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## Sumario/Summary



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**Review**



**Recension**



**Review**

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*Colonel Acting Director of the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies*

# *Presentation of the Spanish Institute For Strategic Studies (IEEE) journal n.º 23*

In this 23rd issue (first half of 2024) of the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE) Journal, we present seven articles on a variety of topics and three reviews that we hope will be attractive to readers interested in strategic, geopolitics and security and defence issues. In these times of enormous uncertainty and growing international tension, where the decisions that may be taken can lead to very different scenarios, some of them very worrying, these works address highly topical issues. In this sense, Covadonga Moreno Vílchez, in her article entitled "¿Sería posible mantener un orden mundial multipolar? Enfoque analítico de un sistema internacional liderado por varias superpotencias" (Would it be possible to maintain a multipolar world order? Analytical approach of an international system led by several superpowers), reflects on coexistence in the international system if the United States and China were to be joined by other superpowers in order to maintain a stable and safe global order.

Using a different approach, in "La doctrina de las grandes potencias en la guerra de la información" (The doctrine of the great powers in information warfare), Pau Muñoz Pairet describes how this type of warfare, which transcends the traditional sphere of armed confrontation, has been present throughout human history, evolving with each advance in information management technologies. The article focuses mainly on the vision and doctrinal approach of today›s three major powers: United States, China and Russia.

In "La República Popular de China y Australia: ¿fin a años de tensiones?" (The People's Republic of China and Australia: an end to years of tension?) Mónica Román González describes Australia›s difficult geopolitical relationship with China. While the country is economically and commercially dependent on the Asian superpower, it is more aligned with the United States on security issues. The growing tensions between the two superpowers thus pose a real diplomatic challenge for the home of kangaroos.

Central Asia, rich in natural resources and a key corridor linking Europe and Asia, is a region of particular geopolitical interest to both Beijing and Moscow. Rafael Santiago Orti›s "El choque ruso-chino en Asia Central. El caso de Kazajistán" (Russia and China clash in Central Asia. The case of Kazakhstan) reveals how historic Russian dominance in Kazakhstan is gradually being displaced by China, and how, despite this, Russia retains significant influence in the region and does not relinquish its interests in Kazakhstan.

Miguel Ángel Pérez Cabrera introduces another dimension in "El espacio ultraterrestre como dominio operativo: un análisis de los retos y desafíos para las Fuerzas Armadas de España" (Outer space as an operational domain: an analysis of the challenges and dares for the Spanish Armed Forces).The article reveals how, in just a few years, outer space has become increasingly important in the field of defence, becoming a new operational domain on which military operations depend to a large extent and where military operations could be conducted independently in the future.

Rodrigo Liras Molinero, in his article "Pistolas y probetas: el efecto del gasto militar público en I+D. Evidencia con datos de países de la OCDE entre 1985 y 2020" (Pistols and test tubes: The effect of public military spending R&D. Evidence with data from OECD countries between 1985 and 2020.), rigorously discusses the number of public resources that governments should allocate to military spending, considering the relationship between such spending and the development of Research and Development (R&D), and reaches some very interesting conclusions.

Finally, Arturo Dueñas Díaz introduces a very different, but ever-present, theme in war, the protection of cultural assets. The title of the article "Atena contra Marte: la protección del patrimonio cultural ucraniano en la guerra contra Rusia" (Athena versus Mars: the protection of Ukranian cultural heritage in the war against Russia) speaks for itself.

This issue of the journal also includes the following reviews:

– *Privacidad es poder: datos, vigilancia y libertad en la era digital* (Privacy is power: data, surveillance and freedom in the digital age)

– *La guerra: teoría para comprender los conflictos del siglo XXI* (War: theory for understanding 21st century conflicts).

– *Observar el arroz crecer: cómo habitar un mundo liderado por China* (Watching rice grow: how to inhabit a world led by China).



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# *Russia and China struggle in Central Asia. The case of Kazakhstan*

**Abstract**

The current international scenario, marked by the conflict in Ukraine, has triggered significant changes in the geopolitical sphere close to Russia. Russia›s historical dominance in Kazakhstan, its main ally in Central Asia, is gradually being displaced by China, which has made progress in its energy and trade agreements in the region, relegating Moscow to a secondary role. The situation in Ukraine is eroding Russia›s capabilities as a security guarantor in the Central Asian region, further weakening its position. Despite this, Russia retains significant influence in the region and is not willing to give up its interests in Kazakhstan, a key player on the Central Asian chessboard.

**Keywords**

Dominance, Oil resources, Geo-strategy, BRI, Soft power.

**Cite this article:**

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## 1. Introduction

The current Russia-China axis is marked primarily by Russia›s historic geopolitical shift eastwards, which has led to a profound confrontation with the Atlantic bloc, whose current battleground is the unfinished war in Ukraine. However, Russia›s war expectations have not been fulfilled and are causing a sharp weakening in its historic zones of influence. Türkiye in the South Caucasus and China in Central Asia are taking up privileged positions that may alter Russia›s status and diplomatic relations in the long run (Santiago, 2024).

The delicate geopolitical balance represents a significant challenge for China today. The radical stance of its ally, Russia, forces China to carefully consider its own moves. On the one hand, openly backing Vladimir Putin on the international stage could seriously threaten its commercial interests in Western markets. On the other hand, joining the NATO-led condemnation would leave Moscow completely isolated, meaning the loss of the only relevant ally in China´s geopolitical and strategic struggle against the United States.

The Russian attack on Ukraine represents, in theory, a rejectionist stance on China´s part, as it is a clear example of encouraging separatism, a problem faced by the PRC (People›s Republic of China) within its own borders in regions such as Taiwan, Xinjiang and Tibet. This problem is one of the three evils identified in China´s policy imperatives, along with extremism and terrorism, and forms part of the Chinese government›s core concerns for internal security and stability.

Despite adverse circumstances, the People›s Republic of China´s (PRC) policy of neutrality has proved successful, managing not only to maintain a difficult balance, but also to profit from it. China has maintained its economic interests in Europe and North America, as well as its energy interests with Russia, while filling the space left by Moscow in Central Asia without coming into conflict with the Russian Federation (Argumosa, 2023).

This study will delve into the various perspectives of Russia-China relations in the Central Asia region. Today›s evolving geopolitical situation invites a closer look at the broad range of approaches, in which, as will be seen below, China seems to have the best chance of prevailing.

## 2. Theories on the Russia-China relationship. Cooperation and competition

Looking at the different perspectives for approaching this article from the field of international relations theory, we have chosen to adopt a realist approach for two main reasons. First, the precursor of the debate on Russia-China relations, the Australian Bobo Lo, is an important exponent of neorealism. Secondly, the leaders of both countries share a realistic vision in projecting their interests on the international stage (Ziegler, 2010).

The starting point in the study of Russia-China relations is the work of Bobo Lo, Axis of Convenience. This work has generated multiple debates that have been recognised and accepted internationally by experts in the relations between these two countries, regardless of their nationality or ideology (Lo, 2008). The analysis will focus, for obvious reasons, on the debate over opposing bilateral interests at the regional level, specifically in the Central Asian space, which Lo believes could lead to major divergences in the future. The two powers› potentially incompatible interests in the region, mainly in energy and economic relations with neighbouring countries, may create frictions that represent a major obstacle to the Beijing-Moscow partnership.

## *2.1. Converging interests and cooperation*

The synergies and compatible cooperative interests between Russia and China are one of the few aspects on which most experts agree, as they have remained unchanged over time for obvious geopolitical reasons. These points can mainly be made concrete in two spheres: an internal one, which seeks economic development and political stability, and an external one, which aims to isolate the region from the influence of Western powers (Stronski & Ng, 2018).

Control of the region without external interference is an obvious goal for Russia and China, as this implies the absence of enemies on the chessboard, which ostensibly reduces the degree of complexity and tension by limiting the number of partners that can negotiate and cooperate without external pressure. Stability in the region, a shared goal of both countries, requires cooperation and agreements on security and military matters due to the geographical proximity to trouble spots such as Taliban extremism in Afghanistan. Both Russia (in the troubled Caucasus regions of Chechnya and Dagestan) and China (in the Uighur region of Xinjiang) fear that actions in their area of influence could penetrate their borders and destabilise national integrity. However, the two countries disagree on how to deal with these procedures.

Russia has historically opted for military efforts through the establishment of bases and counter-terrorism operations within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, while China has preferred softer approaches based on trade and investment. China concentrates its efforts on stabilising Central Asia through economic power (Stronski & Ng, 2018). In other words, it seeks influence through non-coercive measures, ruling out the use of military tools.

The presence of the PRC as a potential security guarantor complements Russia, as China prioritises protecting its investments and borders (Pardo, 2023).

### 2.2. *Divergent interests and competition*

China´s entry into the region, motivated by the presence of numerous significant deposits and its geographical proximity, marked the end of Russian energy hegemony and triggered a competition for control that continues nowadays. In addition, the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project, promoted by Chinese President Xi Jinping, which seeks to connect China with European markets through Central Asia, has consolidated China´s position as the main economic and trade partner and the largest investor in the region. In other words, China has positioned itself as the dominant economic and energy player in Central Asia.

Zhao Mingwen and other Chinese experts acknowledge that the construction of the gas pipeline connecting the Central Asia region to China broke Russia›s historic monopoly in the region, triggering energy disputes, as will be detailed below. The subsequent development and expansion of the Central Asian producers› pipeline network to China has been inevitable, contrary to Russian interests. In this regard, Shun Wang predicts energy competitions between China and Russia in Kazakhstan (Wang, 2023). Finally, it is relevant to note that the economic elites of Central Asian countries, which have traditionally been linked to Russia and in which Moscow exercises considerable soft power through language and the media, among other tools, are increasingly attracted by the security offered by the Chinese partner, to the detriment of a Russia that is vulnerable due to the Ukrainian conflict.

It is significant, as Stronski and Ng (2018) rightly state, that it is China and not a Western country that has broken Russia›s energy monopoly in Central Asia and that it is a Chinese initiative that connects Central Asia to foreign markets.

#### 2.2.1. *The Western line*

Leading European and American experts agree that there is a significant asymmetry in Sino-Russian relations in Central Asia, with China emerging as the predominant actor. This assessment is based on contrasting trends and China´s dominance over the most attractive aspects of the region, such as control of energy resources and trade and economic relations.

Beijing has been gradually increasing its presence in the region, while Russia has seen its sphere of influence shrink to a critical point. The war in Ukraine, as mentioned above, has weakened Russia›s position as a security guarantor in the area, one of its last remaining bastions after a past of undisputed hegemony (Santiago, 2024).

According to Pardo (2023), Beijing and Moscow have established a division of labour in the region that facilitates cooperation between the two sides. China focuses on economic and investment issues, while Russia focuses on regional security. Although the author rules out a strategic conflict, he predicts an emerging rivalry due to the unequal weight of the two sides, a situation that has been growing since the conflict in Ukraine.

Along these lines, the researcher M. Hess (2023) considers that 2022 marked the beginning of the end of Russian hegemony in Central Asia, a circumstance that has been reinforced by the war in Ukraine. The author also foresees turbulence in Russia›s backyard.

Finally, there is a certain group of scholars who do not fear for the health of Beijing-Moscow relations because of China´s greater weight. The theories of Kaczmarski (2019) stand out among these authors, who, while acknowledging that there are sensitive issues, do not pose a danger to the health of the relationship. Another example is provided by Pantucci and Arduino (2023) who argue that Russia is no longer concerned about China´s advance in the region, as it has already conceded that its secondary role in the region is a reality.

### *2.2.2. The Chinese line*

The main experts consulted generally follow the mainstream analysis, characterised by a discourse that emphasises cooperative aspects with Russia rather than disagreements, using a cautious approach. This does not imply that they do not recognise and accept disagreements on certain issues, mainly in the energy field, which are at the root of tensions in the strategic partnership in Central Asia, but they consider that the strength of the relationship outweighs these obstacles.

The main point of disagreement arises with China´s entry into the region as an energy partner, which allows for the diversification of energy sources. This breaks with the monopolistic practices that Russia had hitherto enjoyed, going back to Soviet times. China´s energy needs represent an alternative customer for the Central Asian republics, forcing Russia to renegotiate with producer countries. The Austrian author Thomas S. Eder picks up on this first episode of competition for control of resources by analysing the Chinese literature on the subject, in which two authors stand out. According to Zhao Huasheng, "China´s presence in the Central Asian energy sector is a challenge for Russia [...] China and Russia are energy partners and competitors in Central Asia" (Eder, 2013: 116-117). The expert acknowledges the harm to Russian interests due to China´s entry but believes that Russia›s fears are unfounded: "China, unlike the West, respects the Russian sphere of influence, not seeking any privileges, let alone regional hegemony [...] but a peaceful, stable situation, a secure neighbourhood and vital energy imports" (Eder, 2013: 118-119).

This view has hardly changed over the years and the recent conflicts. As mentioned above, China needs its Russian partner to avoid being isolated on the world stage, so it cannot afford to make mistakes or unfortunate statements that could negatively affect its neighbour or its strategic partnership with it. Russia›s current vulnerability has therefore led to greater prudence and caution on China´s part. As a result, moderate statements have been made by experts such as Huasheng (2023), who considers a conflict between Russia and China in a new version of the great game (Source, 2024) in Central Asia to be a Western invention, as relations between the two countries are based on mutual and peaceful coexistence. Despite the years that have passed, the author has not altered his discourse, pointing to the West as the main discordant element.

In the same vein, former Chinese diplomat Zhao Mingwen, whose position remains confident that Sino-Russian relations are strong and have not changed significantly over time, expresses himself along the same lines. According to Mingwen, “The positive trend of deepening cooperation in all spheres of Sino-Russian relations is considered impossible to derail” (Eder, 2013: 119). Moreover, for the author, Beijing and Moscow have no boundaries and both countries would support each other in the face of conflicts originating from external powers (Hille and Lewis, 2022), which reinforces the idea of a syntony between the two revisionist powers.

### *2.2.3. The Russian line*

Russian expert opinion in Central Asia in many cases indirectly acknowledges Chinese superiority and seeks cooperative approaches between the various Chinese and Russian-led organisations when it is not possible to do so independently. Where the Chinese presence prevents these organisations from developing on their own, they should cooperate with Chinese projects. In this way, they link the region›s economic future to decisions taken in the BRI and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), although they also recognise the importance of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). Another variable on which these analysts agree is the need for mutual unity in the face of a common rival: US imperialism. Predictably, these authors highlight the synergies that are generated when Russia and China work together towards a common goal, which is none other than the stability of the young Central Asian republics, highlighting Russia›s valuable and necessary presence as a guarantor of peace in the region.

On the other hand, it is important to note that the volume of Russian literature in the field of Sino-Russian relations in Central Asia has decreased considerably after the outbreak of the Moscow-Kiev conflict, which is now at the forefront of publications by Russian authors. One example of how the information vector has shifted westwards is Lukin›s extensive analysis of how the Ukrainian conflict affects the Moscow-Beijing axis. The Russian expert has emphasised the strength of the pairing, omitting a comparison of their weight, highlighting Moscow›s rapprochement with Beijing as a *brother in arms* in its confrontation with the West (Šrāders & Terry, 2022).

## 3. The case of Kazakhstan

Authoritarian regimes in Central Asia are characterised by a strong concentration of power, which is a result, among other reasons, of the premature birth of these republics and the need for a cohesive element.

Kazakhstan›s geographical characteristics have exerted a powerful influence on power-shaping. The extensive steppe that covers a significant part of the country, combined with desert areas and mountain ranges that serve as a natural border with China and Kyrgyzstan, has hindered the sedentary lifestyle of the nomadic populations residing in the region. Kazakhstan›s social structure is characterised by the presence of clans, whose rivalry has a decisive impact on the country›s internal politics.

Kazakhstan has pursued a foreign policy of multi-vector diplomacy since its independence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. While this diversification strategy was vital in the early years after independence, it has evolved as the country achieved the stability necessary to protect its autonomy and negotiate relations with neighbouring great powers (Vanderhill *et al.*, 2020). Given its geographical location between Russia and China, Kazakhstan has had to make significant diplomatic efforts to maintain its independence.

The Central Asian country has traditionally maintained good relations with Russia, although this dynamic has changed significantly in recent times. At the same time, Kazakhstan has strongly defended its sovereignty and sought to maintain an independent foreign policy. However, the gradual rise of China as a key player in the region has generated remarkable synergies, taking advantage of the economic opportunities that the Asian giant offers.

Kazakhstan›s stability has historically been a magnet for foreign investment, especially due to its considerable energy reserves, which have positioned it as one of the most important economic players in the region. This strategy of multilateralism has allowed it to reconcile the influences of Russia and China with investments from the US and the EU, striking a delicate balance that is essential for its survival. Moreover, Kazakhstan has been respected and regarded by other Central Asian countries as an independent regional power not subservient to foreign interests.

In terms of its political structure, Kazakhstan is characterised by a strong neo-patrimonialism that influences decision-making (Ballesteros, 2022). Moreover, it is a clear example of a rentier state, where the economy has been subordinated to political interests. Substantial revenues from the export of hydrocarbons, natural gas and uranium have helped maintain and perpetuate kleptocracy and nepotism, with the Nazarbayev family and a group of oligarchs close to the regime at the centre of power.

While initially President Nursultan Nazarbayev may have shown some disposition towards democratic openness, over time the regime has become increasingly authoritarian. Significant legislative changes have expanded the president›s power and hindered the participation of opposition parties, which have been delegitimised and persecuted.

As a result, the electoral system has been conditioned, limiting the presence of independent political parties and favouring those affiliated to the president. Revenues from hydrocarbon exports have been instrumental in sustaining the country›s economy and enriching the ruling elites, while the population has experienced a gradual decline in individual freedoms, as well as a deterioration in working and living conditions.

### *3.1. Current context*

The current political situation in Kazakhstan is marked by the uncertainty inherent in a change of presidency, especially when the predecessor has served a long term in office. This was the case with President Nazarbayev, who led the country from the Soviet era until 2019, making him one of the longest-serving leaders in Central Asia. After an election with few elements of transparency, the winner of the elections was Kasmin-Yomart Tokayev. Although continuity in his mandate was expected, several unexpected events have led to significant changes in the country›s government, with repercussions for its foreign policy.

The most prominent event, with decisive consequences, was the mass protest in early 2022 by a significant part of the population in Zhanaozen against the increase in the price of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), commonly used as a fuel in Central Asia. This protest, which quickly spread across the country, highlighted deeper social problems, from the precarious economic situation affecting much of the country, with income levels barely above the subsistence threshold, to repressive policies, such as the lack of freedoms and corruption, as well as energy problems, such as the interruption of electricity supply in the easternmost regions (Gil, 2023).

Faced with his first significant challenge as president, Tokayev did not hesitate to seek external support from Russia through the CSTO, arguing that the protests were the result of foreign influence and accusing the demonstrators of terrorism, thus evoking pro-Western colour revolutions. The crackdown on the demonstrations resulted in the loss of hundreds of lives and significant purges in the government, affecting important figures linked to Nazarbayev, including the former president himself, who was removed from Kazakhstan›s Security Council.

Many experts point out that Tokayev handled these protests skilfully, blaming his predecessor for the social unrest and revoking the lifetime positions he held. In this way, it has justified a profound change in political leadership, all in a context marked by Russian backing and intervention, leaving Nazarbayev with no room for manoeuvre (Stronski, 2023).

In contrast, other authors accept a significant change in the political elite but doubt this immediacy. They argue that this transformation will be gradual, as, among other reasons, the old oligarchic elites still retain certain segments of power, although these show evidence of attrition (Kudaibergenova & Laruelle, 2022).

The paradigm shift in Kazakh politics, where Tokayev has emerged as a central figure, has marked a new era in the nation. Not only it is evident in the change of the capital›s name to Nursultan, but it has also brought with it a transformation in the international perception of the country, which is now rocked by protests and risks losing foreign investment and trade agreements.

This momentous change in Kazakh politics raises many questions. The purge and renewal in institutions once loyal to his predecessor, Nazarbayev, and now under

Tokayev›s control, threatens the oligarchs who benefited from the former president›s protection. This corrupt oligarchy, which includes the former president›s daughters and sons-in-law, is now in the spotlight. The fundamental question is whether these changes will be structural, involving less restrictive measures and greater democratic openness that will benefit society, or whether they will simply be limited to a superficial change of elites, with renewed loyalty to Tokayev.

## *3.2. Russia, the soft power*

### *3.2.1. Moscow, from historically to uncertainty*

From the Russian perspective, influenced by Putin›s particular vision and the development of Duguin›s theories, the role of the shared past and Kazakhstan›s current subordination to Moscow is emphasised. There are disagreements between Russia and Kazakhstan over the concept of Eurasian identity attributed to the latter. Russian theories, aligned with the country›s interests, argue that the emergence of the Kazakh state is due to the eponymous socialist republic in the Soviet era, from which the Central Asian states are derived, with the Russian Federation as their natural successor. On the other hand, the Kazakh perspective locates its roots in the pre-USSR Turkic Khanate, thus distancing itself from Russian narratives and acknowledging ethnic diversity and the development of its civilisation within Eurasia. Furthermore, it is noted that while there were unilateral interactions during the Soviet period, the history before and after this period has been on separate tracks. Kazakhstan upholds the notion of an independent history both within and beyond its borders (Vanderhill *et al.*, 2020).

Subsequent developments have been unfavourable to Moscow›s interests. Kazakhstan, Russia›s main ally and the gateway to the Central Asian courtyard, is also the country with the largest Russian population (given the demographic characteristics of the region, the geographical factor in Central Asian countries is crucial) and the only Central Asian republic that is part of all relevant Russian institutions in the international arena. Strong cultural, geographic ties and both economic and energy objectives represent Russia›s main interests in the country. Relations previously characterised by understanding between Putin and Nazarbayev have now cooled with the arrival of Tokayev. Multiple analysts suggest that this may be due to the closeness between Putin and the former president›s elites, while others point out that the newcomer has interpreted the invasion of Ukraine as a sign of imperialist anxieties that could affect more countries in the Soviet sphere, a circumstance that will be analysed below. Despite immediate Russian backing during the Zhanaozen protests, most analysts anticipated a clear continuity in Kazakhstan›s foreign policy, where Moscow plays a prominent role. However, Tokayev surprised everyone in June of the same year by stating during a visit to Saint Petersburg that just as he does not recognise the pro-Russian separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, he would maintain the same position should Lugansk and Donetsk (pro-Russian provinces in Ukraine›s disputed far east) be granted similar status.

These strong statements have not been isolated incidents. Soon after, Tokayev implemented an open-door policy to allow all Russians who had been called up to serve in the war in Ukraine to enter the country. In addition to these open criticisms of the Russian initiated war, the latest developments in this series of disagreements with Moscow include the new abstention on international demands for the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine during the UN vote in early 2023. At the end of the same year, Tokayev used the Kazakh language instead of Russian (the latter being coofficial in Kazakhstan) during Putin›s official visit to the country.

Russia›s response was swift. Kazakhstan, which relies on Russian infrastructure to export its energy resources to Europe, has experienced supply cuts on Russian territory. In response, the Tokayev government has intensified its contacts with the West and China to counter the Russian blockade. As a result, there has been an increase in the volume of the Trans-Caspian Canal, using Azerbaijan as a route to connect to the BTC (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan) and reach European markets. In addition, China is increasing its share as Kazakhstan›s main oil customer, which represents a victory for Kazakhstan in the Russian pressure game (Hess, 2023).

As regards intra-EEAU cooperation, Russia›s occupation of Crimea generated new disagreement. Moscow tried unsuccessfully to pressure other members to support Russian measures in the context of the annexation. As for the Russian-led common security partnership, the CSTO, Kazakhstan has once again shown defiance by conducting military exercises with NATO and refusing to purchase Russian weaponry (Vanderhill *et al.*, 2020).

Kazakhstan›s role is crucial in the Kremlin›s policy landscape, where more subtle and less coercive approaches will be required to engage its southern neighbour and regain lost influence. The crisis in relations not only represents a significant challenge for Russia because of the loss of a vital ally, increasingly close to China, but also because Kazakhstan is the main gateway to the rest of the Central Asian republics.

#### *3.2.2. Russian minorities and the invasion of Ukraine*

The high presence of the Russian population in Kazakhstan can be traced back to historical and geographical reasons. On the one hand, during the Soviet era, repopulation policies were implemented (in many cases, forced) towards geographically disadvantaged regions, such as Siberia or Kazakhstan. Proximity to the neighbouring country also encouraged emigration, making Kazakhstan the country with the largest number of Russian citizens in the entire Central Asian region. In many cases, the Russian population outnumbered the Kazakh population, mainly concentrated in the north of the country.

Nationalist discourses in the early years of independence sought to establish a common sense of identity in order to cohere an artificially created state, which could have led to ethnic tensions between Kazakhs and Russians. However, Nazarbayev›s skill achieved a conciliation that was not easy in his social policies, achieving a peaceful ethnic balance. Kazakhs were promoted to senior positions in the public sector (which, since Soviet times, had been mostly occupied by Slavs), while the principle of non-discrimination was upheld and "incitement to inter-ethnic discord" was strictly prohibited (Bohr *et al.*, 2019).

The relaxed atmosphere achieved by the president, which mitigated the risks of secession in the north of the country and promoted peaceful coexistence between two distinct ethnic groups, was disrupted in 2014 with Russia›s annexation of Crimea. Similarities in relations with Russia, between Ukraine and Kazakhstan have raised alarm bells in Astana, a situation that has intensified following Russia›s invasion in early 2022. This has generated a common fear among the different ethnic groups. On the one hand, the Kazakhs fear that the Russians will act as infiltrators, similar to what happened in pro-Russian villages in eastern Ukraine. On the other hand, Kazakh Russians fear social persecution in response to Moscow›s actions in Ukraine (Bohr *et al.*, 2019).

Further along this line of thought, we find reasoning that justifies Kazakh fear in defence and protection of state sovereignty to avoid becoming a client state of any of the great powers, but especially of Russia, given its historical role as a colonial power in the region (Vanderhill *et al.*, 2020). The best example in this context of the Ukrainian conflict as a scenario of national infringement in favour of another regional power is Lukashenko›s Belarus, which has become yet another instrument of Russia in the Ukrainian war. Kazakhstan does not want to become another Belarus.

Despite the notable presence of a russophile population in northern Kazakhstan, which could raise similar concerns to those in Ukraine›s eastern provinces, a similar conflict is unlikely to arise in the short term. Unlike the conflict in Ukraine, the Kremlin has not supported any secessionist aspirations of Kazakh Russians in the north of the country. Moreover, Russia›s fragility because of the protracted conflict with Kiev would rule out the idea of opening new fronts. Tokayev›s moves therefore seem to respond more to a desire to eliminate any vestige of his predecessor›s policies.

#### *3.2.3.Soft power*

A large group of experts now argue that the Russian threat in Kazakhstan comes not primarily from Russian minorities, but from the influence of Russian soft power. This concept, now developed by several authors based on Nye›s work, involves the subtle, often difficult to identify, meddling of elements by a foreign actor that influence and modify a country›s policies to its advantage. This infiltration, as Nye (2005) argues, "predisposes people to accept their leadership, as they share their vision and values, and are therefore more likely to support policies that support these assumptions".

The application of such tools is currently proving successful, as it does not require the use of violence and often goes unnoticed socially. China is a prime example of the use of these economic and investment practices to exert control in its area of influence. Military experts support the idea that Russia has the capacity to overthrow regimes that are adverse to Moscow and replace them with regimes more sympathetic to its interests. The Kremlin wields this soft power through its cultural and ideological influence, using mainly five instruments to alter and condition Kazakhstan›s political guidelines in its favour. These instruments include cooperative approaches, public diplomacy, the Russian language, education and the media (Hudson, 2022).

Cooperative approaches benefit from a number of common characteristics, such as values or culture, which are mainly a result of the russification of the country during the Soviet era and which are still present in Kazakh society today, the most influenced by Russian culture of all the former Central Asian republics. Kazakh diplomacy, as mentioned above, is based on a strategy of diversification that allows it to establish multiple links but requires significant efforts to achieve a balance that does not generate tensions. Russia has traditionally been the main axis or one of the main variables on which Kazakhstan›s foreign policy is developed.

As for the Russian language, it has been an important asset in the past but is now in decline. This decline is explained by the population growth of Kazakhs, influenced by a significant exodus of ethnic Russian Kazakhs since the war in Ukraine. This is reflected in statistical results, especially in the field of education, where a reduction in the number of schools teaching in Russian in Kazakhstan has been observed, decreasing from 32 % in 2008 to 17 % in 2020. In addition, there has been a drop in the percentage of students studying entirely in Russian, from 36 % to 12 % over the same period (Hudson, 2022).

As for university education, despite the decline of Russian in schools, the situation is different. Russia remains the preferred destination for Kazakh students abroad, and the number of them choosing to study in Russia has increased since 2005 (Hudson, 2022). The reasons behind this trend are easily understandable, including geographical, linguistic and economic factors.

Finally, we find the role of the media, one of the main forms of soft power in the era of globalisation of communications, facilitated by the use of the internet as the network of networks. In addition, the presence of Russian TV channels and radio stations in Kazakhstan is widespread.

But how do the consequences of this soft power manifest themselves? According to the author, soft power that promotes a positive image of Russia within Kazakhstan is projected in the international arena, contributing to the achievement of Russian economic, political and security goals. A clear example is the international cooperation between the two countries, evidenced by Kazakhstan›s participation in all Russian-run bodies at the international level. This strong link justifies and normalises the intervention of Russian troops in support of the president during the January protests as a result of soft power. Without this phenomenom, criticism from nationalist or pro-Western Kazakhs of the entry of CSTO forces would have been more noticeable. However, Tokayev is using various means to reduce this Russian influence in virtually all areas of soft power.

The main responses have been in the cultural sphere, with multiple events highlighting the country›s own history, disassociating itself from the link with Russia. Other significant and less subtle manifestations include the switch to the Latin alphabet, scheduled prior to the current crisis, and the limitation of Russian propaganda through the Kazakh media, as open criticism of Western countries created uncomfortable situations for partners within Kazakhstan›s multi-vectoral political character. Finally, to reduce the importance of the Russian language, the study of a third language, English, was introduced as an international showcase (Bohr *et al.*, 2019). The last incident mentioned was the language episode at one of the last meetings between the leaders of the two countries, suggesting that the situation is closer to a continuation of tensions and rivalry than an easing. For these reasons, Kazakhstan is justified as the best scenario to exemplify Russian soft power.

