eastern continent⁸⁴. The same concept, already introduced in the previous version dated June 1996, was also reiterated within the mid-2000 Joint Vision 2020, a document drafted by the Department of Defense concerning the evolution of military doctrine, which alluded to the potential emergence of an Asian strategic peer competitor even though the profile of China did not directly appear⁸⁵.

Despite this, we all know that China's ascent to powerhouse status in the first part of this century is very likely. It was predicted in the mid-2000s to become a "moderately developed country" by 2050, but most analysts now predict it will catch up to the United States by 2030, if not before⁸⁶. In the event that China emerges as the next superpower, two nations will control a considerably greater portion of the world economy than the top second-ranking nations, which include Brazil, France, Germany, Russia, India, and Japan.

The main idea back then was that the United States and China will eventually take center stage in world politics, but they won't do it in a fundamentally bipolar manner; rather, they will work in tandem with numerous other countries. The world that emerges may prove to be a more benign and constructive form of Hobbesian anarchy, rather than a "state of nature" where the strong flourish and the weak are subjugated, but rather one that is ruled by a growing number of checks and balances. Geopolitics will still be somewhat significant. In fact, we might be seeing the beginnings of a new kind of triangularism, a post-modern triangle, in which the vast formal and informal networks including nation-states, multilateral institutions, and non-state players constitute the third side rather than Russia or any other major power. Although a system like that might be a little chaotic, it would be closer to the democratization of international

⁸³ Shepperd, *Sino-US relations, and the role of emotion in state action: understanding post-cold war crisis interactions*, p. 37.

⁸⁴ DoD, *Quadriennial Defense Review*, 2001, p 2.

⁸⁵ Lucio, R., Candidato, C., Di, L., Correlatore, M. and Marchetti, R. (2014). *FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE POLITICHE CORSO DI LAUREA IN RELAZIONI INTERNAZIONALI Tesi di Laurea in Studi Strategici Cina e Stati Uniti: la contesa del XXI secolo*. [online]

⁸⁶ Conversations with the author in May 2009 in Beijing and Shanghai.

relations that Beijing and Moscow openly support. Furthermore, it would be predicated on a triangularism that was more equitable and possibly more sustainable than any other in this widely misconstrued concept's past⁸⁷.

The peak of tension reached in the early stages of the Bush administration will be in stark contrast to the future developments of Sino-American relations, particularly following the 09/11 attacks, which provided a new lens through which to interpret immediate global challenges and thus new strategies to confront them⁸⁸. The era of the Little Red Book and the export of revolution, as well as aggression towards its regional neighbors, was definitively coming to an end.

Nonetheless, like Deng Xiaoping before him, Jiang Zemin worked to not definitively rupture bilateral relations and to dissuade the external world from perceiving China as a threat, as evidenced by the flexibility in the Fang Lizhi issue, promises regarding anti-proliferation cooperation, and the revocation of martial law in Beijing and Tibet. This attitude was confirmed by the words of outgoing President of the PRC Deng Xiaoping during one of Kissinger's conciliatory visits: China and the United States of America ought to reevaluate issues in the long run. In addition to serving the interests of the country, economic growth and social stability make China a global force for peace and stability – with his successor ensuring that China will never pose a danger to any nation worldwide⁸⁹. The new cornerstone of foreign policy was summarized in the formula of the aforementioned "New Security Concept". It was based on the evergreen "peaceful coexistence" and thus on the willingness to establish an international order in which internal ideological patterns did not dictate the nature of relations between powers, but rather national strategic interests. There was a perceived urgency to avoid a negative escalation in relations with the USA, which were still too politically, financially, and militarily superior, particularly in terms of control over maritime communication routes (Sea Lanes of Communication), crucial in ensuring China's economic-commercial development.

The United States thus entered the new millennium with a posture towards China more tilted towards containment than engagement, despite deepening economic

⁸⁷ Lo, B. (n.d.). *Russia, China and the United States from Strategic Triangularism to the Post-modern Triangle In collaboration with the Atomic Energy Commission (CEA) Security Studies Center In cooperation with the Russia/NIS Center, Ifri.* [online].

⁸⁸ Lucio, R., Candidato, C., Di, L., Correlatore, M. and Marchetti, R. (2014). *FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE POLITICHE CORSO DI LAUREA IN RELAZIONI INTERNAZIONALI Tesi di Laurea in Studi Strategici Cina e Stati Uniti: la contesa del XXI secolo.* [online]

⁸⁹ Kissinger, *op cit*, p. 392.

interdependence at extraordinary rates, as evidenced by the trade deficit with the PRC growing from 11.8 billion dollars in 1990 to 85 billion dollars in 2001. Nevertheless, the perception of China as a potential threat to American superiority in the Asia-Pacific region, as described in official American reports in the years 2000-2001 and in the presidential campaign, was propelled by the renewed vigor of the Blue Team, particularly the neoconservative movement – among the political references of the military-industrial complex lobbyists constantly seeking a new enemy – and numerous affiliated think tanks. Among them stood out the Project for the New American Century, whose explicit goal was to lead the country towards a policy based on military might and moral clarity to usher in a new century that is supportive of American values and interests ⁹⁰, and among whose ranks were prominent members of the Bush administration such as Dick Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, and Donald Rumsfeld, as well as political scientists of the caliber of Francis Fukuyama, Paul Kagan, William Kristol, and Steve Forbes.

As a consequence of the disputes over Bush's statements, the spy plane incident, and the sale of new arms to Taiwan, the new fundamental turning point that would immediately shape bilateral relations could only be represented by the September 11, 2001, attacks.

As a consequence, as evident from the 2002 National Security Strategy, the new strategic priorities of American foreign policy were represented by the global war on terror, rogue states, and regional crises. While warning that U.S. forces would remain "strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States"⁹¹, to the great relief of the PRC, the reference to the emergence of potential strategic competitors in Asia disappeared. Instead, the focal point of the USA's universal messianic mission became the global war on terrorism - with the spread of democratic values as its corollary, conducted through a coalition of the willing which, given the new unilateralist and Manichaeian course set by the new Bush administration, would amass not only economic and military resources but also in terms of soft power and thus legitimacy. Bush has neglected to employ soft power in the fight against terrorism.

⁹⁰ *Statement of Principles*, Project for the New American Century, June 1997. In www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.htm.

⁹¹ *National Security Strategy*, White House Press Office, Washington, 9/2002, p. 14.

September Eleventh had thus opened a "new diplomatic course between Washington and Beijing"⁹², marking the discovery of that expedient that would allow both administrations to freeze the perception of each other's threat to focus on shorter-term tactical objectives. According to Kissinger, in fact, it was at the dawn of the new millennium that Sino-American relations took on the pragmatic relationships between major powers seem to be emerging⁹³, where, in addition to inevitable divergences, there were also areas where interests converged. While the Bush administration pushed for a more active involvement of China in both economic and security organizations, it also balanced its rise with elements of containment, safeguarding itself through the traditional dense network of bilateral relations with Japan, South Korea, and Australia foremost, but also India, the Philippines, Thailand, and Singapore, not to mention bases in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan. On the other hand, China itself seized the opportunity, the new strategic opportunity, to implement the New Security Concept based on cooperation, equality, mutual benefit, mutual trust, and observance of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence - and promoted through a foreign policy of benevolence, reciprocity, and win-win collaboration in terms of security and the economy with other nations⁹⁴. According to the 2004 White Paper, the PRC had indeed established military and economic ties with over 150 countries, pursuing its own growth while working for a peaceful international environment in order to promote world peace⁹⁵.

In the report of the Senate Commission on the state of Sino-American relations, dated July 2005, it was highlighted how the main source of concern was represented by China's growing geo-economic and geopolitical global reach and the consequences of Beijing's expansion in terms of political-economic influence for American interests. It was emphasized how China's "appetite for resources" had led to the signing of a large number of contracts for oil and gas, collaboration in science and technology, and multilateral security arrangements with countries around the world, some of which were key allies of the USA⁹⁶. These developments raised the possibility of challenges to U.S. political and economic interests, especially in view of Chinese actions in areas like East

⁹² Weber, *Cina-USA: la Vera Sfida*, p. 67.

⁹³ Kissinger, *op cit*, p 421.

⁹⁴Information Office of the State Council, *China's National Defense*, Pecking, 2004.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ www.uscc.gov. (n.d.). *Homepage | U.S.- CHINA | ECONOMIC and SECURITY REVIEW COMMISSION*.

Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East, which were starting to resemble a counterbalancing strategy toward the U.S.⁹⁷. Similarly, Beijing's support for rogue regimes and anti-American governments and groups in vital regions of the globe seemed to have a specific strategic objective in the eyes of Washington: to counterbalance American influence, develop a substitute form of government, and obstruct the international community's efforts to enforce its standards⁹⁸. The same concept was echoed in the Report on The Military Power of the People's Republic of China in 2005, in which the Pentagon emphasized in particular how Its diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific area was focused on regional organizations that would keep the U.S. out⁹⁹.

Therefore, in 2005, when the 9/11 honey money was over, the phase of comprehensive engagement had come to an end and China had to, without further delay, show itself to be a responsible stakeholder¹⁰⁰ in the international system, the same system that guaranteed its development. From these statements, it is possible to deduce both the recognition of Chinese advancements and the pressure for the giant to cooperate within the framework centered around American leadership. According to the Pentagon, China was facing a strategic crossroads, being able to pursue a path of " Instead of seeking to exercise a dominant influence in a growing sector, the goal should be peaceful integration and constructive competition¹⁰¹ .

Therefore, while the geopolitical horizon was shaken by colored revolutions and Americans were bolstered by "victories" in the Middle East, the RPC returned to the attention of the United States, both for its staggering economic development, which corresponded to a new "dramatic record" of trade deficit and the increasing acquisition of U.S. public debt, and for its increasing role as a decisive actor in regional and global contexts.

Another point on which American concerns converged concerned the issue of energy security, as at the time the USA still led the special ranking of oil-importing nations. China's energy policies, as a whole, were not considered compatible with those of a responsible player in the international energy market, given the inclination to invest in countries whose governments continue hostilities and violations of human rights in

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ DoD, *CMP Report*, 2005.

¹⁰⁰ Zoellick, *Whither China: From Membership to Responsibility?* DoS, 21/9/2005.

¹⁰¹ DoD, *CMP Report*, 2005.

places like Burma, Iran, and Sudan¹⁰². The actions of the Chinese government, moreover, influenced U.S. foreign policy interests are eventually at odds with the national security interests of the United States in the Middle East and Asia, which puts pressure on the global extraction and distribution system and leads to measures like the Iranian government's efforts to acquire nuclear weapons¹⁰³.

This emerged in the context of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, not only in recent years but as early as 2014. Essentially, Ukraine seeks to influence the situation by appealing to the EU and the USA to gain advantage and support. Despite appearing to do so equally, Kyiv is aware that the EU is internally divided and cannot do much in negotiations, primarily on an economic level. Therefore, it appeals to Washington.

Energy security, trade connections, and regional conflict resolution are just a few of the concerns that are addressed through bilateral talks between Russia and Ukraine. Russia and Ukraine are heavily dependent on each other in the energy sector, making energy security a major worry for both countries. The main topics of discussion in bilateral talks include pricing structures, transit routes, and reliable energy supply. But disagreements over gas prices and transportation costs have historically resulted in regular disruptions, emphasizing the necessity of constant communication and collaboration to reduce such risks. Two major areas of attention in bilateral energy conversations are the negotiation of long-term contracts for gas supply and the upgrade of energy infrastructure. Geopolitical conflicts and commercial interests have shaped the complex trade relations between Russia and Ukraine.

The objectives of bilateral dialogues are to further trade liberalization, eliminate trade obstacles, and strengthen economic ties between the two nations. But trade barriers, political conflicts, and penalties have impeded this field's advancement. The main goals of bilateral trade discussions are to advance shared economic interests and settle trade disputes diplomatically. The crisis in Eastern Ukraine, which started in 2014 after Russia annexed Crimea, continues to be a significant obstacle to bilateral relations. The goal of bilateral conversations is to resolve the underlying issues that lead to conflict, such as geopolitical rivalries, ethnic conflicts, and territorial disputes. Key elements of conflict resolution discussions include initiatives to carry out the Minsk agreements, facilitate humanitarian relief, and encourage communication between disputing parties.

¹⁰² *US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Annual Report, 2006*, pp 7-11.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

But despite the slow pace of improvement, the war nevertheless poses a threat to regional stability.

Many obstacles stand in the way of Ukraine and Russia's bilateral discussions, such as political mistrust, conflicting interests, and geopolitical rivalry. Cooperation is hampered by historical grievances, unsolved territorial disputes, and conflicting narratives that heighten tensions. The process of communication is further complicated by the fact that outside parties, such as the U.S. and the EU, frequently influence bilateral ties.

Notwithstanding the obstacles, bilateral discussions between Russia and Ukraine have the ability to enhance confidence, encourage collaboration, and lessen regional tensions. Trade agreements, diplomatic initiatives to resolve disputes, and sustainable energy cooperation can all support stability and prosperity in both nations. Regional programs like the Trilateral Contact Group and the Normandy Format also provide forums for discussion and mediation, opening doors to positive interaction and conflict resolution.

According to the latest National Security Strategy published during the Bush era, America had to decide between taking the route of confidence and fear; we decided to address our issues head-on rather than leaving them to future generations¹⁰⁴. Among the future implications would be the shift of focus towards the Asia-Pacific region, the basis of the Rebalancing implemented by the future President Barack Obama. Once again, after the end of the bipolar era, the possibility of a rebalancing of the American war machine was suggested, such that at least half of the armed forces flying the stars and stripes would be reassigned to the region witnessing China's rise. This chorus of voices, mainly from the Pentagon and affiliated industrial lobbies, but also from that part of the political world that was an integral part of the Blue Team, would serve as a prelude to the new course of US grand strategy, which the subsequent administration would embody after the unsuccessful concerted approach. However, efforts to strengthen ties with a region partially sidelined in the last decade - in this phase through networks of essentially military strategic bilateral relations - and which had seen Chinese status grow exponentially, would inevitably lead to a resurgence of the "Irritable Border Syndrome" of the PRC, as Robert Kaplan defines it¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰⁴ White House Press Office, *NSS*, 2006, p. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Kaplan, *The Geography of Chinese Power*, in, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 89, n°3, 2010.

On the other hand, the policy of engagement also continued, manifesting itself through enhanced multidimensional, if not formal, cooperation at the bilateral level.

Ultimately, the China policy of the Bush administration seems to confirm itself as a combination of integration and balance. It aimed to integrate the PRC into the international political-economic system while simultaneously counterbalancing its rise through the strengthening of regional alliances and the freezing of the status quo for the Taiwan issue. However, contrary to what happened during the Clinton era, the emphasis seemed to have gradually shifted towards balancing or containment.

There is no doubt that the Asia-Pacific region and the Eurasian framework were not only undergoing profound changes compared to the context in which Brzezinski wrote in 1997 but would continue to evolve further in the following years, imposing on the new U.S. administration an increasing focus on the Chinese issue.

2.1.1 Relevance in Contemporary International Relations

The alternative outlined by the realist political universe to the construction of a new international order would have been the inevitable spread of systemic chaos. Already starting in 2008, the American policy of openness towards Iran was followed, in the course of 2009, by the announcement of withdrawal from Iraq to be completed by 2011 and a more gradual withdrawal from Afghanistan. At the same time, the relationship with Moscow was favored, disregarding the rebukes of the Bush administration regarding the conflict between Russia and Georgia that erupted the previous year and effectively pushing NATO partners towards greater proactivity in the Euro-Atlantic and Mediterranean context.

Mindful of the loss of credibility that his predecessors had to face following the non-fulfillment of electoral promises regarding the approach to the PRC, President Obama opted for a softer rhetoric, reminiscent of Nixon's posture rather than the initial one of Clinton and G.W. Bush. According to Obama, it was crucial, if not vital, to include China in talks about "the Iranian and North Korean nuclear programs, the global recession, pressure on Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and climate change"¹⁰⁶. The goal was to avoid tensions that had previously undermined relations with Beijing and the international legitimacy of the USA, making it less easy for Americans to pursue

¹⁰⁶ Bader, *Obama, and China's Rise: an insider's account of America's Asia Strategy*.

their strategic interests. The new administration also seemed convinced that containment alone would not work, as long-standing authoritative voices from both realist and liberal schools had argued. Therefore, the United States would aim, in full continuity with previous administrations, for an approach in constant balance between engagement and hedging, where, however, the former term would be the reference for a foreign policy that was as pragmatic and multilateralist as it was flexible and demilitarized, a distant relative of the ideological freedom agenda pursued by Bush¹⁰⁷. However, America remained a nation at war, anchored to historical values with strong liberal-democratic tones and aimed at preserving its role as a global superpower; factors that, together with the progressive change in global power dynamics, imposed on the new President the need to reassure other actors in the system of their resolve and staunch determination to ensure international balances and therefore full usability of the global commons. Therefore, elements of hedging would not be lacking, as confirmed by the friendship agreement with ASEAN in 2009, as well as by the repeated trips of Secretary Clinton before and Obama afterward to the Asia-Pacific region¹⁰⁸. The top echelons of the American establishment, besides visiting Beijing, would review the Asian capitals that are the cornerstone of the US alliance system in the region, strengthening old alliances and forging new ones. From longstanding partners in the northeastern quadrant like Seoul and Tokyo, to the southeastern region, primarily Indonesia, Vietnam, and India, not to forget Australia and the Philippines.