## *3.3. China, the emerging partner*

### *3.3.1. Chinese interests in Kazakhstan*

Kazakhstan plays a crucial role in Chinese projects. Its privileged geographical location, sharing a border with China and serving as the main route to European markets, is combined with its vast natural resources. As Pieper (2021) notes, "Kazakhstan did not need to lobby for the use of any particular branch. Geography and logistics play in Kazakhstan's favour because of the country's central location in the heart of Eurasia".

According to Kazakh authorities, in 2021, Kazakhstan›s exports to China will reach an all-time high of 147 million tonnes of oil and 44 billion $m^3$ of gas. Crude oil and its derivatives ranked first in terms of value, reaching $4.1 billion, followed by natural gas, with a value of $1.2 billion. In this context, CNPC (China National Petroleum Corporation) stands out as one of the main foreign investors (Nurdavletova *et al.*, 2023).

Kazakhstan plays a leading role in the energy sphere with China, being one of its main partners due to its abundance of natural resources. The current geopolitical trend is strengthening ties between the two countries, at the expense of Russia. Kazakhstan has emerged as a regular participant in multilateral forums and meetings, as well as in bilateral negotiations in the energy sphere, which some authors have called energy diplomacy (Nurdavletova *et al.*, 2023). Energy relations between China and Kazakhstan date back to the late 1990s, when the first energy agreements were signed.

However, it is from 2013, with the introduction of the BRI, that China´s presence in Kazakhstan experienced a significant and definitive increase. This progress is materialised through a broad and generous network of economic and commercial investments, with energy cooperation being one of the key pillars of the project, according to Professor Shun Wang (2023). Cooperation between the two countries has been strengthened since the beginning of the new millennium and has reached a decisive level with the monumental BRI project, which involves Chinese state-owned enterprises, such as the mentioned CNPC.

Table I presents updated official Kazakh government statistics, revealing that the country›s economic engine is the country›s large exports of natural resources, mainly oil and oil products, which account for more than half of the total monetary value, amounting to 53.8 %, far ahead of other raw materials such as radioactive chemical elements (4.4 %) and refined copper (4.1 %).

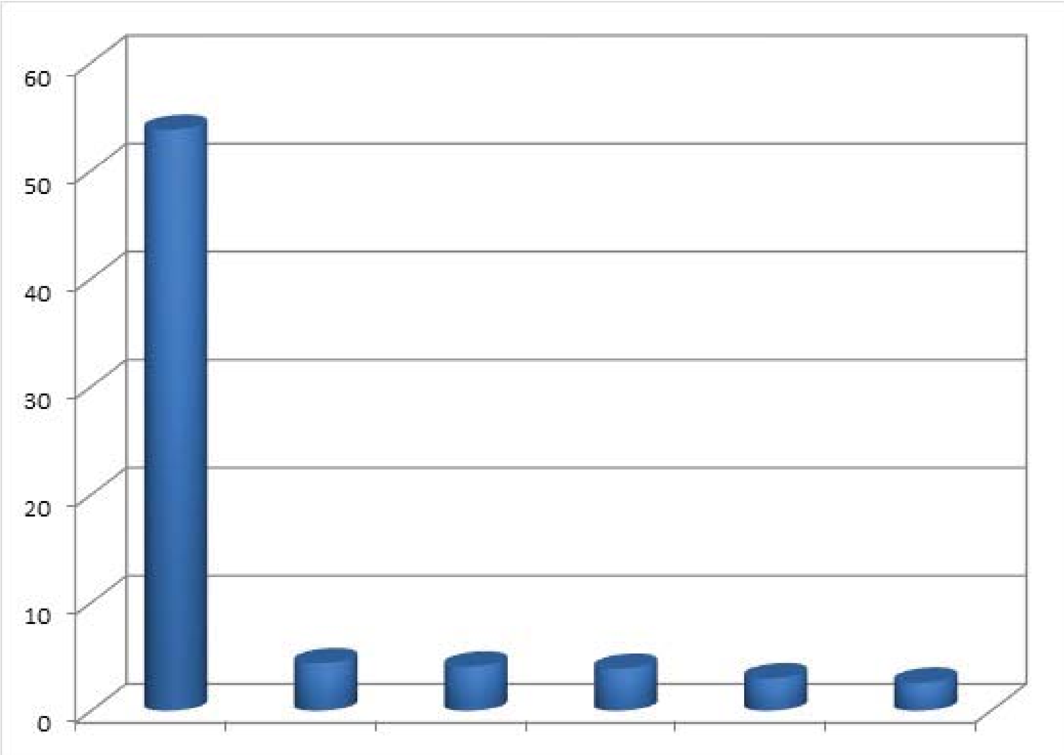


Table I. Kazakhstan's exports in 2023 by product (in %). Source: Author's elaboration based on data obtained from the National Statistical Office of Kazakhstan. Available at: https://stat.gov.kz/en/industries/economy/foreign-market/publications/123067/

Table II shows the geographically segmented trade balance. Total exports in 2023 reached 78 674.5 million US dollars (USD). In terms of ranking by trading partner, it can be seen in Kazakh imports (Table II) that China (18.7 %) is slightly surpassed by Italy (18.9 %). It is followed by Russia (12.4 %) and the Netherlands (5.2 %). On the other hand, in terms of exports (Table III), as was to be expected from the above, China is the main destination for Kazakh resources, representing 27.4 % of total exports, closely followed by Russia (26.5 %), whose trend, with the conflict in Ukraine in the background, is difficult to foresee.

Not surprisingly, Kazakhstan is the Central Asian country that receives the most attention and investment from China. In addition to the energy interests mentioned above, there are also important Chinese economic, commercial and security objectives in Kazakhstan.

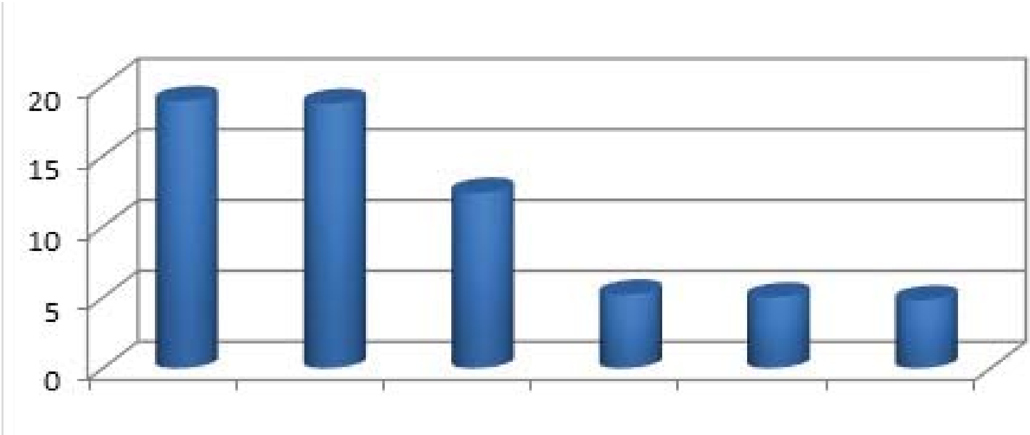


Table II. Kazakhstan's imports in 2023 by country (in %). Source: Author's elaboration based on data obtained from the National Statistical Office of Kazakhstan. Available at: https://stat.gov.kz/en/industries/economy/foreign-market/publications/123067/

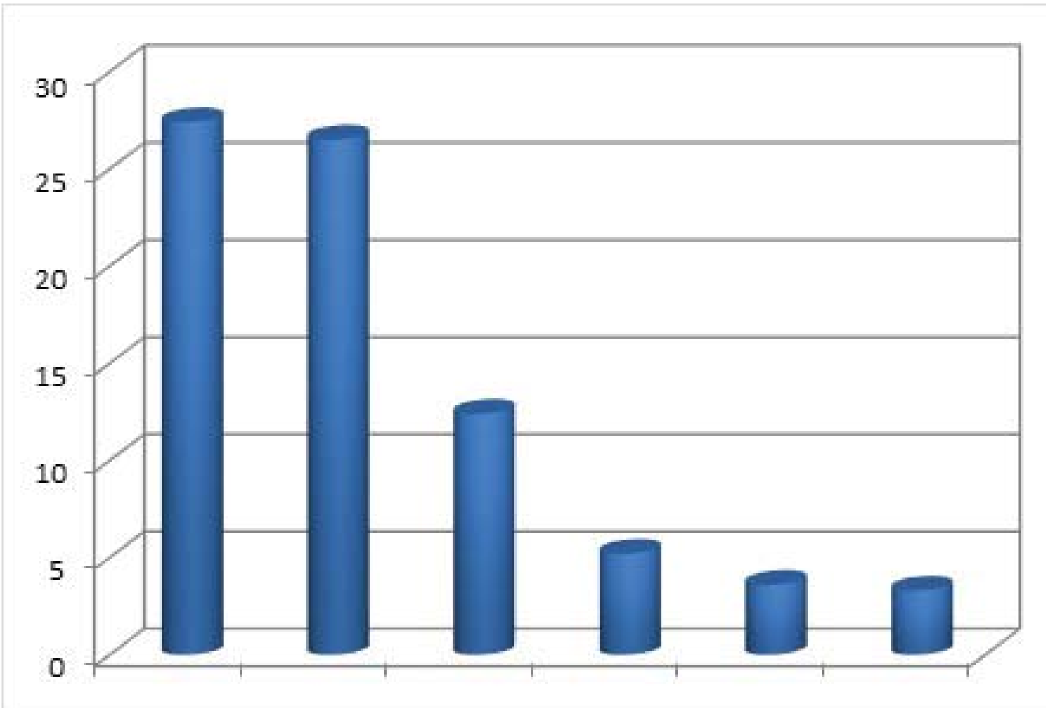


Tabla III. Exportaciones de Kazajistán en 2023 por países (en porcentaje). Fuente: Elaboración propia. A partir de datos obtenidos a través del Oficina Nacional de Estadísticas de Kazajistán. Disponible en: https://stat.gov.kz/en/industries/economy/foreign-market/publications/123067/

These interests are closely linked to the success of the Belt and Road Initiative, which has involved considerable investment for the benefit of the Central Asian country to create and modernise non-existent or old infrastructure inherited from the Soviet era.

Recently, the partnership between the two states has evolved into a comprehensive strategic partnership, further consolidating relations. However, there are dissenting voices within the country itself, perhaps influenced by a latent Sinophobia, who estimate a decline in Chinese investment and minimise Beijing›s role in the Kazakh economy. This feeling of rejection is mainly due to two reasons: the growing Chinese presence in the country›s economy and the ethnic problems on the border resulting from the persecution of the Uighur minority.

## 4. Conclusions

In the current context, the prospective outline of Kazakhstan›s foreign policy in the coming years becomes complex. The multi-vector strategy, the bedrock of Kazakh diplomatic success, will continue to be a key pillar, delineated by relations with its Chinese and Russian neighbours. The challenges faced with each one, and the decisions and actions taken, have a decisive impact on the direction of this vector, not only in Kazakhstan but in the entire Central Asian sphere.

The cooling of relations between Tokayev and Putin introduces unprecedented uncertainty into bilateral relations, a situation that China is taking advantage of. Kazakhstan observes, with justified suspicion, Russia›s moves in Ukraine, seeking some distancing in order to safeguard its autonomy and avoid being subjugated as Belarus is experiencing under Lukashenko›s regime. However, this stance faces obstacles, as Russia has significant resources to influence its neighbour. Russian interference in Kazakhstan›s political life through electronic media creates instability and serves its interests. The outcome of the war in Ukraine will condition the extent of Russian soft power in the country and thus in the Central Asian region.

China positions itself as Kazakhstan›s priority partner, with which it shares a strategic partnership of multilateral scope. This cooperation goes beyond energy agreements, representing a crucial factor in the delicate balance of power in the region, especially in the face of recent tensions between Kazakhstan and Russia. Relations between the two countries will largely depend on the success or failure of the Belt and Road Initiative projects as they pass through Kazakhstan. However, incidents involving the Kazakh minority on Chinese territory are generating a sense of rejection, exacerbating what the Kazakh population calls a yellow invasion. Reversing this mentality requires a reversal of domestic policies in the Xinjiang region, as well as investments that benefit both Chinese interests and Kazakh citizens.

In sum, there is reasonable evidence of competitive tensions and disputes between Russia and China in Central Asia, especially over the control of energy resources, where Kazakhstan plays a major role as the main producer. While Moscow and Beijing are unlikely to publicly highlight their differences, disputes could intensify in future scenarios if significant changes in the world order occur. However, such assumptions are unlikely in the short to medium term.

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# *Athena versus Mars: the protection of ukrainian cultural heritage in the war against Russia*

**Abstract**

The Ukrainian war has awakened old fears in Europe. This war has its origins in ethno-cultural issues that go back centuries. To understand the origin of the conflict between Russians and Ukrainians, it is necessary to go back to the Russian empire, which is reflected today in aspects such as language and religion. In such a conflict, cultural property becomes a potential victim and subject to manipulation, plunder, damage and destruction. Since the beginning of the war, hundreds of cultural properties in Ukraine have been damaged or destroyed despite international regulations protecting heritage in the event of armed conflict, much of which has been ratified by both Kiev and Moscow. This paper will begin by analyzing Ukrainian versus Russian national identity from its origins to the present day, continue by examining the mechanisms of protection of cultural property applicable to this case, as well as the damage suffered to this day by Ukrainian heritage, and try to determine whether such acts are contrary to international law and how they can be judged.

**Keywords**

Ukraine, Cultural heritage, Destruction, Armed conflict, UNESCO.

**Cite this article:**

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## 1. Introduction

On February 24, 2022, the Russian army crossed the border and marched on Ukraine. Since the beginning of the Russian invasion, the Ukrainian government has worked together with UNESCO and other cultural organisations to protect the country›s cultural property by fixing the emblem prescribed by the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, surrounding historical monuments with sandbags and trying to evacuate cultural property from museums.

It is interesting to analyse the protection of Ukraine›s wartime cultural heritage for several reasons. First, cultural property is also a victim of conflict and is subject to theft, damage or destruction. In addition, their protection is often compromised by being subordinated to the military needs of the warring parties. Secondly, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has very strong cultural motivations, which puts cultural assets even more in the spotlight as their destruction is an effective means of undermining morale and humiliating the adversary.

This paper will seek to answer the following research questions: Which cultural assets are most threatened in war? Has Russia committed war crimes by its actions against cultural property in Ukraine? And if the answer is yes, how can they be judged? Naturally, the answer to these questions will be detailed in the conclusions.

The work is divided into three distinct parts. The first part will consist of an analysis of what is meant by heritage and of the range of international standards aimed at protecting cultural property. The second part will analyse precisely the Ukrainian national consciousness *vis-à-vis* the Russian one from its origins to the present day. Exploring the identity and interests of both sides will reveal the ideals and objectives of the actors and allow us to demonstrate that identity is an element that is present in the construction of the foreign policy of states, as well as the effectiveness and importance that its study can have in international relations. The third part will provide the reader with an overview of the current situation of cultural heritage in Ukraine now that the country is in the midst of war. Finally, the fourth part will look at how to bring to justice the crimes committed against heritage in this conflict.

### *1.1. What is cultural heritage?*

Influenced by the ravages suffered by historical and cultural heritage during World War II, the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict adopted in The Hague in 1954 first delineated in article 1 what was meant by cultural property: “movable or immovable property of great importance to the cultural heritage of every people”, be they monuments, works of art, manuscripts, etc. and “buildings whose main and effective purpose is to preserve or exhibit the movable cultural property”, such as museums, libraries, archives or even shelters intended for their protection. Sites that concentrate a considerable number of cultural properties of the two previous classes will be considered as monumental centres (Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, 1954)10,31]]},»issued»:{«date-parts»:[[«1954»,5,14]]}}}],»schema»:»https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json»} .

Besides, the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted within the framework of the UNESCO General Conference at its 17th session held in Paris from October 17 to November 21, 1972, in its article 1 defines cultural heritage as:

> "Monuments: architectural works, works of monumental sculpture and painting, elements or structures of an archaeological nature, inscriptions, cave dwellings and combinations of features, which are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science; groups of buildings: groups of separate or connected buildings which, because of their architecture, their homogeneity or their place in the landscape, are of outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science; and sites: works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view" (Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, 1972).

The latter definition is key, not only for its precision and clarity, but also for highlighting the universal value of heritage. This idea of cultural diversity as an invaluable asset for the whole of humanity is taken up by UNESCO in one of its declarations of November 15, 1972, article 7 of which recognises "the right of all countries and peoples to preserve their culture as part of the common heritage of mankind" *(Declaración sobre los Principios Rectores del Empleo de las Transmisiones por Satélite para la Libre Circulación de la Información, la Difusión de la Educación y la Intensificación de los Intercambios Culturales, 1972).*

Indeed, heritage can be understood as an inheritance that a human group receives from previous generations, which it can pass on to future generations, and which the members of the group carry with them to express their identity and collective memory. It is because of this potential of heritage as a basis from which to project oneself into the future that, after decolonisation, third world countries pushed for the recognition within the United Nations of the so-called third generation rights or human rights of solidarity, among which the right of peoples to their natural wealth and resources is of particular interest to us. The latter would crystallise in articles 13 to 15 of the 1976 Universal Declaration of the Rights of Peoples, concerning the right to preserve their own culture and conserve their heritage (Urueña Álvarez, 2004).

Given its role as a bridge between the past and the present, the deliberate destruction of cultural property has been frequently used as a weapon of war throughout history up to the present day, as recognised by the Cultural Heritage Policy of the Office of the

Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court: "Deliberate attacks on cultural heritage are a centuries-old practice that remains a feature of modern conflicts". Indeed, the destruction of heritage assets is part of strategies to eliminate the adversary›s cultural and ideological references in order to undermine its morale and weaken the historical justifications for its claims. The loss of heritage is a severe blow to the identity of a nation, which sees an important part of its past erased with the stroke of a pen. Without testimonies of its tradition that allow it to project itself into the present and the future, a culture is exposed to the manipulation of its history, its cultural cleansing and its dilution in favour of another imposed or assimilated culture. From a security perspective, identity crises also foster instability and conflict by increasing the likelihood of violent struggles within societies to forge a new identity and of feelings of resentment between different human groups (Cortés Jiménez, 2019).

### *1.2. Mechanisms for the protection of cultural heritage in armed conflict*

Once the object of study has been defined, we can go on to consider the set of legal bases that ensure its protection. First of all, cultural heritage is protected by human rights themselves, more specifically article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which ensures the right of everyone to "freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits", an idea that is also enshrined in article 15 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which both Russia and Ukraine are parties (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948), this idea is also reflected in article 15 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which both Russia and Ukraine are parties (Drazewska y Hausler, s. f.).

In the field of *ius in bello*, article 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 considers "destruction and appropriation of property not justified by military necessity and carried out on a large scale in an unlawful and wantonly" as grave breaches (Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, 1949). Similarly, its 1977 Additional Protocol I on the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, which is binding on Russia and Ukraine, stipulates in article 53 that "historic monuments, works of art or places of worship which constitute the cultural or spiritual heritage of peoples" must not be attacked, be the object of reprisals, or be used in support of the military effort (Protocolo I adicional, 1977).

The 1954 Hague Convention mentioned above is a key document as the first treaty of universal scope devoted exclusively to the protection of cultural heritage (Urueña Álvarez, 2004). This Convention, which was sponsored by UNESCO and to which both Russia and Ukraine are parties, requires in its Article 4 that states parties respect cultural property located on the territory of other states, refrain from any act of theft, pillage, misappropriation or vandalism against it and avoid retaliatory measures against cultural property. Likewise, States Parties to the Convention must both avoid "exposing such property to destruction or damage in the event of armed conflict"

(Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property, 1954), and take advantage of the protection enjoyed by the property by using it in support of the military effort.

The 1954 Convention offers cultural property two types of protection: a general one, under Article 6, for anything that can be considered cultural property under Article 1, whereby it is the task of the State Party to determine which property is of sufficient importance to enjoy the protection of the Convention; and a special protection, for cultural property of great importance which is not used for military purposes, which is remote from important military objectives and which is inscribed on the International Register of Cultural Property under Special Protection, in addition to shelters of specific property, and transports which are specially used for the purpose of transporting cultural property (article 8). In order to mark the properties to be protected, the Convention establishes an emblem of obligatory use in the case of cultural property subject to special protection, and optional use for those with general protection (Balcells Magrans, 2022).

Subsequently, in view of the brutal acts committed during the Kosovo war, it became clear that a new treaty was needed that would take up the development of humanitarian law since 1954 and deepen the protection of heritage (de Rueda Roigé, 1998). Thus, at the Diplomatic Conference held in The Hague in 1999, the Second Protocol was signed, Chapter III of which established a new category of enhanced protection for cultural property of particular importance for humanity which benefits from appropriate national protection measures and which is not used for military purposes (Second Protocol, 1999).

#### *1.2.1. Military requirements*

Despite the general prohibition of subjecting cultural property to attack, international law also provides for certain exceptions under which it is lawful. Thus, the 1954 Convention introduces for the first time the idea of military necessity taking precedence over the protection of cultural property (de Rueda Roigé, 1998). Regarding cultural property enjoying general protection, article 4.2 of the Convention provides that it shall lose its protection if military necessity prevents compliance. The conditions for waiving the immunity of specially protected cultural property are stricter and according to Article 11 can only be done on a temporary basis if the adversary attacks cultural property or uses the property or its immediate vicinity for military purposes, and prior efforts should be made to require the adversary, whenever possible, to cease such violation within a reasonable time. The decision to waive immunity can only be taken by, at least, one Head of Division and must be communicated to the opposing party, if circumstances permit it, well in advance and in writing to the Commissioner-General for Cultural Property, explaining the reasons for taking such action (Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property, 1954). It goes without saying that, under the principle of proportionality, a waiver of military necessity does not justify a disproportionate attack (Drazewska y Hausler, s. f.).

The Second Protocol, pursuant to article 4 of the 1954 Convention, in its article 6, further elaborates on the concept of military necessity by accepting it in case the cultural property in question has been rendered a military objective by its function, or if the capture, neutralisation or destruction of the cultural property would provide a military advantage not otherwise achievable. Therefore, military necessity cannot be invoked if the attack does not involve such a military advantage or if the damage caused to the cultural property is excessive in relation to the military advantage anticipated, as prescribed by article 7 of the same Protocol (Second Protocol, 1999), or if it has other purposes such as spreading terror among the population, which is prohibited by article 51 (2) of the 1977 Additional Protocol I.

### *1.2.2. Looting of cultural property*

Finally, the 1954 Convention had certain gaps, such as the restitution of cultural property in post-conflict situations and how to deal with illicit situations resulting from a possible lack of vigilance and conservation, such as illicit trafficking in property, archaeological plundering, or the restoration or modification of cultural property with ideological intent. These gaps have been filled by subsequent protocols and conventions such as the Protocol for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, adopted at the same time as the 1954 Convention of the same name (Miranda Gonçalves, 2020). This Protocol, which has been signed and ratified by both Russia and Ukraine, in its Chapter I requires its States Parties to prevent the export of cultural property located in territory occupied during the armed conflict, to seize cultural property imported into their territory, to return it and to compensate the competent authorities of the territory of the State from which it was exported after the end of hostilities (Protocol for Protection, 1954). In the same vein, the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property was adopted within the framework of UNESCO in 1970 and approved by Russia and Ukraine in 1988 (Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, 1970). The 1999 Second Protocol also addresses this issue in Article 9 by prohibiting, in occupied territory, the export of cultural property by the occupying power, as well as archaeological excavations and restorations, except when indispensable for the safeguarding of the property. They should also, if necessary, enlist the cooperation of the competent national authorities of the occupied territory, if and when circumstances permit (Segundo Protocolo, 1999).

## 2. The case of Ukraine

The causes of the present conflict are numerous and varied in nature: geopolitical, strategic, economic and, of course, cultural and identity-based. The American political scientist Alexander Wendt already argued that identity and interests were the main factors guiding the actions of states, and that identity and interests were determined not so much by material forces as by ideas. As a consequence of interacting with other actors, their awareness of themselves *vis-à-vis* others, their own characteristics and history, international actors construct images of themselves in order to differentiate themselves from other actors. These images constitute what we know as identity and condition its relationship with the other states with which it interacts, as well as the interests that lie behind this relationship (Wendt, 1994).

Three days before the invasion, on February 21, 2022, Vladimir Putin made a speech to justify Russia›s intervention in the neighbouring country. Among the reasons given were NATO›s expansion right up to Russia›s doorstep, but especially the legitimacy of Ukraine›s identity and its right to statehood (Putin, 2022).

This is not the first time Putin has made similar statements. For example, in 2008, on a visit to the US, he told US President George W. Bush that "Ukraine is not a country" and in his speech to the Duma in 2014, after the annexation of Crimea, he claimed that Russians and Ukrainians were one nation (Behrends, 2014). Such statements reflect Putin›s belief in the unity of the peoples descended from Kievan Rus on the basis of their Slavic and Orthodox Christian identity (Dlugy, 2022). However, it omits the influence of other cultures that have contributed to making Ukraine, Belarus and Russia distinct nations.

The idea shared by the Russian elite of the existence of one great Russian nation divided into three Russias corresponding to a Greater Russia, a Lesser Russia (Ukraine) and a White Russia (Belarus) dates back to the time when the Grand Principality of Moscow brought the various Eastern Slavic groups under its control and has been promoted through the Russian imperial education system of the 19th century to the present day (Mankoff, 2022).

According to this approach, Ukrainian and Belarusian national identities would be a product of manipulation from the outside, and thus artificial. In the case of Ukraine, although its inhabitants had been culturally and linguistically different from Russians for centuries, Ukrainian nationalism did not emerge until the 19th century after the partition of Ukraine between Russia and Austria, which came to control the Ukrainian regions of Galicia, Bukovina and Transcarpathia. Saint Petersburg tried to suppress Ukrainian nationalist sentiment by banning the publication of works and teaching in the Ukrainian language, judging it to be a minor dialect and a contrived creation of Austria-Hungary to weaken the greater Russian identity (Behrends, 2014), which Putin evokes in his accusations of NATO and the EU manipulating Ukrainian national identity as part of their geostrategic rivalry with the Kremlin.

Ukraine sought independence after the collapse of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires in the aftermath of World War I and during World War II, when the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists led by Stepan Bandera attempted to create an independent Ukrainian state with the cooperation of Nazi Germany. Nevertheless, Stalin carried out an intense russification campaign in Ukraine that would be continued by his successors until Gorbachev›s glasnost, when nationalist movements advocating independence from the USSR regained their importance. Yeltsin supported Ukrainian independence in the belief that it would not be permanent and that an independent Ukraine would always remain linked to Russia (Behrends, 2014).

On the contrary, since its independence, Ukraine has taken steps towards consolidating its national identity, including in the majority Russian-speaking regions in the east and south of the country. Of particular note are the efforts made in this regard during Petro Poroshenko›s presidency during which, in 2019, a law was passed making Ukrainian the official language of the state and increasing its use in the media and administration. As a result of this nation-building process, today two thirds of Ukrainian citizens consider Ukrainian to be their mother tongue and a large part of the eastern part of the country is bilingual in Ukrainian and Russian (Behrends, 2014).

Ukraine›s cultural disconnection from Russia has even been reflected in the religious sphere. Until 2014, the largest of all Ukrainian Orthodox churches was the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) (Behrends, 2014), which had been created during the last days of the USSR as an autonomous Church dependent on the Moscow Patriarchate despite the existence of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), which had been created in 1992 as independent from the Moscow Church shortly after Ukraine›s declaration of independence. However, both the UAOC and the UOC-KP lacked recognition in the orthodox church hierarchy and were branded schismatic. The situation changed on December 15, 2018 with the Unification Council held in Saint Sophia Cathedral in Kiev, which unified the UAOC, the UOC-KP and some parishes of the UOC-MP into the new Orthodox Church of Ukraine (UOC) which was also granted autocephaly and recognition by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, much to the frustration of the Moscow Patriarchate (Orzechowski y Wejman, 2021). This separation between the Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox churches adds a dimension of religious warfare to an already complex conflict. Since its inception, the UOC has taken steps to move closer to the Western Catholic churches and away from the traditions of the Russian Orthodox Church. On December 24, 2022, the Primates of the UOC and the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine signed an agreement to harmonise their liturgical calendars and the dates of their religious holidays, which meant that, for example, Christmas would henceforth be celebrated in the Slavic country on December 25 and not on January 7 as per Orthodox tradition. At the present juncture, even the UOC-MP has distanced itself from Russia despite the harmony of its primate with the current Patriarch of Moscow. In May 2022, the UOC-MP issued a communiqué rejecting the Russian invasion and amending its statutes, underlining its autonomy from the Russian Orthodox Church, although it did not miss the opportunity to blame the UOC and its ideology for the invasion (Bianchi y Botti, 2023). According to sources, the UOC would today be the largest church in Ukraine with 54 % of the Ukrainian population being members. In contrast, while the UOC-MP had always been the majority church among the Ukrainian population, today only 4 % of Ukrainians would identify with this religious denomination (Лев, 2022), probably because of accusations that it is a focus of Russian influence if not collaboration with the invader.

The relative success of Kiev›s ukrainianisation policy has set alarm bells ringing in Moscow and the invasion unleashed in February last year can be interpreted as a last desperate attempt to bring Ukraine back into the Russian fold. However, it seems that this war has had the opposite effect of bringing Ukrainian citizens closer together and reinforcing the separation between Russian and Ukrainian identities.

## 3. Heritage damage in the Ukrainian war

The ethnic and cultural element is key in this war between two groups that are perceived as two distinct cultures and ethnic groups. Given the close relationship between cultural heritage and identity, cultural property runs the risk of being used in a propagandistic manner to strengthen the positions of groups and of becoming military targets to deny the cultural identity of the other. This is not the first time that Ukraine›s cultural heritage has been threatened by war. Already during the occupation of the country by German troops during World War II, Ukraine suffered severe cultural losses due to looting and destruction (Pasikowska-Schnass, 2022). In the current war, if one thing is clear from the photographs and videos that reach us, it is that there are no neutral zones and that even civilian places such as homes, hospitals, nuclear power plants, schools, places of worship, museums and archaeological sites are not free from military targeting and artillery fire (Bazhenova, 2022). Since the beginning of the war, the vast majority of Ukrainian territory has been shelled with ballistic and cruise missiles aimed at intimidating and demoralising the population. In February 2022 alone, the Russian military is estimated to launch more than 1100 missiles, around fifty per day (Koval y Gaidai, 2022). Such actions should come as no surprise given that Russia has already demonstrated its disregard for international norms in Syria by targeting some of its attacks on hospitals and important heritage sites (Daniels, 2022).