Obama, therefore, had to find a compromise with China, if only for Mutual Assured Economic Destruction; on the other hand, he also had to push it to take on the responsibilities and costs arising from its international status, de facto forcing it to play by its rules. In this regard, and unlike what happened with the last two presidents, Obama began his presidential venture with a rather conciliatory attitude towards the PRC.

Already in April 2008, as the cornerstone of U.S. security presence in the region and a vital contributor to regional stability, he was concerned with maintaining the continuation of the U.S. protective umbrella to regional allies including Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰⁷ Castellaneta, *Obama e l'ombra cinese*, Guida.

¹⁰⁸ Lucio, R., Candidato, C., Di, L., Correlatore, M. and Marchetti, R. (2014). *FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE POLITICHE CORSO DI LAUREA IN RELAZIONI INTERNAZIONALI Tesi di Laurea in Studi Strategici Cina e Stati Uniti: la contesa del XXI secolo*. [online]

¹⁰⁹ Elegant, *Obama and McCain on China*.

The Obama administration, therefore, in continuity with the legacy of the previous one, would seek to maintain the balance of regional power intact, in the face of a deeply changing economic and security scenario and considering the maintaining U.S. interests in the region's stability and prosperity. Therefore, it was considered crucial, for both the United States and the rest of the world to benefit from China's rise¹¹⁰.

Obama wasted no time. As the first president to visit China during his first year in office, he declared during the opening of the first round of the new bilateral consultation mechanism in July that Sino-American relations would, literally, shape the 21st century. He added that China ought to have a bigger role in line with its increased responsibilities¹¹¹. During the November visit, a Joint Communiqué was even signed, the first since the Clinton-Jiang Zemin meeting in 1997, affirming the importance of the American role in ensuring peace and security in the Asia-Pacific and more generally the convergence between the USA and China. However, the Chinese delegation proved inflexible in demanding the inclusion of an expression that is emblematic of the Chinese attitude, ready to show willingness to dialogue as much as it is stubborn in pursuing its national interests¹¹². In the communication, it stood out that one of the fundamental issues for the continuation of the relationship would be respecting each other's core interests. This meant that Chinese cornerstones aimed at safeguarding economic development, national sovereignty, and territorial integrity would not be up for discussion. As one can imagine, in the absence of a clear definition of what the core interests were, the situation of Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, and claims in the South China Sea would leave room for conflicting interpretations, which would not be long in manifesting.

The initial approach of the new U.S. administration was reflected in the cautious diplomatic line of 2009, which saw evident concessions such as the exploitation of every useful opportunity to dialogue directly with leader Hu Jintao in international fora, the upgrading of the S&ED, the G20, and the partial stand-by in the partnership with India that had worried the PRC so much. Also unexpected was the pragmatism shown by Hilary Clinton, as a good Democrat usually unwavering on human rights issues, during her visit to China, which paved the way for her president's visit. The former first lady stressed that although some people think of China as an enemy by definition, in

¹¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹¹ The White House. (n.d.). *Briefing Room*.

¹¹² Ibidem.

actuality, both nations can gain from and contribute to each other's success. The international community considered stronger Sino-American cooperation to be necessary. Therefore, not only was an attempt made to reassure China regarding the strategic hedging that had marked the second Bush administration's China policy, but also the Democratic Party's proclaimed commitment as the ultimate defender of human rights waned, as these were not supposed to interfere with collaboration on global economic crisis, climate change, and especially international security.

Following Trump's victory in 2016, there was open battle among the sharply divided U.S. ruling class and, more importantly, a cleft nation fighting cultural wars. The attempts by Trump's opponents to undermine the president would make the U.S. unpredictable both at home and abroad. If and when the U.S. would become politically unstable, serious trouble would begin. The global system was more shaped by the internal divides within America than by the activities of Russia. These trends seemed to favor China at first. China had now ascended to the summit of the triangle, to apply Kissinger's formula.

In recent days, rather than attempting to overthrow the current global order, Beijing is working to advance within it. It is deliberately steering clear of a confrontation with Washington in favor of moving forward gradually. Above all, it aims to increase military might, acquire diplomatic experience, and broaden its knowledge and comprehension of foreign areas.

China's main ally in Eurasia has been Russia. The two nations have succeeded in establishing a brand-new kind of major power partnership for the last 25 years. China and Russia have a formula for their relationship that states they will never go against one another but also that they are not required to follow one another. The formula mixes flexibility with certainty.

The task Beijing and Moscow now face is to build a regional order based on new principles using the foundation of their bilateral alliance. A single power cannot rule over all of Eurasia. Therefore, a long-lasting order can only be multilateral, with the main powers setting the example but also taking into account the interests of all other nations. A system centered on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's platform might be based on consensus rather than one-country leadership, harmony instead of balance, and variety instead of homogeneity¹¹³.

¹¹³ Trenin, *New Triangular Diplomacy Emerges Amid Changing Global Political Landscape*.

With great accuracy, the United States' then-director of national intelligence, Dan Coats, stated in January 2019 that "China and Russia are more aligned than at any point since the mid-1950s"¹¹⁴. It was acknowledged by Chinese media that ties with Russia were at "their best in history." President's Xi Jinping of China and Vladimir Putin of Russia referred to each other as good friends and agreed to collaborate on projects ranging from trade to aerospace during Putin's April 2019 visit to Beijing. According to Xi, Russia is a key partner in the co-construction of the Belt and Road Initiative, and both nations should uphold multilateralism and enhance international cooperation. Putin praised Xi for creating a significant platform for enhancing global cooperation and he supported the initiative spearheaded by Beijing. Putin added that Russia is open to collaborating with China on significant projects related to energy, connectivity, and other areas, as well as enhancing communication and cooperation¹¹⁵. Following Putin's visit to Beijing, a week of coordinated maneuvers known as "Joint Sea 2019" involved Chinese and Russian ships, submarines, aircraft, and marine elements.

The drills came after some 3,200 Chinese soldiers took part in Russia's biggest-ever war games in September 2018 in Siberia, when about 300,000 Russian soldiers trained amidst escalating tensions with NATO. In June 2019, when in Moscow, Xi stated, that Russia is the country he has visited the most, and President Putin is his best friend and colleague. To outsiders, what is the seeming solidarity worth?¹¹⁶

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the three biggest military powers in the world are still Russia, China, and the United States. China's gross national product has surpassed or equaled that of the United States, despite decades of economic stagnation in Russia. China's growth has been consistent in material terms. However, if Russia and China cooperate, their combined military, geopolitical, scientific, and financial resources could result in powerful weapons that could be used against the U.S. and its allies in Europe and beyond.

China's diplomacy has allowed it to increase its soft power over time. It is by far the biggest trading partner for almost all Asian nations. China started the Belt and Road Initiative (also known as One Belt One Road, or BRI) in 2013 as a massive infrastructure project to improve economic integration and regional connectivity

¹¹⁴ Global Asia. (n.d.). *Triangular Diplomacy in the Age of Putin, Xi, and Trump*. [online]

¹¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

through the construction of roads, buildings, railroads, trade, and investment with trading partners in Europe and Africa in addition to its neighbors. BRI is a massive infrastructure project that would not only facilitate commerce but also lessen the reliance of participating economies on Europe and the U.S. It is funded by the Chinese Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and special funds. China is presenting itself as the head of the new global order and an advocate of globalization, with 140 trading partners in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) from Asia, Europe, Oceania, and Africa¹¹⁷. Aside from the economy, China is strengthening its position internationally by pressuring its partners and supporters in the UN General Assembly and Security Council. This stance is supported by a media strategy aimed at influencing people's perceptions of China and Chinese values globally. With the goal of achieving its enormous potential, China has implemented economic, political, and military reforms that have propelled it to the forefront of both regional and global affairs.

China is attempting to have a significant impact in the Indo-Pacific area by using both its hard and soft power. Since 2013, China's leadership has demonstrated exceptional diplomatic ability to handle relations with its neighbors, including Pakistan, India, Japan, and Russia. Thanks to modernization and gradual reformation, Asians can now compete with the West and even constitute a threat in the political, economic, military, and social domains.

2.2 Assessing the Current Landscape of Triangular Diplomacy

Change is the one constant in the universe. As trends in high and low politics change, the field of international politics is always shifting, presenting a continuous threat to the current global order. Recent occurrences, such the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the 15th BRICS Summit, which took place in Johannesburg, South Africa, from August 22 to 24, 2023, have the capacity to significantly alter world dynamics¹¹⁸. States and regions have seen power shifts throughout history, dividing some and boosting others. Such patterns of devaluing and elevating have an impact on the global power structure in addition to interstate ties. Because of the rise of new power centers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, recent trends have begun to reshape the power structure.

¹¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹¹⁸ Ashraf, *Shifts in Global Power: From West to the Rest*.

The international global order has undergone a process of power dispersion within the international community, thus inaugurating the era of the so-called multipolarity. In reality, this does not involve a simultaneous presence of "poles" as understood in the classical definition by Waltz, that is, countries more populous, extensive, and stable than others, which have accumulated a disproportionate amount of resources and possess much more advanced economic and military capabilities than others¹¹⁹; some scholars propose the model of a "post-American" or "post-Western world" in which nations are no longer passive spectators in the context of the international community but play an active role in shaping its contours and rules. Asian countries are leading this shift in terms of geopolitics¹²⁰.

In the last 4 years, the multipolar discourse has increasingly become a reality on the international stage, as there has been a growing perception across the Global South of a West that controls the entire international system in favor of its own interests, sidelining those of the rest of the world. The management of the global crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic and, subsequently, that of the war in Ukraine and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have only exacerbated this tendency, leading many countries - even those that historically have had excellent relations with the Western world - to harshly criticize the standards and objectives set by the West for the entire international community, demanding loudly equality and respect for mutual interests.

Multipolarity is now a *fait accompli*, at least from the point of view of the positions taken by various countries, which do not necessarily align with one side or the other¹²¹.

Realist academics like Robert Gilpin argued that post-war settlements and the new order are shaped by the growing power and are a dynamic reflection of changing power relations among states, which are characterized by recurring wars and reorganizations¹²². The globe may have entered a new period where two or more powers are ready to challenge the U.S.'s financial and political hegemony, according to recent developments in the international system. But it's expected that U.S. military might will continue to go unchallenged. Nonetheless, the emergence of the emerging powers looks set to bring in a counterbalance¹²³.

¹¹⁹ K.N. Waltz, *The Stability of a Bipolar World*, pp. 881-909.

¹²⁰ Sakwa, *What Role for Russia in a Multipolar World? in Multipolarity after Ukraine: Old Wine in New Bottles?*

¹²¹ Paikin, *After the Ukraine War: Liberal Order Revisited, in Multipolarity after Ukraine: Old Wine in New Bottles?*

¹²² Omeed, *Emerging Multipolarity: Critical Analysis of a Shifting Global Order*.

¹²³ *Ibidem*

Concurrently, there is a widely held belief throughout the world that significant international organizations, including the United Nations (UN), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and many other multinational associations, have had difficulty effectively addressing urgent issues in the contemporary world order. This has led to a worldwide search for a new multipolar order based on a more equal allocation of power across states. The notion of multipolarity posits a world in which numerous centers of power coexist, each with the ability to exert influence on international events. Together with Russia's comeback, China has become a powerful military, economic, and political force that has drastically changed the geopolitical landscape of the world. China's sponsorship of the Iran-Saudi Arabia agreement, in particular, highlights the growing power of China in the Middle East¹²⁴. Concurrently, emerging economies such as Brazil, Turkey, and India have begun to play increasingly significant roles in world politics, indicating a move towards multipolarity. Wide-ranging effects of the Ukrainian crisis include a weakening of the current international order and a heightened competition between the U.S. and China. The international scene becomes even more complicated at the same time as regional forces become more prominent.

China and Russia support a multipolar world, emphasizing mutually beneficial global security over U.S. dominance. Russia has made a commitment to changing the global financial order by attempting to overhaul the Bretton Woods financial system. In contrast, Jo Inge Bekkevold argues that multipolarity is a myth and that the U.S. and China are the only ones with sufficient economic, military, and global clout to be regarded as true poles, with other nations not likely to catch up¹²⁵. This viewpoint is consistent with the Biden administration's (reminiscent of Cold War) efforts to create a "network security architecture" in the Pacific and to strengthen the bonds between European and Asian Allies. In the meantime, a Stimson Center study that questions the aforementioned viewpoints looks at the changing hierarchy and provides guidance to U.S. policymakers on how to deal with the changing international environment. The paper presents the case for adopting multipolarity as a central pillar of U.S. foreign policy, concluding that the U.S. no longer enjoys the same degree of military and economic domination that it did in the early Cold War era and that China currently does not approach the peak power of the Soviet Union.

¹²⁴ Ibidem.

¹²⁵ Ibidem.

Furthermore, the Biden administration's policy of relying on allies and containing China is risky. Coercive actions may erode U.S. economic power, and the U.S. lacks the economic domination necessary to isolate China. In this global system, the United States needs to adopt flexible strategies. The transition to multipolarity is advantageous for both developed and developing countries¹²⁶.

In addition to the distribution of wealth, the emerging multipolar world is being driven by a surge in the demand for identity and sovereignty, especially in the varied Global South. More and more nations in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia are thinking outside of the West for their solutions. These options cover military, scientific, ideological, and economic aspects.

It is crucial to understand that the anticipated downfall of the U.S.-led World Order does not necessitate a complete reconstruction of the entire international order. It is not expected of the emerging powers, either individually or collectively, to take full responsibility for the operation of the international system or to completely deconstruct it.

In a piece published in *Foreign Policy* on October 3, 2019, journalist Melinda Liu hypothesized that Chinese officials had foreseen the three-way geopolitical dynamic between Beijing, Moscow, and Washington by reading China's beloved story, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*¹²⁷.

The epic *Luo Guanzhong*, written in the 14th century, recounts the tale of conflict and treachery between three rival fiefdoms two millennia ago. Following the collapse of the Han dynasty, a dance of alliance, treachery, hostility, and realignment took place between the kingdoms of Shu, Wu, and Wei¹²⁸.

The character traits and conventional military strategies of each monarch are outlined in this story of human ambition and ruthlessness. These strategies are still used in Chinese diplomacy, business talks, and well-known online games. It appears that Xi is constantly thinking of the first words in the revised 1679 edition of the *Romance*: "The Empire, long divided, must unite; long united, must divide"¹²⁹. So, it has always been.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Global Asia. (n.d.). *Triangular Diplomacy in the Age of Putin, Xi, and Trump*.

¹²⁸ Liu, *China-Russia Alliance Was Forged by Washington's Hostility but May Not Last*. [online] *Foreign Policy*.

¹²⁹ Ibidem.

Since they are always nourishing and advancing one another, neither unity nor division is everlasting.

In the near future it is unlikely that China and Russia will work together in any meaningful way against the U.S. and its allies given their unpleasant previous experiences with one another, which are further supported by their uneven material resources and divergent security goals. Nonetheless, as both Beijing and Moscow seek to expand, the U.S. and other Western nations do face grave risks. Xi and Putin both intent on maintaining and even growing their empires against the will of their vulnerable neighbors and subjugated peoples. The persecution of ethnic minorities by Beijing, is a cancer in international relations. However, each nation's outward growth poses the biggest threat to global security. These include Beijing's militarization of several islands and claim to the majority of the South China Sea; the Kremlin's occupation of eastern Ukraine, South Ossetia, Transdniestria, and Abkhazia; and its alleged annexation of Crimea.

The opponents of the United States see the competition as a part of an ongoing, protracted struggle that shares many traits with a conflict. Both acknowledge the dangers associated with going over the line into actual large-scale combat and strive to accomplish their objectives before it is reached. However, neither considers themselves to be in a true, stable peace; rather, they see themselves as engaged in a protracted struggle with the United States. Therefore, China and Russia view current ideas of rivalry or competitiveness as little more than a description of the normal state of international affairs under the watchful eye of the United States. These views have been more prevalent in recent years, which, for example, helped to explain part of the background for Russia's security concerns—which verge on paranoia—and the unfortunate decision to invade Ukraine.

All Chinese officials, academics, and pundits concur that fundamental structural trend—most notably shifts in the balance of power in the world and the changing makeup of China's economy—have made competition with the United States inevitable. Beijing seems to be motivated by the belief that U.S. leadership unfairly favors the West and the United States over the interests of the emerging non-West, imperils Chinese interests, and is becoming less effective. This belief appears to be the driving force behind Beijing's pursuit of regional dominance and global leadership¹³⁰.

¹³⁰ Timothy, Heath, Grossman, and Clark, *China's Quest for Global Primacy: An Analysis of Chinese International and Defense Strategies to Outcompete the United States*, p. 79.

Rugged limitations further shape Russia's perception of its conflict with the United States. Russia cannot aspire to be the world's superpower like China does due to its current circumstances. More moderate goals are required due to Russia's economic and technological limits, population concerns, financial restraints, and other issues. However, Moscow is adamant about asserting its dominance globally to obtain greater control over developments on its periphery and regaining control as the undisputed hegemon on its own periphery. It also wants to be acknowledged as one of the major powers in a more multilateral—or, as Russian documents put it, plurilateral—world. These aims have molded Russian methods and goals in its rivalry with the United States, expanding on the fundamental objectives of regime survival and territorial security. The invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was a violent manifestation of these.

If at all feasible, China aims to accomplish its goals using non-combative means. While acknowledging the inevitable intensification of interstate conflicts, most writings on Chinese strategy and doctrine do not argue that war is inevitable—if China manages its rising power skillfully and, contrary to what some documents and officials claim if the United States appropriately accepts its emerging subordinate position. It still raises the question of what would happen if China's objectives were unachievable short of going to war—that is, if the U.S. would not accept a submissive role or even a developing parity, and if the U.S. and other countries would not concede to China's claimed vital interests on matters like Taiwan. Although China prefers to achieve its objectives peacefully, this does not mean that conflict will never break out. True test of China's risk appetite will come when some of those objectives, most notably control over Taiwan, cannot be achieved peacefully. However, economic, and diplomatic rivalry are at the top of the pyramid, in part because China does appear focused on averting conflict, at least for the time being. Beijing seeks to fortify its strategic position by restructuring the economic landscape in Eurasia, Africa, and the Middle East around trade and investment from China. This mainly economic power will be supported by diplomatic efforts grounded in a deeply hierarchical understanding of international relations, wherein other nations are required to acknowledge their subservient role to China. All of these actions are supported by military might, however the majority of analyses of China's strategy claim that the nation would rather reserve actual aggression for extreme circumstances.

Russia is currently taking a defensive stance against the rivalry, trying to challenge and fragment the American-dominated system while making room for Russian interests

and preferences. In some ways, China's and Russia's rivalry is about who can protect their own regimes and interests in an international system that is frequently unfriendly to them, primarily through gaining more power over international norms and regulations. Beyond that overarching purpose in global politics, Russia's rivalry aims to further its standing as a great power, maintain its dominant position in the post-Soviet Eurasian zone, and strengthen its ties with growing nations in a world increasingly dominated by several powers.

There are no claims that Russia wants to overthrow the United States as the only superpower, nor do Russian strategic documents outline a desire to reconstruct the Soviet Union. Nor are there any references to imperialist goals or doctrinal guidelines endorsing the use of force to subjugate neighboring states. Exporting Russia's domestic model to other governments is not mentioned in Russia's stated strategy today, which is a considerable divergence from papers from the Soviet era. Indeed, from their own perspective at least, Russian documents and analysts frequently presented an idealized, rhetorical picture of what a more multipolar world might entail. According to Russian declared strategy, a future polycentric world ruled by major powers and marked by predictability, collaboration, and stability is envisaged. Great powers will be the centers of gravity in their respective regions under this new, more equitable, and mutually beneficial system. Red lines will be clearly defined and understood, problems will be negotiated collectively when necessary, and there won't be any unilateral actions taken by one great power to advance its national security at the expense of another¹³¹.

Therefore, China is approaching the contemporary rivalry or struggle from the perspective of a nation that views itself as one of the few remaining major powers in the world, or as the legitimate leader of the world. As many Chinese officials and scholars believe that Chinese society and culture are inherently superior, China is determined to reclaim a voice and role in the international system that is commensurate with its level of power. As a result, China will engage in a continuing struggle with the United States for regional and global supremacy—a struggle that is inherent in the way that international politics are now organized. However, China's aspirations in this

¹³¹ Charap, Massicot, Priebe, Demus, Reach, Stalczyński, Han, and Davis, *Russian Grand Strategy: Rhetoric and Reality*.

struggle are limited, and as of right now, China does not reach the degree of militaristic revisionism as certain big nations of the 20th century.

Thus, there are numerous parallels between Russian and Chinese approaches to the rivalry with the United States, as well as some distinctions. Evidently, Russia's aspirations for the world are relatively modest given its potential power. However, it seems to be much more eager to take chances and to confront accepted standards head-on these days. This could stem in part from Russia's level of dissatisfaction with the state of the world and its dissatisfaction with the rise to power it has experienced since the end of the Cold War. The level of pride and resentment among competitors determines the level of competitive intensity, and Russia has undoubtedly turned into a deeply resentful nation. Russia's startling use of force in Ukraine raises the prospect that its fundamental viewpoint on the rivalry and possibly its goals have shifted in more drastic ways; for example, that it is evolving into a more traditional militaristic revisionist. Though it's too soon to know, that is most definitely a possibility. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a very violent, high-risk move to further interests that it already had a firm grip on during the competition: control over the security environment in its immediate vicinity. It's possible that the main ideas behind Russia's strategy for handling the rivalry haven't altered. Even if such is the true, there are dangerous risks of escalation in this battle that might lead NATO and the United States into a military confrontation with Russia in ways that are different from the rivalry's current nature and present new threats of a bigger war. Again, these kinds of risks mirror the kinds of threats that frequently surface in military conflicts and other forms of strategic rivalry.

There seem to be two long-standing rivalries between the United States that have a lot of potential for instability. However, the United States has at least two significant competitive advantages in both situations, particularly considering that the competitions are focused on issues related to global order, technology, and the economy. One is its dynamic socioeconomic structure, which leads to notable progress, originality, and inventiveness. The other is the worldwide alliance of friends, allies, and others committed to upholding important international standards and a kind of rule-based governance. China and Russia lack significant allies, whereas the United States is the center of a powerful international alliance. Beijing and Moscow create more resistance the more they try to stop this. This dynamic can serve as the cornerstone for how the U.S. responds to the aspirations of China and Russia.

To say that these rivalries reduce international politics to a tripolar competition would be incorrect. The aims and aspirations of other major players, some of whom have significantly more economic power than Russia, will be crucial in determining how the global environment develops. Just three examples include the European Union, which collectively has a GDP that is significantly higher than China's and more than ten times that of Russia; Japan, which is the second-largest economy in the world (in real terms); and India, which is predicted to be one of the three major global economies by 2050.

Furthermore, this evaluation was completed prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has spurred European states to step up their defense and security efforts and strengthened ties between the U.S. and a wide range of other nations. The competition between the United States and China and Russia is not isolated. They are taking place in the background of a broader global community whose objectives, values, and interests are far more in line with those of the U.S. than those of any of its competitors. This reality should inform U.S. policy and have the potential to significantly influence global political outcomes down the road. The specific ways in which the goals of the three subjects interact with one another throughout time are among the most important open problems. There are arguably fewer unresolvable issues between the United States and China or Russia than there were during the Cold War standoff between the two countries. The majority of the more heated disputes originate from regions close to China or Russia, where the U.S. wants to demonstrate that international norms of behavior take precedence over the self-interested desires of Beijing and Moscow. These areas of disagreement may become more intense or less so if U.S. foreign policy goals change. As a result, there is some ambiguity regarding the rivalries' expected level of intensity as well as the particular points of contention.

For major powers, maintaining the status quo, identifying asymmetric threats, and judging rivalries are the principal lenses through which they view world politics. Disputes are seen as opportunities and tactical challenges to realign the balance of power. The numerous hybrid conflicts and proxy wars that have characterized the past three decades are examples of this viewpoint in action. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022, the worst European military conflict since World War II, exposed the shortcomings of great-power politics in resolving security issues. The magnitude of the operations demanded a prompt and

coordinated reaction from international peace and security guarantors. However, the UN Security Council is immobilized, mostly as a result of Russia's inexhaustible veto¹³². Does this mean that the international security establishment is coming apart? There are several facets to the answer. The crisis in Ukraine serves as a stark reminder of the security apparatus's innate inefficiency, but it also raises the possibility that this was purposeful rather than the result of an unanticipated defect. Because institutionalism in international relations theory is unable to adequately handle the growing global security agenda, it is experiencing a severe crisis. This failure results from institutional inefficiencies as well as their persistent indecision. Simultaneously, the diverse interests of participating states often result in impasses in negotiations, hindering the organization's capacity to respond swiftly to developing circumstances¹³³.

The widely held belief that multilateral institutions are infallible cornerstones in modern international affairs has to be critically reevaluated. This is particularly noticeable when our environment becomes more and more multipolar and less unipolar. Since the U.S., the once-dominant state, is no longer directing world affairs, multilateral institutions must function without the guaranteed support of a single superpower. As such, these organizations' legitimacy and stability now depend on the conditional support of multiple powerful individuals.

In this environment, big powers are more interested in engaging in strategic rivalry and disruptive tactics than they are in promoting cooperative architectures, which consistently sidelines the importance of the security agenda. This emphasizes how important it is to reevaluate goals in order to make sure that issues related to international security aren't always eclipsed by political power struggles.

With the number of global concerns rising worldwide—from pandemics to climate change, from glaring economic inequality to cyberattacks—it is becoming more and more clear that these transnational problems call for a coordinated, cross-border response. Even though discussions usually focus on the dominance of large powers, it's important to have a sophisticated understanding of the medium powers.

Middle powers play a crucial but often overlooked role in international affairs by contributing diverse viewpoints and approaches beyond simply endorsing or criticizing the status quo. Defined by "middle power diplomacy," they form coalitions, defend normative values, and mediate disputes between major nations. Their unique security

¹³² Global Asia. (n.d.). *Middle Powers and Resilient Multilateralism*.

¹³³ Gruber, *Ruling the world: Power politics and the rise of supranational institutions*.

concerns prioritize protecting their people and ensuring well-being, adding a moral dimension to discussions, and emphasizing cooperation. While they may lack the resources to enact significant reforms, they influence conversations, redefine standards, and shape decision-making in international organizations. Despite ongoing debate about their role, middle powers are characterized by their intent and capacity to collaborate proactively in global governance¹³⁴.

Stronger regional integration and changing power dynamics are causing major changes in the modern fabric of multilateral cooperation. The steady erosion of great-power hegemony, together with their regional alliances and the assertiveness of middle powers in regional administration, serve as examples of this. In contrast to the deeply ingrained ideologies of great powers, medium powers have distinct capabilities and aspirations that articulate this disparity in their approach to global participation. Middle powers typically exhibit a preference for balance and stability, guaranteeing that any disruptions in the global arena are resolved in a methodical manner¹³⁵.

Middle powers have come to rely more and more on their combined strength and close proximity to one another in regional and global politics. Events over the last ten years have reinforced this viewpoint, with at least one regional actor attempting to defuse tensions in almost every international confrontation. A good example of this dynamic is the current Ukrainian situation. With the resolute support of several small- and mid-sized European countries, Ukraine has opposed Russia. With the support of the entire region, Ukraine has been able to transform from a weak and nearly collapsed state to an asymmetric middle power that is now influencing geopolitical debates and decisions.

Ukraine added another layer of complexity to geopolitics, increasing concerns about global security and, as a result, causing middle power diplomacy to shift from focusing mostly on economic issues to prioritizing security issues. This conflict has brought to light the critical need of cooperative diplomatic action to maintain peace and stability in the face of escalating international tensions¹³⁶. Rethinking preconceived notions is necessary for robust multilateralism in the context of middle-power conduct. The lens shifts away from an insular focus on lone players or

¹³⁴ Robertson, *Middle-power definitions: confusion reigns supreme*, Australian Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 71 No. 4 (2017), pp. 355-370.

¹³⁵ Ravenhill, *Cycles of middle power activism: Constraint and choice in Australian and Canadian foreign policies*, Australian Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 52 No. 3 (1998), pp. 309-327.

¹³⁶ Global Asia. (n.d.). *Middle Powers and Resilient Multilateralism*. [online].

the predominance of large powers and instead highlights the platforms and interconnections that shape global dynamics. Resilient multilateralism recognizes the limits of the globalization that followed the Cold War and draws on policy and scholarly legacies to extract four tenets that are derived from historical precedents.

This strategy is a natural development of a more flexible policy landscape. While bilateral interactions with superpowers may limit the scope of communication, advocating for consensus may alter the frames of reference for international relations. This is where middle powers come into play; their widespread presence gives them the ability to shape and affect international norms.

In summary, there has been a shift toward multipolarity in the contemporary global scene, with several power centers fighting for sway. The international system is changing faster than ever before as a result of developing nations' challenges to the status quo in politics and finance. It is crucial to remember that this shift away from the U.S.-dominated world order does not call for a total reconstruction of the international order. Emerging nations have a great opportunity to influence the development of an international system that is more inclusive. This changing geopolitical landscape presents opportunities and challenges for the global community, therefore navigating it requires a balanced and deliberate approach.

2.3 Economic Interdependence and Non-State Actors in Triangular Cooperation

According to the trade-conflict model, a state, referred to as the "actor," is discouraged from starting a conflict with a trading partner, referred to as the "target," out of concern that it will forfeit the welfare benefits that come with trade. An actor will reduce conflict toward the target if they increase trade with a third party that is the target's friend and will increase conflict toward the target if they increase trade with a third party that is the target's rival. Three blocks are created using a sample of thirty countries from the Conflict and Peace Data Bank (COPDAB): a Western bloc, a Middle Eastern bloc, and an Eastern bloc¹³⁷.

International third-party contacts have rarely been covered in the literature on the relationship between trade and conflict, despite current efforts to settle long-

¹³⁷ CHANG, Y.-C. (2008). *Economic Interdependence and Third-Party International Interactions: A 30-Country Third-Party Bloc Case Study*. Japanese Journal of Political Science, 9(01).

standing questions about the impact of foreign trade on military conflicts. Relationships between trade and conflict with third-party relationships are taken into account to examine the influence and function of the third-party blocs on international interactions¹³⁸. Solomon Polachek developed the trade-conflict model in 1978, arguing that increased trade between countries reduces conflict. An actor country seeks to maximize its plausible social welfare function and states that disputes between the actor and the target will be impacted by trade between the actor and a third party, provided that the assumptions are fair. This study basically emphasizes how crucial it is to take into consideration how shifts in international trade or conflicts among nations impact multilateral international relations. This has clear implications for policy. Free trade is generally associated with a decline in conflict and an increase in cooperation. The two-underlying premises of the classical liberal thesis, which holds that trade between nations fosters peace, are that trade between two states raises the financial burden of going to war and that higher trade naturally fosters increased state-to-state communication. Increased communication between states promotes peaceful conflict resolution and lessens the likelihood of misunderstandings¹³⁹.

A third country is impacted by shifts in the international relations between two nations, according to the notion of structural balance in international politics. The postulates of this theory were developed by Heider (1946) and Cartwright and Harary (1956), and they centered on the propensity toward balance in a triadic interaction. An essential component of changing one's attitude is imbalance. Either all nations decide to be friends, or two decide to enjoy each other and detest the third, who reacts badly to both, in order to correct the imbalance. The majority of interim leaders continue to hold onto the long-held conviction that strengthening economic links will strengthen friendships and dispel the possibility of using force, despite democracy being a global trend. commerce will foster peace and expanded global commerce will make the adage "a friend of a friend is a friend" true if trade benefits boost countries' welfare and

¹³⁸ Ibidem.

¹³⁹ Hegre, *Development and the Liberal Peace: What Does it Take to be a Trading State?* Journal of Peace Research, 37(1): pp. 5–30.

significant conflict among countries interrupts trade. Consequently, there will be structural balance in the international system¹⁴⁰.

The two countries that benefited the most from the globalization phase that lasted from about the middle of the 1970s to the global financial crisis of 2008–2009 were probably the United States and China¹⁴¹. However, now, every nation evaluates that the demand for independence is developing due to a confluence of rising internal pressures and rising exterior volatility, which is mostly the outcome of expanding strategic tensions between the two states. The relationship between the United States and China is likely to worsen further as both Beijing and Washington become less optimistic about their economic interdependence. Asia's economic development will be shaped by this decline, but it won't be controlled. Some Policy implications are that it is possible that China and the United States will view their economic connection as a source of vulnerability rather than stability. Nevertheless, the talk of decoupling is currently out of step with reality, and it will probably be much harder for the United States and China to reduce their interdependence than they would like. A key test of Washington's persistence in Asia will be how well the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework strengthens U.S. economic competitiveness¹⁴².

The United States, and its main geopolitical rival, China, were perhaps the two biggest winners from the phase of globalization. During that roughly 35-year span, trade barriers were removed in many developing nations, global supply chains grew, and the ratio of the value of products traded to world output increased. However, a number of factors, including growing domestic economic difficulties, systemic shocks like the coronavirus pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and escalating bilateral strategic tensions have forced each nation to concentrate more on bolstering its internal economic resilience. Even if these two nations are hardly retreating from globalization, they are becoming more and more aware of the connection between geopolitical unrest and macroeconomic volatility. Asia, where their strategic rivalry is most evident, will be most affected by the changes in their individual dispositions and the altering strategic balance between them¹⁴³.

¹⁴⁰ Chang, *Economic Interdependence and Third-Party International Interactions: A 30-Country Third-Party Bloc Case Study*. Japanese Journal of Political Science.

¹⁴¹ Hinrich Foundation. (n.d.). *US-China Tensions Fray Globalization | White paper*. [online].

¹⁴² The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR). (n.d.). *The Evolving Geopolitics of Economic Interdependence between the United States and China: Reflections on a Deteriorating Great-Power Relationship*.

¹⁴³ Hinrich Foundation. (n.d.). *US-China Tensions Fray Globalization | White paper*. [online].

Though, at the time, the United States had little reason to believe that China would become a formidable challenger, let alone that it would do so very quickly. Kristof's assessment turned out to be remarkably prescient. The fall of the Soviet Union appeared to support the widely held belief in the West that authoritarian governments, like China's, could only withstand so much before collapsing under the (seeming) tide of history. The U.S. thought that by bringing China closer to the global economy, it would gradually liberalize politically and lessen whatever hopes it may have had for changing the postwar order¹⁴⁴.