At present, Ukraine has eight UNESCO World Heritage Sites: the residence of the Metropolitans of Bukovina and Dalmatia in Chernivtsí, the wooden tserkvas of the Carpathian region, the Geodesic arch of Struve, the Chagarian beech forests of the Carpathians, the ancient city of the Tatar Chersonese and its *chôra* in occupied Crimea, Saint Sophia Cathedral, the monastic ensemble and the Kievo-Petchersk laura in Kiev, the ensemble of the historic centre in Lviv, and the historic centre of Odessa. The latter three have been added by UNESCO to its List of World Heritage in Danger because of the serious danger of war damage. The inclusion of the Ukrainian properties on the list is part of efforts both to prevent them from being attacked by Russia and to alert the international community and enlist its urgent support for their preservation. Inscription on the list enables Ukraine to benefit from resources from the World Heritage Fund and to collaborate with the World Heritage Committee in taking corrective measures to ensure the conservation of the properties (*Centro del Patrimonio Mundial*, 2008: 17). Measures Ukraine has benefited from since the beginning of the invasion include a $ 30 million emergency plan, part of which is earmarked for monument protection equipment, and support for the conservation and digitisation of artistic and documentary heritage (UNESCO, 2023).

Ukraine also has seventeen World Heritage candidate sites on its Tentative List (UNESCO, s. f.), among which the Derzhprom complex located in Kharkov›s Freedom Square, the archaeological site of the Stone Tombs and the historical centre of Chernobyl have been affected by the intense fighting (Pasikowska-Schnass, 2022). As part of UNESCO›s efforts to conserve Ukrainian heritage, UNESCO is working hand in hand with the Ukrainian authorities and ICOMOS to develop a rehabilitation plan for the historic centre of Chernobyl (UNESCO, 2024).

According to UNESCO, from the beginning of the war on February 24 to October 18 this year, a total of 295 cultural sites have been damaged or destroyed (according to the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture this figure is 533), including 124 religious sites, 110 historic buildings, 28 museums, nineteen monuments, thirteen libraries and one archive. The overwhelming majority of damaged cultural property is located in areas of heavy fighting such as Donetsk, Kharkov and Lugansk, and in Kiev (UNESCO y Larcan, 2023).

The region with the most damaged or destroyed cultural sites is Donetsk with 85 damaged or destroyed cultural sites, according to UNESCO, especially the city of Mariupol. The former Greek colony on the Sea of Azov is now under the control of the Donetsk People›s Republic (Kishkovsky y Seymour, 2022). It is estimated that around 20 000 of its inhabitants have perished in the Russian offensive (Koval y Gaidai, 2022) and that 90 % of its historic buildings have been destroyed (Verheyen y Chialastri, 2022). On March 16, 2022, one of the most dramatic episodes of the war took place in that city after Russian aircraft dropped two 500 kg bombs on the Donetsk Regional Academic Theatre of Dramatic Art, despite the fact that it was marked in Russian with the word children written large on the ground. In this case the Russians did not destroy it because it was a cultural building, but, worse, because they knew that about a thousand women and children were sheltering there, of whom about 600 perished (Baitsym, 2022).

Kharkov, with 55 sites in particular, is the second Ukrainian region with the most damaged or destroyed cultural heritage. In February 2022 alone, Russian attacks destroyed 80 % of Izium and 1937 buildings, including 1671 residential buildings, in the city of Kharkov (Koval y Gaidai, 2022), Ukraine›s second largest city and a member of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. Some of the buildings of heritage interest in the city centre have suffered the most damage, such as the opera house; the Derzhprom complex on Freedom Square, which is on Ukraine›s Tentative List for future World Heritage status; and the Slovo Building, important in the Ukrainian national consciousness for having been built in the 1920s to house the most prominent Ukrainian writers, a good number of whom would be shot on orders from the USSR (Kishkovsky y Seymour, 2022). On March 9, the city›s Art Museum was also bombed and badly damaged. The museum has a collection of around 25 000 works, including works by Italian, French, Indian, Chinese, Russian and Flemish artists, and although they were fortunately not destroyed in the attack, their conservation, especially that of the paintings, has been severely compromised as their temperature and humidity can no longer be controlled (Baitsym, 2022).

Other Ukrainian cities that have also been severely damaged include Trostianets, Irpin, Bucha, Borodianka and Hostomel, while others such as Lisichansk, Severodonetsk, Rubizhne and Chernobyl have been virtually wiped off the map (Koval y Gaidai, 2022). In the latter, whose historic centre is on the Ukrainian UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List, Russian forces destroyed an estimated 70 % of the buildings in February 2022 (Koval & Gaidai, 2022).

Russian attacks seem to target especially those cultural assets that represent those parts of Ukrainian history and politics that are not compatible with the predominant Russian version of history or that support the idea of a Ukrainian nation, especially monuments, museums, libraries and archives. Russian forces have attacked monuments commemorating victims who perished during the Holodomor, the great famine accompanied by political repression caused by the Stalinist regime in Ukraine between 1932 and 1934 and considered by more than thirty countries as genocide against Ukraine, which Russia still denies today. We know that during the Russian occupation of Mariupol in October 2022 Russian troops ordered the dismantling of a memorial to the victims of the Holomodor (Koval y Gaidai, 2022) and that in July 2023 in Sumy Oblast they bombed a school housing a Holomodor research centre (Sapuppo, 2023). Similarly, several monuments to Taras Shevchenko, the Ukrainian national poet who was forced into exile because of Russian repression, have also been destroyed or damaged. On the other hand, monuments dedicated to personalities viewed favourably by Russia, such as the Cossack hetman Bogdan Khmelnitsky who signed the treaty incorporating the Cossack territories into the Russian Tsarate, are not in danger (Mick, 2023).

Among the museums that have suffered damage, is the Ivankiv Historical and Cultural Museum in Ivankiv, northwest of Kiev, which was burned down in February 2022, just four days after the beginning of the Russian invasion. As a result of the fire, 25 works by the internationally renowned Ukrainian artist Maria Prymachenko (Daniels, 2022) were lost. This artist, whose work received praise from the likes of Pablo Picasso and Marc Chagall, is a key figure in Ukrainian art as she sought an alternative to the prevailing discourse in the USSR that considered Russian art as the pinnacle of creative intelligence while disdaining Ukrainian art and relegating it to inferior categories such as folk and national (Baitsym, 2022). In Kharkov Oblast, on May 7, 2022, a Russian airstrike destroyed the Hryhorii Skovoroda National Literary Memorial Museum, dedicated to the 18th century philosopher and poet after whom it is named, considered a national symbol in Ukraine. The mansion in which he lived and wrote his works in the twilight of his life has also been destroyed, although fortunately its contents had been made safe earlier (Kishkovsky y Seymour, 2022).

Ukraine›s literary heritage has also been affected given its role as a repository of Ukrainian culture. It is estimated that dozens of libraries across the country have been destroyed and more than 150 have been severely damaged, such as the Rare Book Library of the Vasily Karazin National University in Kharkov whose collection of 60 000 historical books and manuscripts was bombed (Sapuppo, 2023). In the Russian-occupied areas, the authorities promote the repression of everything related to Ukrainian culture and history in the educational, political and cultural spheres. Thus, books are confiscated from public libraries and schools to be destroyed and replaced by books on Russian and Soviet language, culture and history (United Nations, 2023). There is also a risk that the Russian occupying forces will destroy archives and documents that contradict their historical narrative, especially documents from the Soviet period (Schäffer y Kirchmair, 2022). There is also evidence that artists and writers have been detained, tortured or even killed in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions because of their pro-Ukrainian views, such as the children›s writer Volodymir Vakulenko (Shcherba, 2023).

In the case of places of worship, many have been damaged and destroyed during this war, reflecting the tension between the different Orthodox churches. For example, the Holy Dormition Orthodox monastery in Sviatohirsk Lavra built in the 16th century and located in Donetsk Oblast. This monastery, which is considered one of the three holiest places in Ukraine by Orthodox Christians, was under the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. Given its proximity to the front, in March, Russian artillery destroyed the Saint George›s skete and heavily damaged the church of All Saints belonging to this monastic complex (Kishkovsky y Seymour, 2022). Other religious cultural properties damaged or destroyed by the war include: the Dormition Cathedral in Kharkov, an Orthodox church built in the 18th and 19th century, whose stained glass windows and icons were damaged on March 2, 2022 after Russian troops launched a bombardment against the cathedral which at the time was being used as a shelter by the civilian population; the Trinity Monastery in Chernobyl, a monastic ensemble of 11th and 17th century buildings which has apparently been severely damaged (Hammer, 2022); and the Transfiguration Cathedral in the port city of Odessa, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which was partially destroyed by a Russian missile strike on July 23 this year (Sapuppo, 2023). It is interesting to note that all of the above religious sites were under the UOC-MP. By destroying these sites Russia destroys a heritage that it perceives as part of its own Russian Orthodox culture. In principle, it does not make much sense for the Russian military to seek to destroy cultural property that it considers its own and can claim. In fact, once the territory was conquered and the conflict was over, it would be expected that these churches would be placed under the direct control of the Russian Orthodox Church (Mick, 2023). However, it is important to bear in mind the direction the war is taking for Russia. The Kremlin realises that taking all of Ukraine and halting its nation-building is now unlikely, hence its strategy now is to slow down the Ukrainian counter-offensive and hold on to as much of the ground it has conquered so far as possible. In order to consolidate its positions, Russia would employ indiscriminate bombing tactics that would make no distinction with cultural property or attempt to avoid damaging it, which is contrary to the 1954 Hague Convention. Likewise, being aware of how unlikely it is at this stage that these churches will end up in the hands of the Russian Orthodox Church, it would not pose a moral dilemma to destroy them and would even be a means of damaging and demoralising the enemy. Apart from Orthodox churches, Russia has also bombed other religious sites, including the mosque of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent and his wife Roxelana in Mariupol, which was bombed on March 12, 2022, when it was used as a shelter by eighty people, including 34 children (Baitsym, 2022).

In many cases, Russian military tactics of bombing non-military areas from a long distance to drive people out of cities make it difficult to distinguish whether a cultural property is deliberately targeted or whether it is collateral damage from these attacks (Peter, 2022). Under the 1954 Convention, a key criterion in determining whether an attack on cultural property can be considered a crime is whether the property in question, its transport or shelter was marked with the appropriate emblem under articles 16 and 17 of the Convention and whether the accused offender therefore knew, or had reasonable grounds to know, of its protection (Campfens, Jakubowski, Hausler y Selter, 2023). According to a February 2023 report by a group of UN Special Rapporteurs, due to the magnitude and disproportionality of the attacks on densely populated areas, it can be inferred that much of the cultural property that has been damaged or destroyed and that was clearly marked has been deliberately destroyed (United Nations, 2023). They were also not used for military purposes and therefore do not qualify for the military needs exception (Koval y Gaidai, 2022). The fact that the list of damaged or destroyed Ukrainian cultural property is constantly growing has even led the Ukrainian Parliament and Zelensky himself to call for the expulsion of the Russian Federation from UNESCO for the damage caused to Ukrainian cultural heritage and for ignoring the rules of international humanitarian law (Adams, 2022). However, it is not yet possible to make a comprehensive assessment of all the damage because of the difficulty of visiting the areas mainly affected by the occupation, the shelling, the danger of mines, and the fragmentary and contradictory information coming from the besieged or occupied areas.

Ukrainian cultural heritage is not only exposed to destruction but also to looting. Since the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, illegal archaeological excavations have been carried out on Greek, Scythian and Tatar sites in Crimea, the finds of which have been illegally transported to Russia or sold on the black market (Daniels, 2022). Such is the case of the archaeological site of the ancient Greek colony of Chersonesus, outside Sevastopol, which happened to be placed under direct supervision of Moscow (Isachenkov, 2015). Already in 2014, UNESCO expressed its concern about "reports of the large-scale transfer of valuable cultural objects from Crimean museums to the Russian capital" (UNESCO, 2014). Similarly, paragraph 278 of the 2020 Report on Preliminary Examination Activities of the International Criminal Court indicated that:

> "The Office found a reasonable basis to believe that, from 26 February 2014 onwards, in the period leading up to, and/or in the context of the occupation of the territory of Crimea, the following crimes were committed: [...] seizing the enemy's property that is not imperatively demanded by the necessities of war, with regard to private and cultural property, pursuant to article 8(2)(b)(xiii) of the Statute" (Report on Preliminary Examination Activities 2020, 2020: par. 278).

Illegal export of historical and artistic artefacts to Russia or occupied Crimea is common in areas under its occupation. For example, there is clear evidence that most of the collections of the museums in Mariupol, Kherson and Melitopol have been looted (Shcherba, 2023), including the valuable collections of Scythian gold artefacts they housed (Koval y Gaidai, 2022). In other cases, the exact affiliation of the groups that seized works and whether they did so to hide and safeguard them or to destroy or steal them is unknown (Kinsella, 2023). This has led UNESCO on March 18, 2022 to urge Russia to respect international humanitarian and human rights law, including the 1954 Hague Convention; to ratify the Second Protocol to the Convention to Prevent and Stop all Forms of Theft, Misappropriation and Vandalism of Cultural Property; and to refrain from seizing movable cultural property in Ukraine (Second Extraordinary Meeting, 2022).

### *3.1. How to prosecute crimes against heritage in the Ukrainian war?*

Attacks on property may amount to war crimes and therefore entail international responsibility. The 1954 Convention and the 1999 Second Protocol, apart from establishing a framework for action to oblige the disputants to respect cultural heritage, also established criminal sanctions for acts against heritage. The 1954 Convention committed its Contracting Parties to adopt in their national legal systems criminal sanctions to punish those persons who have violated, or ordered a violation of the 1954 Convention (Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property, 1954). Article 15.2 of the 1999 Second Protocol also reiterated the obligation of the parties to incorporate into their national legislation the crimes against property established in the Protocol in order to punish them in accordance with general principles of law and international law. Furthermore, it recognised the individual criminal responsibility of persons guilty of crimes against cultural property even if they had not directly committed them. However, this Second Protocol went further than the 1954 Convention by including in its Article 17 the principle of universal justice by providing that the parties must prosecute or extradite any alleged offender of the Protocol who is present in their national territory, even if the alleged offender is not one of their nationals and the alleged offence was committed in the territory of a third State (Additional Protocol Il, 1977). This principle of universal justice opens the door for any country to prosecute or extradite alleged perpetrators of serious crimes against property on its territory regardless of their nationality or where the offence was committed, which may be of particular interest to European states and other Ukrainian allies (Escobar Hernández, 2022).

Although Russia, unlike Ukraine, has not ratified the Second Protocol, its actions must also be judged under its precepts since, thanks to the widespread acceptance of its provisions, they have acquired a customary value in international law. The latter is particularly significant in relation to aspects such as the idea of military necessity in Article 6, which is applicable to the acts of both sides in the conflict and on which the Protocol is not considered to add anything new to the 1954 Convention but merely elaborates on its content (de Rueda Roigé, 1998).

When acts against cultural heritage are committed, the question of how to judge such actions logically arises. The Rome Statute of the ICC of 1998 recognised in its clauses 8.2.b.ix and 8.2.e.iv the jurisdiction of the Court to try individuals for their acts against buildings “dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, historic monuments, hospitals and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided they are not military objectives”. According to article 8.2.e.iv of the Rome Statute, acts against cultural property may also be considered war crimes: “The destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity, carried out on a large scale, unlawfully and arbitrarily” (Rome Statute, 1998).

However, Russia has never ratified the Rome Statute and even withdrew its signature from it after the ICC prosecutor›s office in 2016 in its annual report described the Russian annexation of Crimea as an occupation, so that, according to articles 11, 12 and 24 of the Statute itself, the ICC lacks jurisdiction over crimes committed in Russia by Russian citizens (Rome Statute, 1998). Although Ukraine is also not a party to the Rome Statute, Kiev accepted the jurisdiction of the court by submitting two declarations under Article 12(3) of the Statute. In the former, the ICC›s jurisdiction is limited to alleged crimes committed between November 21, 2013 and February 22, 2014, during the Euromaidan protests, while in the latter it extends to acts committed on Ukrainian territory since February 20, 2014, following Russia›s occupation of Crimea, without any time limit, thus covering crimes committed during the current war. Thanks to these declarations, the ICC is competent to prosecute anyone, including Russian citizens, who commit on Ukrainian soil those crimes that fall under its jurisdiction, i.e. war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. In fact, in March 2022, a total of 39 countries, including Spain, submitted a request to the ICC Office of the Prosecutor to investigate possible war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine (Escobar Hernández, 2022).

Investigating the acts committed in Ukraine and whether they constitute a crime is not easy given the circumstances in which it has to be carried out: a high-intensity armed conflict in which multinational military forces and non-state armed groups are fighting, the areas where the alleged crimes are being committed are outside Ukrainian authority and there have been massive population displacements both inside and outside the country, making it difficult to locate witnesses. These elements are compounded by Moscow›s refusal to cooperate with the ICC, which makes it difficult to obtain evidence, especially in Russian-occupied territories. To obtain information relevant to the investigation, the ICC relies on the cooperation of Ukraine, States Parties, European institutions, and international organisations such as the OSCE, UNESCO and ICOM.

Despite the symbolic power of international criminal law, the ICC has no policing or enforcement powers, so it relies on international cooperation to enforce its warrants to arrest suspects and have them transferred to The Hague for trial (Sagoo y Dias, 2023). On March 17, 2023, the Court issued two arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin and Presidential Commissioner for Children›s Rights in Russia Maria Lvova-Belova for the alleged war crimes of deportation and forcible transfer of minors from Ukraine to Russia under article 8 of the Rome Statute (Sagoo y Dias, 2023). Since Russia is not currently a party to the Rome Statute, it is under no obligation to cooperate with the ICC or to comply with any arrest warrants against suspects on Russian territory, let alone against the current president Vladimir Putin. It is not easy for the ICC to try those responsible for crimes committed in Ukraine, as the Court requires the physical presence of the suspects. Since Russia cannot be expected at this stage to hand over Putin and other Russian leaders to stand trial for possible war crimes, the only way the ICC could do so would be if they were arrested abroad and taken into the custody of the Court (Torrico, 2022). Paradoxically, the current international sanctions imposed against Russian leaders, which include travel bans, could even further complicate their arrest, given that while they are in place, those subject to such sanctions cannot be expected to travel abroad much in the immediate future (Marchuk y Wanigasuriya, 2022). Moreover, although states that are parties to the Rome Statute are obligated to comply with ICC arrest warrants if the accused are found on their national territory, some states parties could refuse to comply by invoking the immunity *ratione personae* enjoyed by heads of state, according to international custom. They can also invoke article 98.1 of the Rome Statute, which establishes that, in order to try a national of a third state that is not a party to the Rome Statute, the ICC will require the cooperation and waiver of the state to waive the immunity of its accused national.

About this, is particularly relevant the Al Bashir case, in which, although the ICC had issued an arrest warrant for Sudan›s former dictator Omar Hassan Ahmad Al Bashir while he was still in office, charging him with crimes against humanity and war crimes, several countries refused to execute it on the grounds of the African leader›s alleged immunity. This case is relevant since, like Russia, Sudan had also not ratified the Rome Statute at the time the ICC issued the arrest warrant for its head of state.

The jurisprudence of the ICC in the Al Bashir case reaffirmed the inappropriateness of invoking immunity to avoid the enforcement of its order on the basis of customary international law and the referral of the case to the ICC Prosecutor by the UN Security Council, which according to article 13.b of the Rome Statute allows the Court to exercise its jurisdiction. Although in the case at hand the cooperation of the Security Council cannot be expected as Russia is a permanent member of the Council, it is still possible to rely on international custom to deal with the thorny issue of immunity (Ugarte Boluarte y Diestra Huerta, 2022).

Regarding the possibility for States Parties to the Statute to refrain from arresting Heads of non-States Parties on the basis of their immunity, the ICC ruled that when a State Party executes an ICC arrest and/or surrender warrant, it is not exercising its national criminal jurisdiction but would be acting on behalf of the ICC. Thus, States Parties would not be in breach of their customary obligations towards third States, while abstaining would violate their ICC obligations (Liu, 2023).

The ICC decision went further by stating that, while it does recognise the immunity of heads of state before their national courts, it does not contemplate its existence before the ICC or any other international court. According to the Court, article 27(2) of the Statute, which denies that the immunity that heads of state may enjoy exempts them from international criminal responsibility and prevents the ICC from exercising its jurisdiction, reflects international custom: "There is neither State practice nor opinio juris that would support the existence of Head of State immunity under customary international law vis-à-vis an international court. To the contrary, such immunity has never been recognised in international law as a bar to the jurisdiction of an international court" (Judgment, 2019).

However, even though states parties are obligated to abide by the Court›s arrest warrants and that immunity from international courts is not recognised, the ICC will continue to depend on Russia›s cooperation if it wishes to bring Putin and his associates to justice one day. Again, the Al Bashir case is useful and offers not particularly encouraging prospects. Although he was overthrown in 2019, the ICC has not yet been able to arrest Al Bashir, let alone try him despite the charges against him because, even today, Sudanese national jurisdiction recognises his immunity as head of state (Rédaction Africanews, 2023).

### *3.2. A possible genocide?*

The gravity of the events has prompted some experts to warn that Russia may be carrying out genocide on Ukrainian soil (Schäffer y Kirchmair, 2022). Article 6 of the Rome Statute and Article 2 of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide limit genocide to "acts [...] with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group" as seriously prejudicing the physical or mental integrity of the members of the group or subjecting them to conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction. Although attacking cultural property cannot be equated to genocide, the International Criminal Court›s own Cultural Heritage Policy in paragraph 78 recognises that acts intended to damage or destroy a group›s cultural property can provide important evidence of genocidal intent as these acts have a psychological impact on the people who suffer them.

In cases such as Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro and the Krstić trial, the International Court of Justice and the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia have ruled respectively that, while the destruction of cultural property shows a clear intent to destroy the cultural, religious or social presence of a group, it is often accompanied by the physical and biological destruction of members of the group and is contrary to international standards. The destruction of a group›s historical, artistic and cultural heritage alone does not fall within the category of genocide under the Rome Statute and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide as it does not necessarily entail the imposition of conditions of life entailing the physical destruction of the group. In any case, although not sufficient to be considered genocide, the International Criminal Court found in the Al Mahdi case that the destruction of property caused such psychological pain to the group that it merits individual and collective reparations.

## 4. Conclusion

The current conflict between Russia and Ukraine is the biggest challenge to peace and security in Europe since the end of the Cold War. The promotion of the Ukrainian language by Kiev and the religious independence of the Kiev patriarchate from the Moscow patriarchate have raised hackles in Russia, which is said to have unleashed its invasion last February with the intention of returning Ukraine to the Russian world. Ukraine cannot be compared to other countries that in the past also belonged to the Russian empire or the Soviet Union, such as Finland, since Finland, unlike Ukraine, would not be part of the ancestral Russian nation, according to Putin and his collaborators. Moscow›s determination and military effort to keep all the Russias united suggests that, with respect to Ukraine, the Kremlin›s Finnish-style neutrality is not enough, that the issue goes beyond Ukraine›s distant, hypothetical NATO membership and that it will not accept anything that does not imply political, economic and identity-based domination over the neighbouring country. The Ukrainian war would therefore be a paradigmatic example of the triumph of Wendt›s constructivist theory, according to which identity and the social perception of reality would take precedence over material issues in understanding the behaviour of states in the international system.

The destruction and damage of Ukrainian cultural heritage is not only an attack on the heritage of humanity, but also aims to weaken the Ukrainian identity as symbols of its essence and its social and cultural values. In light of the facts, we can conclude that Russia›s actions could qualify as war crimes under the definition of article 8.2.iv of the 1998 Rome Statute. No military necessity has been identified to justify the attack on the above-mentioned cultural property, so Moscow would have violated the prohibition of attacking cultural property contained in the 1954 Convention, article 53 of the 1977 Protocol I Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, and even Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 15 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, all signed and ratified by both Russia and Ukraine.

Moscow also allegedly violated its commitments in relation to the prohibition of subjecting cultural property to theft, pillage or misappropriation under article 4 of the 1954 Convention by transferring artistic and historical objects to Russia from occupied Ukraine. Thus, if Russia still wishes to honour its international commitments, and more specifically Chapter I of the 1954 Protocol for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, it should seize all cultural property on its territory originating from Crimea and Ukraine, return it and compensate the Ukrainian authorities after the end of the war.

Sadly, given the way the situation is going and the mood of Putin›s government, it is hard to believe that such a thing will happen. As has also been explained above, it is currently not easy to prosecute war crimes committed by Russian leaders despite Ukraine›s submission to the jurisdiction of the Court and the fact that the Court›s Prosecutor has given the green light to the investigation due to the current impossibility of sitting Putin and his collaborators in The Hague. All of this is further evidence of the weakness of the international criminal justice system in bringing accountability to completion. To prevent impunity for the most serious crimes under international law, states, especially those that are parties to the Rome Statute, must therefore rise to the occasion and cooperate closely in everything the ICC requires.

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# *The people›s Republic of China and Australia: an end to years of tension?*

**Abstract**

Australia is a country which faces a complex situation from the point of view of world geopolitics, as it maintains an economic and trade dependence on China while is also aligned with the United States on security issues. For this reason, Canberra's strategy has been based on trying to balance its trade relationship with Beijing with the strengthening of its defence alliance with Washington.

Despite this, Sino-Australian relations have deteriorated dramatically with accusations and doubts raised about government policies on both sides in recent years. This resulted in China's imposition of trade restrictions on Australian key exports and in a diplomatic freeze between both countries that has now ended after several years.

However, a wide variety of factors have contributed to the stabilisation of the situation between the actors involved, as demonstrated by the meeting between Anthony Albanese and Xi Jinping on November 6, 2023.

**Keywords**

Australia, China, Asia Pacific region, International relations.

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## 1. Introduction

Despite being a country traditionally perceived as Western because of its historical and cultural ties with both the United Kingdom and the United States, Australia decided at the beginning of the 21st century to reach out to new countries in its Asian neighbourhood, such as China. Indeed, during the first years of this century, the Oceanic country decided to extend its political-diplomatic contacts with the Asian giant to make the most of the potential of the economic relations between the two sides.

Thus, in recent decades, relations between the two countries have been mainly linked to the economic sphere to the detriment of the political one. The latter would be more neglected as evidenced by the few high-level meetings of its political leaders at the bilateral level, beyond the existing interactions at the multilateral level in bodies such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the East Asia Summit or the G20.

For China, however, what makes Australia a key target is its strategic value. By increasing its influence over what is one of the United States› main allies in the Asia-Pacific region, Beijing seeks to condition Canberra›s efforts to limit its ambitions. In doing so, the Chinese authorities aim to strengthen their role and undermine US leadership in an increasingly contested region.

Australia, thus, finds itself in a highly complex situation in geopolitical terms as it is situated between two rival powers. While the country is economically and commercially dependent on Beijing, this one is aligned with Washington on security issues. Despite this, there have been numerous occasions on which Australian political figures have defended Australia›s ability to make its own decisions as a sovereign state without having to choose between two nations rather than on the basis of self-interest. This explains Canberra›s strategy so far of balancing its relations with both powers. In this regard, it is important to note that beyond the already noted importance of the economic and trade factor, there are several interests at stake for Australia in its relations with China. This includes the community ties generated by the Chinese diaspora in Australia, the wide diversity of views within the population on Sino-Australian relations, among others.

In recent years, relations between the two countries have been at their worst for many reasons. On the Australian side, there have been several accusations against China in relation to its possible interference in national affairs, the effects of its influence on Australian universities, arbitrary detentions of Australian citizens on Chinese territory, or even threats to Australia›s own security. China has repeatedly expressed its dissatisfaction with such accusations. In addition to allegations of racism towards Chinese citizens on Australian soil, the Asian giant has expressed its strong opposition to Canberra›s regional policies.

Arguably the height of this period of tensions came in 2020 with Australia›s decision to launch an investigation into the origins of COVID-19. This act was seen by China as an unjustifiable attack, which led to China´s decision to take a series of measures that affected Canberra mainly in the economic sphere and eventually resulted in a freeze in relations between the two countries.

However, tensions began to ease recently following the victory of the Labour Party in Australia and the subsequent formation of a new government led by Anthony Albanese from May 23, 2022. An example of this is the new prime minister›s trip to Beijing in November last year, the first visit by an Australian leader to the Asian country since 2016. Since then, both countries appear to have returned to a path of stability, as evidenced by the progressive withdrawal of China´s economic restrictive measures and the softening of Australia›s rhetoric.

Despite the relevance of the issue, the existing bibliography on the subject in Spain is quite scarce, with publications such as, for example, that of Alejandro Mackinlay (2022). Beyond the news related to Sino-Australian tensions that have been published in Spain, in the Spanish literature the issue is generally framed as part of the analysis of the dispute for global power between the United States and China in the Asia-Pacific region, as can be seen in works such as those by Laura Paíno Peña (2018) and Magi Castelltort Claramunt (2023), among others. Thus, the existing literature is primarily Australian and, to a lesser extent, Chinese. Within what is the most abundant bibliography, relatively current articles published by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) stand out, such as those by Bates Gill (2023) and Graeme Dobell (2024). These are of great relevance for an introduction to the topic in question by providing a record of the evolution of the events under study.

The aim of this article is to analyse the main causes and effects of the period of political tensions between Australia and China between 2017 and 2023. Considering that the phenomenon to be analysed requires the integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches, the methodological framework used for this study is the mixed method, characterised by combining both methods (Bryman, 2008: 603). On the one hand, quantitative data collection has been carried out through large official databases accessible on the Internet. Qualitative data collection was based on a literature and documentary review. Among the documents used, a distinction can be made between primary sources, if they are original documents, or secondary sources, if they analyse or refer to primary documents (Lamont, 2021: 97). In the case of the former, a review of official documents such as legislation or political declarations, among others, has been essential. As for the secondary ones, we can highlight the reading of monographs, press or articles in academic and scientific journals.