Even though it would be hard to recall today, it appeared as though China and the United States were ready to slow down the decline of their relationship—at least in the economic sphere—at the beginning of 2020. Unfortunately, the epidemic has actually contributed to the worst state of ties between the United States and China since normalization, rather than prompting emergency bilateral coordination. Furthermore, it has shown China's resilience: out of all the major economies, China's was the only one to grow in 2020, and according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), China grew at the second-highest rate in 2021 (8.1 percent), only behind India's 8.9 percent ¹⁴⁵. Together, the United States and China accounted for 41.9 of the global gross domestic products in 2020¹⁴⁶.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is likely to emphasize the importance of the U.S. and China's strategic rivalry to the development of the global order. The Trump administration came to the conclusion that the United States needs to prioritize great-power competition with China and Russia in its seminal 2017 National Security Strategy and 2018 National Defense Strategy ¹⁴⁷. This conclusion has garnered significant bipartisan momentum in the intervening years. Although the timing and nature of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine are unknown, it is almost a given that the former will be in a worse diplomatic, military, and economic position than it was prior to the conflict¹⁴⁸.

¹⁴⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁵ IMF (2022). *World Economic Outlook, April 2022: War Sets Back the Global Recovery*. [online] IMF.

¹⁴⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁷ The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR). (n.d.). *The Evolving Geopolitics of Economic Interdependence between the United States and China: Reflections on a Deteriorating Great-Power Relationship*.

¹⁴⁸ Reuters Editorial (2019). *Business & Financial News, U.S & International Breaking News* | Reuters. [online].

While Trump's trade advisor, Peter Navarro, contended that "President Trump built the most powerful and beautiful economy in the world in three years", the president himself declared that "China will do anything they can to have me lose this [re-election] race". Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi responded, saying the US was spreading "conspiracies and lies" about the origins of the coronavirus and urged it to "stop wasting time and stop wasting precious lives". Zhao Lijian, a spokesman for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, questioned, "What's behind the closure of the biolab at Fort Detrick? Suggesting that the United States is where the coronavirus first appeared. See Steve Holland, "Exclusive: Trump Says China Wants Him to Lose His Reelection Bid"¹⁴⁹.

Given that advanced industrial democracies, particularly in the West, are moving quickly to reduce their economic interactions with Russia, and that any sanctions relief is likely to be halting and protracted so long as President Vladimir Putin is in office, it seems even more certain that Moscow will be even more subservient to Beijing. Furthermore, Russia after the war is likely to be more resentful and belligerent after realizing that the best way to make up for its losses in Ukraine is to cooperate more willingly with China, the main strategic rival of the United States. Russia will still pose unique challenges to U.S. national interests, but in part because China has publicly refrained from denouncing Russian aggression in favor of blaming the West for not being sufficiently accommodating of Russia's proposals for Eastern Europe's security architecture, the United States is increasingly likely to perceive a Russia-augmented China challenge rather than distinct challenges from Beijing and Moscow.

In summary, the impact of the pandemic and Russia's actions on the international system has been profound, raising fundamental questions about the structure of the global economy and the durability of great-power peace. However, their influence on the global strategic balance has been negligible. If anything, compared to the beginning of this decade, the strategic rivalry between the U.S. and China is at the core of that balance. The actions made by these two superpowers have had and will continue to have a significant influence on the world economy.

Where are we heading? Neither nation seems to think that the time has come to reverse its economic trajectory. Politicians in the United States will have limited opportunity to promote the creation of new trade agreements or the ratification of current ones. Furthermore, the debate over eliminating tariffs is at least as much

¹⁴⁹ Ibidem.

political as it is economic, even though mounting evidence shows that the Trump administration's tariffs have hurt American consumers without forcing China to alter the aspects of its economy that the U.S. finds most troubling¹⁵⁰. The U.S. is unlikely to significantly reduce tariffs without a concession from China that Washington considers to be proportionate. Furthermore, current Chinese domestic politics do not support a recalibration. About three months after Trump declared his intention to launch a tariff campaign, in May 2018, Xi was already framing technological self-reliance in existential terms, calling it “the foundation for the Chinese nation to strive and stand on its own among the nations of the world”¹⁵¹. Specifically, Washington might unintentionally initiate a chaotic, uncontrollable decoupling that it cannot anticipate or manage.

In his article "China Bought None of the Extra \$200 Billion of U.S. Treasury," economist Chad P. Bown cites multiple research that arrive at this conclusion. China bought none more than \$200 billion in U.S. goods, according to a March 8, 2022, article published in the Peterson Institute for International Economics blog¹⁵².

The pandemic and the Western reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine have further strengthened the conviction¹⁵³ that one should exercise caution, though, in presuming that their current orientations will prove unchangeable.

Washington may reconsider its current reluctance to forge new trade agreements if it comes to believe that the United States will prove incapable of holding its own economic against China without a reinvigorated trade agenda, given the country's broad, bipartisan focus on strategic competition with China. Conversely, Beijing might become less fixated with dual circulation if it starts to feel that it won't be able to withstand consistent economic pressure from a group of developed industrial democracies. Asia's Economic Evolution: Aside from such potential shifts, the region's economy will be shaped by at least three variables. The first is how China's economy is doing. China could become "a massive economic bloc unto itself" if it can maintain growth of 4 to 5 percent through 2050, according to a March report from the Lowy Institute. The global economic landscape would be more complex if China could only

¹⁵⁰ PIIE. (2022). *China bought none of the extra \$200 billions of US exports in Trump's trade deal*. [online].

¹⁵¹ Bateman, *U.S.-China Technological 'Decoupling': A Strategy and Policy Framework*. [online]

¹⁵² The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR). (n.d.). *The Evolving Geopolitics of Economic Interdependence between the United States and China: Reflections on a Deteriorating Great-Power Relationship*. [online].

¹⁵³ Zongyuan, *China Is Hardening Itself for Economic War*.

achieve an average growth rate of 2 to 3 percent, but it would still most likely overtake all other economies in terms of U.S. dollars.

On the basis of its economic size alone, however, its advantage over the United States would be negligible and insufficient to provide any meaningful overall competitive advantage. Furthermore, China would not have the economic strength necessary to compete with the major Western economies collectively, for instance in terms of its capacity to invest in research and innovation, military spending, or funding infrastructure projects abroad¹⁵⁴.

Among other things, Asian policy has the potential to damage the world economy. This statement also emphasizes how important economics is to the strategic rivalry between China and the United States: no matter how much the U.S. advances in fortifying its diplomatic and military hegemony in the region, allies and partners will doubt its ability to remain relevant if it is unable to sustainably influence the course of Asia's economic development. When putting the IPEF into practice, the U.S. will face at least three obstacles. The U.S. must first persuade its Asian allies and partners that it can compete economically in the region even if it is not a party to important trade agreements like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)¹⁵⁵. Japan and Singapore, for example, had pushed for U.S. membership in the CPTPP; nevertheless, domestic politics limited the Biden administration's options. Some commentators doubt how much the IPEF will improve U.S. economic competitiveness because it does not lower tariffs or include mechanisms to improve participants' access to the U.S. market. Secondly, Washington needs to reassure ASEAN members that, even with the Quad's increasing strategic significance, the U.S. will continue to collaborate closely and regularly with them to influence the region's economic development. As Australia, India, and Japan join forces with the U.S. to counter China's influence in the area, ASEAN nations are generally more willing to play it safe when interacting with the U.S. and China. The Quad's and ASEAN's increasingly different visions of Asian order may make it more difficult for the U.S. to influence China's external environment. Third, the U.S. needs to present an approach to economic cooperation that is seen as more about advancing its own policies than opposing China's. Lee Hsien Loong, the prime minister of Singapore, has so urged Washington to change

¹⁵⁴ Rajah and Leng, *Revising Down the Rise of China*.

¹⁵⁵ Maizland, *Why China-Taiwan Relations Are so Tense*.

the IPEF's language from one that is "everyone but China" to one that is inclusive. He warns that it is "not just unrealistic, it is wrong" to urge China's neighbors to avoid Chinese engagement¹⁵⁶.

Some analysts contend that the U.S. can do nothing to dispel the notion that its actions are intended to be antagonistic to China.

The changing geopolitics of economic interconnectedness in China is notable by virtue of its absence, even when it purposefully avoids bringing up Beijing in its public pronouncements¹⁵⁷. These are tremendous obstacles, but it would be a mistake to underestimate the IPEF's potential. The thirteen participating nations make up about 40 percent of the global gross product, and seven of them, remarkably, are members of ASEAN, an alliance that is cautious about becoming entangled in the increasingly systemic competition between the U.S. and China. These nations are Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The IPEF's "à la carte" structure, which allows member nations to join any combination of its four pillars (clean economy, connected economy, fair economy, and resilient economy), increases the chance that the framework will spawn an increasingly dense latticework of cooperative, issue-based coalitions. Lastly, because the IPEF is a framework rather than an agreement, it will be better shielded from the domestic politics that eventually made American participation in the TPP untenable. Upon the United States' withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai noted that the agreement "ultimately was something that was quite fragile and that the United States was not able to deliver on, and that informs very much our thinking"¹⁵⁸. If the U.S. can continue to assign top strategic priority to Asia and the IPEF steadily increases U.S. economic competitiveness in the region, then Washington will have at least partially assuaged concerns about its commitment to and resilience in the region.

However, after last September's Quad Leaders' Summit in Washington, D.C., senior China expert Carla Freeman of the United States Institute of Peace observed that "although the Quad's joint statement does not mention China, the initiatives and commitments it presents...make clear that the Quad intends to pursue a multifaceted

¹⁵⁶ Siow, *Singapore's Lee Cautions U.S. Against 'Everyone but China' Approach in Asia Engagement, says 'More Pleased' If Hong Kong Expats Stayed Put*, South China Morning Post.

¹⁵⁷ "What the Quad Leaders' Summit Means for the Indo-Pacific amid Rising Tensions with China," *United States Institute of Peace*; "The Needle Biden Must Thread: How to Compete in Asia Without a New Trade Deal," *Barron's*.

¹⁵⁸ JSullivan, Raimondo, and Tai, *On-the-Record Press Call on the Launch of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework*, White House.

agenda in the Indo-Pacific and beyond that competes with the economic, diplomatic, and hard security capabilities wielded by Beijing¹⁵⁹. In addition, prior to the announcement of the IPEF, Wendy Cutler, vice president of the Asia Society Policy Institute, clarified that the initiative would be evaluated in light of China's recent decision to join the CPTPP, which is a genuine and significant move that offers members concrete advantages in the form of enhanced market access. This statement can be found in her article, "The Needle Biden Must Thread: How to Compete in Asia Without a New Trade Deal". The press call was conducted by Jake Sullivan, Gina Raimondo, and Katherine Tai.

In light of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action's decline, Asia strategy must also take into account the potential for another Middle East destabilization due to a military confrontation between Iran and Israel. The administration also faces the perhaps more difficult problem of Asian partners and friends no longer being able to rely on a foundation of continuity in U.S. foreign policy. Despite government assurances to the contrary, it seems inevitable that Trump or a candidate aligned with his views will be elected in 2024 and usher in an "America first" transnationalism that severely damaged American influence in Asia under the Trump administration.

Therefore, giving the IPEF—and any other regional geoeconomics programs that Biden initiates while in office—enough “stickiness” to make them difficult to undo will be one of the administration’s top priorities. The calculation of China's neighbors is, of course, the third factor that will determine the trajectory of Asia's economic evolution. Asia is deeply concerned about the growing strategic rivalry between the U.S. and China.

Should the worst come to pass—a U.S.-China war over Taiwan that might involve Australia and Japan—it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for China's neighbors to remain neutral. However, it's unclear how much the supposed choice actually applies at least for the time being. Consider trade: seven nations that are members of both the CPTPP and the RCEP have joined the framework, while eleven members of the RCEP, China's favored trade pact, have joined the IPEF. For example, China's neighbors can secure infrastructure through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or the recently formed Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, which is led by the G-7. In addition to the fact that China's neighbors may and will blend Chinese

¹⁵⁹ United States Institute of Peace. (n.d.). *What the Quad Leaders' Summit Means for the Indo-Pacific Amid Rising Tensions with China*. [online].

and American products, they have significantly influenced the shape of Asia's economic order outside of the G-2 window that is all too often used by observers to assess it. For instance, despite the fact that the RCEP is sometimes described as "a Chinese trade agreement," it was actually born at the ASEAN Leaders' Summit in November 2011. Following the United States' withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), Japan brought the remaining nations together and successfully pushed the CPTPP to its conclusion.

India and Australia signed a trade and economic cooperation deal in April, and by the end of this year, they hope to finalize a full agreement on economic cooperation. Beginning in May, India and the United Arab Emirates entered into a comprehensive economic partnership pact. Furthermore, free trade agreements (FTAs) are being negotiated by New Delhi with the United Kingdom, Canada, the European Union, Israel, and Taiwan.

In January, Singapore inked a free trade agreement (FTA) with the Pacific Alliance, which includes Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru. In other words, neither Beijing nor Washington will be able to control how Asia develops. However, "economic integration is making Asia more 'Asian' and less 'Pacific' without it becoming the Sinocentric region that Washington fears." As former State Department official Evan Feigenbaum puts it, "China bulks larger as a trader, builder, and lender in much of Asia"¹⁶⁰. Few of China's neighbors seem to be preparing for a scenario in which the United States or China manages to relegate the other to a marginal role in Asia. Beijing currently plays a greater economic influence there than Washington does. Beijing, however, faces increasing military, diplomatic, and technological cooperation amongst the United States, Australia, India, Japan, and South Korea—five of the strongest democracies in the world. China's neighbors must continue to communicate with both the United States and China if it is acknowledged that they will both remain significant Asian powers. Though the strategic rivalry between the U.S. and China is becoming fiercer, those neighbors shouldn't lose hope because both countries will need to actively pursue them in order to maintain long-lasting influence in the most important theater in the world.

Eventually we can conclude that, there have been significant shifts in the dynamics of power in the twenty-first century. Globally, economic power has surpassed more conventional forms of power like military might and political clout to become the

¹⁶⁰ Feigenbaum, *Meeting the Challenge in Asia*, pp. 27 and 29.

most significant kind of power. This change is explained by the concentration of money among the richest people, who have a significant amount of power over other countries and global issues. Power has been distributed more fairly as a result of globalization, which has given poor nations more economic clout despite obstacles including unstable economies and labor abuse. Global political landscapes have changed due to the development of nationalism and populism, which is driven by worries about sovereignty in the face of globalization. Realpolitik and liberal internationalism are two different geopolitical philosophies, with China and the U.S. playing major roles. Power dynamics have been completely transformed by technology, which now provides both empowerment and monitoring capabilities. Companies have a lot of power and can change social norms and policy. Social media affects power dynamics in society by introducing issues like addiction and cyberbullying, even while it is good for connectivity. In conclusion, the complex interplay of economic, political, technological, and social variables that shape power in the twenty-first century necessitates a comprehensive knowledge in order to properly manage its ramifications¹⁶¹.

¹⁶¹ Omeed, *Emerging Multipolarity: Critical Analysis of a Shifting Global Order*.

CHAPTER 3

Lessons Learned and Future Prospects

3.1 Is China using triangular diplomacy today?

As the United States has escalated pressure on each of its perceived strategic competitors, China and Russia have been working closely together to offset U.S. dominance in multilateral forums, rebuke the U.S.-led international system, and push up bilateral cooperation across several domains. In fact, Russian President Vladimir Putin said during his visit to Russia that relations with Yang Jiechi, China's top diplomat, were at their "best in history".¹⁶² Scholars and decision-makers have taken note of this tendency, particularly in Washington.

Throughout the Trump and Biden administrations, American officials have issued numerous warnings about closer ties between China and Russia. In its Global Trends 2040 assessment, the U.S. intelligence community most recently concluded that China and Russia will probably continue to align themselves in the future¹⁶³.

But how much aligned? That being said, China and Russia's cooperation is more than just a short-lived marriage of convenience, full of unresolved mistrust that might blow apart at any time. The 1997 Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Establishment of a New International Order and the 2001 Treaty of Good Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation both set forth a clear strategic goal for China and Russia's comprehensive strategic partnership. This partnership is built on a long-standing framework of cooperation¹⁶⁴. As long as they are in opposition to the West and the United States, both countries will likely have enough incentive to set aside their disagreements and cooperate to build a more beneficial international order. Nevertheless, this partnership comes with a number of limitations. Despite their mutual fundamental distaste for the international system dominated by the West and American imperialism, China and Russia do not share balanced interests for natural and durable

¹⁶² thediplomat.com. (n.d.). *The Modern China-Russia-US Triangle*. [online].

¹⁶³ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

collaboration. This is particularly true as the distinctions between Russia's low economic complexity and reliance on natural resources and China's varied and sophisticated economy become more pronounced. The bulk of Russia and China's shared economic interests are in the energy sector because of China's growing energy consumption and desire to diversify its energy sources in response to a protracted trade conflict with the United States, as well as Russia's need for a stable market to fend off Western sanctions.

Consequently, it makes sense to draw the conclusion that even with their strong and long-standing connection, China and Russia's level of alignment still heavily rely on U.S. policy. In fact, the Chinese state-owned newspaper Global Times went so far as to associate the oppression of China and Russia by the United States and its primary allies with the strengthening of China-Russian ties in a recent editorial. What happens, though, when this kind of censorship is lifted?¹⁶⁵

Here, we are witnessing the development of a fascinating triangle dynamic. China and the United States are courting Russia even as their competitive arc is nearly guaranteed. China is in a much better position to come together with Russia as long as the U.S. continues to rally its friends and supporters behind a norm-based international order while painting Russia and China as the "bad guys." However, Washington still has some influence over Russia, mostly over friends in Europe, which is one of Russia's most significant foreign policy theatres, if not the most significant. Put another way, rather than being "two against one," the situation is more like "one against one (the United States versus China) plus one (Russia)." Comparing modern alignments to the concrete alliances of the Cold War, the latter offer significantly less flexibility¹⁶⁶. Russia is able to select its moments and engage with the United States and China simultaneously, unlike China, which was compelled to back one side of the Cold War at a time.

Given the continued globalization and growing power disparities between the U.S., China, and Russia, this triangle's current configuration should endure for many years to come. The two countries that will never change are the United States and China, who have a long-running geopolitical competition and are more powerful overall. Instead of competing with the other two, Russia, on the other hand, will assume the position of the variable, hoping to exploit its leverage and shift the scales in its favor.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

To keep the Russian factor from tipping the triangle's overall power balance and causing global disruption, the U.S. will continue to work to normalize relations with Russia while focusing its efforts on competing with China. Though it appears unlikely that there will be a modern-day "Biden to Moscow" moment, the Biden-Putin summit in Europe offered Washington an opportunity to clarify the terms of their cooperation with Russia without appearing to go off course or alienate their European friends.

Similar to this, China will keep up its emphasis on competing with the United States while expanding its cooperation with Russia. It will do this by using the leaders' ostensibly cordial relationship to forge new bilateral interest alignments and coordinate multilateral efforts to counter the United States. China will even provide Russia with enticing economic incentives in an attempt to draw Russia closer to its orbit. Conversely, Beijing is less inclined to seek conflict and more willing to work with Washington on international concerns such as nuclear non-proliferation, COVID-19, and climate change

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Despite Russia's faltering economy, it is crucial to maintain it in the triangle or at the table. In order to exert pressure on Beijing and Washington to reach a settlement, this means maintaining its erratic position in triangle relations. However, Russia's innate sense of nationalistic pride and severe lack of strategic confidence in the other two nations will continue to restrict the scope of future cooperation, especially in areas that Russia is thought to control, like Central Asia or Eastern Europe.

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022 is just the most recent in a string of incidents that have rocked the international community and prompted important debates about the nature and frequency of military conflicts between states, the future of globalization and technological advancement, and the usefulness of long-standing multilateral institutions. These recent shocks have affected the U.S.-China relationship, which is perhaps the most important bilateral partnership in the world, but it has also contributed significantly to the uncertainty surrounding the global order.

The ultimate yardstick for the achievement of the Chinese Dream is the centennial of the People's Republic of China's founding in 2049. By then, the party leadership predicted, China would have fully developed into a contemporary communist superpower, surpassing the United States in every aspect, and changing international relations to suit its own objectives¹⁶⁸. The global China 2049 initiative was

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ ODI. *Global China 2049 Initiative*.

unveiled at the 19th central committee of the Chinese Communist Party's sixth plenum. For Xi Jinping, this resolution means a lot since it implies, he is the one who will steer China in the right direction.

The reunification of Taiwan with the people's Republic¹⁶⁹ is one of the objectives set forth in this plan, which aims to be accomplished in the next 100 years, particularly by 2049.

The year 2035 marks the halfway point of this ambitious strategy. Given the situation, it is likely that Xi Jinping plans to bring the CCP much closer to unification by the time of his term's conclusion in 2032. He will likely continue to serve as the party's president and general secretary for a further ten years. This will probably result in three fronts of action in terms of actual policy¹⁷⁰.

Enhancing its military power in the area is the first and most evident step toward China's reunification. The PLO already possesses missiles capable of striking targets in the West. It appears that more effort needs to be done to procure landing ships for an east coast assault and to establish the capacity to control the surrounding waters and airways¹⁷¹.

It is unlikely that Taiwan would experience a full-scale military invasion anytime soon, no matter how powerful China becomes. Beijing's goal at the moment is simply to demonstrate its strength to the Taiwanese people through drills and movements. This is the initial front in terms of strategy¹⁷². Second, China is going to step up its psychological warfare, unleashing a near-constant torrent of misinformation with the goal of destroying Taiwan's democracy, causing turmoil in Taiwanese society, and harming the standing of the Tsai administration¹⁷³.

Beijing has always recognized the value of utilizing information to influence both domestic and global audiences, viewing the information sphere as being on par with any potential conventional military power. The People's Republic of China employs cyberspace and disinformation campaigns in accordance with its military and political ideologies to accomplish results that are beneficial to its long-term strategic goals. Information warfare is actually under the jurisdiction of China's Strategic Support

¹⁶⁹ Sui, *Will China Try to Take Taiwan in Xi's Third Term?*

¹⁷⁰ Dong, China | *Understanding the 14th Five-Year Plan and the 2035 long-term development target*. BBVA Research.

¹⁷¹ *La riscoperta del futuro*. Limes (2021).

¹⁷² BBC (2022). *Taiwan: China attack not imminent, but US watching closely, says Gen Milley*.

¹⁷³ Nemoto, and Ryugen, *China intensifies disinformation, cyberattacks in Taiwan: report*.

Force Network Systems Department, which is also in charge of electronic, psychological, and cyberwarfare. For example, on August 4, 2022, a few months before Nancy Pelosi became office, an ongoing information operations campaign was uncovered. The sponsored content attempts to enhance China's standing internationally while openly criticizing the United States and its friends. In addition to supporting pro-government positions on Xinjiang and Hong Kong, the initiative aims to discredit anyone who express views that are critical of Beijing. Drills including missiles and cyberattacks provide insight into what China might do in an invasion. In the event of a military invasion, Beijing will first launch a devastating cyberattack on Taiwan's essential infrastructure, including its electrical grid. Chen Yi-fan, an assistant professor in the Department of Diplomacy and International Relations at Tamkang University, believes that cyberattacks have the ability to destabilize Taiwan and weaken its defences, hence lowering the cost of Beijing's invasion. There would be casualties from a direct military invasion as too, and US soldiers would have to be called into action to defend Taiwan¹⁷⁴.

Economic hostility and harassment constitute the third front. China has been imposing economic penalties on Taiwan for a considerable amount of time, which include fines on Taiwanese enterprises and subsequent prohibitions on particular items. Beijing has refrained from limiting imports of processors and semiconductors, which are crucial to the Chinese industry, but has so far only prohibited the importation of non-essential agricultural products¹⁷⁵. The goal of all of these initiatives is to convince the people of Taiwan that the only way to move forward is to unite with mainland China and that staying in the status quo—let alone pursuing independence—is not sustainable¹⁷⁶. On all three fronts, the Xi Jinping administration has stepped up its efforts and tightened the screws. The crucial question is what Beijing will do when it sees that their policy is not working. It will most likely reply by stepping up its military action.

¹⁷⁴ Scognamiglio, B., Patrignani and Gilli, A. (n.d.). Chair of Geopolitical Scenarios and Political Risk *the Ukraine war: from the special operation to the risk of a 'great war'. Can the outcome of the conflict affect China-Taiwan relations?* [online].

¹⁷⁵ The National Bureau of Asian Research (2022), *China's Sanctions Strategy and Its Implications*.

¹⁷⁶ La riscoperta del futuro, *Limes* (2021).

Regretfully, this raises the possibility of mishaps and impromptu arguments that may quickly escalate¹⁷⁷.

During these chaotic months in Europe, it has been difficult to avoid drawing parallels between Taiwan and Ukraine, as both appear to be hubs of an international order moving away from the American unipolar period. Taiwan rejects a reunion with China¹⁷⁸, just as Ukraine refuses to be reintegrated into the Russian world, preferring to look to NATO and the European Union. Thus, Taiwan and Ukraine become the new geopolitical fronts in this worldwide conflict between autocracies and democracies. Or, to put it another way, as the sites of a conflict between an anti-imperialist movement seeking to establish a multipolar and democratic international order and a hegemonic, globalist, and imperialist West¹⁷⁹.

U.S. President Joe Biden declared that his country was ready to use force to protect Taiwan in the event of a potential Chinese invasion¹⁸⁰. The U.S. does not legally promise defence to the Taiwanese government, even though Biden's statement validates what observers have long suspected—that the U.S. would be more likely to dedicate military resources to Taiwan's defence than to Ukraine's. It essentially implies that they would be ready to fight China to protect Taiwan.¹⁸¹ There is disagreement among analysts over the likelihood of this happening and whether the U.S. will be willing to use force against China should it invade Taiwan. However, the idea is still purely theoretical because no one believes that China will invade Taiwan anytime soon and there are currently no convincing indications that it will.¹⁸² However, as the Economist reported a year ago, Taiwan is the most hazardous place on earth¹⁸³, or one of the; the presumption is that Taiwan, an island off the coast of China home to 23 million people, will be the site of a major power conflict should one arise.

For a variety of reasons, the U.S. is prepared to risk a confrontation with China in order to protect Taiwan. The bulk are economic, historical, geopolitical, and military in nature. For instance, if China were to absorb Taiwan, its military might throughout the Pacific Ocean would increase dramatically. It would encompass the 22nd largest

¹⁷⁷ Devine, *Strategic Ambiguity Isn't Working to Deter China on Taiwan – It Will Invade Anyway. It's Time to Commit*, Just Security.

¹⁷⁸ Tocci, *Taiwan has learned a lot from the war in Ukraine — it's time Europe caught up*. POLITICO.

¹⁷⁹ Colby, *Why Protecting Taiwan Really Matters to the U.S.?* Time.

¹⁸⁰ Hale, *Do the US, and China have a 'Taiwan agreement'?* Al Jazeera.

¹⁸¹ Ayson, *what does Biden mean in Taiwan?* The Interpreter.

¹⁸² Dominiguez, *what would be the signs China is preparing to invade Taiwan?* The Japan Times.

¹⁸³ Kwan, *"Most dangerous place on Earth": Taiwan Twitter derides The Economist's latest cover story*, Hong Kong Free Press HKFP.

economy in the world at the time as well as Taiwan's crucial microprocessor sector, which is unique and fundamental to global technological growth.¹⁸⁴ . In addition to the already discussed, there is another ideological justification. It is a fact that Taiwan is the most dangerous country in the world as well as the most democratic and free nation in all of Asia, according to several surveys. This fact is highly valued by American (and to some extent Western) officials and academics who have played a pivotal role in advancing democracy in Taiwan and turning it into a successful model against Chinese state authoritarianism¹⁸⁵. In actuality, Taiwan establishes the bar for rights. It is unquestionably one of Asia's most developed democracies, if not the most sophisticated overall. The political systems of China and Taiwan are two fascinating examples of political transition processes. By beginning from a shared cultural, political, and historical core, Taiwan was able to overcome the authoritarianism of Chiang Kai-shek and his son Chiang Ching-kuo and move toward democracy at the end of the 20th century, while the People's Republic of China continues to uphold its totalitarian, one-party communist regime that was established in 1949.

The conflict over national reunification with China and Taiwan's unstable worldwide reputation are obstacles to the country's democracy's consolidation. The political and strategic tactics taken in the cases of Taiwan and Ukraine are in no way comparable or extrapolable. There is no sign that the People's Republic of China PRC intends to attack Formosa, despite Beijing's rhetoric and ongoing manoeuvres in the Straits. There are a lot of reasons for this¹⁸⁶ . The Communist Party of China's ideological foundation must be taken into consideration first. The Republic of China is not acknowledged as a distinct political entity by the People's Republic of China¹⁸⁷. Instead, it counts the peaceful reunification of China as one of the main goals of the Communist Party of China and sees the island as a province with autonomy under its own government. The one-China policy, which stipulates that a country with institutional links to Beijing cannot have any with Taipei, is one result of the territorial unification principle¹⁸⁸. As a result of this approach,

¹⁸⁴ Gil, *Por qué EE. UU. "está comprometido por ley" a facilitar armas a Taiwán en claro desafío a China*, BBC News Mundo.

¹⁸⁵ Patrick, *Four Contending U.S. Approaches to Multilateralism*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

¹⁸⁶ CNN (2022). *¿Por qué el caso de Taiwán y China no es igual al de Ucrania y Rusia?*.

¹⁸⁷ Patrignani, *The Ukraine war: from the special operation to the risk of a great war: can the outcome of the conflict affect China-Taiwan relations?* [online].

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

Taiwan has gradually been more and more isolated diplomatically. It was expelled from the UN by a vote in 1971, and only 13 states still recognize it, following Nicaragua's decision to cut ties in favour of the People's Republic of China ¹⁸⁹ . To yet, it appears that President Xi Jinping is determined to keep up his image as a peaceful leader by pursuing reunification through commercial and political means rather than using force. This is more than merely a tactic for both internal and international affairs: harmony¹⁹⁰, which is defined as managing variety and conflict, is a fundamental Chinese tradition that must be eschewed in favour of chaos. Xi Jinping's ambitions and objectives are hampered by political instability on the national and international levels. This is also a contributing factor to China's ambivalent attitude toward Russian aggression in Ukraine: on the one hand, it wants to avoid severing ties with Russia by denouncing the invasion, but it also worries about instability in the area, which is further impacted by the New Silk Road projects)¹⁹¹.

However, the relationship with the United States, and specifically the 1979 Taiwan Relations Act, is a factor that Beijing cannot undervalue for its future plans. This is what deters the Chinese Communist Party from attacking Taiwan militarily in addition to the principles of harmony and stability. The Taiwan Relations Act calls for the supply of arms and services required for Taiwan to be able to defend itself, rather than the United States engaging in direct military action in the event of an assault¹⁹². The necessity of maintaining both global and domestic stability, as well as the Taiwan-U.S. relationship, are elements that prevent China from intervening militarily. Nonetheless, both nations are keeping a careful eye on events in Ukraine and are prepared to take advantage of any shifts in the geopolitical landscape in the future ¹⁹³ . Taiwan's economy is among the top twenty in the world. It is more strategically and economically significant than Ukraine because it is regarded as one of the top technological hubs in the world. By total trade volume, it ranks seventh among the United States' commercial partners (Ukraine ranks 67th), and it is also more equipped

¹⁸⁹ Binda, *Perché è improbabile che Taiwan sia il prossimo fronte di un conflitto*, Futuranetwork.eu.

¹⁹⁰ Communication (2016), *What You Need to Know About: Chinese Harmony Theory*.

¹⁹¹ Binda, *Perché è improbabile che Taiwan sia il prossimo fronte di un conflitto*, Futuranetwork.eu.

¹⁹² Scognamiglio, B., Patrignani and Gilli, A. (n.d.). Chair of Geopolitical Scenarios and Political Risk *the Ukraine war: from the special operation to the risk of a 'great war'. Can the outcome of the conflict affect China-Taiwan relations?* [online].

¹⁹³ *Should the United States Pledge to Defend Taiwan?* Foreign Affairs.

In addition, Taiwan, commonly known as Formosa, is only 130 kilometers from mainland China by water, but Ukraine shares a border with Russia that is more than 2,000 kilometers. The final pieces of the Republic of China, over one hundred islands and atolls dispersed throughout the South and East China Seas, are governed by authorities based in Taipei, the capital city¹⁹⁵. Their heavily armed garrisons are outfitted with guided missiles, fast-reaction ships, radar systems, and artillery batteries. They are its primary early warning system and outer wall of defence on their own.¹⁹⁶ These barriers would have to be overcome in order for an invading fleet from the mainland to cross the Formosa Strait, one of the world's busiest and most closely patrolled waterways. Most starting places would require two to three days to complete the voyage, and the ships would be under constant threat from the defenders' guided missiles and submarines as soon as they departed port. Beijing would have to spend months storing troops, vehicles, and supplies (such as food, fuel, ammunition, and medical supplies) along the shores of Zhejiang, Fujian, and Guangdong in the rare event that it decides to launch a conventional invasion. It would be impossible to carry this out covertly, and this would allow time for the deployment of a troop of allies to Taiwan as a deterrent. Similar to this, Taiwan's supplies would first have to come from the sea because it lacks the infrastructure and food stocks necessary to support such a sizable invasion army. One of the main objectives of the attackers would be to neutralize Taiwan's air forces, guided missile systems, and anti-aircraft defences on the several islands within the first two days of operations. It would only be feasible to secure multiple airfields at that point, enabling the air to deliver some of the supplies¹⁹⁷. Beijing has consistently insisted on keeping the military as a last choice, even in the face of the impossibility of such an endeavour¹⁹⁸.

¹⁹⁴ *Foreign Trade* (2022). «Top Trading Partners - February 2022», United States Census Bureau. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/statistics/highlights/toppartners.html>.

¹⁹⁵ *Taiwan geography, maps, climate, environment, and terrain from Taiwan*, Country Reports (s.d.).

¹⁹⁶ Scognamiglio, B., Patrignani and Gilli, A. (n.d.). Chair of Geopolitical Scenarios and Political Risk *the Ukraine war: from the special operation to the risk of a 'great war'. Can the outcome of the conflict affect China-Taiwan relations?* [online].

¹⁹⁷ *Military reserves, civil defense worry Taiwan as China looms*, The Economic Times (2022).

¹⁹⁸ Cheng, *China would only use force as a 'last resort' for Taiwan reunification*, former PLA official says. *CNBC*.