The article is therefore structured in three sections, which will be accompanied by the respective conclusion of the research. First, by way of introduction, the document has a first section in which the most important episodes of tension that have taken place between the two countries from 2017 to the present day are presented chronologically. Then, taking into account the importance of the economic and security factor in Sino-Australian relations, China´s role in these areas is analysed in order to explain as fully as possible the effects that these tensions have had on Australia. Finally, the conclusions section presents the main results of the research in order to be able to conceive possible future scenarios with respect to the issue analysed.

## 2. Sino-Australian tensions since 2017

The main erosion of Sino-Australian relations since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1972 occurred in 2017. From the second decade of this century onwards, Australia began to adopt defensive policies towards China, coinciding with the rise of the latter as a power and the consequent changes in the international power structure. China's actions stemming from its growing influence as a major player changed Australia's perception of the regional security environment and its concerns about interference in internal affairs (Gill, 2023: 250-263). In this regard, there have been several reasons for such a deterioration in the bilateral relations between the two countries.

On the one hand, Canberra has denounced Chinese meddling in Australian affairs and in various sectors of Australian society, including government and institutions, going so far as to accuse China of espionage almost directly. In 2017, Australia's then prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, publicly denounced the danger posed to the country by foreign meddling in national affairs, putting democracy and the values that characterise the Australian state at risk:

> "We should not be naïve about this; foreign powers are making unprecedented and increasingly sophisticated attempts to influence the political process both here and abroad […] Recently we have seen disturbing reports of Chinese influence. I take these reports very seriously, as do my colleagues. But these reforms are not just about one country. Foreign interference is a global problem" (Turnbull, 2017).

Consequently, a year later the Australian Parliament pushed through legislation against foreign interference with the aim of ensuring national security by strengthening the country›s capabilities against acts intended to interfere in Australia›s affairs and/or support the intelligence activities of a foreign government (Australian Government, 2018). Although Canberra initially sought to generalise on this issue without explicitly naming China in these laws, their mere passage further inflamed tensions with the Asian giant.

In the same year, Australian authorities banned Chinese technology companies Huawei and ZTE from carrying out projects in Australia aimed at providing 5G technology to the country›s wireless networks, citing national security concerns: "The Government considers that the involvement of vendors who are likely to be subject to extrajudicial instructions from a foreign government that conflict with Australian law, may run the risk of inadequacy on the part of the operator to adequately protect a 5G network from unauthorised access or interference" (Parliament of Australia, 2018).

Although not explicitly referred to, this decision by the Australian executive came almost immediately after the adoption of the National Intelligence Law of the People›s Republic of China, Article 7 of which states that: "Pursuant to the law, any organisation and citizen shall support, assist and cooperate in national intelligence work and protect the secrecy of national intelligence work of which they are aware" (The National People›s Congress of the People›s Republic of China, 2017; China Law Translate, 2017). In response, as tensions between the two countries escalated, arrests of Australian citizens on Chinese soil became a constant occurrence, to the point where the Australian government issued official warnings to its people about travelling to the Asian giant. These, which are still in force today, explicitly state that: "Australians may be at risk of arbitrary detention or strict enforcement of local laws, including the broadly defined National Security Acts" (Government of Australia, 2024).

Another measure taken by Beijing was to send Chinese academics to Australia with the aim of criticising the drift of Australia›s policies and to generate a feeling of rejection of the future of Sino-Australian relations among the population, also generating sympathy towards China to the detriment of the United States (Hayes and Ping, 2023). In this regard, another Australian concern about its Asian neighbour is its growing influence on its universities and its dangerous effects on academic freedom (Babones, 2019). This Chinese influence is growing due to the increasing dependence of Australian higher education on investment and the influx of international students, most of whom come from China (Australian Government Department of Education, 2024).

Given the drift in Sino-Australian relations against such a backdrop, the Fifth China-Australia Diplomatic and Strategic Dialogue between the then foreign ministers of the two countries, Wang Yi and Marise Payne, was held in Beijing at the end of 2018. In order to promote stability in the Asia-Pacific region, the aim is to rebalance bilateral relations between two key regional players by rebuilding mutual political trust between them (Minister for Foreign Affairs of Australia, 2018; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People›s Republic of China, 2018). But far from easing, the situation escalated further in 2020, when the then Australian Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, addressed the United Nations Assembly and made a clear case for an enquiry into the origins of COVID-19 (UN Audiovisual Library, 2020). In this way, Australia led global calls for impartial international research, consolidating an initiative that would be endorsed by several countries at the World Health Assembly (World Health Organization, 2020).

China´s response to the Australian initiative was swift. The Beijing authorities decided to impose high tariffs and trade investigations on major Australian exports in an attempt to get Australia to reverse its actions. The main products affected were barley, beef and wine, while restrictions were imposed on a range of other products including coal. These have been among Canberra›s top twenty-five exports since before 2020, with China also being its largest market (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2023). For this reason, Australia requested consultations under the World Trade Organisation›s dispute settlement mechanism regarding the Beijing government›s measures on its products (World Trade Organisation, 2020).

The same year also saw further episodes of tension. On the one hand, Australia suffered a large-scale cyberattack, adding to a long series of attacks spread over several years. In this case, while the Australian authorities avoided blaming any actor, the then Australian Prime Minister and Defence Minister, Scott Morrison and Linda Reynolds, noted that the scale of such an attack pointed to it being carried out with the backing of a state (Australian Government Defence, 2020a). As reported by the Chinese government›s official news agency, the *Xinhua News Agency* (2020), China responded to the possible accusations by accusing the Australian Strategic Policy Institute of conducting a smear campaign against Beijing in order to please Washington. In turn and following the example of countries such as the UK and Canada, Australia took the decision to unilaterally suspend its extradition and mutual legal assistance treaties with Hong Kong as a rejection of China´s controversial implementation of the National Security Law (Parliament of Australia, 2020).

Therefore, in late 2020, in a clear attempt to put pressure on the Scott Morrison government, the Embassy of the People›s Republic of China in Canberra provided local Australian media with a document listing a total of fourteen complaints from the Asian country regarding the future of Sino-Australian relations and the policies adopted by the then prime minister. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, one of the Australian news media to receive this document, reported that the complaints were as follows:

- The rejection of Chinese investment projects.
- The decision to exclude Huawei and ZTE from the country's 5G network.
- Legislation against foreign interference.
- Politicisation and obstruction of cooperation between countries.
- The enquiry into the origins of COVID-19.
- Australia›s position on Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Taiwan.
- Australia›s statement to the United Nations on the South China Sea.
- Alignment with the United States and its campaign against China.
- Attempts to torpedo the Belt and Road Initiative.
- Funding "anti-China" think tanks.
- Random actions and seizures against Chinese journalists.
- Accusations against Beijing regarding cyber-attacks.
- Criticism of the Chinese government and alleged racism towards Chinese citizens.
- Negative coverage of China by the Australian media (Kearsley, Bagshaw and Galloway, 2020).

On a related note, the same newspaper published an ultimatum issued by a Chinese official stating: "China is angry. If you make China the enemy, China will be the enemy" such that only if Australia gave in to these demands, could the relations between the parties be stabilised once again (Kearsley, Bagshaw and Galloway, 2020). Far from giving in, the Australian authorities stated on numerous occasions that they would not compromise Australia›s national security and sovereignty to suit the interests of any state. Moreover, their stance on Chinese provocations has since then become much firmer, as proved by the government's response to a social media post by the spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Zhao Lijian. It featured a fake photograph of an Australian soldier holding a bloody knife to a child›s throat in Afghanistan. This aroused Canberra›s ire to such an extent that the then Prime Minister demanded an apology from the Asian giant, which the latter refused to make (Bagshaw, 2020).

The situation would once again become complicated in September 2021 with the signing of the AUKUS agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. This initiative would seek to deepen cooperation between the three countries in the area of security and defence, a key issue for the country within a context where security challenges in the region have only increased significantly. Specifically, the agreement would focus on strengthening cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies and submarine capabilities by delivering nuclear propulsion technology to the country so it could equip nuclear attack submarines (Australian Government Defence, 2021).

This all changed with the election of a new government in Australia in 2022, when the Labour Party won and Anthony Albanese became the current Prime Minister. Since coming to power, it is clear that the new leader has opted to pursue a policy focused on normalising relations with the Asian giant in order to ease Sino-Australian tensions in both economic and security terms. Even though its mandate began with a new incident with the Asian giant, the controversial interception of an Australian plane by a Chinese aircraft in the South China Sea region (Australian Government Defence, 2022a), the new government has taken several steps towards diplomatic stability.

Firstly, there was the meeting between the defence ministers of the two countries. In June 2022, during the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Richard Marles and Wei Fenghe held talks that were defined by both countries as a key step towards stabilising their complex relations. After stressing Australia›s intention to not forego its own interests and values, Marles raised Australia›s concerns with his Chinese counterpart in what was the first ministerial meeting between the parties in almost three years (Australian Government Defence, 2022b).

In November 2022, Anthony Albanese and Xi Jinping met on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Bali in what was an initial rapprochement (Prime Minister of Australia, 2022). One month later, it was announced that Australia›s Foreign Minister Penny Wong would visit China for th[e] 6th Australia-China Foreign and Strategic Dialogue, becoming the first Australian Foreign Minister to visit China in almost five years. This visit, which took place on the occasion of the [5]0th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries, sought to formally stabilise relations between the nations (Minister for Foreign Affairs, 2022).

Meanwhile, Albanese visited China in November 2023 in what was the first visit by an Australian Prime Minister since Turnbull in 2016. During this visit, Xi Jinping acknowledged that with Albanese›s appointment "the China-Australia relationship has embarked on the right path of improvement and development" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People›s Republic of China, 2023). Albanese declared that "we can [...] take up the opportunity to explore how we can have further cooperation between our two countries" (Prime Minister of Australia, 2023).

Other notable diplomatic achievements include the release of the Australian journalist Cheng Lei, who was arrested in China in 2020, as well as Albanese›s announcement not to cancel the Chinese company Landbridge Group›s lease of the port of Darwin (Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2023), a key city in the US strategy to contain China within the Pacific. Moreover, his election seems to have marked a step not only towards diplomatic stability with Beijing, but also economic stability. The softening of Australian rhetoric has been followed by China´s gradual withdrawal of restrictive trade measures adopted at the height of the tensions, while Australia has withdrawn its complaints to the World Trade Organisation, suspending the dispute (Minister for Foreign Affairs, 2023).

However, several hurdles will have to be overcome in order to maintain this stability. One example is the recent conviction of the Australian writer Yang Hengjun, who was detained in China in 2019 as one of the aforesaid successive arbitrary detentions. In this regard, while Australia›s Foreign Minister declared her government›s disagreement with the ruling, she also rejected measures such as the expulsion of the Chinese ambassador from the country, insisting on Canberra›s willingness to continue to work with Beijing (Minister for Foreign Affairs, 2024).

## 3. Australia-China relations in economic terms

As with several other states within the international system, ever since China emerged as a key player within it, Australia›s economy is highly dependent on the Asian giant, it being crucial for the nation›s own development. As mentioned, Beijing›s trade dynamics in the new century encouraged Canberra to deepen its economic ties thereafter. Under the government of John Howard, a staunch advocate of centring Sino-Australian relations in terms of economic interaction as the real converging interests of both sides, the concept of a strategic economic partnership with China had been introduced in the country›s main strategic documents (Uren and Sharpe, 2012: 114-16).

In 2015, the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement came into force. It improved trade, financial and socio-economic relations between the parties by guaranteeing zero tariff measures on almost all Australian products until 2029. This agreement has generated benefits for Canberra by improving its competitive position in the Chinese market and boosting its own economic growth (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2015).

Looking at the most current data for the year 2022, China is both the main destination for Australian exports (accounting for 27.6 % of the annual total) and the main source of Canberra›s imports (accounting for 21.5 % of the total). Far behind are Japan as the second largest export destination and the United States as the second largest source of the country›s imports, with 17.9 % and 10.7 % respectively (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022). In the same year, 2.2 % of Chinese exports were destined for Australia, which is the thirteenth main destination for the Asian giant›s total exports. At the same time, 5.2 % of Beijing›s imports came from Canberra, making it the fifth largest source of its imports (Australian Government, 2022a).

This makes China Australia›s largest two-way trading partner, accounting for almost a third of Australia›s trade. For this reason, the country explored various tactics intended to mitigate the impact of Chinese restrictions introduced in 2020 at the height of tensions. These include diverting products through grey routes to enter the Asian continent or increasing exports of certain products to other markets such as barley to Saudi Arabia, copper to Japan and Europe, or cotton to Bangladesh and Vietnam. However, the search for alternative destinations for other affected products such as wine or timber was not as effective because they were specifically produced for the Chinese market (Wilson, 2021).

Sino-Australian tensions made market diversification a matter of urgency for Australia, which is once again being driven by the concerning international economic situation. Therefore, several agreements have been put in place since then to foster new trade relations. At the regional level, these include the Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (IA-CEPA), the Australia-India Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (AI-CECA) or the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). At the global level, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), the Australia-UK Free Trade Agreement (A-UK FTA) or the Australia-EU Free Trade Agreement (A-EUFTA) are noteworthy agreements (Monzalsha *et al.*, 2023: 162-163). Except for A-EUFTA, most of them have already been signed.

Another of Australia's options to diversify its economy is to focus on strengthening its role in rare earth supply chains. As well as being key to the energy transition, these are required to produce essential components for a wide range of products, from major electronic devices to defence technology. Given its importance, the fact that China is the world›s largest rare earth producer and dominates this supply chain has prompted numerous initiatives by different stakeholders to internationalise it. However, while China leads by a large margin in this area, there are countries such as Australia with significant rare earth reserves but little domestic production (Chipman Koty, 2022).


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As diversifying this supply chain has become a priority for important players in the international system, Canberra is gradually investing in rare earth production, having identified it as a strategic industry. For example, during the Scott Morrison government, the then Minister for Industry, Energy and Emissions Reduction, Angus Taylor, announced major investments to exploit Australian reserves with the explicit aim of countering China´s dominance (Minister for Industry, Energy and Emissions Reduction, 2022). At the same time, the general interest in reducing reliance on Chinese supply chains has encouraged several countries to establish partnerships with Australia in this area. In this regard, apart from ongoing cooperation under the Quad (Curtis, 2023), the formalisation of the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) between Australia, India and Japan is noteworthy (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022). However, given the complexity of the field in question, it must be understood that the success of these projects will only be possible in the long term.

All the above highlights Beijing›s economic importance for Canberra. On one hand, although there are other stakeholders such as the United States who are also important in terms of trade and especially investment, it is clear that trade figures between China and Australia are far removed from what other markets can offer the latter. In relation to this, it is also worth noting that between 2017 and 2022, corresponding to the period of increased tensions, Australia›s exports of goods and services to China grew by 9.8 %. Australian imports of goods and services from China also grew by 9.6 % within the same period (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022).

Thus, despite the predictable negative effects of Chinese restrictions on Australia, Canberra›s economy proved resilience. As noted in the report published last year by the Australian Government's Productivity Commission, while the measures imposed by Beijing led to a decline in the export of products such as lobsters and wine, thereby affecting Australian exporters, exports of other products subject to the restrictions were generally resilient (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2023: 38).

While the aforesaid diversification strategies have had an effect, another factor behind this situation is the very real importance of the Australian economy for China. For example, China´s need to import certain materials from Australia explains the increase in Canberra›s total exports to Beijing even after the measures were implemented in 2020. Given the Chinese economy›s dependence on construction and manufacturing exports, materials such as iron ore and Australian thermal coal are virtually irreplaceable for the Asian giant (Coyne *et al.*, 2021: 15). This explains China´s interest in stabilising relations with Australia by taking advantage of the change of government in the latter.

Regardless of the possible success of this new Sino-Australian reset, it is clear that the market diversification promoted by Australia, especially since 2020, must remain a foreign policy target for the country. Given the international economic situation today and China's unreliability as a partner for Canberra, the lifting of trade restrictions should not deter Canberra from continuing to search for new markets in order to ensure its economic resilience.

## 4. China as a challenge to Australia›s security

Another of Australia›s major concerns *vis-à-vis* China is in the area of security and defence. While Beijing continuously asserts its stance in favour of regional cooperation and integration policies as the main instrument to achieve greater regional security (The State Council of The People›s Republic of China, 2017), both its moves and its clear intentions to dominate the Indo-Pacific and counter US influence in the region indicate the opposite. While the Asian giant mainly makes use of soft-power, vigorous efforts to build up its military might indicate that the country is preparing to use hard-power if necessary (Peña, 2018: 711-712).

Despite still being one of the largest importers of arms globally in recent years according to data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2024), China´s arms industry responds to the demands of its armed forces thanks to, among other things, the military-civil fusion and self-sufficiency policies implemented by the country given its rapid economic growth. The progress of the Asian giant›s domestic arms production means that it is beginning to replace imports by covering, not only major weapon types, but also advanced technology, as demonstrated by the fact that China is a pioneer in the production of armed unmanned aerial vehicles (Béraud-Sudreau, 2022: 12). This military build-up has gone hand in hand with the widespread narrative within Australia›s mainstream political circles identifying Beijing as a revisionist power that seeks to undermine the structures of the existing order for its own benefit. These concerns regarding the Asian giant and its growing presence in the Pacific have led Australia to perceive China as a threat (Varrall, 2021: 107-109).

Australia›s growing unease about the Asian power is reflected in its key defence regulatory documents. The 2009 Defence White Paper already discussed the strategic implications of China´s rise, especially at the regional level, (Australian Government, 2009: 34). Although China was not explicitly named in the security documents approved in 2013, they mention the risk posed by states with hostile intentions and the capacity to exert influence over Canberra through economic, political or military pressure (Australian Government, 2013a: 25, 2013b: 11). Years later, the 2016 Defence White Paper acknowledged Australia›s rapidly changing security environment due to regional uncertainty and tension stemming mainly from territorial disputes in the East and South China seas, as well as the evolving relationship between Beijing and Washington (Australian Government, 2016: 30). A year later, the 2017 Defence White Paper re-emphasised the importance of Sino-US relations for the stability of an increasingly confrontational region. In this regard, Australia made explicit its support for the United States and its commitment to regional affairs, at the same time encouraging China to exercise its power peacefully in the region and to respect the interests of all other actors involved (Australian Government, 2017: 38-39).

In the year 2020, when Sino-Australian relations were strained, Canberra decided to update its defence strategy by boosting its military budget, among other steps. In order to respond to the rapidly changing strategic environment, Australia published both the 2020 Strategic Update (Australian Government Defence, 2020b) and the

2020 Force Structure Plan (Australian Government Defence, 2020c). An analysis of the documents reveals that their main goals were to shape Australia›s strategic environment, deter actions against Australian interests, and provide the country with the ability to respond with credible military force, if necessary. To achieve these goals, the country pushed for the development of a robust defence strategy along with increased defence spending in order to have the real capacity for its implementation.

It is also noteworthy that, when contextualising the situation faced by Australia, the 2020 Strategic Update (Australian Government Defence, 2020b) explicitly mentions the US-China confrontation as a driver of Asia-Pacific dynamics. In addition to the specific case of Beijing›s active attempts to exert greater influence in the region, it is also worth noting its recognition of the coercive behaviour of certain countries as a threat, in what appears to be a compilation of episodes of tension with the Asian giant:

> "Some countries will continue to pursue their strategic interests through a combination of coercive activities, including espionage, interference and economic levers. Tensions over territorial claims and the establishment of new military facilities are rising and are involving the use of military or paramilitary forces more frequently than in the past, including coercive paramilitary activities in the South China Sea" (Australian Government Defence, 2020b: 12).

At the same time, Canberra reiterated that it would continue its alliance with the US, despite seeking greater self-sufficiency in military terms (Australian Government Defence, 2020b: 4). Thus, the 2020 Strategic Update and the 2020 Force Structure Plan not only outline the country›s main measures to strengthen its military capabilities, but also state the importance of boosting its security ties with neighbours such as Japan, India and Indonesia in order to preserve stability within its geographical environment. As a result, several months later, Australia and Japan announced breakthrough negotiations on the Australia-Japan Reciprocal Access Agreement, which was finally signed in early 2022 (Australian Government, 2022b).

Likewise, the gradual expansion of Chinese interests in the region and its increasing military capabilities have aroused Australian fears of a new String of Pearls, that is, the Chinese installation of port infrastructures around Australian territory that could be used to carry out operations against the latter. This explains Australia's interest in signing the AUKUS treaty by which Canberra would not only strengthen its alliance with the world›s leading maritime power, the United States, but also exponentially expand its naval capabilities (Mackinlay, 2022: 15-16).

Canberra is also concerned about the Asian giant›s activities in the Pacific Islands region. Firstly, it is possible that China´s increasing influence over these islands will mean that the future behaviour and positions of their governments will be conditioned by Beijing›s directives as compensation for the loans granted to them (Varrall, 2021: 119-139). However, it is important to note that China´s debt trap diplomacy is a controversial and little-proven assertion that has been refuted by certain studies, such as that of researchers Lee Jones and Shahar Hameiri (2020). On the other hand, while historically it has been Australia›s objective to maintain security and stability in what is one of its closest areas (Hegarty, 2015: 8), one of the country›s main apprehensions today involves China´s ambition to establish military bases in the region as part of a power projection strategy (Varrall, 2021: 117).

This may be seen in the first official document on security published by Canberra after the recent stabilisation of Sino-Australian relations began: the Defence Strategic Review 2023. This type of document has only been published three times in the country›s history, its predecessors being the 1986 *Review of Australia›s Defence Capabilities* and the 2012 *Defence Force Posture Review*. Indeed, according to the report, its publication responds to the country›s need to adapt to a new strategic reality marked by the destabilisation of regional security, especially as a result of China´s assertiveness:

> "Regional countries continue to modernise their military forces. China's military build-up is now the largest and most ambitious of any country since the end of the Second World War. This has occurred alongside significant economic development, benefiting many countries in the Indo-Pacific, including Australia. This build-up is occurring without transparency or reassurance to the Indo-Pacific region of China's strategic intent. China's assertion of sovereignty over the South China Sea threatens the global rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific in a way that adversely impacts Australia's national interests. China is also engaged in strategic competition in Australia's near neighbourhood" (Australian Government Defence, 2023: 23-24).

Thus, according to the document, immediate actions to be taken by the country range from developing the capabilities of the Australian Armed Forces to deepening the country›s ties with key partners in the Indo-Pacific, either in diplomatic terms or in defence terms, especially through the AUKUS format (Australian Government Defence, 2023: 7).

In this regard, it is worth noting that two elements are constantly repeated in all referenced documents. Firstly, the US is recognised as Australia›s main security ally, and secondly, Australia›s firm stance in favour of maintaining global and regional security in the hands of Washington and not any emerging power such as China itself, is repeatedly underscored. This is due to the fact that Canberra has regarded the US as an indispensable and priority partner since 1952, when the ANZUS Treaty was signed between Australia, New Zealand and the United States in order to promote defence cooperation between the signatories.

In this regard, despite being a diplomatic initiative, Australia›s participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is also noteworthy. Factors such as China´s assertiveness under Xi Jinping›s leadership, the implications of the Belt and Road Initiative, and tensions in the East and South China seas would lead to the reactivation of this initiative, which was initially proposed in 2007 (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2024). Ten years later, Australia, India, Japan and the United States took up the plan based on a common interest in countering

Chinese action in the region to provide the latter with a stable balance of power (Lee, 2020: 2-4).

## 5. Conclusions

Although there has been little media coverage, the ongoing tensions between Australia and China in recent years are a good example of the power struggle that exists in the Asia-Pacific, a region where the centre of global power is increasingly shifting. Beyond highlighting China´s well-known claims to strategic enclaves in the region, the tense episodes in Sino-Australian relations in recent years have demonstrated the tools and capabilities at Beijing's disposal to exert influence over any actor involved in the region.

So far, Australia has faced the challenge of balancing its economic dependence on China with its own values and interests in the face of growing authoritarianism in the Asian giant and its continuing regional ambitions. However, it should not be forgotten that there are differences of opinion within Australia itself on the direction to be taken by the nation in its relations with China, as Beijing›s economic importance means that many view cooperation with the Asian giant as a necessity.

Australia has found it increasingly difficult to maintain its traditional duality between economic interests represented by China, and strategic interests represented, in this case, by the United States. This explains Beijing›s economic coercion regarding Canberra as the latter›s actions were increasingly not to its liking. Thus, scholars such as Clive Hamilton (2018) consider that, rather than a trade war *per se*, this case may be defined as a psychological war waged by China on Australia.

While Chinese trade restrictions fell far short of the impact sought by Chinese authorities on the Australian economy, the constant episodes of tensions in recent years have pushed Canberra to strive to diversify of its economy. In general terms, however, it is very difficult for this country in Oceania to find a suitable alternative to offset its trade figures with China, despite available options such as strengthening regional ties with countries such as India or with other global actors such as the European Union. In this sense, the fact that both sides sought to stabilise bilateral relations and the consequent withdrawal of restrictive economic measures from 2022 onwards, coinciding with the discouraging international situation, especially in economic terms, is somewhat revealing.

In terms of security, the growing hostilities between the two nations increased Australia's sense of vulnerability. Even though the country›s main security documents approved over the last century increasingly identify the Asian giant as a threat, this period of tensions has definitely forced Canberra to intensify the strengthening of its ties with regional allies and increase national defence spending. This accounts for Australia's attempts to reinforce its official security and defence instruments, as well as the signing of the AUKUS agreement.

Therefore, while the new Australian government appears to have taken the decision to implement policies of rapprochement with China, leaving aside past tensions, it is clear that Australia must still keep in mind the importance of reducing its economic dependence on the Asian giant, even if this is an extremely complex measure, given the Chinese market's significance for its national economy. Given that China can use economic coercion to target the most vulnerable sectors of Australia's economy as a punitive measure if it does not act in the former's interests, Australia must realise that to maintain its sovereignty and independence, it must diversify its economy, even if Beijing remains an essential trading partner today.

In security terms, Australia is obliged to continue to expand its partnerships and further strengthen its own defence capabilities. Beijing›s increasingly active claims to leadership in the region and the very history of tensions between the two countries, not only make China an unreliable partner, but also a permanent threat to Australian security. Regardless of whether these improved relations between the two countries will continue in the medium and long term or not, it is clear that the main basis for this period of stability will be economic, given the complementarity between the two sides. In the area of security, there will still be new concerns.

Despite the considerable differences between the parties involved, all these factors make it clear that both countries now seem to be opting for a new direction in their relations, towards a common goal of prosperity. However, it should be understood that this stabilisation is in the interest of both sides so as to maintain their converging interests rather than to foster real two-way trust. This Sino-Australian reconciliation must therefore still be treated with caution. It remains to be seen whether this trend will continue over time, given the situation of both countries in a region whose geostrategic value has made it a key matter in the fight for global dominance.

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# *The doctrine of the great powers in information warfare*

**Abstract**

Information warfare is a type of conflict that transcends the traditional realm of armed confrontation. The struggle within the information domain has persisted throughout human history, evolving with every advancement in information management technologies, from parchment to the internet. Through a comparative analysis, this paper focuses on the doctrinal vision and approach of the three current major powers: the United States, China, and Russia. Given their advanced media and technological capabilities, these powers emerge as dominant protagonists in this informational confrontation arena. Similarly, their status in the international system, from which a vast array of opposing interests arises, places them in a perpetually latent conflict scenario. Hence, they provide the most substantial base of examples and resources for the study of this phenomenon. By examining their recent history, as well as their doctrinal documents and primary academic contributions, we come to understand not only their strategies and tactics but also the dynamics of competition and the evolution of information warfare in the contemporary context.

**Keywords**

Cognitive warfare, Cyber warfare, Propaganda, Realism, Foreign policy.

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## 1. Introduction

The premise information is power has consistently resonated throughout human history. Throughout the various periods of human history, information management has dominated political dynamics in numerous arenas: influencing tactics, operations and strategies around the world. Its historical influence has been and continues to be far-reaching, manifesting itself both in times of conflict and in times of peace. During periods of war, information has served both as a weapon and as a battlefield, being used for deception, the implementation of camouflage or decoys, the spread of rumours and the interception of enemy communications. In peacetime, it has represented the cornerstone of espionage, a key tool for political manipulation in its various forms. In this respect, information control has been used both defensively and offensively.

Competition for control of the information domain is not a recent phenomenon. In fact, it has been the subject of analysis and documentation in multiple cultures throughout history; from the teachings of Sun Tzu in China and Kautilya in India to the reflections of Xenophon and Thucydides in classical Greece. The same importance can be seen in Rome, in Frontinus› *Stratagemata* and, centuries later, in Machiavelli›s *The Prince*. These works, among many others, underlined the intrinsic value of information and how its mastery and management have influenced the strategic culture of different nations over time (Gilpin, 1984).

As technology advanced, its impact on information management became evident. From the invention of the printing press, through the advent of radio and more recently, the proliferation of the Internet, each technical innovation was quickly adopted and adapted to serve the information warfare. Not only technological innovations, but also social developments, particularly the Industrial Revolution, have played a fundamental role in structuring and developing the strategies and tactics of this type of conflict. These developments motivated armies and intelligence services of various nations to develop and strengthen their Information Warfare capabilities. As a result, these methods and techniques are not only employed in armed conflicts but are also central to covert actions and the dissemination of state propaganda.

Contemporary information warfare is in a phase of consolidation. Since the Second World War (WWII) it has undergone significant development, which has increased in recent decades, and is now recognised as an autonomous form of conflict, worthy of study and analysis in its own right. Its relevance is such that it often becomes the core of military operations and is essential to modern political power projection strategies.

Although information warfare is a global phenomenon involving multiple state and non-state actors, the great powers currently dominate this arena with the greatest intensity. Naturally, information warfare is a complex phenomenon, which requires both solid intelligence systems, a particular capacity for global influence and a strongly developed technological sector. Thus, the dominance of the great powers over this mode of warfare is largely due to their advanced media and technological sectors. Not only do these powers have the capabilities, but also clashing interests that drive them to compete actively in this field, with the overriding goal of expanding their influence globally.

In this article we focus on the study of Information Warfare from the perspective of the three great powers of the international system: the United States, China, and Russia. Through a comparative analysis, we examine their doctrinal approaches. Beyond understanding their capabilities and potential in the field of information warfare, this research allows us to study their competitive dynamics, as well as the evolution of this mode of warfare throughout recent history.