This compels it to consider an attack as a possible option, which begs two fundamental questions: first, what would an invasion look like, and second, would Washington really honour its word if it came to pass?

Undoubtedly, Taipei's primary advantage is its alliance with the United States. By 2021, the U.S. In the event that Taiwan was attacked, President Joe Biden declared that Washington would step in¹⁹⁹. But the specific circumstances under which and how they would act have never been made clear by U.S. administrations before this one. Furthermore, they have not indicated what tactics, other from an invasion or overt act of violence, could be considered an "attack"²⁰⁰. This is where the true threat to the area rests.

This statement, regrettably, is still true in one particular context: tactical engagement. Since the Sino-American Treaty of Mutual Défense expired²⁰¹ and the Taiwan Relations Act was passed, the United States has pursued a policy of "strategic ambiguity" that has irritated Taipei in recent years. Without outside assistance, the island's defense is currently an impossibility²⁰². Despite the Taiwan Armed Forces' exceptional readiness. Washington has consistently given the region the resources it needs to defend itself and is adamant about assisting it in doing so. But it has never included Taiwan into a succinct security structure that would guarantee the government of that nation that U.S. forces will truly assist it²⁰³.

A failure in the campaign to seize Formosa would also not provide Beijing with any honourable way out, in contrast to the mess in Ukraine, which still presents several opportunities for "success" for Russia; this is especially true if targets inside the PRC were hit during hostilities or if the United States were to intervene in the conflict (which is highly likely). As an expensive and very dangerous endeavour with much to lose and little to gain for Beijing, the enterprise of capturing Formosa looks even less conceivable now than it did six years ago²⁰⁴.

Thus, geography—one of Taiwan's many advantages over Ukraine—would exacerbate the situation. Taiwan's capacity to respond may be hampered by a naval

¹⁹⁹ Sanger, *Biden Said the U.S. Would Protect Taiwan. But It's Not That Clear-Cut*, The New York Times.

²⁰⁰ Miles Yu *On Taiwan: America's strategic clarity in defense of Taiwan: The dangerous illusion of strategic ambiguity*, Taipei Times.

²⁰¹ Huang, *The United States and Taiwan's Defense Transformation*, Brookings.

²⁰² García, *Las Fuerzas Armadas de Taiwán y el programa nuclear de Taipéi*, IEEE.

²⁰³ Keegan, *Strengthening Dual Deterrence on Taiwan: The Key to US-China Strategic Stability*, Stimson Center.

²⁰⁴ *Perché una guerra a Taiwan sarebbe molto peggio dell'Ucraina*, Econopoly (2022).

blockade²⁰⁵ that would not result in deaths or damage to infrastructure. Furthermore, Taiwan's present defence strategy is intended to counter a direct attack rather than a protracted encirclement²⁰⁶.

A blockade, on the other hand, would be extremely costly, require a large number of resources, and take months or even years to begin showing results. Taiwan could be supplied with air travel in a number of ways, but the world would take offense²⁰⁷. In the latter case, Ukraine has a number of insightful insights to impart. The international community's sanctions against Russia offer insights into possible reactions from other governments in the event that Beijing engages in bellicose behaviour. In fact, several observers evaluated how the PRC's leaders' decision to wage war could result in sanctions against the nation and damage to its foreign economy as early as the early 2020s²⁰⁸.

Depending on how a possible crisis arises and plays out, Washington's particular response would change. This is due to the U.S.'s several (and conflicting) interests in the area, which range from preventing an assault by the PRC to upholding "fluid" relations with Beijing. One way to prevent tensions from rising is to discourage Taipei from issuing an official proclamation of independence²⁰⁹.

This final point appears to be one of the main pillars that guarantee Taiwan's protection for the foreseeable future, despite the fact that it is unacceptable to a significant portion of the island's population²¹⁰.

However, Washington will eventually need to integrate its defence in a collective regional security arrangement that includes South Korea, Japan, and the AUKUS alliance if such a project is to be maintained²¹¹.

When it comes to expensive gestures meant to allay concerns about America's commitment to territorial defence, the Trump administration has been by far the most extravagant. Sales of military hardware to Taiwan have skyrocketed under his leadership, and in November 2020, a few dozen Marines carried out manoeuvres on the

²⁰⁵ Baron, *Taiwan, and Ukraine: Parallels, Divergences and Potential Lessons*, Global Asia.

²⁰⁶ Sanger, and Qin, *As China Plans Drills Circling Taiwan, U.S. Officials Fear a Squeeze Play*, The New York Times.

²⁰⁷ Condon, *Yellen Says U.S. Would Use Sanctions If China Invaded Taiwan*, Bloomberg.

²⁰⁸ Zelikow, and Blackwill, *The United States, China, and Taiwan: A Strategy to Prevent War*. Council on Foreign Relations.

²⁰⁹ *Avoiding War Over Taiwan*, Asia Society (2022).

²¹⁰ Scognamiglio, B., Patrignani and Gilli, A. (n.d.). Chair of Geopolitical Scenarios and Political Risk *the Ukraine war: from the special operation to the risk of a 'great war'. Can the outcome of the conflict affect China-Taiwan relations?* [online].

²¹¹ Fatuzzo, *Usa-Taiwan: tra ambiguità e chiarezza strategica*. Geopolitica.info.

island²¹². Furthermore, the U.S. took steps to promote Taiwan's increased engagement in the global community with the enactment of the Taipei Act (2020), albeit without altering its status²¹³. Beijing has, of course, denounced the plan, but Washington's principal allies have adopted it. Over the last three years, warships from several countries have been observed navigating the Strait, including France, Germany, the UK, Canada, and Australia. Additionally, they have engaged in cooperative drills with the U.S. and Japanese navies in adjacent waters. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is certain that a peaceful reunification is both possible and imminent, having realized that the costs of a conflict would far outweigh the benefits of annexation.

In a mid-March 2022 interview with CNN, Qin Gang, the PRC ambassador to Washington, stated that the peaceful growth of cross-strait ties is the only thing that can secure Taiwan's future²¹⁴. Taiwan is not Ukraine, and the PRC is not Russia, either²¹⁵. Reckless behaviour is not an option for a nation that aspires to project an image of responsibility in order to take centre stage in the new global order. It would be disastrous to attack and occupy a region where a democratic government has been established and solidified. The country's four decades of efforts to establish itself as a "peaceful power" would be severely damaged, and the infrastructure of the territory it seeks to annex would be damaged, and civilians it seeks to absorb would suffer casualties²¹⁶.

In the Taiwan conflict, the military option is only mentioned as a last resort and only in the case that the authorities in Taipei make a firm decision to fully separate from China. The tactic of portraying such activity as a danger of a conventional invasion is more intended to appease nationalist fears than to address a legitimate strategic issue. After all, the PRC has profited immensely from trading connections with Taiwan thus far and doesn't actually need the island²¹⁷. It appears that Beijing's primary goal is to make Taiwan's economy reliant on Chinese capital flows²¹⁸. For both sides' economic interests, a war would be disastrous. While the PRC still depends on Taiwan for some high-tech components, many Taiwanese

²¹² Everington, *Pentagon doubles number of US troops in Taiwan under Biden*, Taiwan News.

²¹³ Kuo, *Trump and the TAIPEI Act*, The Diplomat.

²¹⁴ *La Cina e Taiwan, la riunificazione anche con la forza*, Agi (2022).

²¹⁵ Scobell, *China Is Not Russia. Taiwan Is Not Ukraine*, United States Institute of Peace.

²¹⁶ Zhang, *China Is Not Russia; Taiwan Is Not Ukraine*, The Diplomat.

²¹⁷ Prina Cerai, *Le conseguenze economiche di un conflitto su Taiwan*.

²¹⁸ Glaser, & Mark, *Taiwan and China Are Locked in Economic Co-Dependence*. Foreign Policy.

companies have moved a large portion of their manufacturing to factories on the mainland since the 1980s. In the event of a conflict, Taiwan's raw material supply would be complicated, and the PRC would lose access to several crucial industries, like semiconductors, which are made by South Korean and Taiwanese companies' percent of the time²¹⁹. Given the COVID crisis on the continent and the saturation of supply chains, caution and stability are necessary in this situation. On the political front, the same holds true.

It is a fact, nevertheless, that it is getting harder to draw clear boundaries between different parts of the world in an increasingly interconnected globe. Beijing has not endorsed Russian intervention in Ukraine in any manner, but the special bond between Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping has raised questions²²⁰. Taiwan has benefited from the European conflict primarily in that it has strengthened its strategic position and reaffirmed its unique status quo for the time being. A few days prior to the invasion, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson made a rare direct reference to the territory when he said that "Western inaction in the face of aggression in Ukraine poses a direct threat to Taiwan's security"²²¹. Taiwan no longer had a problem with mentioning Formosa explicitly. Two things have to happen for the PRC to decide to attack Taiwan²²²: first, a shift in power in the Western Pacific that gives Beijing confidence that the U.S. won't step in to defend the island; and second, social and political conditions in Taiwan and the PRC itself that encourage the PRC to take on the project with a reasonable margin of error²²³.

In the near future, neither looks likely. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is aware that Taiwan has a greater worldwide strategic importance for Washington than Ukraine does²²⁴. The PLA has not fought in battle since 1979, so even without Washington, they would still have to contend with Taiwanese armed forces that are more equipped than ever to resist. The only true similarity between the situations in Taiwan and Ukraine is that both democratic states fear being overtaken by a more powerful and militarily expansive

²¹⁹ Williams, *Why Taiwan matters to China (and the rest of the world)*, Investment Monitor.

²²⁰ Wong, and Fraser, *Putin-Xi talks: Russian leader reveals China's 'concern' over Ukraine*, BBC News.

²²¹ *UK says Western inaction on Ukraine would send dangerous message for Taiwan*, Reuters (2022).

²²² Perriello, *La Cina pronta a invadere Taiwan? Dove e come può attaccare*. QuiFinanza.

²²³ Milliken, *UK sees threat to Taiwan if West does not support Ukraine*. Reuters.

²²⁴ *Taiwan more important for preserving US' influence than Ukraine* — political scientist. (2022). TASS.

authoritarian neighbour²²⁵. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia does not imply that an attack on Taiwan is now more likely, much less imminent. Regardless of what transpires in Europe, relations between the People's Republic of China and Taiwan follow their own logic and path²²⁶.

The precarious balance in the strait is constantly in jeopardy due to the People's Republic of China's increasing economic development and the U.S.'s growing competition for global leadership. Taiwan, on the other hand, has seen steady growth over the past 20 years in terms of democracy, with the PPD, the majority party with the complete backing of the youth, set to rule the nation for many more years. The PPD puts the conflict between the two sides succinctly and effectively: "Democracy vs. Autocracy"227

A simplification that, despite receiving praise from the West, appears to ignore the reality and complexity of the issue given the entwined interests at play. These interests affect not only Beijing and Formosa, the two main protagonists, but also, and perhaps most importantly, the USA, which, despite reiterating its commitment to the idea of "one China," appears more inclined toward a policy of "one China, one Taiwan"²²⁸.

Observe the regular U.S.-China military drills in the Indo-Pacific region and Speaker Nancy Pelosi's travel to Taiwan, which China fiercely denounced and threatened to retaliate against. It is imperative that the U.S. not only oppose Taiwan's independence but also work to foster more social, cultural, and economic ties between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China in order to further the goal of peace²²⁹. To achieve this, it would be vital to refrain from supporting Taiwan's and the PRC's separation based only on ideological grounds. Because addressing the issue in this way will only encourage anti-Chinese policies and emotions that raise the possibility of a cross-strait confrontation. However, in the Taiwan Strait, commercial and scientific advancements, investment, and economic linkages between the two beaches have significantly strengthened over time, despite political and military concerns. In addition to influencing Chinese consumer behaviour, philanthropy, religion, popular culture, and law, many experts think that China's position as a global

²²⁵ Scognamiglio, B., Patrignani and Gilli, A. (n.d.). Chair of Geopolitical Scenarios and Political *Risk the Ukraine war: from the special operation to the risk of a 'great war'. Can the outcome of the conflict affect China-Taiwan relations?* [online].

²²⁶ *Guerra Globale: Il conflitto russo-ucraino e l'ordine internazionale*. Memorial Italia (2023).

²²⁷ Ronkin, *Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies*.

²²⁸ Caracciolo, *La Pace è finita: così ricominciamo la pace in Europa*.

²²⁹ *Guerra Globale: Il conflitto russo-ucraino e l'ordine internazionale*. Memorial Italia (2023).

leader in current trade is largely due to the commercial connection between the two nations²³⁰. In addition to generating millions of employments on the mainland, the Taiwanese investment community has grown to be an essential component of international supply chains. Before being marketed on the international market, a large number of "made in China" goods are produced or assembled in Taiwanese investment enterprises located on the mainland²³¹.

The realities presented and the economic-commercial cooperation between Taipei and Beijing appear, or at least one hopes, to put an end to the threat of a war between superpowers across the Taiwan Strait, even in the face of ongoing changes to the political-international system that are still being rattled by the end of the U.S. unipolar era, which started with the Great Recession of 2007–2009. The primary themes of contemporary global politics, including imperialism, peoples' right to self-determination, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, encourage generalist media and public opinion—including that of our own nation—to interpret the Beijing-Taipei crisis through the prism of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, potentially leading to significant distortions.

3.1.1 Patterns in Triangular Diplomacy Successes

In *White House Years*, the first book of his memoirs, Kissinger explained that "triangular diplomacy, to be effective, must rely on the natural incentives and propensities of the players"²³².

He reiterated that the goal of triangle diplomacy was to balance "China against the Soviet Union from a position in which America was closer to each Communist giant than they were to each other"²³³. Undue moralism was avoided in triangular diplomacy. Kissinger stated that "a sentimental policy knows no reciprocity," citing Bismarck.

Triangle diplomacy, which was based on the balance-of-power idea, entailed utilizing ties with one nation as leverage to get concessions from another.

²³⁰ Molinari, *Il ritorno degli imperi*.

²³¹ *Why commercial ties between Taiwan and China are beginning to fray*, *The Economist* (2020).

²³² thediplomat.com. (n.d.). *Is Kissinger's Triangular Diplomacy the Answer to Sino-Russian Rapprochement?* [online].

²³³ Kissinger, *World Order*.

In December 1970, Time magazine correspondents were usually given the most thorough and nuanced explanation of triangular diplomacy by Kissinger. He clarified that because of the Sino-Soviet border dispute, the Soviets were interested in working with the United States in order "to free their Western rear so that they can focus more on China." Furthermore, by merely announcing "that we are restudying the China question," the United States could ensure that it had the greatest possible power over Moscow²³⁴. "To develop a dialogue with them [the Chinese] for its own sake and then to have a counterweight with the Soviets" was the administration's evolving China strategy²³⁵.

A Mexican law serves as an example of triangle cooperation defining it as a cooperation method used in conjunction with a conventional bilateral or multilateral source to take joint action in favor of a third country that is in need of assistance and has either a lower or comparable degree of development²³⁶.

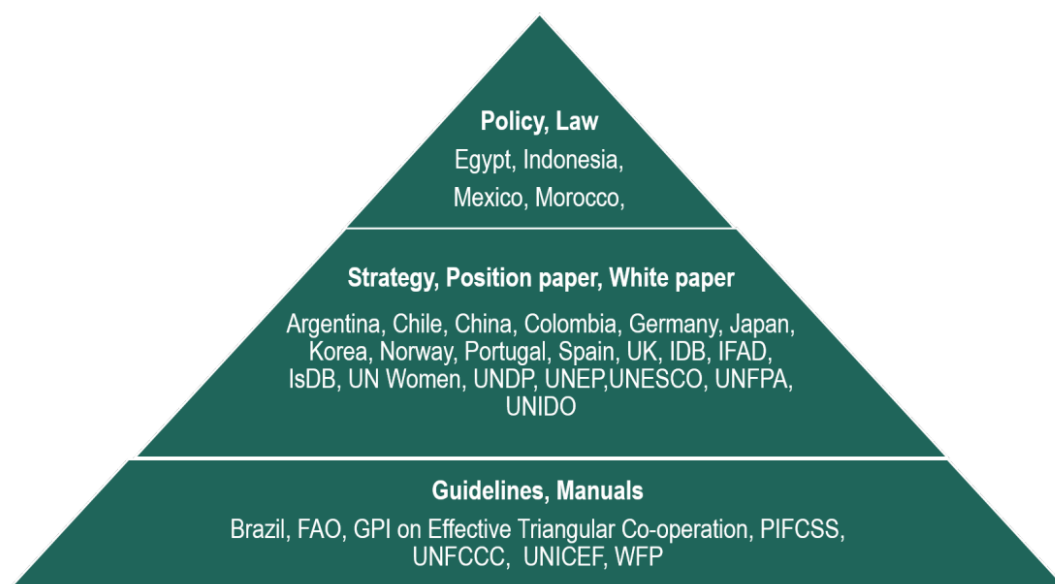
Mexico serves as an example to demonstrate how enshrining high-level political support in a law makes it easier to create the institutions, policies, practices, and resources required to engage in triangle cooperation. In a more comprehensive approach to foreign and development policy, many facilitating partners do, however, use triangular cooperation as a tool to collaborate with emerging economies and crucial partners. Furthermore, it is beneficial for each nation to incorporate triangular cooperation into its development cooperation toolkit, just as it has been done with sub-national, bilateral, regional, and multilateral cooperation as well as different delivery channels like grants, loans, blended finance, program-based approaches, and technical cooperation.