To carry out the analysis, we have taken into consideration the main doctrinal documents available in official publications. Similarly, the contributions and analyses of leading intellectuals and military think tanks in each of these nations have been taken into consideration.

## 2. War in the information domain

Information warfare is defined as a mode of warfare that involves the manipulation, distribution and, occasionally, denial of information. Its main purpose is to gain a competitive advantage over the opponent, while simultaneously protecting one›s own information systems (Libicki, 1995). The aim is to influence the opponent›s decisions, behaviour, perceptions and capabilities. To achieve this, a wide spectrum of tools and tactics are employed, ranging from traditional ones, such as propaganda and disinformation, to more contemporary ones, such as cyber operations and electronic warfare (Libicki, 2017).

The definition encompasses both traditional, primarily cognitive-based methods of information warfare, such as propaganda, and more recent methods, such as technical operations in cyberspace. This mode of warfare can manifest itself in a variety of contexts, whether in peacetime or during armed conflict, and can be executed by both state and non-state actors.

Conflict in the information space cuts across all aspects of information management. It focuses not only on the channels of communication, but also on those who send and receive the information, as well as on the content of the message itself. Within this approach, the human being is recognised as a vital actor, playing simultaneously the roles of sender and receiver within the vast information ecosystem. Thus, when we speak of information warfare, we are referring both to operations that attack or defend the cognitive aspect of information - such as disinformation and propaganda - and to those that focus on its technological dimension, such as electronic warfare, cyberespionage and cyberwarfare (Aro, 2016; Robinson M. K., 2015; Sampanis, 2024).

Beyond the use of technological innovations, this mode of combat is characterised by its versatility and adaptability. Thus, it can manifest itself subtly in times of peace between nations, becoming evident through activities such as espionage or political influence. In a context of open warfare, it has the capacity to escalate and adapt quickly to more belligerent contexts. In such open conflict scenarios, it can escalate to more aggressive tactics, such as electronic warfare, mass dissemination of disinformation or even cyber-attacks with purely sabotage objectives. All operations that escalate from a pre-existing base built before conventional warfare, on already established tactics.

Once the conflict has ceased, information warfare operations may decrease in intensity, adapting to the new post-war scenario. However, these operations never disappear completely; they are simply transformed and adapted according to circumstances.

Thus, this adaptive approach to information warfare makes it one of the main tools in the service of hybrid warfare operations, a mode which combines conventional and unconventional tactics in the same military arena (Hoffman, 2007). In this context, this phenomenon aligns perfectly with the concept of grey zone actions, operations that fall between peace and outright conflict, and which seek to exploit ambiguities and gaps in international regulations and norms (Votel, 2016; Liu, 2024).

## 3. The great powers in information warfare

To fully understand the dynamics in the international system, characterised by its typically anarchic nature, we turn to the main theories that have attempted to explain such relations. Among the many existing currents, the realist perspective emerges as the predominant one in the contemporary study of international *r*elations (IR). Realism is not monolithic and presents significant sub-currents, among which we can identify neoclassical realism, structuralist realism -also known as defensive realism, represented by theorists such as Waltz-, and offensive realism, whose main figure is Mearsheimer (Waltz, 2018; Mearsheimer, 2001).

The lens of offensive realism stands out as offering a particularly enriching conceptual tool for dealing with information warfare between the great powers. In this light, such a war is not an anomaly, but an inevitable and persistent component of the international power game.

Within this theoretical framework and backed by the consensus in the field of international *r*elations, Mearsheimer conceptualises great powers as those states equipped with military forces robust enough to not only defend their territory but also to project power beyond their borders (Mearsheimer, 2001). They have nuclear capabilities and an advanced technological environment. Moreover, their resources and economic strength make them remarkably self-sufficient. These powers are also characterised by a high degree of political autonomy and possess distinctive political and cultural systems that have the potential to be promoted or defended internationally as tools of influence. Naturally, this combination of factors fuels its geopolitical ambition.

In the same vein, it should be stressed that if any of these great powers manages to consolidate hegemony at the regional level, it can be categorised as a superpower or hegemonic power. This designation has profound implications for the balance of the international system and how these entities interact with their counterparts.

Today, Russia, China and the United States dominate the global stage as great powers. The United States, in turn, plays a leading role in the system, established as the only superpower in the international system. Despite the current US regional hegemony, we cannot ignore China´s growing presence in the system and its stated intention to reach a similar position in the coming years.

Thus, the offensive realism approach, as outlined by Mearsheimer, suggests that, in an anarchic international system, these great powers, in their eagerness to ensure their own security, are inclined to maximise their power (Mearsheimer, 2001). This expansion of power, if conditions are right, can materialise through direct military intervention. The underlying logic suggests that, in the long run, conflict between these powers becomes more likely, especially when we are in a context of unbalanced multipolarity. China´s recent growth signals that the international system is in transition towards this type of configuration (Mearsheimer, 2021). In this sense, the United States, in accordance with the postulates of this approach in international *r*elations, is in the process of adapting its foreign policy to face the competition for power in the Indo-Pacific (Perez, 2023).

In the struggle for global hegemony, confrontation between the great powers is practically guaranteed. The establishment and consolidation of hegemony involves not only military or economic dominance, but also decisive political and cultural influence on the rest of the system. It is therefore common for these powers to collide as they try to exert their influence in similar regions or attempt to undermine the regional dominance of their rivals. Information warfare emerges in this context as an essential strategic tool. Its advantage is that it tends to carry minimal political costs, but with the capacity to escalate into more aggressive and extensive operations should it lead to a traditional military confrontation (Harknett, 1996). Given these dynamics, information warfare is not only likely, but inevitable in the global arena. The relevance of examining this phenomenon from a great power perspective is indisputable. These nations, given their vast resource pool, strategic interests and capacity for self-sufficiency, are in an unparalleled position to formulate and dictate specific doctrines. In addition, they have the ability and means to develop clear techniques and strategies in the field of information warfare, thus reflecting a distinctive and characteristic approach.

To investigate this phenomenon, it is essential to approach it through doctrinal analysis of these preponderant powers. An effective methodology for this study involves the close examination of official documents issued by these powers.

Thus, in order to practically study a country›s doctrine on information warfare, we shall rely on the analysis of the main official documents in a multi-level strategy combining the analysis of the historical context with the legal and especially the military doctrine.

Before starting the doctrinal analysis, we should bear in mind the historical context of the country, both in terms of its internal politics and especially in terms of its interaction with the other powers, as its historical facts, legends and myths can often be instrumentalised in information warfare, and its historical tendency will naturally give us a general idea of its mode of action. When analysing a country›s doctrine, we will first look at the official doctrinal documents on the subject, often issued by the respective Ministry of Defence, National Security Council or equivalent high-level organisation. These documents will be a combination of the country›s historical context, its political idiosyncrasies, national interest and capabilities. Where official doctrinal documents are available for the particular period of study, the analysis can be largely derived from them. In studying US doctrine, we will therefore look at the *Joint Doctrine Publications* and the various iterations of the National Security Strategy, documents that either cover the official US view on specific information warfare matters such as psychological warfare or cyberwarfare, or the country›s general strategy in which these aspects are included. With regard to the study of China, we will look at the various white papers, their discussion of National Defence, the Defence Policy documents, as well as the various specific military manuals on these subjects. Finally, in the case of Russia, we will study the Russian Federation›s Military Doctrine and the different iterations of the National Security Concept, complementing them with the National Security and Foreign Policy Strategies periodically released by the office of the president.

At the second level of analysis, we find the set of legal instruments and executive resolutions relating to the different sub-domains of information warfare. Although said documents do not establish a doctrine after their publication, as the resolutions affect partial developments and the laws can be interpreted or applied in different ways, they do allow us to establish the country›s capabilities and possibilities when it comes to confronting this domain.

The third level of analysis will be composed of the collection of publications issued by the country›s main centres of thought on military, security or strategic studies in general. While the documents published in said forums pave the way for the establishment of formal doctrines, their academic and prospective nature means that the work within them is often considerably more advanced to the practical reality of the country. It is therefore very common to see how works of analysis and reflection on matters related to information warfare published in the main journals and strategic forums end up giving rise to the establishment or simple formalisation of national doctrines. In the United States we will look largely at the work published in institutions such as the Rand Corporation, the *Military Review*. In Russia we can look at the content of publications such as Военное Обозрение (*Military Review*) and Военнно-промышленнный курьер (*Military-Industrial Post*). In China we will look at the 解放军报 (*PLA Daily*), as well as the 中国国防报 (*National Defence Newspaper*).

Finally, we can supplement the analysis with a study of known information operations, the structure of the armed forces and the main ideological currents in international politics in the respective countries, as well as taking into account the country›s own position in the international system and its status in terms of the development of its media and scientific-technical systems, since it is through these systems that it will be able to build its capabilities.

Therefore, when carrying out this analysis, we have relied on the study of these documents through the methodology outlined above.

### *3.1. The US doctrine*

Information warfare, as we know it today, originated as a term used in US military circles during the 1980s. However, its essence and practical application go even further back in time. It was after the Gulf War that this term acquired the essential importance it retains today, highlighting the relevance of information and disinformation in the field of operations.

Thus, if we trace the origins of organised US implementation of information warfare tactics, we find that they date back to the early decades of the last century. It was during this period that theorists such as Lasswell and Lippman began to develop concepts and strategies around the power of information (Laswell, 1948; Lippman, 1946). His work provided the basis for establishing a theoretical and practical framework within which the United States could begin to operate. Lippman himself played a central role in helping to found and direct the public opinion committee, articulating much of American war propaganda in World War II around innovative concepts, from radio to the use of humorous cartoons (Ruiz, 2018).

At a military level, we can trace the initial efforts in US information warfare to World War II. During World War II and the Cold War, the United States intensified its tactics in this field. During this time, it incorporated specific tactics and strategies to dominate the media landscape. Hollywood produced films that favoured American values and countered adversarial propaganda, while the US government promoted propaganda efforts through agencies such as the Committee of Public Opinion and the creation of propaganda agents such as the Four minutes men.

Beyond mere internal propaganda, the military tactics of the era incorporated elements of deception and camouflage, reaching new heights of complexity. Notable examples include the use of inflatable tanks, bonfires or loudspeakers, as well as other simulations to deceive the enemy about the location and size of Allied forces. The notorious Operation Mincemeat, in turn, is another classic example of strategic deception where the body of a dead man was used to transmit false information to the Nazis.

The field of electronic warfare underwent a major revolution during this period. Beach jumper units were established by the US Navy to conduct deception operations, based primarily on jamming and the deployment of electronic decoys. Similarly, interception and protection of information also became key areas, as seen in the collaboration between the Allies to decipher Nazi codes and in the use of Navajo for communications, an indigenous language used as a virtually unbreakable code at the time.

During the advance of the Cold War in the 1960s and 1970s, information warfare was central between the United States and USSR focusing on espionage and ideology. The US and its allies debated ideologically against the USSR and communism, seeking to promote democratic and capitalist values. To this end, the US used media, educational programmes and support for pro-democracy organisations, acting both overtly and covertly. Initiatives such as Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty broadcasted news in censored areas, while documents such as the Church report revealed covert Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) tactics in information warfare. In education, programmes such as Fullbright, which focused on educational and cultural exchanges, sought to project democratic values and practices abroad by ensuring US influence through soft power (Nye, 1990).

However, it was not all directed outwards; Operation CHAOS, under President Johnson, emerged in the context of the Vietnam War to monitor domestic anti-war groups, reflecting the growing concern about the effects of information warfare within the country›s own borders. This concern was also evident during the war against the Viet Cong itself, where psychological operations, such as Wandering Soul, were based on a deep understanding of Vietnamese culture, and there was a constant attempt to manage and control the narrative presented by the press.

In the 1980s, with Ronald Reagan as president, the US intensified its ideological stance. In 1982, the Reagan administration sought to strengthen the infrastructure of democracy by investing more in prodemocracy media and organisations. In 1983, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) was founded with an initial budget of $31.3 million to support democracy, press freedom and human rights in communist-influenced areas.

In turn, during this period, information warfare took on a more strategic nature. The Strategic Defence Initiative demoralised the USSR, labelled as the evil empire by Reagan, in its competition with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. In Latin America, Radio and Television Martí were created in 1985 and 1990 to influence Cuba, and the US supported the Contras in Nicaragua, reaffirming its anti-communist stance, showing that, in information warfare, ideological battles influenced history as much as military power.

The 1990s and 2000s brought with them new challenges arising from the technical and professional sophistication that enabled the launch of 24-hour news channels and the subsequent emergence of internet communication. During the 1990s, the CNN effect and the televised war demonstrated the power of the media to influence public opinion essential to justifying US foreign policy (Robinson, 1999). This was particularly evident during the Gulf War and the successive

Balkan Wars, where the country›s own public opinion played a key role in facilitating military intervention. Thus, in response to the growing importance of public perception in the international context, successive US administrations began to move from psychological action to strategic communication. An approach to the direct manipulation or influence of public opinion to gain support for military and political actions abroad was observed. This approach integrated the media as an essential tool in information warfare, using real-time coverage and intensive reporting to foster narratives that aligned public opinion with the government›s foreign policy objectives (Robinson, 1999).

At the same time, technological transition, represented by the expansion of the internet and digitalisation, demanded a rethinking of information security. The Bush and Clinton administrations initiated both defensive and offensive efforts in cyberspace. With resolutions, such as National Security Directive 42, and the formation of working groups, the US sought to strengthen its information infrastructure. Amidst these technical advances, a recognition of the need for a more coherent theoretical framework emerged. Libicki (1995) Johnson, (2004) among others, worked on the disambiguation and structuring of the concept of information warfare, generating a comprehensive framework of understanding, not only from a technical angle, but also from a cognitive and psychological one.

Thus, the turn of the millennium saw a rapid formalisation of these ideas. Documents such as Joint Vision 2010 and the Joint Doctrine for Information Operations emerged as benchmarks in Information Warfare. In addition, the Joint Publications series detailed specific operations, from electronic warfare to cyberspace operations.

The attacks of September 11, 2001 reshaped the perception of security in the United States. Information warfare tactics were no longer just tools in the struggle of nation-states, but also of non-state actors (Soriano, 2018). In the contemporary, post-2018 scenario, the U.S. Department of Defence has recognised the importance of cognitive warfare. The current emphasis is on strategic communication (STRATCOM), moving away from pure psychological manipulation towards an attempt at positive and explanatory influence, where the justification of military actions takes centre stage.

Today, as far as information warfare is concerned, while there is no official US government definition, leading military analysts and officials generally conceptualise it as a strategy or planning process to achieve objectives and goals of national interest, for the use and management of information to gain a competitive advantage, including both defensive and offensive operations. In this respect, (information) operations, developed extensively in previous decades, represent the link that connects strategic objectives with tactics, techniques and procedures. Beyond the lack of a unified definition, it is worth noting that various organisations and experts in the country have contributed their own perspectives on the subject and maintain them as a doctrinal framework, with the Department of Defense (DoD) being the most relevant organisation. The DoD has thus conceptualised information warfare since the beginning of the century as an interrelationship between physical information systems and information itself (Understanding Gray zone warfare from multiple perspectives., 2023). Information warfare would focus on affecting the (military) decision-making process by attacking physical information systems or the information itself.

It is important to understand that, according to the US doctrinal approach, these activities naturally take place within the information domain, which comprises three main dimensions: physical, communicative or information and cognitive. In the digital age in which we are immersed, all instruments of national power can be projected and employed in this new environment, including by non-military elements of government, responding to a common strategy (The White House, 2022). As for the cognitive-based aspect of information warfare, three main categories have been identified in the US; three ways in which information can be manipulated or biased, namely propaganda, misinformation, focused on misleading the enemy, and disinformation, or biased information with possibly false parts focused on deception and manipulation (ODNI, 2023). The current US strategic approach in this regard focuses on the dissemination of accurate and truthful information combined with the use of propaganda to influence public opinion in enemy societies (USA-JCS, 2022). To this end, the US government, through various national initiatives, routinely sponsors fake news identification technologies, news verification agencies and similar entities. This modus operandi is applied both internally within the country, as a defensive measure, and externally, seeking to neutralise enemy narratives, replacing them with its own propaganda, through favourable media and official outlets such as Voice of America and the like.

However, unlike the autocratic powers discussed below, the US strives to apply information warfare tactics in an offensive but also defensive manner, where ethics are important, and freedom of the press must be respected. Similarly, the complex network of agencies and units linked to the information warfare in the US as well as the democratic nature of the country, makes it particularly difficult to carry out certain types of actions in a coordinated and effective manner, something that autocratic powers do not suffer from.

In terms of actions in cyberspace, the US strategy has enormous advantages over its adversaries, due to the strength and scientific-technical sophistication of the military industrial complex, as well as the possibility of establishing agreements and links with strategic companies such as Google, Microsoft or certifying entities linked to encryption systems.

US information warfare capabilities are thus organised through a complex network of government agencies, military units and the indispensable support of think tanks and the military-industrial complex. While in the US, influencing and propaganda in favour of its foreign policy can be carried out through a network in which NGOs, strategic companies and even individuals can operate in a, more or less, coordinated manner with government interests, the main capabilities in this area are shared between the Intelligence Services, the Armed Forces and the State Department (ODNI, 2023).

### *3.2. The Russian doctrine*

The Russian approach to information warfare, while not departing from the general approach to the concept, has deep roots in its history. It is worth remembering that Russia›s relationship with the control of information and propaganda in modern times is as old as the Russian Revolution itself. It was during this period that the management of information became particularly important, becoming both a weapon and a battlefield, in a scenario in which the lines between politics and war were becoming increasingly blurred. The rise of the communist party and the triumph of the October Revolution would mark the beginning of a historical tradition in information warfare, allowing for the development of a unique approach.

After the October Revolution of 1917, propaganda became one of the main weapons in the Bolshevik arsenal, being used to legitimise themselves, broaden popular support and consolidate their power through the information space. Posters, leaflets and newspapers with pro-Bolshevik messages were distributed. During the Russian Civil War (1918-1922), propaganda sought to destabilise opponents both inside and outside Russia. Revolutionary fervour spread beyond Russia›s borders, influencing Europe, with the backing of the Communist Party.

After achieving military victories in the war and consolidating its power, the Communist Party, aware of its value, began to articulate a comprehensive strategy for absolute control of the information domain. On the official level, the Bolsheviks began consolidating their control over the media space. Thus, shortly after the October Revolution, they issued the Press Decree, placing restrictions on the non-socialist press, ensuring almost total domination over public discourse. At the same time, the Cheka, the Bolshevik secret police, was set up. Beyond its intelligence work, it played an essential role in spreading the Bolshevik message, especially in the repression of any form of dissent.

As to the handling of information warfare, a central pillar in this propaganda apparatus was Agitprop, established in 1920 (Mally, 2003). As the main propaganda arm of the party, it played a crucial role in promoting communist ideology both inside and outside the USSR. This committee stood out for its great management of the information space, putting creativity and the technologies of the time at the service of propaganda. Clear examples of this can be found in the rosta posters, a series of propaganda posters created by the official news agency Rosta between 1919 and 1922. These posters were pioneers of Russian propaganda strategy and would be used by the party throughout the Cold War, being equivalent to the current memes that are so relevant across online social networks. Similarly, stations such as Radio Moscow became the first instruments of international influence projection in the country.

The Communist International, or Comintern, emerged in 1919 to propagate the Communist Revolution globally, reflecting Russia›s strategy of winning ideological allies against capitalist influences. This organisation, active from 1920 to 1943, put ideology at the service of USSR propaganda and strategy. Their actions were based on doctrinal documents, such as the 21 Conditions of 1920, which emphasised loyalty to Moscow and violent revolution. The Comintern Programme of 1928 reaffirmed these aims, promoting the dictatorship of the global proletariat.

From its earliest days, the Comintern was resolute in its mission. Its mandate, to fight against bourgeois organisations and to fight for an international soviet republic, revealed its overall revolutionary aim. However, its efforts to catalyse communist revolutions in post-World War I Europe, while passionate, had limited success. They sought to capitalise on discontent in countries such as Germany, especially the fragile Weimar Republic, and Hungary, where a Soviet republic briefly emerged in 1919. However, political and social circumstances did not always favour the emergence of lasting communist regimes. In many of the conflict arenas, communist ideology had to struggle against reactionary movements and local nationalism.

Noting that the Comintern›s results in Europe were not entirely favourable, the organisation shifted its gaze to Asia. Being a continent with vast territories and populations, and where colonial and post-colonial discontent offered opportunities for communism. Thus, its support was instrumental in the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921, which would eventually become one of the most powerful communist forces in the world.

The 1930s would present new challenges for Soviet influence in Europe due to the rise of fascism on the continent. In response, the Comintern adopted a firm anti-fascist stance, urging communist parties to form alliances, known as popular fronts, with other left groups to counter the threat. But geopolitics is always complex, and during the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between 1939 and 1941, the Comintern had to adopt a stance of neutrality towards Nazi Germany. This position would change drastically with the German invasion of the USSR in 1941, bringing the Comintern back to the stalwart support of the anti-Nazi resistance in Europe. However, Soviet geostrategic realities in the context of World War II demanded a political flexibility that the Comintern could not manage. In 1943, Stalin dissolved the Comintern, partly as a gesture to his new Western allies. He argued that the Comintern had fulfilled its mission and was no longer needed in the new stage of global politics.

Although the Comintern was disbanded, this did not mean the loss of the USSR›s Information Warfare capabilities, quite the contrary. In parallel to ideological initiatives such as this organisation, the Soviet Union strengthened its intelligence and espionage capabilities. Organisations such as the People›s Commissariat for Internal Affairs of the Soviet Union (Народный комисссариат внутреннних дел СССР, NKVD) and the Central Intelligence Department of the Armed Forces (Главное Разведывательное Управление, GRU) were established, and during the 1920s and 1930s, Moscow created specialised schools to train agents in espionage, counterintelligence, and propaganda techniques. These agents, once trained, were deployed all over the world, becoming the eyes and ears of the Soviet state before, during and (especially) after the war. Later, the NKVD would evolve into the main intelligence body of the Committee for State Security (Коми́тет Госуда́рственной Безопа́сности, KGB). In this sense, the Second World War gave way to the Cold War, a period marked by Information Warfare between the two great blocs. In strictly military terms, information management played a decisive role in the Soviet victory in the East. It was during this period that Soviet military doctrine integrated the use of deception at all levels, giving rise to the term Maskirovka as a doctrinal approach (Keating, 1981), a doctrinal approach, it must be said, which was revived after the Russian resurgence under Putin (Staun, 2023).

During the extended Cold War period, the USSR focused on its confrontation with the Western bloc. Being not only a military but also an ideological and political struggle, the USSR›s tactics ranged from propaganda to covert intelligence. Radio stations such as Radio Moscow and Voice of Russia were vital in this regard, broadcasting Soviet propaganda to global audiences in several languages, and often presenting the world from a pro-Soviet and anti-Western perspective. In the field of covert operations, Soviet intelligence services carried out particularly relevant manoeuvres such as Operation INFEKTION in the 1980s, which spread the unfounded rumour that the HIV/AIDS virus was a creation of the US government (Bates, 2010). They also sponsored magazines such as *New Times* and *World Marxis Review* to disseminate their ideological perspective. During the 1980s, amid rising tensions, the USSR initiated disinformation campaigns that portrayed the United States as the main impediment to world peace, while striving to promote disarmament initiatives that furthered its own interests. These operations, referred to in the KGB doctrine as Active Measures, covered a wide range of tactics aimed at influencing politics and public opinion in other countries. These were not limited to disinformation. The Soviet strategy was broader, focused on seeking change in the political system. In this sense the USSR provided funding, arms, training and propaganda to support communist parties and liberation movements in different parts of the world, in collision, naturally, with the USA (Brantly, 2020).

In this context, the KGB, which was the backbone of these strategies and was primarily responsible for the operations described above, developed numerous manuals that became doctrine. While much of it was classified as secret, examples leaked as *The Science of Disinformation* (Bittman, 1985) in the 1980s detailed techniques and tactics for disinformation operations. These were mainly based on the creation of false stories, the use of fabricated documents, the infiltration of the media, and cooperation with sympathisers and agents abroad (Darczewska, 2015).

Similarly, specialised institutions were set up to train agents in these techniques, becoming experts in information warfare. Over time, Soviet military doctrine, reflected in concepts such as deep war and Maskirovka, underlined the need to use disinformation and deception as crucial tools, both in the information sphere and on the battlefield.

When the USSR disintegrated in 1991, the KGB gave way to new intelligence services in Russia, such as the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (Федеральная служба безопасности Росссийской Федерациии, FSB) and the Foreign Intelligence Service (Служба Внешней Разведки, SVR), continuing similar operations in line with Russian foreign policy, inheriting its approach from the Soviet one. Similarly, the GRU continued its activities, responsible for military intelligence and sabotage operations. Today, these three bodies are central to the design and execution of Russia›s major Information Warfare operations.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked a turning point in the global geopolitical landscape. Russia, the largest successor state to the USSR, was plunged into a deep political, economic and social crisis. This internal situation had direct consequences on its presence and influence in global affairs. In the years immediately after disintegration, Russia was predominantly focused on its internal affairs, striving to ensure a modicum of stability in a country undergoing radical transformations.

This Russian introspection somewhat overshadowed its information warfare operations. During the 1990s, Russia faced severe financial constraints that affected many sectors, including the information warfare one. There was a significant reduction in funding and prioritisation of such operations, resulting in a virtual paralysis of efforts in this domain for much of the decade. However, the entry into the chaos of the 1990s not only affected Russia›s ability to undertake information warfare operations, but also laid the groundwork for a transformation of the system that would later lead to renewed efforts in this field in the new millennium. It is essential to understand two crucial aspects that emerged in this context.

First, the collapse of the USSR created power vacuums in Russia. These, combined with the economic emergency and the process of accelerated privatisation, facilitated the emergence and consolidation of various non-state actors with great power and influence. This group includes the well-known oligarchs, tycoons who amassed enormous fortunes during this period and who, over time, became major political players. Although these oligarchs occasionally operated on the margins of the state, they possessed significant economic and political power. As a result of their situation, they began to maintain a set of interests that sometimes transcended and even contradicted Russia›s official foreign policy.

Secondly, the temporary fragility of the Russian state in that decade left an open door to foreign influence, especially in the cultural, political, telecommunications and other sectors. In telecommunications, some foreign companies began operating in Russia to connect Russia to the global network, marking the beginning of the internet era in the country. Unlike in nations such as China, where mechanisms for network control and regulation were quickly established, Russia, aspiring to democratisation and under Western influence, did not implement legal frameworks and rigorous technical capabilities to regulate telecommunications until much later. This lack of regulation led to the flourishing of a community of hackers and political commentators (Woolley, 2018), who in subsequent years would play a key role in the evolution of information warfare from the Russian approach.

Similarly, the perceived fragility of the newly formed Russian state in the 1990s not only exposed the country to foreign influence, but also set the stage for the emergence of new political actors. The latter saw rapprochement with the West as an opportunity to consolidate their position and political success. This geopolitical context led to a series of movements and revolts across the post-Soviet space better known as the Colour Revolutions in the first decades of the 21st century. Said Colour Revolutions refer to a series of political movements that took place in several post-Soviet countries, such as Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, where mass and mostly peaceful protests led to the removal of governments deemed authoritarian or corrupt and their replacement by more pro-Western regimes. For Russian elites, these movements not only represented a challenge to their traditional sphere of influence, but also raised deep concerns about possible foreign interference and the export of Revolutions to Russia itself. This context of revolutions and the geopolitical changes they brought with them generated a sense of alarm and mistrust among the Russian authorities, who interpreted these revolutions as part of a Western-driven hybrid warfare strategy (Guerasimov, 2013).

In the face of this general sense of alarm, the systematic response of Russian elites was to armour the national information space, not only by reinforcing censorship and capacity building, but also at the moral and ideological level. Thus, by establishing a new national narrative reinforced by propaganda capable of unifying the country ideologically, the country would be better shielded against various campaigns of foreign influence, whatever they might be. The elites, thus, found in currents such as Aleksander Duguin›s Eurasianism an ideological basis on which to build a national narrative and thus justify their foreign policy or even go so far as to fight for the hegemony of the narrative against liberal democracy. Duguin himself would highlight the role of propaganda and the establishment of alternative national narratives to Atlanticism in one of his major works; rn Project Eurasia stressed the need to “establish an alternative communication ecosystem to the dominant Atlanticism” (Duguin, 1999).

It is precisely the ideas of thinkers like Duguin that would begin to take shape from 2005 onwards through the progressive establishment of an entire Russian international communication ecosystem. Said system would be headed by the Russia Today channel established that same year, along with other channels and agencies like Sputnik, and would in turn be backed by a wide network of proxy media linked to extremism of all kinds, alternative communicators and social media (Galán, 2023). The application of these new capabilities would allow the Kremlin to begin to contest the Western narrative around the world with particular success in regions with latent anti-imperialist currents and sentiments such as Ibero-America (Miles, 2021). This narrative battle would progressively begin with the launch of media outlets such as RT and would gradually intensify after events such as Euromaidan or the very beginning of the Special Military Operation in Ukraine (Darczewska, 2014).

Similarly, this fear, together with the technological revolution that was redefining the media, accelerated Russia›s interest in developing and consolidating its own doctrine in the field of information warfare, as well as specific capabilities such as military units in the form of information troops or new means of cyber and electronic warfare (Gerasimov, 2016; Lysenko, 2018). This transformation was nurtured by the thinking of Russian academics and military men and translated into a series of guidelines and strategies that were incorporated into official Russian army doctrine (Rumer, 2019).


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Once the problem in the information domain had been identified and the first capabilities in the media sector had been built, Russian elites proceeded to transfer this new scenario into a formal doctrine. As the 21st century progressed, and under Vladimir Putin›s administration, this doctrine was both embodied in various official strategic documents and materialised in the construction and application of capabilities, consolidating Russia›s vision of information warfare as a response to the challenges it presented in the international arena.

Russia›s contemporary stance in information warfare is rooted in a number of key strategic documents. The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, updated in 2014 (Kremlin.ru, 2010; 2014) while focusing primarily on traditional military defence matters, emphasises the importance of information and stresses the need to safeguard the country›s information sovereignty against external threats that seek to destabilise its sovereignty and territorial integrity. In 2016, the Information Security Strategy of the Russian Federation was adopted (рф, Доктрина информационной безопасности Российской Федерации, 2016) which prioritises information security, identifies threats in the digital sphere and establishes a framework for preserving national information integrity. In the same year, the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation emphasised the need to use information tools to achieve foreign policy objectives, recognising the conflicts that are projected in the information space (рф, kremlin.ru, 2015-2021) and in its 2023 version it further emphasises defence against "disinformation and the influence of external actors", understanding the defence of the country›s internal information space as a central element in national security and an enabler of foreign policy (kremlin.ru, 2023). On the other hand, while the Russian Federation›s National Counterterrorism Strategy focuses on terrorism, it does not overlook the imperative of combating the spread of extremist ideologies in the information sphere.

This doctrinal framework reflects the Russian idea of Information Warfare as a multifaceted phenomenon, articulated through the military, the intelligence services and the official media, encompassing both cognitive and technical dimensions (Darczewska, 2015). Notorious examples of this stance are Russian actions integrating hacking, leaks, disinformation and propaganda techniques, as evidenced in events such as the intervention in Estonia in 2007 (Ottis, 2008; Sanger, 2016) and the alleged interference in the 2016 US elections. Russia, recognising itself as a persistent target of this information war by the West, adopts a defensive stance that often manifests itself in counterattacks, explaining its behaviour and perspective on the current global stage.

### *3.3. The Chinese doctrine*

China emerges as a player in information warfare, with a less sophisticated doctrinal development than the United States, but with an informal doctrine, solidly embedded in its strategic and military thinking. Although the value of information control has been recognised in China since ancient times, it has been during the last three decades that the country has undergone a doctrinal revolution, especially after the Gulf War (Cheng, 2011).

The control and manipulation of information has been central to Chinese strategies since the time of Sun Tzu, as illustrated in the *Art of War*, a treatise that emphasises the importance of strategy, intelligence and cunning in combat (Ota, 2014). However, to understand the modern doctrine of Chinese information warfare, we must go back to the second half of the 20th century and the establishment of communism in China.

Thus, with the advent of the communist revolution in 1949, and the establishment of the People›s Republic of China, the importance of information control rose to unprecedented levels. In this context, propaganda became a crucial tool for the promotion and consolidation of communist ideology. However, due to the country›s technological and economic limitations at the time, the technological facet of China´s information warfare did not develop until much later. During this early period, the foundations of the country›s information machinery were laid, with entities such as the Xinhua News Agency and the People›s Daily playing key roles, roles which they still retain today.

The next critical stage in the evolution of information warfare in China was the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). This decade witnessed an intensification of propaganda, where its main objective was to consolidate the power of the Communist Party of China (CPC). During this time, propaganda was not only omnipresent, but also extremely political. Mass mobilisation and propaganda reached uncontrollable levels, with intense ideological campaigns aimed at eliminating counterrevolutionaries and other enemies of the state. These campaigns took the form of study sessions, infiltration of all sectors of society, activation of youth groups, distribution of written material, and radio broadcasts (Mittler, 2014). The end of this era came with the rise of Deng Xiaoping, who initiated a phase of opening and reform in China.

After the era of the Cultural Revolution, with the arrival of Deng Xiaoping, China adopted a stance of openness to the world, prioritising its economic development through international trade. During this phase, China moderated its information warfare activities, limiting them mainly to domestic information management to ensure regime stability, without being overly ambitious in the international arena. However, this period also saw the birth of the first doctrinal conceptualisations of information warfare in China. Dr. Shen Weiguang, in 1985, is recognised as the father of the concept in China and defined this phenomenon as "both side's attempt to gain the initiative of the battle through their control over information and flow of intelligence" (Weiguang, 1985).

The 1991 Gulf War conflict was to be a turning point for China. Noting US supremacy in the information domain and its ability to use precision weapons and intelligence against the adversary, China recognised the need to invest and adapt. This post-Gulf War period also saw technology and digitalisation begin to play a more prominent role in China´s strategy, inspired in part by US developments (Cheng, 2011).

During the 1990s, military figures such as General Wang Pufeng (Pufeng, 1995) and Colonels Wang Baocun and Li Fei enriched and expanded China´s conceptualisation of information warfare (Neilson, 1997). Wang Pufeng linked it to network warfare, highlighting the relevance of information technology, while Wang Baocun and Li Fei took a more technological approach, relating information warfare to network technology and sensorisation on the battlefield.

Liang Zhenxing and General Yan Banggen, for their part, proposed a broader and more holistic definition that encompasses not only the military aspect, but also the wider struggle for supremacy in the acquisition, control and use of information in all spheres of society (Zhenxing, 1997). In doing so, it revolutionised its understanding and application of information warfare from its historical roots to the most modern conceptions, integrating it into its foreign policy, both civilian and military.

In this sense, China´s Three Wars doctrine (三战), set out in the Political Work Regulations of the People›s Liberation Army in 2003 (PCCh, 2003), is a clear manifestation of how the Chinese Communist Party and the People›s Liberation Army (PLA) continued to conceptualise and adapt their approaches to warfare in the information age. In this context, the three wars refer to:

– **Psychological warfare (心理战)**

  It aims to influence and undermine the morale of the opponent, be it the general population, the leadership structure, or the armed forces. It seeks to establish or promote narratives that favour China´s position, while undermining opposing positions and perspectives.

– **Media wars (舆论战)**

  This war focuses on the battle of narratives in the public information space, especially through media. Its aim is to dominate the discourse and ensure that the Chinese perspective is dominant or, at least, widely represented and accepted.

– **Legal warfare (法律战)**

  Also known as lawfare, this strategy involves the use of international and national laws to achieve strategic objectives. China has used legal arguments, for example, to justify its territorial claims in the South China Sea.

These three wars demonstrate how China has conceptualised conflict in the information space, moving beyond the realm of conventional warfare and into the cognitive realm, harnessing all mechanisms in the information space to its advantage. This approach has progressively increased following Xi Jinping›s rise to power, and China´s foreign policy shift towards a more assertive stance in international affairs.

In terms of its application today, China´s information warfare doctrine, while not solely reflected in a series of official documents, emanates from the various historical publications by its intellectual elite, as well as from the General Doctrine of the Armed Forces and defence white papers. It emphasises the pursuit of the total computerisation of its armed forces, the development of technology and cyberforces, as well as the application of the Three Wars framework within an all-out war scenario, which Colonels Liang and XIangsui defined in their doctrinal vision as unrestricted warfare (Chew, 2018).

Thus, China´s information warfare doctrine has evolved, incorporating a mix of elements borrowed from the US doctrine, as well as its Soviet heritage with its own historical elements such as the concept of people›s war, targeting weak points, deception and false flag attacks (Charon, 2021).

From the 2015 edition of China´s Defence White Paper (China, gov.cn, 2015) we can see how the People›s Liberation Army (PLA) has devoted and is devoting significant resources to the computerisation of its forces. This process is not limited to guaranteeing access to military intelligence and deception operations to the PLA but encompasses the control of information inputs and outputs across all military elements as a critical component of national security. This approach was confirmed and expanded in the 2019 edition of the same publication entitled China´s National Defence in the New Era (China, gov.cn). The document expanded the information domain by identifying three global spaces of particular security concern, namely outer space, nuclear and cyberspace. Including cyberspace as a domain of special interest, as well as outer space which is especially dependent on information management, China consolidated its doctrinal approach linked to the computerisation of warfare.

In the PLA›s cyber domain, cyber warfare is vital to information warfare, focusing on accessing and occasionally damaging enemy systems. These operations aim to strengthen the country›s power, complement intelligence gathering, map foreign networks and improve defensive capabilities. In turn, China maintains psychological warfare, employing propaganda in information warfare to influence public opinion abroad. To this end, it employs local activists linked to the government to modulate opinion on social networks and in Asian media. These patriotic activists, aligned with the country›s people›s war, can be employed to alter public opinion online. In turn, the control of internal discourse protects its information rearguard.

For practical purposes, this doctrinal consolidation materialised in the establishment in 2015 of the PLA Strategic Support Force (SSF), centralising space, cyber, electronic warfare and psychological warfare missions under a single organisation, progressively absorbing the capabilities of the third and fourth departments of the PLA (Costello, 2018). The launch of the SSF was a particularly significant event in that it materialised the CCP authorities› realisation of the enormous strategic value of the information domain and especially its cross-cutting nature as an enhancer or even enabler of comprehensive operations in the rest of the conventional domains. Similarly, the SSF would also serve as a capability development centre enabling the PLA to professionalise in the various sub-domains in information warfare.

Along with the restructuring of the armed forces, the CCP began to adapt its legal architecture to modern information warfare. On July 1, 2015, the National Security Law of the People›s Republic of China was passed (China, ilo.org, 2015) covering a multitude of areas related to state security, designed to manage both internal and external security threats in China. The law, which is currently in force, is made up of 84 articles distributed in ten chapters that deal with various aspects such as political, territorial, military, economic, cultural, social and technological security. With regard to technology, the law is notable for its special attention to the domain of cyberspace. It broadly underlines the centrality of the CCP›s leadership and the need to safeguard political stability in the country, allowing for a crackdown on political dissent under the justification of the concept of political security.

The cyber approach emphasises the country›s cyber sovereignty, promoting internet control, censorship and surveillance. article 11 states that everyone in China must cooperate in the security of the state in accordance with the law. Although ambiguous, it suggests that they must assist the state if information or assistance related to national security is requested, or they could be charged with treason. The 2017 Cyber Security Law requires ICT companies to cooperate with government investigations and store Chinese user data within the country.

The next and final step in the materialisation of China´s information warfare capabilities is the splitting of the SSF into three new dedicated agencies, further emphasising the importance of the information domain.

The three new agencies, placed directly under the direct supervision of the CCP›s Central Military Commission, include the Information Support Force (direct heir to the SSF) complemented by the Cyberspace Force and the Military Space Force. Each of these new entities absorbs one of the specific dimensions of information warfare, all of which are directly coordinated by the country›s highest military authority, Xi Jinping (Singer, 2024).

China´s current approach to information warfare is thus articulated through two main avenues, namely the total computerisation of military systems and technical warfare in this domain, and the use of media and communication systems to conduct global influence campaigns. To execute this strategy, the Chinese Communist Party puts all the mechanisms of the state at its service in a systemic people›s war approach.

### *3.4. Comparative analysis*

Information warfare is a cross-cutting phenomenon, involving all states as well as a significant number of non-state actors. The great powers, because of their stance and their constantly conflicting interests, apply this framework of conflict to gain strategic advantages without resorting to arms. At present, the US, the People›s Republic of China and Russia are the main actors in the conflict, due to their technological and social development, their military-political tradition and their global interests.

In this regard, the United States stands out for its sophisticated and structured defence doctrine, which naturally carries over into the realm of information warfare. Thus, the establishment of a clear doctrine and its open dissemination is, to a large extent, a result of its democratic system, which promotes open and transparent communication on foreign and defence policy. In military terms, its doctrine is detailed in the *Joint Publications*, of the Department of Defence, while, in broad terms, the country›s strategic intentions and movements are set out in National Security Council documents.

In its modern approach to warfare, the United States has adopted a strategy based on multidomain integration, gradually positioning information as the central core of the battlefield. From a cognitive perspective, there has been a remarkable shift in the US approach: the nation has evolved towards STRATCOM, leaving behind traditional psychological operations, which are now handled in secret by its intelligence services.

US global influence extends beyond military force. Thanks to its dominant audiovisual and cultural industry, and its centrality in the Western media, the United States exerts a powerful influence —or soft power— over the West and much of the world. This position is reinforced by educational and support programmes, allowing the US to avoid direct conflict in the digital realm, reserving such tactics for very specific situations.

Additionally, in response to challenges posed by other great powers in the disinformation arena, the United States has invested heavily in media literacy initiatives and anti-disinformation campaigns. Organisations such as USAGM and the recently established FMIC agency, which operates under the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, are clear examples of these efforts. The United States is similarly renowned for its remarkable sophistication and precision in military and intelligence operations. This prowess is a direct product of its robust military-industrial complex, a feature that differs drastically from the approach taken by Russia. US meticulousness and efficiency in the military realm has been evidenced in high-calibre strategic operations such as Olympic Games (Kamiński, 2020) targeting Iran›s nuclear programme, and the more recent Operation Triangulation (Kucheryn, 2023) which targeted the selective interception of communications on Russian territory.

However, despite its leadership in the information domain, the United States faces considerable vulnerabilities in this landscape of conflict. One of the main weaknesses lies in the country›s extensive and tangled network of intelligence and military services. This densely bureaucratised infrastructure is often slow, presenting challenges in terms of effective communication and coordination. At the same time, the US democratic system›s strong commitment to individual freedom and its natural resistance to censorship, while virtuous, can act as a double-edged sword. Respect for these principles can complicate rapid decision-making and, in certain circumstances, give an advantage to adversaries operating with fewer constraints.

Unlike the United States, Russia does not have a comprehensive and structured doctrinal framework for information warfare; public information on the subject is scarce. Thus, on the basis of scant official documentation, limited mainly to government-issued national security perspectives, Russia›s national security strategy can be discerned through its concrete actions on the international stage. In this sense, Russia adopts a guerrilla approach to information warfare. Despite lacking the technical sophistication of other powers and facing international isolation, it compensates for these weaknesses with a cost-effective and extremely agile strategy. This approach has its roots in the Soviet era, characterised by techniques of infiltration and manipulation of the political systems of target nations, now adapted to the (new) digital environment.

Russia›s tumultuous transition to the information society after the collapse of the USSR profoundly influenced its approach to information warfare. While the Kremlin and the oligarchs maintain an iron grip on traditional media, the deregulation of the internet has allowed the emergence of a distinctive hacker culture. This culture, which includes active and politicised bloggers and users, eventually evolved into figures such as patriotic hackers and professional trolls.

Since the advent of the new millennium, Russia has strengthened both its capabilities in cyberwarfare and cyberespionage and in the manipulation of the cognitive domain. Its ability to integrate operations in both domains is evident, as seen in the cyber-attacks on Estonia, the attacks on the Democratic National Committee in the US and the constant incursions into Ukraine›s critical infrastructure, all accompanied by disinformation and propaganda campaigns.

Russia›s agility in these operations stems from an approach that gives the different intelligence agencies a great deal of autonomy, to the point of competing each other. In addition, the frequent use of non-state actors, such as the Wagner group, allows Russia to deploy rapid, cost-effective and scalable operations globally, although this brings its own challenges and associated problems.

China has rapidly established itself as an emerging power, positioning itself near the forefront of information warfare. From the late 1990s onwards, Chinese military intellectual elites began to develop their own doctrine in this area, largely influenced by the events of the Gulf War. This development led China to realise the crucial importance of information dominance. Unlike other nations, China does not distinguish between the cyber and psychological aspects of Information Warfare. In its vision, information is a strategic domain in its own right.

Chinese information warfare doctrine has itself undergone a significant metamorphosis over the years. Initially influenced by the Soviet heritage, which prioritised propaganda and the instrumentalisation of communist ideology, China has adapted its approach to a more comprehensive information warfare. This adaptation is based on a combination of technology, psychological operations and international media manipulation. It is noteworthy that, in its evolution, China took inspiration from US doctrine but adapted it according to its Soviet context and legacy.

Today, China is striving for full integration of information in the context of warfare. In its view, all war is, in essence, an information war. This concept is the cornerstone of the Chinese armed forces› modernisation process. Moreover, China´s information warfare has a cross-cutting approach, involving all actors in society. In keeping with the country›s communist heritage, the people›s war remains a central strategy, with the Communist Party having the ultimate responsibility for managing and directing these operations.

At a strategic level, the People›s Republic of China has incorporated information warfare into its Three War doctrine: media, legal and psychological. Through these, it seeks to exert political, diplomatic and communicative pressure, gradually escalating and using all available resources in the information space. The overriding objective is to build an international arena that is conducive to China´s foreign policy. This is achieved through media manipulation, the reinterpretation of international law to its advantage, and aggressive manipulative tactics ranging from military intimidation (as in the case of Taiwan) to disinformation campaigns and online harassment, exemplified by tactics such as wolf warrior diplomacy.

Internally, the Chinese state has instituted strict control over the flow of information. This control is materialised through various mechanisms: constant propaganda aimed at the population, advanced technological surveillance systems such as the Golden Shield and, of course, the omnipresence of the Communist Party which monitors and guides all aspects of society. In fact, China´s information warfare is not just a strategy of the upper echelons of government; it is an approach that is woven throughout society, involving both individuals and corporate entities.

In this context, strategic Chinese companies, ranging from large telecommunications operators to social media giants, play a crucial role. Under national security law, these companies can be mobilised to contribute to the country›s information warfare efforts. This integration of companies into national information strategies is significantly more systematic and structured than in countries such as Russia. Moreover, China´s position as a global technological and economic power gives it a sophistication that surpasses the Russian approach and presents an agility that, in many respects, challenges even the United States.

From a military perspective, this information warfare doctrine has led to significant reorganisations within the PLA. A relevant milestone in this process was the creation of the Strategic Support Force in 2015 as an integration and development force for the various information warfare capabilities in the country, and its subsequent expansion into three specific agencies in the communication, cyber and space sub-domains under the direct command of the Central Military Commission in 2024.

## 4. Conclusions

Since the dawn of civilisation, organised groups of all kinds have sought supremacy in the information domain, to secure or support their control over physical territory. However, the real transformation in this struggle over the years has come about through technological and social advances, which have redefined the strategies, tactics, techniques and procedures of the actors involved. The consolidation of information warfare as a relevant mode of combat took hold in the 20$^{th}$ century, especially with the rise of ICTs in the new millennium. This contemporary approach divides into two domains: the cognitive, in which propaganda, deception and disinformation are the main weapons; and the technological, dominated by cyberwarfare, electronic warfare and cyberespionage.

To understand the complexities of today›s information warfare, it is essential to analyse it through the prism of the operations of the three great powers: The US, Russia and China. Each of these powers approaches information warfare with its own unique approach, but regardless of how they act, they all share a common goal: to consolidate and expand their influence in the international system. Offensive realism offers a clear perspective for understanding this phenomenon. At their core, the great powers, in their quest for hegemony, are destined for clash and conflict. This clash does not only manifest itself in conventional military confrontations, but also in the information arena. Information warfare, because of its low political cost and easy scalability, has become an essential, indispensable tool for these powers. The struggle for political and cultural influence over the international system results in a constant battle in the information domain.

Thus, in this new global scenario, information warfare is not just a possibility, it is an inevitable phenomenon. The great powers, through their vast resources and capabilities, are engaged in a constant struggle to define and redefine reality, influence perceptions and control the flow of information in an increasingly connected world. The information domain has undoubtedly become one of the main arenas of conflict in contemporary international politics. The doctrinal study of information warfare through the great powers allows for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Given their capacity for innovation and leadership in large-scale operations, these nations not only set standards, but also influence the direction and position taken by other powers in this field, often generating alliances and common fronts.

Despite sharing certain similarities, especially in their growing interest in competition in this domain since the Second World War, the techno-political realities of these powers have led them down different paths. China and Russia, under the ideological umbrella of communism, have adopted information warfare with a focus on political influence. In particular, Russia, strengthened by Cold War tensions, invested heavily in sabotage and information manipulation, which has characterised its aggressive approach, now adapted to the digital realm.

On the other hand, the US has adapted its strategy of defending democracy using advanced technology, cyber weapons and cyberspace operations to support its international position. China in turn, combining experiences from the US and its Soviet heritage, has created an information-centric strategy, merging civilian and military efforts under the Communist Party.

This current panorama suggests an intensification of Information Warfare in the years to come. The powers will advance their doctrines, seeking greater sophistication and integration. While conventional military power still dominates the dynamics of international conflict, modern warfare increasingly tends towards information warfare. The objective will be to destabilise and disrupt enemy command and control capabilities at all levels, from influencing public perception to disrupting vital telecommunications systems. Ultimately, whether on the plains of Eastern Europe, on the island of Formosa or even within Western democracies, information will be the key to power. Its control and manipulation will decide the outcome of confrontations, both in the international political and military arenas.

As we have discussed in this paper, information warfare is a phenomenon that is as permanent as it is inevitable. Because of their global interests, as well as the breadth and social complexity of their territories, the great powers are forced to interfere in the information domain, whether to coordinate the collective action of their vast human resources, to facilitate cooperation with distant populations or to obtain strategic information. Information warfare between such powers is inevitable, as we have seen in the cases of Russia and China, precisely as a country achieves (or regains) great power status it is naturally forced to compete in that domain, whether by fighting for narrative or by expanding and sophisticating its intelligence and sabotage capabilities.

The recognition and study of this mode of warfare is therefore more than imperative for leaders and strategists, both in these countries and especially in middle-ranking and lesser powers, among which, for example, we find Spain. These powers, because of their lesser capacity for influence, often limited to their immediate geographical surroundings, are strongly influenced by both doctrinal developments and the actions of the great powers. Having less weight in the international system, depending on political, economic and military alliances dominated by the great powers, these states become battlegrounds where the great powers struggle for influence. As a result, they are often victims of digital or conventional espionage campaigns, influence peddling, interference and political manoeuvring of all kinds. This can already be observed today in Latin American regions, and to a lesser extent in Western Europe. Even traditionally influential powers like Israel, capable of defending themselves technically and narratively, are often implicated in the power dynamics of great powers through the information domain.

Against this backdrop, it is imperative that these powers develop their own information warfare capabilities, especially those with systems based on liberal democracy, which are much more vulnerable to destabilising action from powers with autocratic regimes. It is therefore essential to legally reinforce these capabilities through laws regulating the activity of foreign agents, be they intelligence services or political groups linked to foreign powers. The primacy of foreign agent laws such as the one in the US over the recently discussed anti-disinformation laws puts the focus on foreign interference beyond content, guaranteeing state protection as well as the right to freedom of expression in the face of political censorship. Similarly, it is essential to increase counterintelligence and cyber intelligence capabilities, both at the human and technological levels, while fostering greater communication and transparency towards society in order to reinforce confidence in these organisations, as has already been pointed out by Maddox *et al.* (2021). Militarily, the cross-cutting nature of the phenomenon must be recognised and robust communication mechanisms in the chain of command and, in particular, specialised units capable of handling the full cycle of information warfare must be established, integrating both technical and communication capabilities. In terms of training, military academies and think tanks should be able to train new generations of military cadres in specific information warfare profiles, from psychology to cybersecurity. The implementation of such measures will ensure a more efficient defence adapted to the contemporary challenges of the global geopolitical environment.

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# *Would it be possible to maintain a multipolar world order? Analytical approach of an international system led by several superpowers*

**Abstract**

Throughout history, diverse power structures have emerged and evolved. The Peace of Westphalia established a new state order, and the Cold War consolidated the United States as a leader. However, the recent strengthening of other emerging powers presents the possibility of reorganising the current system towards a multipolar one.

The analysis is conducted from the perspective of realist and neo-realist theories of international *r*elations. Classical realists, such as Hans Morgenthau, consider that multipolarity offers greater stability, while neorealists, proponents of Kenneth Waltz, argue that it is less stable due to superpower competition and difficulties in terms of cooperation.

The article explores key concepts such as multipolarity, hegemony and world order, and examines the historical role of superpowers. It considers scenarios in which the international system is led by superpowers and exposes and analyses the debate as to whether a multipolar system could maintain a stable world order or would rather lead to chaos, to global disorder.

**Keywords**

World disorder, International stability, Polarity, Hegemony, International system.

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## 1. Introduction

Throughout history, power structures have succeeded one another on an international scale, shaping varied and changing systems and altering the predominance of each state over time. Within this spiral of change, the post-Cold War role of the United States as a leading power may be undermined by the strengthening of other major powers and the consequent reorganisation of the structure, thus causing the international system to drift into chaos or, in other words, into what is often referred to as global disorder (Murray & Brown, 2012).

The international system is on the verge of change and, as such, predictions regarding the outcomes of these changes have flooded the field of international relations. At the start of the 21st century, in 2008, the US National Intelligence Council had already assessed the prospects of a multipolar system arising from globalisation, economics, developmental differences between nations, and the rise of emerging powers (National Intelligence Council, 2008).

Multipolarity has become a widely discussed scenario as a plausible successor to the current international system, raising the question of whether such a change would be capable to sustaining a lasting world order.

To answer this question, different approaches have been adopted by authors of the realist school of thought within international relations. On one hand, classical realists who follow the doctrine of Hans Morgenthau (1948) consider the multipolar system to provide the greatest stability to the international system. Morgenthau supports the theory that international politics is based on the struggle for power and international relations on the search for a balance of power, which, according to him, is more feasible in a multipolar system than in a bipolar one. On the other hand, neo-realists who are successors of Kenneth Waltz (1979) consider multipolarity to be a less stable structure. Their stance is rooted in the realist idea of anarchy between nations and the security dilemma it poses. They suggest that a multipolar system would eventually lead to competition between the dominant superpowers and a regionalisation of the inner workings of the international system, making cooperation less feasible and international engagement easily reversible, leading to a slow build-up of global disorder.

This article explores the question of multipolar international systems based on Waltz›s neorealist theory of the unstable nature of multipolarity, and it specifically seeks to elucidate how this multipolar system governed by numerous superpowers would, over time, encounter obstacles to ensuring world order and ultimately lead to global disorder. To this end, the first part of the article will discuss, through the lens of neorealism as opposed to classical realism, the specific nomenclature involved in the dichotomous question of multipolarity and world order: the concepts of multipolarity, superpower, hegemony and world order, to better understand the question behind this study and to understand possible future scenarios. The second part will address the role of superpowers in maintaining a multipolar world order by examining their historical presence through the Industrial Revolution and the Cold War. The analysis will focus on demonstrating the compatibility, or lack thereof, of superpowers and their chances of survival in a multipolar system, through both a historical and a theoretical approach. The third and final part of the analysis will draw conclusions based on the discussion, as well as possible future outcomes to be expected from the changing world order.

## 2. Conceptual framework: multipolarity, world order and hegemony

In order to explore the question of multipolarity and world order, it is worth analysing the meaning of both concepts. The concept of multipolarity was first introduced in *The New York Times* in the late 1960s and early 1970s and is linked to the foreign policy of US President Richard Nixon and his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger (Wardhani, 2021: 106-111). Aware of the ongoing changes in the international system, they theorised about the prognosis of a shift from a bipolar to a multipolar system. According to Waltz (1988), the concept of multipolarity refers to an international system in which more than two rival states coexist. On the other hand, Raymond Aron (1962: 95-115), 20th century philosopher, sociologist and political commentator, defines the multipolar system as a system composed of several rival countries with more or less equal capabilities. For the purposes of this article, a multipolar system will be considered as a system with more than two rival states with similar capabilities.

The concept of world order has been widely used in the history of international relations. The Peace of Westphalia, signed in 1648, is commonly referenced as a turning point in the world order, transforming it into a pragmatic order as opposed to the ideological order prevalent in Europe in previous centuries (Kissinger, 2016). Although it is a recurring concept in international relations theory, its meaning is subject to debate.

It was the US President Woodrow Wilson (1918) who first referenced this order after World War I in his defence of the Fourteen Points before the US Congress. However, in this call for peace, mention was made of the international order. This multiplicity of similar concepts has also given rise to debate among academics. Robert Cooper (2002: 103-112), a British diplomat, distinguishes between world order and international order on the basis of the referenced era rather than their meaning, and reference to the structure and distribution of power. According to him, the international order existed prior to the Peace of Westphalia in which the order was the empire, and the world order began its development with the balance of power and globalisation. Like Cooper, other authors such as Kissinger make no conceptual distinction between world order and international order.

The theorist and philosopher Hedley Bull (1977) considers the concepts of international order and world order to be distinct. According to the author, the international order is the system shared by countries in which there are common rules and expectations based on the limitation of violence, respect for agreements and respect for sovereignty. He refers to a pattern for achieving the goals of human society, built through a pattern of activity aimed at fulfilling "elementary or primary goals of the society of states". The main goal of human society is security: security against violence and death, security of possessions, security of agreements, and security against constant and unlimited challenges. These aspirations transcend the state level and are transformed into the state rules and expectations mentioned above. On the other hand, he perceives the world order as a counterparty system based on the relationship between individuals (Bull, 1977). Despite the ambiguity of the concept of world order, an appropriate definition can be drawn from the contributions of these authors for the purposes of this article. Here, world order is thus defined as the pattern of state behaviour driven towards limiting violence, respecting agreements and sovereignty, and ultimately fulfilling the goals of human society.

Throughout history, the international system has experienced attempts to establish a multipolar structure. The 19th century, for example, was characterised by its multipolar arrangement, in which various European powers such as Germany and Britain, together with emerging Asian powers such as Japan, supported the international system and shared status with the eventual leader, the United States. Two centuries later, with the rise of Russia and China, and a flourishing India, the prospect of a world system with several major powers at the forefront becomes feasible. The real question is not only whether a multipolar international system is possible, but also whether it would be effective in maintaining world order or whether it would lead to global disorder.

In order to answer this question, it is important to carefully consider the status of the rival states that make up multipolarity. Being a leading nation in a multipolar system means being at the head of the international system, exerting influence and strength over the rest of the countries, but without being the exclusive holder of power in the system, *i.e.*, not a hegemon. The concept of hegemony began to gain ground in the field of international relations in the early 20th century when the Marxist philosopher, politician and theorist Antonio Gramsci (2023) questioned why capitalist countries in particular were the most developed in the West. The definition proposed by the author focused on social classes rather than states and referred to the strategy of a certain social group that, through persuasion and consensus, achieves the acceptance of its ideas and interests by other social groups, thus being the ideological leader among all groups. Robert Keohane (1988), professor and political scientist, focuses his definition of hegemony on nations. He establishes hegemony as the juncture at which a country with superior resources and capabilities is powerful enough to guarantee the rules governing international relations and is willing to uphold them. Taking Keohane as a reference, it is understood that the leadership of a single country makes the existence of more than one hegemon impossible and, therefore, that the multipolar system does not admit the concept of hegemony.

It is clear, therefore, that being a leading state in a multipolar system does not mean being a hegemon, it means being a superpower. The term superpower was coined by international relations lecturer and theorist William. T. R. Fox in 1944 to define the superiority of Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union, nations which, at the Yalta Conference, laid the foundations for the end of the Second World War and the structure that would remain in place during the Cold War. Fox›s defined these leading countries as superpowers, states with great power and great capacity to implement this power, and which are essential for maintaining peace (Calduch, 1991). Prior to that, they had all been considered great powers, a concept that seemed insufficient as their superior status amongst other great powers demanded a greater distinction (Bull, 1971).