Only thirty nations and international organizations have created particular policies, plans, or guiding documents for their triangular cooperation, despite the increased interest and political attention.

²³⁴ Department Of State. The Office of Electronic Information, B. of P.A. (n.d.). Summary.

²³⁵ Department Of State. The Office of Electronic Information, B. of P.A. (n.d.). *Summary*. [online] 2001-2009.state.gov.

²³⁶ OECD and Islamic Development Bank (2023). *Global Perspectives on Triangular Co-operation*. OECD Publishing.



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Most partners base their triangular cooperation on their overall development cooperation strategy (e.g., China, Portugal) or their foreign policy (e.g., Argentina, Chile, United Kingdom). These tactics occasionally make mention of tripartite cooperation (Japan, Korea, Spain, etc.).

Additional tactics include "bringing out complementarity and synergies between competing approaches"²³⁸, as mentioned in the People's Republic of China's White Paper on Foreign Aid²³⁹: China increased efforts to promote international cooperation in development assistance and conducted trilateral co-operation featuring complementary advantage with multilateral and bilateral assistance providers by leveraging each party's strengths on the pretext of fully respecting the recipient countries. This was done in order to effectively learn from international experience, improve assistance efficiency, and enrich assistance forms. All rules must strike a good balance between allowing freedom for innovation and co-creation to flourish and keeping flexibility, while requiring parties to agree on specific methods of carrying out triangular cooperation.

Some guidelines for triangular cooperation that are effective are ownership by the country and demand-driven cooperation: triangular cooperation need to be carried out

²³⁷ Ibidem.

²³⁸ Berger, and Wissenbach, *EU China Africa Trilateral Development Cooperation - Common Challenges and New Directions*.

²³⁹ *China's Foreign Aid*, State Council of the People's Republic of China (2014).

under the direction of partner nations and in accordance with both nations' national agendas and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.

Sharing the commitment, allowing partners consent to take part in and divide accountability for identification, design, implementation, contribution, monitoring, and assessment; putting an emphasis on methods and solutions that are results-oriented when each partner pledges to attain the predetermined outcomes and to demonstrate and systematize those outcomes; an inclusive partnerships and multi-stakeholder dialogues; Openness and reciprocal responsibility; Innovation and co-creation utilizing technology, smart risk-taking, evidence-based programming and policy, flexible approaches to locally-driven innovative solutions, and new and existing partnerships, with the goal of enhancing development outcomes; Collaborative learning and knowledge-sharing for sustainable development; promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls; Triangular cooperation promoting inclusive multi-stakeholder partnerships, including those that offer assistance to the most vulnerable are the following guidelines²⁴⁰.

Effectiveness is enhanced when triangular cooperation projects are backed locally by the Embassy network. Furthermore, because they recognize the nation's strengths and weaknesses, these organizations frequently serve as a conduit for incoming triangular cooperation initiatives.

The coordination of trilateral activities amongst several ministries and government actors is a challenge in this paradigm because most have their own funds and divisions for international cooperation, much like sub-national players do. Therefore, they are not required to collaborate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the agency. Furthermore, not all partners always have clear access to the experts chosen to work on particular topics in triangular cooperation. To improve coordination, these issues that impede efficient triangular cooperation must be resolved. Engaging specialists with knowledge of particular subjects who may be more suited to the beneficiary partner's context at the same time will increase initiative ownership and efficacy.

Key partners in triangular cooperation initiatives include those from outside national governments, such as municipal authorities, the commercial sector, academia, charitable organizations, and civil society. They can play the three roles of facilitator, key, or beneficiary partner in a particular trilateral endeavor, and they offer significant

²⁴⁰ GPI (2019), *Triangular Co-operation in the Era of the 2030 Agenda – Sharing Evidence and Stories from the Field*.

contributions to triangular cooperation projects. For example, civil society organizations can be the primary project implementers, partners offering specialized knowledge, seminar trainers, facilitators of decentralized triangular cooperation (which links public and private partners at different levels of governance), and advocates for triangular cooperation through dialogue and advocacy efforts.

A crucial resource in triangular cooperation is knowledge and competence.

On the one hand, triangular cooperation favors the beneficiary partner more by giving them greater ownership and negotiating leverage.

Furthermore, there are no easy or lasting answers when it comes to maintaining the balance of power on the planet. As Kissinger clarified in *White House Years*, maintaining a balance of power is a continuous process rather than a project with a predetermined conclusion. It is mostly a psychological phenomenon; if power is seen as equal, it won't be put to the test. Potential power must be taken into account in calculations, together with actual power—that is, power must be both possessed and used with willpower²⁴¹. Maintaining the balance of power demands persistence, delicacy, bravery, and most importantly, knowledge of what it takes. This does not imply that China's aggressive actions in the South and East China Seas, or Russian aggression in Ukraine, should be tolerated by the United States. In his memoirs, Kissinger remembered that détente with the Soviet Union did not stop Nixon from ordering a nuclear alert to dissuade Soviet action in the Yom Kippur War of 1973, bombing Haiphong Harbor in North Vietnam, and resisting Soviet intentions in the Indo-Pakistan War. The opening to China also didn't stop Taiwan and China from continuing their defense cooperation. Nixon and Kissinger's use of "triangular diplomacy" did not imply giving up on American security interests or backing down from conflict when such interests were contested²⁴².

As a result, the triangular diplomacy approach would be the most effective way to maintain international order. The Soviet Union, China, and other Communist states had a long-standing, covert competition that gradually came to light. Triangular diplomacy, as it was subsequently termed, sought "...to exploit that rivalry to win advantages for the United States"²⁴³.

²⁴¹ thediplomat.com. (n.d.). *Is Kissinger's Triangular Diplomacy the Answer to Sino-Russian Rapprochement?* [online].

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Kissinger, *Diplomacy*.

Numerous respondents to this study's success and hindrance factors assessment evaluated the ecosystems and enabling environment for triangle co-operation, and they concluded that the primary barrier to effective triangular co-operation was "higher" transaction costs.

The six areas identified in the OECD "Toolkit for identifying, monitoring and evaluating the value added of triangular co-operation"²⁴⁴—building ownership and trust, promoting complementarity, and increasing coordination in development cooperation—are closely reflected in the interviewees' perceptions of the value added of triangular cooperation²⁴⁵. • Increasing scale, scope, and volume; • Collaborating to co-create solutions and flexibility; • Sharing knowledge and learning; and • Reaching regional and global development objectives through enhanced partnerships for sustainable development. When organizing, creating, putting into practice, and assessing a triangle collaboration, the Toolkit offers direction on how to methodically incorporate elements pertaining to these six categories.

3.1.2 Identifying pros and cons.

Prior to the idea of *détente*, the U.S., China, and the USSR held diverse positions in the world and may gain differently from *détente*. China maintained tense relations with both superpowers and feared isolation, particularly during the Vietnam War. Although the U.S. enjoyed nuclear superiority at first, this advantage was lessened by the sheer number of nuclear weapons, and by 1968, missile parity with the USSR had been reached. In spite of ideological differences, the U.S. pursued *détente* in order to improve relations and lower military spending, especially in the wake of the expensive Vietnam War. Secularism was also beneficial to the Soviet Union, which regarded it as a means of lowering military budget, easing tensions, and maybe fostering better ties with China and the U.S. *détente* seemed to be beneficial for all three countries overall²⁴⁶.

Detente meant a reduction in hostilities, the establishment of a new multipolar power structure, and a new international system. Arms control accords, such as the SALT I and ABM agreements, were the first effective steps toward the *detente* policy.

²⁴⁴ OECD (2018). *OECD iLibrary | Education at a Glance 2018: OECD Indicators*. [online] [Oecd-ilibrary.org](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org).

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, Chapter 28.

There is a widespread belief that triangle cooperation initiatives are more expensive to conduct than other forms of development cooperation. However, some of the study's interview subjects, attendees of the fifth international conference on triangular cooperation in Lisbon, and survey participants on transaction costs, referred to what is typically called a "cost" as actually being the foundation and essence of triangular cooperation, transforming it into a "benefit." Recasting transaction expenses as investments helps achieve this, especially when it comes to fostering confidence between participants in triangular cooperation. When considering the dual goals of development and partnership, which lead to triangular cooperation, one may make sense of what appears to be a contradiction amongst the many partners. Although the idea of transaction costs originated in economics, there hasn't been a discussion about what exactly is meant by the term or a standard measurement method that can be applied to all forms of development cooperation.

In triangular cooperation, all partners acknowledge that coordinating with more people comes with higher logistical costs. Diverse conditions and processes for resource access as well as stringent reporting requirements necessitated greater coordination between facilitator partners. The facilitators acknowledged the advantages and drawbacks of having more participants. Trilateral initiatives are subject to additional volatility because multiple countries share technical and financial resources, and the more partners there are, the greater the risk of external factors impacting the project (e.g., political instability in a partner). However, having more partners means that the project is more stable because there are more people to cover for one another in case one of them runs into difficulties. More people are driven to succeed as a result of increased accountability. Additionally, a number of participants voiced apprehension with the notion that critical partners serve only as a means of disseminating norms and standards that have similarities to current development cooperation agreements. Furthermore, part of the political calculus that contributes to the suspicion and anxiety that raise transaction costs is the potential for important partners—especially in the context of country-level partnerships—to transform into regional powers and proxies. Existing power dynamics that place beneficiaries in weaker bargaining positions during agenda-setting and trilateral agreement formation also cast a shadow over triangular cooperation. In order to resolve these problems, development cooperation projects must be redesigned from the ground up, both in terms of their structural organization and the dynamics among the many actors.

As the preceding sections have demonstrated, the form of triangular cooperation projects varies depending on the development partner, which is partly because of varying definitions and variations in transaction costs. This section examines the elements that increase the advantages of triangular cooperation and provides a framework for decision-makers to identify and, to the greatest extent feasible, plan for these "costs"²⁴⁷.

All three forms of transaction costs can be reduced by being explicit about the partnership's goals and directing projects toward these extra advantages. The costs associated with search and information - encouraging complementarity and enhancing coordination in development cooperation.

In triangular cooperation, bargaining and decision-making costs are particularly significant, particularly during the negotiation and formulation of a new trilateral initiative.

Nonetheless, this is an essential procedure that fosters a sense of ownership and trust among all parties. This is particularly apparent in the case of triangular cooperation because of the increased focus on partnerships, horizontal accountability, and shared risks and benefits for all involved parties. Because there are more partners, it takes more work to establish confidence. Once established, the benefits of establishing trust serve as a means of lowering conflict in subsequent interactions. In certain cases, or for some partners, the primary focus and advantage of involvement is relationship building, therefore this cannot be seen solely in terms of the constrictive concept of "cost." It is crucial for decision-makers to remember that field experience demonstrates the increased time and energy invested in establishing trust, results in more significant and impactful involvement, and offers the extra benefit of future cooperative endeavors.

Respondents stated that it was simpler to foster common understanding in situations where parties were already well-aware of the benefits of triangular cooperation and how they contributed to trilateral interactions. White papers, policies, plans, and other documents may all reflect this. This is not to argue that standardization is necessary for triangle cooperation; rather, it is to suggest that this type of documented "thinking" offers a uniform foundation and identifies the fundamental ideals and concepts that direct partner attitudes to and expectations for triangular cooperation. Thus, it is critical

²⁴⁷ OECD and Islamic Development Bank (2023). *Global Perspectives on Triangular Co-operation*. OECD Publishing.

that decision-makers and practitioners take into account the length, scope, and development of trilateral engagements.

Trilateral partnerships have the potential to generate creative, economical, and context-specific solutions by enlisting the help of "neutral brokers" and development partners who might not have otherwise joined together. Additionally, this lessens the dispersion of efforts in development cooperation. According to the majority of interviewees, trilateral initiatives have a steep learning curve that benefits and teaches all three (or more) parties. However, depending on the project design, the degree of trust, and the willingness to share knowledge and benefit from others' experiences, there may be different transaction costs involved. When a solution is not immediately apparent and must be sought by utilizing the complementary knowledge of all participants, triangle cooperation is an appropriate approach. If there is insufficient room and flexibility to promote co-creation, transaction costs may increase. It also heavily depends on the degree of trust that is established early on and maintained over the course of the project. Depending on the nature of co-creation, steps like intellectual property rights agreements could be necessary to guarantee that each participant feels free to contribute and owns the solution. Aiming for more common frameworks and guidelines, such as those developed by the Global Partnership Initiative on effective triangular cooperation, there is room to systematize experiences from project development and management, keeping in mind the need for flexibility and creative ways of working. In order to scale up projects to other areas with comparable issues, triangular cooperation promotes the sharing of bi- and multilateral cooperation's successes. Building bridges between couples who have had poor or no relationships in the past is also made possible by this. Over time, this leads to decreased transaction costs as a percentage of total costs.

In order to enhance long-term cost-effectiveness and preparedness, coordination between three partners generates strength in numbers, resources, and geographic scope. For example, military exercises and intelligence gathering may be costly or difficult for any nation to undertake on its own or with only one partner. Moreover, trilateralism necessitates internal cooperation and participation from each of the three nations. The trilateral agreement enables the nations to cooperate even if two of them are experiencing bilateral conflicts. By using non-traditional security measures, trilateral members can also advance common values and norms and reap economic benefits.

Trilateral countries should work together on cybersecurity and space, investigate strategies to strengthen regional energy security, and take part in combined HADR and peacekeeping missions in order to enhance nontraditional security.

3.2 Diplomatic Strategies for the Future of American foreign policy

To fully reap the benefits described above, the U.S. and its allies need to confront and resolve the associated obstacles. In light of our findings, we recommend the following: Military cooperation should be given top priority by the U.S., the ROK, and Japan in order to fortify security with North Korea. As has been the case for the past few years, the three nations should keep up their trilateral training exercises in naval ballistic missile defense, particularly when it comes to vital Aegis ship-based systems. In order to achieve this, the U.S. and the ROK must resist the need to do away with proven military cooperation systems just because they were created by earlier administrations. Instead, even with regard to delicate matters involving South Korea and Japan, the United States need to take a more proactive stance in promoting dialogue and collaboration between the three nations. In order to improve missile defense capabilities in the area, the U.S. should also push South Korea to complete the THAAD system's implementation.

Coordinated deployment experiences for use in a contingency situation on the Korean Peninsula would be provided by joint multilateral disaster relief training between the U.S., the ROK, and Japan. Energy security in the region would be increased by cooperative government incentive plans for a regional hub for natural gas trade, and the U.S. and its allies could take the lead in streamlining regulations pertaining to LNG exports. Apart from constructing additional authorized energy trading networks, the U.S. can extend invitations to its allies to take part in routine cybersecurity defense drills led by U.S. Cyber Command. Last but not least, information exchange between the U.S., ROK, and Japan on space data, like tracking space debris and recovering launched items, will enhance general situational awareness in space.

The global scenario is changing by the day, with new challenges arising, instability and conflicts in different regions of the world and a new balance of powers. Sovereign countries need to adapt to find suitable strategies responding to multiple objectives, mainly in relation to safeguarding the citizens and the domestic policies;

finding negotiated agreements to end conflicts; and maintaining stability in the respective regions through collaboration with key actors, such as multilateral organizations and non-governmental entities.

Another key challenge, specifically for the United States, is to maintain - constructive relations with leading actors in the global arena, particularly the emerging economies and the newly democratized countries, such as the BRICS and some of the leading African states, on which the continent's stability depends.

"Now we find ourselves at another hinge moment in history - grappling with the fundamental question of strategy, as Nitze defined it: How do we get from where we are to where we want to be, without being struck by disaster along the way?"²⁴⁸ Secretary Antony J. Blinken said to the Johns Hopkins students.

Where do the U.S. want to be? Through its Foreign Policy, they are mandated to: Preserve the U.S. and its citizens; promote democracy, human rights, and other international interests; encourage foreign comprehension of U.S. policies and values; and assist U.S. diplomats, government employees, and other personnel both domestically and overseas who work to achieve these objectives.²⁴⁹

And, to get where the U.S. want to be, have they been struck by disaster along the way? Certainly. In a post-Cold war era, the order and progress achieved in more than 40 years of intense diplomatic efforts, technological advancements, and discoveries to improve lives simply ended. The related geopolitical stability that some of the countries achieved - in Europe, for example - competed with the rise of some authoritarian powers, i.e. Russia, Iran, North Korea among others, threatening the global order and its guiding principles, its universal human rights first and foremost.

Non-state actors, such as corporations, NGOs, and criminal organizations are also positioning themselves as key players in the global field. The public opinion is deeply discouraged by the flaws in multilateral organizations, which often do not impede conflicts to arise and do not offer adequate tools to address today's main challenges, like climate change, migration, terrorism, and growing inequalities.

In light of this global landscape, what is the evolving role of the U.S. Diplomacy and its strategies to respond to such pressing needs? Several factors are required, both internal and external.

²⁴⁸ *The Power and Purpose of American Diplomacy in a New Era*, [online] U.S. Embassy & Consulates in China.

²⁴⁹ *Diplomacy: The U.S. Department of State at Work*. U.S. Department of State. (n.d.). [online].