The neorealist author Barry Buzan shares and expands the definition of a superpower. He believes that a superpower must have first-rate military capabilities, but its power is not reduced to this aspect only. It must have a wide range of capabilities that it exercises globally, such as political and negotiating influence in the international system. It must also have the economic power to back up its capabilities and to gain the support and recognition of other states for its superpower status. This primordial position in the international system requires a superpower to be an active player in securitisation and desecuritisation processes around the world, as well as a source of universal values that give shape and cohesion to a specific international system (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). According to this author, the international system refers to a group of countries where the behaviour of each country is a necessary factor determining the behaviour of other states, and where the participants in the system share a set of rules and institutions that they seek to uphold in order to safeguard common interests (Buzan, 1993).

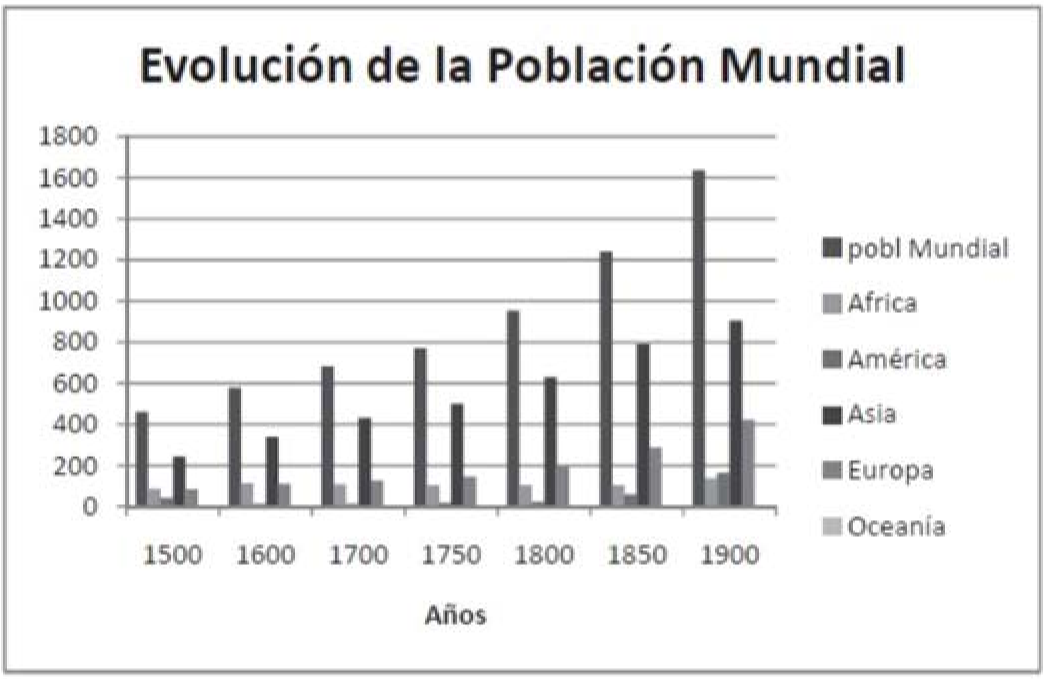
Hedley Bull (1971) also discusses superpowers, adding that they are also major players within an international system. Thus, the author endows these superpowers with a leading role in the creation of the world order or its failure.

## 3. The question of the coexistence of various superpowers

Already in the 19th century, following the industrial revolution, the emergence of the concept of the nation-state, and population growth (see figure 1), major social inequalities arose. On one hand, numerous jobs were replaced by new machinery, leaving a large part of society impoverished, while on the other hand, technology served to enrich a few entrepreneurs (Varela Ferrio, 2021).

At the same time, inequalities between states emerged, leaving power unbalanced and concentrated in a small number of nations. Britain, France, Germany, the United States, Russia and Japan are the few great powers that benefited from and led the international system during the second half of the 19th century and the first part of the 20th century (Buzan, 2012).

The concept of the superpower is the successor to these great European powers which, thanks to technological advances and globalisation, opened up an entirely new power status unimaginable during the post-revolutionary multipolar system. Although similar, the possible multipolar system encompassing several superpowers cannot be studied as a replica of 19th century multipolarity. The key point of the matter must be the fact that the superpowers run the system.




Graph I. Demographic evolution. Alcañiz, M. (2008). Cambios demográficos en la sociedad global. Papeles de población, 14(57), pp. 227-255

According to the above definition, there is also no indication of the difficulty or impossibility of coexistence between superpowers, as demonstrated during the Cold War. Superpowers gain prominence just after the decline of the great powers as leaders of the international system, or possibly they inherit and foster this power. During the First and Second World Wars, especially the latter, states begin to gravitate towards the United States or the then Soviet Union. And, with them, so did the great powers, which ended up being absorbed by one of the two blocs, or poles, that fought the Cold War. Throughout this period, two superpowers coexisted in the international system, suggesting that they can remain together. The question, again, is whether such a situation is sustainable while maintaining a world order.

| PAÍSES | PIB (bill. de USD corrientes en 2011) | PODER MILITAR Presupuesto en defensa (mill. de USD corrientes en 2011) | POBLACIÓN (previsión CIA para julio de 2012, en millones) | EXTENSIÓN GEOGRÁFICA (miles km2) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| EEUU | 15.065 | 692.000 | 314 | 9.629,09 |
| CHINA | 6.988 | 100.000 | 1.343 | 9.598,09 |
| INDIA | 1.843 | 50.400 | 1.205 | 301,32 |
| RUSIA | 1.884 | 56.000 | 138 | 17.098,24 |
| BRASIL | 2.517 | 27.120 | 206 | 8.514,88 |
| JAPÓN | 5.855 | 70.495 | 127 | 377,91 |

Graph II. Superpowers. Source: author's own. Data from Wrana, J. (2024). Superpotencias y países emergentes. Mediterráneo Económico. 22, pp. 19–25

Barry Buzan (2003) believed that a superpower required political-military capabilities and the economic stability to sustain them. The exercise of these capabilities in the international system as a whole, however, may appear challenging, as they may come into conflict at any given moment. However, this plausible question does not limit the scope of the capabilities. A superpower is expected to be able to influence and exercise its powers within the international system, including other superpowers, regardless of the circumstances or the quality of said influence and exercise. The capabilities of each superpower may be exercised when they enter into conflict with the capabilities of other superpowers —or other actors— without any of them being automatically downgraded from their status. A clear example of this are the recent sanctions issued by the United States against Russia following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. The exercise of US economic powers against Russia has not diminished the latter›s superpower status.

Another requirement for superpower status according to Buzan, and one that may be examined when analysing the possibility of the coexistence of several superpowers, is the configuration and dissemination of universal values around the concept of international society. Thus, an international society exists when a number of states share common institutions or values, as well as a cultural substratum. According to Bull (2005), it is this latter characteristic that distinguishes an international society from an international system, with the former concept denoting a deeper and more complex union. These institutions are order, justice, peace, prosperity, and most notably, according to the author, the idea of a State and the understanding of sovereignty (Bull, 1971). Therefore, superpowers, as long as they are the sources of such values, of the comprehension of a state and sovereignty, are legitimised and able to maintain their superpower status. Thus, simultaneously calling several countries superpowers once again appears plausible. The dilemma, thus, lies in the possibility of the dichotomy explored in this article, namely whether a multipolar system of superpowers is compatible with the stability of the world order.

## 4. Superpowers in a multipolar system: scenarios for stability

The stability of multipolarity has been widely examined, and authors differ on whether it is a better or worse system for maintaining security and achieving the inherent goals of human society. As mentioned above, realists consider it to be a more orderly system, while neo-realists disagree. However, they note the possibility of multipolarity being able to provide stability to the international system, conditional on the protagonism of a hegemonic-type power among the leading states of the multipolar system, on the dominance of one of the superpowers. However, as discussed above, a multipolar system is not compatible with the existence of a hegemonic country. Nevertheless, different scenarios may be explored for a multipolar system led by superpowers. On one hand, and considering the points outlined so far, one situation worth studying would be an international system in which the leading superpowers would have the same capabilities, with no different measure of power. On the other hand, the other possibility is that superpowers, while sharing the central characteristics for superpower status, vary in their power.

The first of the possible scenarios is the equality of all ruling superpowers, that they all have the same means, the same power. Hedley Bull (1971) argues that, if this were to happen, order could not be maintained, since, if nations were equal in power as well as in law, conflict resolution would be difficult to achieve, since the process of creating alliances or agreements would lead to perceptions of inferiority on the part of some countries involved, and, for this very reason, the claims of each state could not be brought to fruition. Equal power would make it very difficult for superpowers to cooperate to maintain world order, as alliances, agreements or rules would be almost impossible to enforce. Neither superpowers nor other countries of lower status would be able to achieve the primary objectives of sovereign states and, as a result, the ultimate objectives of human society would also not be met, thus failing to maintain the world order. This approach to the coexistence of several superpowers is developed as a utopian outcome.

Another of the two possible scenarios in a multipolar system led by superpowers is a situation where these powers are different in means, influence and other capabilities, in which a priori there is no dominant or hegemonic power. On an abstract basis, this poses the best chance to maintain the world order within a multipolarity of superpowers. To finally arrive at the analysis of whether the revealed system has the capacity to maintain a lasting world order, the implications of it being a system based on polarity and led by equally strong superpowers must be examined more closely.

The concept of polarity was applied long before it was used in the field of international relations. Geography, Geometry and Magnetism are some fields of knowledge that first studied polarity. Later, it was used in international relations metaphorically, giving the Cold War superpowers the title of poles. All of the above disciplines define poles, in a general sense, as opposing points on an axis, and socially, the term pole has also been commonly used to define opposing or contradictory principles or positions. Polarity is also described as a situation of two opposing positions. De Keersmaeker (2017) considers polarity as "the state of having two opposite or contradictory tendencies, opinions or aspects". The author summarises the definitions based on international relations in three main points. First, it considers the poles as key elements of the social structure, regarding the great powers —or superpowers in contrast to lower status nations— as organisers of the structure in the international system. Secondly, there is the axis configuration of the poles, towards which the weaker powers are drawn and around which they revolve. And thirdly, the existence of poles leads to polarisation and hostility between these poles or positions (De Keersmaeker, 2017: 14-17).

The definitions given fall within the field of study of international relations, in a stricter sense in the bipolar system, and more metaphorically in the multipolar system. Despite their metaphorical character, they undoubtedly reveal some of the problems that arise when considering a multipolar international system. The existence of different superpowers, which would function in the system as poles, would mean that each of them would defend or embody a certain set of ideas and principles. These principles would run counter to the ideas of other superpowers, leading to a collision of ideological positions and making it increasingly difficult to reach common ground when it comes to cooperation, conflict resolution or agreements. This theory is reflected in the United Nations, especially considering the Russia's veto power, one of the three superpowers with this power in the UN (China, Russia, and the United States). Since the organisation›s birth in 1945, Russia has exercised its veto power more than 100 times (United Nations, 2024), preventing numerous resolutions from being adopted. The most recent ones concern non-proliferation and the responsible use and exploitation of outer space, and the war in Ukraine. The latter resolution condemned Russian actions and called for the withdrawal of its troops from Ukraine. This resolution was vetoed by Russia and, consequently, the war continues.

Moreover, each superpower within a multipolar system has a larger number of competitors with a similar range of capabilities, there are a variety of poles, of power centres with similar resources that compete to lead agreements, to be on the winning side of conflict resolution, or to extend their scope of influence over other situations in which competition is unavoidable (Murray & Brown, 2012). Hedley Bull (1971) argues that states direct their efforts towards achieving preponderance over other countries and, with it, the fulfilment of their ambitions, which will not necessarily bring about international or world order. The author states that "it cannot be denied that the world order that is sustained by the cooperation of the superpowers is an order in which the superpowers have a special interest", i.e. when this cooperation takes place, there is a disguised self-interest behind the actions of each state, even if it is aimed at maintaining the world order. Regardless of any hidden motivations, this cooperation may be successful in achieving order. However, it would be a superficial order, due to the aforesaid desire for preponderance and the previously discussed impasse between states when striving to reach agreements.

Alliances would also be difficult to form and, if successful, would hardly be able to maintain an orderly system. According to the paradox of alliances, developed by political scientist and lecturer Patricia A. Weitsman (2004), the more an alliance develops its internal security and achieves greater peace and cohesion internally, the more difficult it becomes to maintain it externally, as the allegedly imposing capabilities of the alliance would increase insecurity within the international system. This theory is reflected in the not-so-distant events that engulfed the European Union (EU) during the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. In 2022 the EU named Ukraine as an official candidate in view of the insecurity that the incipient war was causing both for Ukraine and, potentially, for the EU›s own borders. Possible Ukrainian integration, however, was received in Russia as a threat to its borders. The process of promoting UN internal security thus resulted in a complication of maintaining peace with states outside the organisation.

The difficulty faced by superpowers in cooperating and creating alliances outlined above is based, as previously explained, on the fact that superpower rivalry is inexorable, a rivalry that arises not only because of the disparity of certain ideas and principles, but also, and more specifically, because of the security dilemma.

Therefore, while being a beacon of values is a pillar that builds a superpower, its capabilities —political-military, economic, etc.— are crucial for achieving an orderly international system. In the scenarios on superpower coexistence outlined above, it has been shown that the balance of material power is decisive when achieving order or disorder.

## 5. The role of a leading superpower within a multipolar system in maintaining world order

As clarified above, the primary objective of the state is to safeguard the security of its society and, to that end, to maintain its own sovereignty. This implies that all nations, including superpowers, would do what is necessary to protect this primary objective, and rival powers are aware of it. Thus, these competitors would also be ready to protect their own needs, creating a spiral of insecurity, fear of losing sovereignty and having their security violated, and thus enhancing their power and readiness to fight for their needs (Weitsman, 2004). This security dilemma leads to increased tensions between superpowers, which would then direct their efforts towards achieving preponderance over other superpowers to achieve security, and the multipolar system would become unstable and increasingly insecure.

The aforesaid dilemma may also be affected by a situation of mutual deterrence that would aggravate the spiral of insecurity into which, as stated above, the international system would eventually drift. Mutual deterrence occurs when there is a prevailing perception that the rival superpower has the capabilities and the will to retaliate directly and inflict serious damage on the civil society of the aggressor state if attacked (Bull, 1971). This deterrence might cause superpowers to avoid and reject the use of violence, or perhaps, more likely, given the ultimate intention is to maintain state sovereignty, to protect the goals of human society and, in an effort to gain preponderance among the superpowers, these nations would work to strengthen themselves and their security through empowerment.

The concept of state autism introduced by Barry Buzan (2018), is largely expressed in this circumstance. In human beings, autism causes an overwhelming response to outside stimuli and leads to challenging social interactions. Extrapolated to the state level, Buzan considers that "autism may be understood as a reaction to external stimuli much more based on internal state processes than on rational, fact-based assessment and engagement with the other states and societies that constitute international society". This translates into increased internal concerns and a greater pursuit of self-interest, making cooperation and agreement among powers highly difficult. It especially affects the strongest powers, raising concerns about whether superpowers would be able to fight for world order if they neglected this responsibility.

These new obstacles would add force and danger to the security dilemma, further destabilising the international multipolar system and, at the same time, endangering the world order.

In this polar system, superpowers become increasingly unpredictable, so that cooperation and diplomacy become more important, but also more complicated. This deterioration in the capacity for agreement stems both from the polarisation of ideas and principles between superpowers and the increase in the number of fronts open to each superpower. In the absence of a single hegemonic power or leader, there is no single country capable of advocating compliance with international consensus or norms, no global policing role in the international system to watch over international society or human society.

By focusing excessively on their own survival and dominance in the international system, superpowers fail to pay attention to minor internal and external threats, both man-made and non-man-made —epidemics, climate change, resource scarcity, etc.— that may accrue and worsen, and eventually disrupt the goals of human society, driving the international system into global disorder.

## 6. Conclusions

Initially, this article questioned the possibility of a multipolar system in which several superpowers run the international system. Referring to the above analysis, the plausibility of more than two superpowers coexisting in the same system is a sound approach to elucidating the prospects of the current international system. With the expectation of a number of potential superpowers, such as the United States, Russia, China, India, Japan, or Brazil, this analysis is relevant in order to shed light on a possible future in which these superpowers become responsible for maintaining an orderly world.

The study has exposed the existence of a variety of views on the stability of different polar systems in schools of thought within international relations. Realists believe that the multipolar system is the most stable, while neorealists consider it highly unstable.

This article has attempted to shed light on this debate by examining whether this system would be capable of maintaining a lasting order or, on the contrary, would drift towards global disorder. As discussed above, world order is built on the basis of the state's security and ultimately, of human society. It therefore means that the fulfilment of this group›s primary objective will determine whether an international system is orderly or not. Bearing this in mind, a multipolar system led by superpowers would entail several problems in dealing with order in the system. In this multipolarity, mutual deterrence would be accentuated, state autism would become a major feature of superpowers and, as a result, security dilemmas would emerge as a major cause of conflict and ineffective international relations. Thus, the multipolar system would eventually lead to the breakdown of cooperation, agreements would become increasingly difficult to reach, and negotiations for conflict resolution would be futile.

This scenario would set the stage for the rise of various violent actors, boosted by rapid globalisation and technological advances, meaning that borders are slowly dissipating, information and communication are spreading easily, and weaponry is becoming increasingly accessible to individuals and organisations.

Inevitably, the authority hitherto held by states would be weakened in these circumstances and, along with it, their ability to fulfil human society›s goal of preserving its bodily and moral security. It is therefore understood that a multipolar system led by superpowers over time would fail to provide the desired state security, and with it, human security. Thus, superpowers would be transformed into diminished authorities in the system, unable to maintain stability and eventually causing the international system to drift towards global disorder, thereby forcing a return to the debate on the optimal polarity for achieving world order.

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# *Outer space as an operational domain: an analysis of the challenges and challenges for the Spanish Armed Forces*

**Abstract**

Outer space has become a new physical space where human beings perform multiple activities, both public and private, and in some cases, they are strategic services, essential for the functioning of our societies and a matter of concern for national security, since without them our way of life might change dramatically. Additionally, there could be some other activities and services with extraordinary perspectives to economic growth, if the possibility of exploiting the profitable natural resources from celestial bodies materialised. For this reason, a new space race has already begun with the aim of leading this new stage of commercial expansion towards the Moon. Therefore, in just a few years, outer space has become increasingly relevant in the field of defence, as it is already considered a new operational domain on which current military operations depend extensively, possibly being in the near future carried out independently. Thus, in the face of these new challenges for humanity and our nation, the Spanish Armed Forces should be committed to adapt to such vertiginous changes and evolve towards a new paradigm of warfare that is being defined nowadays. As we witnessed previously in the history of nations, this will require the modernisation of current military capabilities and the development of new weapons systems, as well as far-reaching doctrinal and organisational changes to adequately equip the Air and Space Force. If we do not evolve accordingly with our time, we are at risk of

jeopardising our national security and even worse, the future of our very society and the principles and values it represents.

**Keywords**

Security and defence, Outer space, Spatial geopolitics, Militarization, Operational domain, Space domain.

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*Outer space is considered the final frontier of geopolitical confrontation (National Security Council (NSC), 2021).*

## 1. Introduction

The change of name of the Air and Space Army (EA after its abbreviation in Spanish) of the Kingdom of Spain is not simply changing names similar to other allied nations but is a declaration of intent that reveals the determination to begin a new phase in the history of the Spanish Armed Forces (after its abbreviation in Spanish) (*Ministerio de Defensa*, 2022b).

It embodies a new phase for the Spanish Armed Forces that will allow them to adapt to the new geopolitical situation and confront the new risks and threats in space, which have been defined by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) (2022b), and which will require it to be at the technological forefront in order to develop new capabilities and conduct military operations within a new operational domain: outer space.

Over the last three years, this change has been reflected in an important organisational adaptation for the Armed Forces: both in the institutional sphere of the EA and in the operational sphere of the Office of the Chiefs of Staff (EMAD after its abbreviation in Spanish). It has led to the creation of new units, such as the Space Command (MESPA after its abbreviation in Spanish) and the Space Surveillance Operations Centre (COVE after its abbreviation in Spanish), and command and control structures, such as the Operational Space Command (MOESPA after its abbreviation in Spanish) and the Space Component Command (MCESPA after its abbreviation in Spanish).

These organisational changes in defence are taking place at a time when human activity in outer space has become vitally important for the development of modern societies, to such an extent that one may argue that there is now a large-scale dependence on space services (Azcárraga Arana, 2013).

Over the last two decades, human activity in space has increased exponentially. A resurgence of global interest in space, spurred by millions of dollars in investment and technological advances brought about by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, has sparked a new space race between major powers to gain ground in space. In the specific case of the superpowers, the US and China, the goal is to colonise the moon and, perhaps in the future, Mars as well.

This period is characterised by new state actors joining the exploration and exploitation of space, with more than 100 countries now deploying some form of space assets, but also by non-state actors, who have become increasingly important and a major element of space missions.

Compared to the first space race, this new space race is witnessing a commercial drive by the private sector, thanks to the business opportunities offered by space for the future of mankind (Aznar & Sánchez-Mayorga, 2021).

Alongside traditional government agencies, civilian bodies and private companies have shaped an environment conducive to the commercial exploitation of space, which has become the engine of progress and prosperity in our states. But, at the same time, it has induced a dependence on the space segment that affects a large part of the world economy and, consequently, is a matter of national security for leading states, reaching geopolitical dimensions for the major powers (*Ministerio de Defensa*, 2022a).

In the words of Colonel Martínez Cortés (2020b): "Modern societies depend on satellite services in transportation, business and commerce, financial services, internet-based services, broadcasting, weather forecasting, disaster management, agriculture, environmental protection, science and military activities". Because of this dependence, our way of life would change radically if we could not avail these strategic infrastructures for society.

This dependence also affects to a large extent the highly technical Armed Forces (*FF. AA.* after its abbreviation in Spanish), so that, in just a few decades, these space assets have gone from being a support element of ground military operations to becoming an indispensable element of the planning, control and execution of military operations. This weakness of the *FF. AA.* poses a vulnerability for national security, forcing states to protect the space segment and even to defend these means with the use of force, if necessary.

In the words of the Chief of Staff of the Air and Space Army, Air General Javier Salto Martínez-Avial:

> "We have to assume that Space is no longer a sanctuary. Recent geopolitical developments only confirm that it has become an environment of high strategic interest, increasingly competitive and contested, and that some of our neighbours such as France, or the United States, do not hesitate to call space the new battlefield. Therefore, in order to minimise its vulnerability to irresponsible or malicious use and to boost its security, it is a priority to guarantee free access to and exploitation of space, protecting aerospace infrastructures, resources and services of national interest against any challenge or threat whatsoever» (Salto Martínez-Avial, 2022c: 20-21).

NATO›s new Strategic Concept, agreed by the Heads of State and Government at the Madrid Summit in 2022, states the need to combat authoritarian regimes that undermine the democratic principles and values of member states (Organización del Tratado del Atlántico Norte (OTAN), 2022a: 3).

The publication of the Spanish Ministry of Defence, Operating Environment 2035, analyses possible scenarios or operational contexts of action by the Armed Forces and the changes they will have to face in order to adapt to the environment; it determines the strategic nature of these resources and the importance of these services provided by space systems for national security (*Ministerio de Defensa,* 2019).

In their task of defending society, our Armed Forces are obliged to adjust to the new situation currently underway in space, so they may protect space assets and thereby, our daily lives. Given the complexity of the enterprise, it is necessary to understand the different aspects involved in the domain of space, from the civil to the military, from the political to the legal, and how they are interconnected.

This article analyses the relevance of the private sector in the development and operation of space assets, in order to understand the significance of the space sector in our nation›s economy and its strategic importance for public security.

This is followed by a discussion on international space governance and the need for a legal framework regulating the exploration and exploitation of the stars in accordance with international law, which is necessary to avoid conflicts between states.

Next, it examines the geopolitical environment and the importance of space for international security and defence, in a global scenario characterised by instability and confrontation. Subsequently, it presents the most relevant aspects characterising the progressive militarisation of space.

The article concludes with an analysis of the different space capabilities available to the FF. AA and the challenges faced by the EA in fulfilling its responsibilities as the guarantor of national security within this operational domain.

## 2. Security and Defence in Outer Space

The 20$^{th}$ century space race was a competition between the two superpowers that emerged after World War II, the USA and the USSR, who strove to develop space capabilities that were superior to those achieved by their direct competitor.

Such was this rivalry that, on every space mission, the space race became a show of strength in the competition for strategic control of space and technological superiority. It was not for nothing that these space achievements became a multiplier of the international reputation and external influence of these two rival powers (Pérez-Grande, 2021).

During this period, important advances were made, such as the launch of the first artificial satellites and space probes, manned space flights in orbit around the Earth, and even multiple moon landings, which have gone down in the annals of human history (Nucera, 2019). The technological developments of this era have enabled the subsequent development of other space systems that are highly important for the economy of today›s societies, such as satellite communications, terrestrial imagery for weather forecasting or global positioning.

What is unknown about this birth of the space age is that the technology that made it possible to launch objects into space came from another military technology, which had been developed to build large rockets capable of launching intercontinental missiles (ICBMs), or the technology used to develop the first military satellites for observation and spying on adversaries.

From its beginnings, the space race has been linked to both security and defence and to scientific research for non-military purposes, fostering close links between state space agencies and the military in order to launch different space systems into orbit, as well as the dual use of many of these systems.

This symbiosis allowed space systems for military use to become an essential defensive element, to the extent that the 1991 Iraq war was the first to be dubbed a space war:

> "The first demonstration of the use of outer space for military purposes. Although the conflict didn›t occur in outer space, it has been referred to as *the first space war*. The reason for this designation is that the US and coalition forces relied heavily on GPS satellites and other types of satellite capabilities to manage and control the military conflict and navigate civilian activities" (Dawson, 2018: 16).

Since then, the space domain has become an extremely important means of national defence and therefore a matter of national security. Proof of this is that certain military capabilities which are crucial to the defence of these superpowers, rely on space-based means, such as the aforesaid launch of intercontinental missiles and missile defence on which nuclear deterrence itself dependent (Aznar & Sánchez-Mayorga, 2021).

## *2.1. The private sector as a driver of change in space: a paradigm shift in the space domain*

In the early days of the space race, space activities were conducted exclusively by public agencies of the nations that had the necessary technology; and, until the 1980s, private sector participation was almost entirely subject to the state's monopoly.

This began to change during the 1990s, when some private companies made inroads into the space market through the satellite telecommunications sector. But it was not until well into the 21st century that the revolution in private-sector space activities took place, to such an extent that it has been called the democratisation of space (Ventura-Traveset, 2021).

Over the last decades, the space sector has witnessed the creation of multiple companies with a clear business purpose; to the extent that today 82 % of the space economy is in the hands of private enterprise, and it is estimated that by 2030, the space economy will have grown by 74 % (Euroconsult, 2022).

This demonstrates how the progressive increase in business volume within the space sector and its immense future prospects have stimulated the growth of space activity, which in turn has benefited from the development of miniaturisation technologies applied to building small satellites. These multitasking high-performance satellites can be launched and operated at affordable prices by private companies, compared to the multi-billion-dollar figures at the beginning of the space race.

These technological advances are bringing about a new revolution in the space telecommunications sector with the launch of mega constellations of satellites into orbit; to provide high-speed internet services to the entire planet, among other purposes. This will make it possible to meet the huge demand for connectivity required by societies today for their global development (Ventura-Traveset, 2021).

The private sector has also identified a significant business opportunity in other fields such as Earth observation, space tourism, space debris removal and even space mining. This is a new context for the space sector which has revolutionised the old concept of space activity, to the extent that there has been a democratising effect, known as *New Space*, which represents a paradigm shift from the Cold War context (Ventura-Traveset, 2021).

It is not a by-product of the current unstable geopolitical situation and the formation of different spatial alliances. It is not even a product of renewed interest in exploiting the resources of other extra-terrestrial bodies such as the moon. The new paradigm has been triggered mainly by the emergence of private enterprise in the space market. This has been demonstrated over the last decade, when the private sector went from playing a testimonial role to each year placing more satellites in orbit than state space agencies. In some cases, they have become key actors in the space activity of states.

This unprecedented entrepreneurial achievement was enabled by government support as in the United States, which has permitted most of these civil space activities to be carried out by US-based companies. Moreover, private companies with relevant levels of space activity are also beginning to emerge in other countries such as Japan or China (Ventura-Traveset, 2021).

This phenomenon has drawn the attention of the European Space Agency (ESA), which has realised that there is a great opportunity to exploit space assets along the lines of the US model, as it possesses the experience, technology and competitive industrial capabilities to do so. This has already been set out in the ESA Agenda 2025 (Aschbacher, 2021).

Currently, Europe is at a lower level than the US. In order to achieve these objectives, an ambitious European space strategy that takes advantage of this potential is needed, which in turn must be translated into concrete investments in the space sector. It is also necessary to make changes to European policies, like those of the United States, as has already been done by Japan and China, as well as a review of the legislative framework applicable to the use and exploitation of space resources (Aschbacher, 2021).

### *2.2. Space governance and the shortcomings of international legislation*

Global governance is constituted by the legal enforcement framework and its implementing international organisations; united in a collective effort to identify, comprehend or address global problems that are beyond the capacity of individual states. It consists of different international regimes that are defined as a set of principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures intended to provide some overall order in the specific field of international relations (Jakhu & Pelton, 2017).

Due to its complex nature, international law has overlapping rules that may regulate the same issue in an uneven manner, resulting in a highly complex and unmanageable system which, in the specific case of space, is even more complex.

Most states are aware of the importance of ensuring security in the space domain and agree on the need for effective guidelines, rules and regulations, as well as clearly defining the limits of responsible behaviour (Jakhu & Pelton, 2017). However, in practice, there are notable differences between the rhetoric and the reality of actions by certain states, which reveal a lack of unanimous support for existing international law and hinders its effective implementation by states (Álvarez Calderón *et al.*, 2019).

There are multiple mechanisms for space governance. Of these, the most significant are five treaties which are administered by the United Nations (UN) through the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) (Santa-Bárbara Vozmediano, 2021).