To begin with, it is the leading role of the very U.S. diplomats that needs to be strengthened. There are several studies and initiatives aimed at reshaping the U.S. Foreign Service to make it highly performing and supported further. Two of such initiatives are that of the *Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School* ²⁵⁰ and *The Scowcroft Centre's project on twenty-first-century diplomacy*. ²⁵¹

Improved and more effective diplomacy requires an internal cultural shift. Racial and ethnic diversity among the staff has indeed been overlooked, at a time when the U.S. needs diplomats of all backgrounds to reach nearly every country. As was the case for the military and intelligence agencies in recent decades, so does the Diplomatic Service need to adapt to a multicultural environment by ensuring its staff represents all segments of the American society.

Secondly, the U.S. Diplomacy needs to become more tech-savvy, to respond to the day-to-day evolution of artificial intelligence and the advanced technological innovations on the global marketplace, in which China is predominantly strong. This requires investments in technology, capacity-building, and training on new tools, as well as strengthening linkages with institutions, corporations and organizations that support the U.S. in facing challenges to its political stability.

As presented in previous chapters, the U.S. Foreign Policy is adapting to a new scenario whereby the West is no longer the protagonist of the global economic activity. According to the Atlantic Council, indeed, by mid-century, such activity will have decreased to 40 percent against 70 percent in the 1990s, and shifted to Asia - guided by China and India - which is likely to account for most of the global GDP. ²⁵²

Not only China is a threatening economic rival, but it is challenging the U.S. through its diplomacy, aimed at changing the narrative to make China less authoritarian in spite of its aggressive foreign policy and persuasion power, even within the United Nations Human Rights Council. ²⁵³ China is not the only state-based threat to peace and stability. The U.S. needs to keep relations with Russia, particularly in light of the conflict with Ukraine and the U.S. positioning against the Russian invasion, and with the rogue states

²⁵⁰ www.belfercenter.org. (n.d.). *A U.S. Diplomatic Service for the 21st Century* | Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs.

²⁵¹ Cimmino, J. and Rothschild, A. (2022). *Twenty-first-century diplomacy: Strengthening US diplomacy for the challenges of today and tomorrow*. [online] Atlantic Council.

²⁵² Jain and Kroenig, *Present at the Re-Creation: A Global Strategy for Revitalizing, Adapting, and Defending a Rules-Based International System*, Atlantic Council,

²⁵³ Lawler, *the 53 Countries Supporting China's Crackdown on Hong Kong*, Axios.

such as North Korea and Iran, which may endanger lives of the American people. However, China still remains the biggest rival as it encompasses several aspects that would decrease the U.S. global power, albeit the latter plays in a position of undoubted advantage.

Digitalization represents an additional challenge that the U.S. Diplomacy is facing, requiring the new diplomats to think differently compared to their predecessors in the post-Cold war era. A notable initiative, though not sufficient, is the creation of the Bureau of Cyberspace and Digital Policy at the State Department, aimed at finding solutions to an ever-changing landscape where technology advances by the minute.

The U.S. needs to reassert its leading role in multilateral organizations, which was underestimated due to its overwhelming political power. This solitary, neglecting approach is no longer possible, especially in light of the growing presence of China in such institutions. A recent podcast on China's Role in the United Nations²⁵⁴ states that, China "had deputies in nine other agencies and headed four of the 15 principal specialized agencies of the UN in 2020." In parallel, the U.S. can strengthen partnerships with likeminded allies, such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, to create a core group of countries countering the new Asian powers in a highly advanced technological era.

Furthermore, bilateral relationships with key countries should be re-established to counter the Chinese influence, as some of such countries neglected the American presence in recent times, particularly in Africa.

In conclusion, a strengthened American diplomacy, starting from internal equality, cultural change, and diversity, can be crucial in advancing the U.S. and allied interests in the 21st century, as it has been in the past to overcome the most recent challenges on the global landscape.

3.3. Recommendations for Policymakers

As illustrated above, triangular diplomacy has evolved over the years, and so have the main actors who feed such an environment with opportunities and challenges, i.e. sovereign states, multilateral organizations, and non-state actors such as the civil society and private sector entities.

²⁵⁴ GMFUS. (n.d.). *China's Role in the United Nations*. [online].

This work presented the evolution of such diplomatic strategy, in history and in an ever-changing environment where sovereign actors are no longer the only protagonists. It also showed some of the key aspects that need to be considered for the U.S. foreign policy to adapt to the new landscape, and to maintain its global predominance. These are:

1. Ensure Diplomats and Officials are up to speed, in terms of internal training and cultural shift, with the changing needs of global diplomacy (technology and the use of artificial intelligence), and that each society group - women/men, ethnic groups - are adequately represented.
2. Strengthen the partnership with key allies and reiterate the strong role of the U.S. within multilateral organizations (such as the United Nations and NATO), positioning itself as one of their steering members in opposition with the growing influence of China.
3. Forge partnerships with key corporations and private sector entities who can support the U.S. in advancing its technology and filling the gap through training and service provision.
4. Not only private partners are to be considered though. Civil society and public opinion are crucial to raise morale and awareness about the U.S. foreign policy and the values it stands for.

Prioritize the powerful tool of negotiation and dialogue to end conflicts and do no harm to civilians in situations of armed conflict.

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis sought to examine the success or failure of Kissinger's triangular diplomacy strategy and the process by which the U.S. severed ties with China and the Soviet Union.

In any case, Kissinger ranked among the most significant individuals influencing U.S. foreign policy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Contending that the detente policy and the balance of power are integral components of triangular diplomacy, we should take into account whether or if his policy was successful should depend on the conditions and duration of his tenure in the White House. We might infer that his policy was effective if we consider the facts that he was the only one in charge of the Opening to China and detente, the SALT agreements, and the 1973 agreement in Paris that ended U.S. presence in Southeast Asia. In addition, he received the Nobel Peace Prize for putting a stop to the Vietnam War.

Kissinger took American policy to an unprecedented and advanced degree. When Kissinger joined the administration, the U.S. was on the defense and in a situation of crisis. The United States was still fighting a losing war in Southeast Asia as the Cold War raged on.

Three significant things happened under the Nixon administration: the arms accord with the Soviet Union, the conclusion of the Vietnam War, and the opening of relations with China and detente. Without Kissinger's participation and extensive understanding of international affairs, these events would not have taken place²⁵⁵. During the Nixon administration, the balance of power theory was used to keep things stable. The U.S. and the Soviet Union's relationship stabilized once the U.S. began to build positive connections with China. On her side China contributed to strengthening the positive ties that existed between the U.S. and the USSR.

Nixon's primary objective was to maintain American leadership in the world. Kissinger assisted him in achieving his objective. It is also true, though, that the U.S. and the USSR never relinquished their diplomatic influence over the countries. Although most of Kissinger's policies were quite successful, some of them were contentious. As the last chapter examined the contentious or unfavorable elements of triangle diplomacy, demonstrated that the superpowers were not always on the same side. However, it might

²⁵⁵ Lukacsova, V. (2009). *Kissinger's triangular diplomacy*. [online].

be argued that even effective policies, if they achieve their primary objectives, may have unintended consequences.

Thus, the question of whether Washington and Beijing can work together as China grows in power and influence must be asked until the international system stabilizes, and new powers do not lead to hegemonic wars or conflicts over spheres of influence reminiscent of the Cold War. However, Washington has a multitude of competing interests that impact its political decisions in addition to the necessity of responding to public opinion and internal discussion among liberals, progressives, neoconservatives, and idealists. From the military industries and the Pentagon, who view Beijing's ascent as a way to secure money and contracts, to the economic interests of multinational corporations, for whom China has represented and continues to represent a market with substantial underlying profits. Therefore, the inability to get past this ambivalence represents the common thread of the American approach. In keeping with the legacy of the pragmatic President Bush Sr., the "globalization president" upheld a decidedly conciliatory posture dictated by market democracy during the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton, despite rhetorical rebukes in the wake of the events of Tiananmen Square and the Taiwan crisis of 1995–96. In fact, Beijing's return to the ranks of the great powers was pushed by powerful economic-financial lobbies and influential realist politicians like Baker, Brzezinski, Kissinger, and Scowcroft. This was confirmed by the 1998 joint declaration affirming the establishment of a strategic partnership for the twenty-first century. Similar to this, during George W. Bush's two terms, the initial cooling of relations would be significantly reviewed in light of the global war on terror. However, beginning in 2005, efforts were made to contain China's rise through military means, but these efforts were weakened by the emergence of the financial crisis, the exponential growth in the two economies' interdependence, the crisis in Georgia, and the Republican president's declining political standing. In a similar vein, Barack Obama prioritized recovering the U.S. economy and leaving non-strategic theaters to concentrate on Asia, the region's emerging hub for business. Obama's grand strategy was built on smart power and intended to reduce the imperial overstretch.

However, from Beijing's point of view, a return to international significance in both politics and economy was contingent upon the relationship with the United States. Adopting a highly practical and ostentatiously peaceful approach, in fact, would have enabled China to take advantage of the advantageous circumstances provided by the

international system—assured at ever-increasing expense by the United States—and to exploit its vulnerabilities by squeezing itself into the gaps left by American foreign policy.

As the Washington Consensus was reaching its peak and Clinton was calling for democratic enlargement but exercising extreme care when it came to humanitarian causes, Beijing, capitalizing on its rapidly increasing influence, joined important international and regional organizations. Analogously, the global war on terror and the U.S. financial crisis would have broadened the strategic window for China, allowing it to divert U.S. pressure and concentrate on strengthening its financial and economic ties with major global poles, especially the U.S., thereby extending its geopolitical and economic influence worldwide. China was able to seal a rapprochement with the unwieldy Russian neighbor on its own terms, solidify its role in the Asia-Pacific, and concentrate on penetration into Central Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, with Europe as a landing point, despite Obama's partial Rebalancing to Asia and wavering in the Greater Middle East, as well as the Ukrainian issue. China's economy, indeed, is not going to grow at the rate it has been for the past thirty years.

Chinese strategists have attempted to restore their nation's reputation based on the Confucian model of societal harmony rather than enacting the IMF-signed shock treatment, like Russia did under Yeltsin. They also gain from the significant benefit of long-term planning, which enables development to be gradually adjusted to the needs of the nation. They will, however, soon need to make a significant advancement—this time a political one—that conflicts with institutional privileges of CCP hierarchies, clientelist links, and entrenched interests. Thus, we have reached that it is inconceivable that a nation with the People's Republic's underlying potential would stay in the same game and not alter it, even with all of its internal conflicts. The hegemonic position of the dollar and the U.S. economy in the international system, as well as the U.S.'s self-perception and global mission, remain unaffected despite all of this, especially in light of the traditional American aspiration to maintain a planetary balance of power and the economic and soft power scenario that has been diminished by the Republican experience of the new millennium.

In this sense, Xi Jinping's request to avoid the Thucydides Trap and to build a "new major-power relationship" should be understood²⁵⁶.

The ironic thing is that Beijing appears to have taken a cue from Kissinger and his realpolitik, acting with a measure of realism, and knowing how to maneuver within the U.S.-branded international system for its benefit. This illustrates how it is both nations, U.S. and China, firm in defending what it views as its legitimate interests, such as those in the South China Sea and in opposing the dollar's hegemony, and humble enough to learn from history. However, the Chinese ruling class is aware that exerting its influence externally in an aggressive manner is ineffective ²⁵⁷ . Therefore, it has sought to base its soft power on the example of its development model and on the defense of national sovereignty, manipulating every situation to its advantage, in line with the cornerstone of Sun Tzu, which states, "The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting"²⁵⁸.

China will not rule the world, just as the idea that the U.S. is leading the world alone is the result of unique circumstances that are unlikely to happen again. Contrarily, Washington's relative weight decreases during the unipolar post-Cold War era, despite its military and economic-financial dominance guaranteeing it the status of an unrivaled global superpower. The USA interpreted this period as a new crystallization of the international order, as if the right side of history had become universal. Even though the People's Republic of China is the classic illustration of this process, apocalyptic predictions of the twenty-first century, such the Chinese century, which predicts America's unavoidable decline, appear out of date.

The thesis added to the body of knowledge on the dramatic reality of the Russian-Ukrainian war that came to a close in 2022, leaving a massive trail of devastation, debris, and fatalities—both of military soldiers and innocent civilians. The year 2023, showed no signs that could inspire hope for peace, if not for a truce that would allow for talks involving not only the warring parties but also the other world powers involved: first and foremost, the United States and Europe, but also China, whose commercial interests are seriously jeopardized.

²⁵⁶ Rosencrance, Miller, *The Next Great War?* p. 136.

²⁵⁷ Lucio, R., Candidato, C., Di, L., Correlatore, M. and Marchetti, R. (2014). FACOLTÀ DI SCIENZE POLITICHE CORSO DI LAUREA IN RELAZIONI INTERNAZIONALI Tesi di Laurea in Studi Strategici Cina e Stati Uniti: la contesa del XXI secolo. [online].

²⁵⁸ Mini, *L'altra Strategia*, p. 27.

America does not want to bring Russia to its knees due to the serious issues that would arise, not the least of which being the strengthening of China, which is the actual and most feared adversary of American interests globally. The fact that Xi Jinping is observing the Ukrainian conflict through a spyglass and maintaining a safe distance from the parties involved, despite verbally expressing his solidarity with Putin, without providing any military or economic support, and without taking a leading role in mediating the situation, is evidence of this. Even more, his primary goal is to bring the conflict to an end so that trade can resume, which is aided by the Silk Road passing through Ukrainian territory.

The circumstances of the past two years are actually still in favor of Ukraine receiving progressively noticeable armament supplies. Perhaps in an effort to avoid depleting the military supplies of European nations, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has also requested South Korea to provide armaments to Ukraine. Such a request demonstrates how the idea of the West is built on the concept of a geopolitical alliance that pits Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, Japan, and possibly even India against the rest of the world, in addition to its geographic significance.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to remember the significance of how this conflict would affect China's policies toward the Indo-Pacific area in general and the Taiwan issue in particular. Should the "one China, one Taiwan" concept rather than "one China" principle be the driving force behind that country's independence movement? As previously said, it would be inappropriate to draw a complete connection between the developments in Ukraine and the future of the United States and China's relationship with regard to Formosa. In the first instance, as has been amply demonstrated, there has been aggression directed towards the nation of Ukraine, which has been independent since 1991. In contrast, there is no discussion of Taiwan's independence at all; in fact, it appears that it must be ruled out at this point in order to prevent tensions between the United States and China from rising. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia is not a likely scenario for a future Taiwan Strait battle. First off, it is improbable that the Western nations' unity, which emerged following the invasion of Ukraine, could be achieved in the event of a Chinese invasion of the island. This is due in part to geographic factors, but primarily to the importance of NATO and its function on the European continent, where American domination and entanglements in politics, economy, and culture are more pronounced than they are in Southeast Asia. The only similarity between the two relationships—China-Taiwan and Russia-Ukraine—is that in both, a larger power seeks

to use its influence to impose its will on a smaller country, even though the latter can rely on the backing of the American empire and its NATO allies. The aforementioned none clearly excludes those relationships. Furthermore, it does not imply that the resolution of the dispute between Moscow and Kiev will have no bearing on the resolution of the Taiwan issue in the future.

While it is true that the war in Eastern Europe has contributed to the resuscitation of public opinions that had previously shown little interest in that scenario, it is also true that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has not only made the people of Taiwan more resilient to a potential invasion but has also reignited discussions about potential tactics that the Taiwan-U.S. axis could employ to defend the island.

However, at the same time, China should also reevaluate its stance on the military option due to the dangers involved and, in particular, the loss of its existing mercantile quotas, which demonstrate faster rates of GDP and economic-social growth than those of other global powers. Furthermore, the Taiwanese government has vehemently refuted any similarities between the cases of Taiwan and Ukraine, citing the possibility that such similarities would serve the so-called cognitive warfare strategy, which aims to demoralize Taiwan. But the fact remains that there is ongoing tension in that part of the Indo-Pacific, considering not only Taiwan's desire for recognition of its independence from the People's Republic of China, but also U.S. military interests there and Taiwan's status as a region producing semiconductor materials, whose value in the telematics industry seems indispensable.

However, the fact that U.S. Secretary of State Lloyd Austin signed a military agreement with the Philippines February 2023 for the establishment of nine military bases meant to house American soldiers and be used by the U.S. Navy and Air Force for exercises with allies in the Indo-Pacific region has angered the Beijing government. The Chinese government, speaking through its Foreign Minister, could not help but criticize the agreement, claiming that the White House was "endangering peace and stability in the region" by doing so. Given the close proximity of Taiwan to the Philippines, especially in the event of a Chinese invasion of the island, it is evident that the pact seeks to tip the scales of power in the region in favor of the United States.

of risk aversion for military ventures. Unsurprisingly, Biden threatened Xi with "consequences" if China aided Russia in the conflict with Ukraine.

On the one hand, there is a noticeable shift in U.S. policy away from the Middle East. On the other hand, an axis is being welded between Tehran and Moscow. This is despite the fact that Israel has knowingly permitted the transfer of American weapons that are kept in its warehouses to Ukraine. All of this also clearly shows how important the Middle East is to the current state of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, especially given some of its regional participants.

In conclusion, it is critical to examine hedging tactics, the U.S.'s rapprochement with China, and the triangle diplomacy program. It can be useful for both modern researchers and decision-makers. Policymakers can employ and recognize these methods when they are used against them if they have a proper understanding of how wedging strategies operate. Scholars can gain a better knowledge of current trends and changes in international politics.

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