These treaties are the 1967 Outer Space Treaty (OST), the 1968 Rescue Agreement, the 1972 Liability Convention, the 1976 Registration Convention and the 1984 Moon Agreement (United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), 2008).

There are other international enforcement mechanisms for space affairs, such as the 1963 Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in Outer Space and Under Water; the 1978 Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Effects of Environmental Modification Techniques, and the 1994 Constitution and Convention of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

Mention should also be made of the UN Charter itself, which will prevail over commitments made in other space-related treaties, and two key provisions of the Charter that are directly applicable to this space domain: Article 2.4, which prohibits the threat or use of force, including in outer space. And Article 51, on the right to self-defence or collective defence.

However, unlike other security sectors, such as nuclear weapons, space governance still lacks an effective multilateral management system for an adequate level of security in space; to guarantee order and stability; and to ensure long-term sustainability (Fabara Espín & Viteri Moreira, 2023).

Although there are numerous treaties and conventions in international space law today, there are important shortcomings such as the low number of signatory countries to these treaties. This is either because the number is insufficient, fluctuating between 110 signatory states of the OST and eighteen of the Moon Agreement or because the signatory states are not the most representative ones in this field. For example, the eighteen signatories to the Moon Agreement do not include any of the major space powers (Fabara Espín & Viteri Moreira, 2023).

At the same time, these treaties often contain some kind of ambiguity or vagueness that poses an obstacle to correctly interpreting them in terms of disputed issues. There is still a lack of consensus on whether outer space should be considered a Province of Mankind or a common heritage of mankind. A distinguishing aspect that determines how each State interprets its right to explore and exploit extraterrestrial bodies (Baqués Quesada, 2023).

In this regard, it is worth mentioning that Spanish national legislation interprets outer space as common heritage of mankind and this is explicitly stated in its National Aerospace Security Strategy (González Ferreiro, 2021).

In order to understand the complexity of space governance and the resulting complications in applying its security instruments, two aspects should be considered: firstly, the inherent complexity that characterises the new challenges of international space law and, secondly, the progressive increase in the number of COPUOS member states, which makes it difficult to take decisions by consensus (Álvarez Calderón *et al.*, 2019).

In the past, legal instruments governed spatial activities adequately. However, there is now a general consensus that space activities have reached a new dimension and that these legal instruments have become too ambiguous to be effective.

The treaties of international law do not fit current needs because they were adopted at a time when the challenges and threats facing the space environment were significantly different from those of today (Jakhu & Pelton, 2017). A gulf that continues to widen, with space activities expected to multiply exponentially over the next few years compared to the last two decades (Euroconsult, 2022).

Given this new reality of space, which has brought about the paradigm shift established during the Cold War, it is essential to review existing treaties in order to bring space governance in line with the very nature of space. A nature characterised by fragmented international legislation and the complexity of applying it, as well as by a constant evolution that seeks to regulate a technology in continuous development (Álvarez Calderón *et al.*, 2019).

In recent years, the US government has maintained strong support for the private exploitation of celestial bodies such as the moon, which runs counter to international treaties such as the OST and the Moon Treaty. It has also prompted signatory states to the Artemis Accords to publicly announce their support for unblocking current international legislation and promoting civilian use of the moon. A new treaty that aims to establish new principles of cooperation governing future space activities and to provide an interpretation of certain provisions of the Space Treaty (OST) that are not unanimous in the international community.

Despite having been developed outside the COPUOS —only supported by those nations aligned with the USA—, the Artemis Accords are intended to establish a common vision for improving space governance over the exploration and civilian use of the Moon, Mars and other astronomical objects, as well as to enhance operational safety, reduce uncertainty and promote a sustainable use of space for the benefit of all humanity (National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), 2020).

For a significant part of the international community, this agreement is the first step towards shifting space from a common heritage of mankind, as many have understood it until now, to becoming a province of mankind. A slight semantic change that heralds an enormous conceptual change, as it reasserts the firm commitment of a large part of the international community to reduce the restrictions on the exploitation of space, but which represents a break with previous multilateralism and reveals the waning power of international organisations such as the UN, as it has not led this agreement as it should have done (Baqués Quesada, 2023).

In terms of the above, it may be stated that there have been some important developments in international legislation in order to define space governance. They respond to the need to update and revise the *Corpus Iuris Spatialis* in order to adapt it to the changes that have occurred in space over the last two decades.

Although this new treaty does not have the necessary international consensus, it does not seem possible to reach a majority agreement, given that the climate of collaboration that led to the signing of the first treaties at the height of the Cold War no longer exists. In fact, the future looks bleak in this regard, with geopolitical competition making its presence felt in the international legal arena as a means of exerting pressure on adversaries.

A global threat is looming that could wipe out years of multilateralism, cooperation and consensus in the UN, affecting the governance of space and undermining its necessary safeguarding (Jakhu & Pelton, 2017). In the words of Baqués (2023: 207): "A US withdrawal from the OST would lead to the immediate collapse of the legal regime deployed. We are talking about international relations: the superpowers would go ahead with their agendas and what would have to be reconsidered is not so much their degree of adaptation to existing law [...] but the very content of the law itself".

### *2.3. The geopolitics of space*

As mentioned above, the new space race has benefited from continuous technological advances, but also from the lack of consensus among the major powers and the deliberate fragility of the international space regime which favours states with greater technological and military development, which have not been able to revise the international treaties in force and define a new legal framework to regulate nations' activities in space (Álvarez Calderón *et al.*, 2019).

As a result, a period characterised by stability and widespread prosperity, in which international cooperation and understanding prevailed, may be considered to be at an end. Once again, the geopolitical precepts of realism prevail, and cooperation and unity are ended, when the hegemonic power of a superpower is weakened and unilateralism disappears. We are at the start of a new phase characterised by rivalry and geopolitical confrontation between revisionist states striving to regain their lost status. In the words of Santa-Bárbara Vozmediano (2021: 4):

> "The current trend is towards realism, competition and militarisation, as terrestrial rivalries are replicated in relations in space, and as international regulation becomes more obsolete by the day. The logical spiral of confrontation between the US and China, as the two main actors in this new context, is especially worrying, since other space powers are at risk of being dragged in".

This geopolitical confrontation has surfaced in conflicts such as Russia›s invasion of Ukraine in early 2022, the worsening of the Taiwan Strait Crisis or the conflict in Palestine between Israel and Iran in support of Hamas.

These armed conflicts, which have global repercussions, undermine any hope that the balance of power will be maintained and that the multilateralism that prevailed in the early decades of the 21st century and fostered a climate of trust for international cooperation and understanding, will not disappear. A balance of power that sought to build a global governance based on the precepts of liberalism, with capitalism and democracy as the ultimate exponents of a global world.

The step taken by Russia in 2022 to start a war in Ukraine or those taken by China in the South China Sea, through a progressive territorial expansion in conflict with other neighbouring states; as well as Iran with its support for terrorist groups such as Hezbollah or Hamas, with the aim of destabilising the Middle East in its favour; are perceived as a return to a world in conflict and the beginning of a new Cold War between the two superpowers: the US and China. According to some authors, this represents "the march towards a new bipolarity that turns the present into an era of transition and geopolitical rebalancing" (Aznar & Sánchez-Mayorga, 2021: 164).

This bipolarity would be led by the US on one hand and China on the other, replacing the former Soviet Union (USSR) as the geopolitical adversary of the US. Both are the leaders of two blocs around which other international states are grouped, most of which are led by the same actors as in the Cold War, confirming the return to a bipolar balance of power.

This revisionism, which favours a change in the balance of power between the great powers and produces a corresponding geopolitical rebalancing, also has direct repercussions for space. Indeed, this new Cold War, similar to the first, has the opportunity to view the conflict spill over into the domain of space.

The notable difference is that this time, in contrast to the Cold War, the international security implications of a conflict in space would be more significant due to the strategic value of the services provided by the space sector. The destructive potential for the global economy could involve the disabling of space infrastructures and the consequent technological blackout of the entire planet with direct consequences for the global economy. So, once again, the geopolitical importance of space and the complex international relations between the many spacefaring states is beginning to be discussed (Aznar & Sánchez-Mayorga, 2021)

At this point, characterised by a situation of generalised instability that could lead to armed conflict on a global scale, states perceive their national security to be at risk and therefore feel obliged to take exceptional measures to guarantee their security and defence. It is understandable that major powers should be striving to develop defence mechanisms and start reinforcing their military capabilities in space, initiating an escalation of weapons development and a new militarisation of space, which is nothing more than a demonstration of the existing level of confrontation and the struggle to not be overtaken by the adversary.

This is similar to past events where the clash between two superpowers has resulted in the loss of power and decline of one of them, the most recent example being the decline of the USSR after the end of the Cold War. This time there are sufficient indications that the Western bloc of states will be forced to contain the direct confrontation of the Sino-Russian bloc and its allied states. This is an unavoidable situation, and it is expected that this confrontation will be waged in every sphere of power, from the diplomatic to the economic, political, cultural and social spheres. It goes without saying that this is also true in the military sphere, where one must be prepared to fight this battle in each of its operational domains. As well as in space (Castro Torres, 2020).

These developments have paved the way for the implementation of new security and defence strategies and policies, based on the motivation to preserve national security by defending the vital interests of the state. Today, this defence of national interests also includes the new space domain as a domain to be protected against new threats.

In military terms applied to the space domain, it is to achieve a sufficient degree of autonomy for the execution of military operations. This is not possible without the means to continuously monitor and assess the political and military situation, both in peacetime and in crisis; and requires the necessary capabilities, suitable number of and scope of sensors, as well as command and control structures, in accordance with a decision-making process, both short and long term (Martínez Cortes, 2020a).

In this new confrontational scenario, it is necessary to equip ourselves with tools to improve space surveillance and defensive capabilities to protect space assets, in orbit such as satellites or on the ground such as ground segment elements. At the same time, there are tools to reduce reaction time to unforeseen situations. There are a number of national and international implications regarding how to respond to these needs, which pose a real challenge to the FF. AA. The EA faces a new and unprecedented challenge. Only an appropriate optimisation of existing resources can ensure that these objectives are achieved (Sánchez de Lara, 2020).

### *2.4. Militarisation in space*

Initially, the major concern in terms of space security was Planetary Defence against stars that might collide with the Earth. As was safety in the operation of space systems, in order to avoid possible accidents or space failures and their detrimental effect. However, in recent years, the risks and threats to space security in terms of state security and defence have increased.

The environment of cooperation in space where international consensus was followed and where scientific and commercial interests prevailed, has given way to an environment of confrontation where rivalry and conflict are widespread and where space plays a central role in preserving national interests and security (Jordán, 2023).

Space has become an increasingly contested environment, not only for military but also for civilian activity, which has grown exponentially in recent years. Thus, taking into account the economic value of space assets, both civilian and military, the services they provide to society and its dependence and security in relation to them, it may be assumed that they should be subject to a high degree of protection (Martínez Cortés, 2023).

A priority review process is underway to emphasise the need to assess security and defence risks, together with the search for synergies to ensure operational safety. International civil-military and public-private cooperation is essential.

Militarisation or the use of space for military purposes is inherent to human activity in space. In fact, as discussed above, just after the end of the Second World War, the United States and the USSR embarked on the development of military satellites.

The USA launched its first military observation satellite in 1960, followed by the Soviet Union in 1962. Their purpose was above, military, and military satellite launches accounted for three quarters of the total launched during the Cold War.

The new space race seeks to establish permanent human settlements on the Moon. A project of epic dimensions that twenty years ago would have been the plot of a science fiction novel and an unattainable goal. Today, however, technological advances make this possible.

Due to the environment of confrontation and mistrust between adversaries vying for the mineral resources of the lunar body, these programmes to establish lunar settlements require protection and, therefore, the deployment of military forces to defend US space-based interests.

The US, and by inference also China, are engaged in a secret arms race to develop new weapons systems that may be used on lunar bases. In this new context of increasing militarisation, authors such as Al-Rodhan (2018: 32-33) express the following considerations: “Outer space is in danger of becoming a battlefield […] Space is an area that should be used to strengthen our collective security, not weaken it. It is imperative that states begin, as soon as possible, to agree on ways to ensure the safe, peaceful, and responsible use of space in order to guarantee our security now and in the future”.

When considering the legal status of space, it is crucial to understand that the OST prohibits only the use of weapons of mass destruction. It does not prohibit the deployment of conventional weaponry.

In this regard it is necessary to distinguish between the terms militarisation of space and space weaponisation, since militarisation of space in international law refers specifically to the military use of a space system, but not to the use of weaponry. However, space weaponisation is defined as the placement in space, for any period of time, of any device designed to attack from space targets located in space or on Earth.

However, weapons deployment in space is always considered a form of militarisation; the militarisation of space via the use of military spacecraft does not necessarily imply the deployment of weaponry. In this way, a distinction may be made between military capabilities that are deemed weaponisation and offensive, and others that are not.

Under this broad definition that characterises today›s space environments, virtually all space objects are dual-use and may be used for military or civilian purposes, with commercial space systems providing extensive services to the military.

At the national level, the planning document Panorama of Geopolitical Trends Horizon 2040 defines the militarisation situation as follows:

> “The growing importance of the use of outer space will offer multiple possibilities for the benefit of society, but free access and use will also be restricted by those who have the capacity to do so. […] The possibility of deploying weapons systems and the need to protect assets in orbit will lead to a progressive militarisation of space” (Instituto Español de Estudios Estrategicos (IEEE), 2019: 30).

This need to protect assets in orbit, and the fact that space is becoming increasingly important for security, has led major organisations such as NATO to adopt a new space policy and to declare space as an operational domain in 2019, alongside land, sea, air and cyberspace.

The importance of space assets in the Alliance was reflected at the Brussels Summit in 2021, when it was recognised that “attacks to, from, or within space present a clear challenge to the security of the Alliance […] could lead to the invocation of Article 5 (of the North Atlantic Treaty)” (Organización del Tratado del Atlántico Norte (OTAN), 2021).

In 2019, several NATO member states made decisive changes to their space policy. For example, under Donald Trump, the US created the US Space Force as a separate and completely independent service from the US Air Force - although for several years, the two services formed a single unit called the Air and Space Force.

The US Space Force is responsible for defence-related aspects of space. It is a new service that has been equipped with specific financial, material and personnel resources for space colonisation, beginning with the stars closest to Earth.

Until now, major space powers have developed some form of military capability to enable them to defend their space assets or deny their adversaries the use of space. For their part, both France and the UK have created space commands within their armed forces. But one of the differentiating aspects of the implementation of spatial capabilities is how the concept of the space operational domain is interpreted. It is not the same among allied nations such as the US, France, the UK and Italy. Each state interprets it differently and according to its particular circumstances.

For example, the US considers the space domain as more of a warfighting domain than a simple operational domain supporting operational domains such as land or sea. It believes that specific and offensive military operations may be conducted in space. This will require the development of military space assets and an armed forces with an operational structure adapted to its defence policy targets.

The US justifies the militarisation of space, including the moon, as the only way to counter China´s ambitions. At the same time, however, China and Russia have criticised the creation of the US Space Force as weapons proliferation in space.

France, for its part, although highly active in the space domain, has opted for a more conservative interpretation than the US, continuing to execute space missions to and from space for the time being, but not in space. Its space force is part of aviation alongside aerospace, as a single service called the Armée de l›air et de l›espace. However, the change of name reflects the growing importance of the space segment and, for this purpose, it also imitates the US in setting up independent operational command and control structures. Therefore, it cannot be ignored that the progressive advance of technology will allow expeditionary missions in the future (Martínez Cortes, 2020a).

The UK has also implemented major changes, but, unlike the US and France, it has not assigned this enterprise to the Royal Air Force (RAF) but has developed a unique model with joint command and control structures and personnel from all services, in contrast to what its NATO allies have been doing.

At the moment, NATO is at the opposite end of the US. Currently, the Alliance›s stance has been more moderate than those of some of its member states, such as the United States. conditioned by a lack of its own means and total dependence on the capabilities provided by its members (Martínez Cortes, 2020a).

According to the Alliance, the space operational domain does not include the operation of armed space assets and according to the OST, its functions will be limited to conducting space operations in support of military operations on Earth (Organización del Tratado del Atlántico Norte (OTAN), 2021). This is in line with the international policy of many of its member states, which are also EU member states, committed to the peaceful use of outer space.

Given the dimension of space, space security within NATO will require alliances between space powers, where information sharing will be crucial.

### 2.5. Security strategies in space and the challenges for the Spanish Armed Forces

Spain's status as a member of the EU and NATO is a decisive factor in the development of national space strategies and policies, which must be aligned with those of international organisations. Similarly, national interests must be placed at the service of the general interest together with other Member States (Azcárraga Arana, 2014).

Until now, the security and defence strategies of these two organisations were significantly different in terms of certain relevant defence-related aspects. However, recent changes in the geopolitical landscape and armed conflicts in Europe, Asia and the Middle East have prompted the EU to review its defence policies.

With regard to space, the recent promulgation of its new security and defence strategy in 2022, called the Strategic Compass, reflects the EU's shift towards more assertive defence policy that addresses current risks and threats, and is determined to use force when necessary (Consejo de la Unión Europea, 2022).

It represents a substantial change in the space domain which envisages the development of a space strategy and the need for increased security through civilian and military means. This explicit mention of aspects of space defence and the use of space assets demonstrates the increasing importance of space in security and defence matters.

Following the NATO Summit in Madrid, the Alliance also published its new Strategic Concept in 2022, which also noted that threats in space pose a serious security risk to member states. However, the Atlantic Alliance, unlike the EU, does have a permanent military structure with dedicated means, which allows it to develop all of these strategies and major security and defence policies.

NATO, unlike the EU, conducts military operations in space and therefore requires its members to acquire space capabilities in support of the Alliance. These include two of the aforementioned capabilities: space situational awareness, which makes it possible to identify the perpetrators of actions against space interests, and the ability to detect the launch of intercontinental missiles.

Through their security and defence strategies, both the EU and NATO have appealed to member states to urgently develop space capabilities and place more resources at the service of space. An increase in material, personnel and financial resources is required to cope with the demand for these space services.

At the national level, Spain is following the trend set by international security and defence organisations and has initiated a policy of organisational transformation and provision of necessary space capabilities. This poses a challenge for the FF. AA, and specifically for the EA, which is responsible for identifying operational needs, acquiring and operating military systems, as well as training and educating the personnel who will later constitute the SAF's space capabilities.

The various priority areas identified by NATO, and which result in national contributions to the Alliance, include the following:

- Permanent activation of space surveillance centres and command and control structures at different levels, both within the Alliance structure and in Spain, which will require an increasing number of personnel.
- Full interoperability between national and multinational centres and agencies, many of which are newly established or still in progress.
- Personnel training and subsequent unit-based training.

Space as an operational domain is not an exclusively military domain, and the space domain also involves numerous actors from different sectors, both public and private, civilian and military, national and international. Similarly, the development and operation of the FF. AA' space capabilities do not take place in isolation but require complex coordination at all levels and in different areas.

In Spain, governmental competences and responsibilities on outer space have been assigned to seven different ministries. An excessive number of public bodies may lead to inefficient management due to the resulting slowdown, as well as a systemic lack of coordination in public administration. This has become evident with the exponential increase in space activities, and which has boosted the creation of the Space Council and the Spanish Space Agency (*AEE* after its abbreviation in Spanish) in 2022, whose Statutes were approved on March 8, 2023 by Royal Decree 158/2023.

These two Spanish governmental institutions are tasked with alleviating current problems and reversing the situation in order to have a national law that regulates space activities. A space law that would facilitate economic and industrial development in our country and seize the opportunity to integrate civilian and military operations.

Over the last five years, several Security and Defence documents have been promulgated in Spain, which constitute the reference framework for the application of activities in outer space and which have implications for national security. These include:

- The 2021 National Security Strategy (NSS)

  It expresses concern regarding shortcomings in space as "the lack of regulations facilitates irregular activity in outer space and hinders the protection of strategic assets such as satellite communications, positioning and timing systems or earth observation satellites" (Departamento de Seguridad Nacional (DSN), 2021: 63).

Previously, the 2019 National Security Strategy (NSS), had identified gaps in national space legislation and the need to regulate the space activities of private operators. Such space activities are deemed ultra-hazardous and therefore a matter of national security, requiring an obligation to ensure the safety of space infrastructures, which are critical to society today and are exposed to multiple challenges and threats (González Ferreiro, 2021).

– Within the scope of the Ministry of Defence, the Operational Environment 2035 studies the characteristics of the operational environment in each operational domain, including space, and reflects on the changes to be faced by the Armed Forces in order to successfully adapt to this uncertain and complex environment.

– Royal Decree 524/2022 of June 27, 2022, which establishes the new name of the Air and Space Army, highlights the importance of outer space within the security and defence framework, emphasising the essential role to be assumed by the FF. AA in the protection and control of space, as well as the leading role of the Air Force in this environment.

– Ministerial Order DEF/264/2023 of March 16, which implements the basic organisation of the EA. The concept of the Air and Space Force is introduced and the Operational Space Command (MESPA) is created. According to the aforesaid Ministerial Order: The creation of this new command body in the EA, the MESPA, will make it possible to centralise the preparation of its units, as well as the direction, planning, organisation and coordination of the functions that make space surveillance, control and operations possible" (*Ministerio de Defensa*, 2023a: 41857).

– Ministerial Order DEF/1110/2023, of October 4, which implements the basic organisation of the Office of the Chiefs of Staff, on the creation of the Operational Space Command (MOESPA) and the Space Component Command; shall enable: "The adjustment of the FF. AA' organisational structure to better meet the increasing challenges of outer space also has an impact on the operational structure, as the latter is reliant on the former. Thus, it is necessary to reorganise the operational structure such that there is better correlation with the organisational structure" (*Ministerio de Defensa* (MINISDEF), 2023b: 136015).

On the other hand, within the civilian sphere and in line with the above-mentioned EU responsibilities, it is worth mentioning the strategic agreement between the EU and ESA, which formalises the collaboration between both organisations to jointly develop a single policy for the use of space assets for a common interest.

## 3. Conclusions

The theoretical currents of the realist school represented by Dolman (2001) advocate a geopolitical reality of space based on world domination through control of space, which may be formulated as follows: a global superpower seeking to exercise hegemonic power on Earth must be able to exercise control in outer space.

In other words, a superpower must achieve an optimal degree of strategic autonomy in space and therefore have the necessary assets to be a decisive actor in the event of a potential conflict that affects the space domain.

The possible confirmation of this hypothesis on the geopolitical importance of space and the need for adequate means to confront a potential adversary in space, leads one to think that generalised instability and conflict, as is currently the case, will be accompanied by a progressive increase in the militarisation of space and even an escalation in weaponisation.

As has happened in the past in other similar contexts of economic confrontation between states, progressive militarisation in space gravitates to the existential need of states to maintain their developmental status and wealth, especially as the space segment increasingly represents a significant percentage of their economies. Conversely, a degradation of a state›s space services would pose a risk to its national security, which could justify an arms race in space.

For the time being, the powers have begun to take protectionist measures related to the security and defence of space. They include enacting new laws that reinforce the legal framework and regulate space activity; to creating public, civilian and military bodies to strengthen state action, or signing of international agreements and treaties to participate in multinational projects with other allied nations.

These protectionist measures have also been applied in the field of security and defence by reviewing national security strategies, complemented by the enactment of new defence policies aimed at strengthening the Armed Forces and developing new military capabilities required to operate in this new operational domain: outer space.

This regulatory process of nations confirms that there has been a change of cycle where the previous multinational cooperation between rival powers is fading away, to be replaced by a new scenario of international confrontation, accompanied by increased space risks and threats, which endanger stability and world order.

The response among leading nations has been unanimous and has led to the transformation of many of our neighbouring armed forces. In most cases, this response has boosted the creation of new organisational and operational structures for space operations.

However, this response has been uneven among Spain's neighbouring allies, and the level of ambition of each nation has been based on its national needs and interests, its risks and threats, its resources, and so on. The response on how to conduct military operations in the operational domain of space and the capabilities to be developed is also uneven, as is the way in which military activities in space are managed.

However, space-related issues are constantly evolving and more and more states are joining the reformist movement to reshape the military operations environment.

First came the traditional physical domains, land and sea, then air; recently it has been extended to non-physical domains such as cyberspace and the cognitive domain, and finally we arrive at the space domain, as a medium that will revolutionise military operations.

NATO considers space to be an operational domain from which space operations supporting military operations on Earth are carried out. This concept of military use does not contemplate the weapons use or deployment in this environment, one consistent with the foreign policy of many of its member states who are committed to the space treaties for the peaceful use of outer space and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

However, for other nations such as the US, the space domain is more than that, it is a combat domain and therefore an environment in which specific military operations require dedicated military assets.

The US has developed an operationally structured Armed Forces that fits the ambitious nature of its defence policy and has both offensive and defensive military space systems, some of which are orbiting the Earth. It is a demonstration of its enormous capabilities in this regard, which very few other powers currently possess and which gives it a clear advantage in the arms race in space.

In Spain, it has become a priority for the EA to adapt the Armed Forces to the new operational domain, unrivalled by any other target, in order to be able to define the necessary capabilities to fulfil the mission entrusted to it and to provide security and defence for space assets.

An organisational and operational adaptation whose priority is to be aware of events within the space of national interest. This means having a global database of space systems and space debris and space surveillance aswell, in order to identify irresponsible uses of these systems and to activate the required defence measures in the event of an act that may be deemed hostile.

Currently, there is already an organisational command, the MESPA, which is part of the Air and Space Army of the EA; and an operational command and structure, the MOESPA, for permanent operations, and the MCESPA, for crisis or conflict operations.

There are also two specialised units in the space domain: first, the Centre for Aerospace Observation Systems (CESAEROB), responsible for managing Earth observation imagery; and second, the Space Surveillance Operations Centre (COVE), responsible for space situational awareness and which is part of the national warning system for possible uncontrolled re-entry of space objects.

In the future, it is intended that Spain will have all assets required to ensure an adequate level of deterrence against unlawful acts such as those that occur on a daily basis in peacetime and which affect public services.

On the other hand, the goal is also to be able to prevent, jointly with its allies, possible attacks in space, such as the recent attack on communications satellites during the invasion of Ukraine.

As may be seen, in national terms, Spain is undergoing a change of phase in the field of security and defence promoted by geopolitical instability, which endangers its space assets, its economic development and its national security.

The FF. AA is undergoing a process of military transformation unparalleled in recent decades. A process that will be a historic feat, rather than just a challenge, due to the magnitude of the task at hand. Operating in a new domain such as space, in an environment where the laws of physics defy humanity and where disruptive technologies set the pace, is an undertaking that will require a complete rethinking of familiar concepts and models. A project that will change the world.

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# *Pistols and test tubes. The effect of public military spending on R&D. Evidence with data from OECD countries between 1985 and 2020*

**Abstract**

This research tries to enlighten the discussion about invest public money on military spending or not. The focus is put on the relation between this spending and the R&D of a country. After reading the previous literature and finding some causal mechanisms that could work as spillovers from the military world to R&D, I carry out a regression analysis to test the hypotheses. To do it, I take data from OECD countries from 1985 to 2020. Then, a positive relation between military spending and R&D is found in this analysis, and the causal mechanisms are also found to be significant.

**Keywords**

Research, Defence, Government investments.

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## 1. Introduction

In today›s societies, where voters who are also taxpayers have a say in what they want their taxes to be spent on, one of the most attention-grabbing and polarising discussions is regarding military spending. On one hand, the pacifists and on the other hand the militarists argue over whether the state should invest money in its defence and security, or whether the money should be spent in areas considered more essential by the former, such as health or education. The goal would be to strive for a more peaceful world where armed forces are not necessary. In this case, both sides have put forward valid arguments but nevertheless, I believe that there are many different sides to this discussion, and, like everything in life, the conclusion is neither black nor white. At the same time, I would like to make it clear that my aim in this article is not to position myself on either side, but rather to conduct an econometric study on the effect of public military spending on R&D.

Those in favour of spending public resources on defence often argue that its goal is to not only win wars, but there may be numerous other secondary objectives that seek to aid society: to help in pandemics, to foster national industries, or to develop a country›s R&D (Centre for Studies on Army Defence Culture, 2023).

This ongoing debate makes it essential to investigate and attempt to find extra returns on defence investment. By doing so, it will provide those in favour of maintaining or increasing these investments with arguments in their favour. This study focuses on R&D, with the goal of linking public military spending to increased innovation and development.

Using previous insights from existing literature as well as new contributions, I look for certain causal mechanisms to demonstrate that increased military spending can have spillover effects that would function as positive externalities for society and thus increase the country›s R&D. Therefore, my hypothesis is as follows: public military spending has a positive effect on a country›s R&D, therefore increasing public military spending will encourage investment in R&D. This articles, thus, expects that public military spending will have a positive spillover effect on R&D.

Previous literature on the subject discusses the concept of spillovers, which is translated as *derrames* in the Spanish version of this article, and I hereby explain the reason for opting for this translation. These spillovers involve knowledge flows between sectors. Thus, in the case of public defence spending, the importance of such spillovers has been extensively discussed. Since the defence sector does not have an easily calculable utility in economic terms (national security or protection from natural disasters), spillovers become a useful means of measuring the utility of this public defence investment.

For the analysis, I use data from various OECD countries from different sources, mainly from the SIPRI and OECD databases. The results suggest that my hypothesis is indeed correct and a 1 % increase in military spending four years ago implies an increase of about 0.35 % in the country›s R&D as of today. I also find that the causal mechanisms of the relationship between military spending and R&D are significant. Finally, I attempt to decipher the case of Iceland, which has high levels of R&D but no armed forces and no military spending.

## 2. Previous literature

In the field of R&D, extensive studies and research have already been carried out over the last fifty years, covering most bases. For this reason, and in order not to deviate from the original objective, this literature review will focus mainly on the two most important research issues: State intervention and military research.

Regarding state intervention in R&D, research may be traced back to the late 1950s and early 1960s. The basic mechanisms of R&D resource allocation were explained long ago, with various theories laying the foundations of the field. As a sector where profit gains are not immediate, may never be achieved and may not generate social value, coupled with problems of imperfect information, R&D investment is plagued by market failures and private firms may be unwilling to reach a social optimum of investment. This would require the State to step in and add an extra pool of public resources. However, empirical analyses until now have failed to confirm these theories, with conflicting and contradictory results (Nelson, 1959; Arrow, 1962).

For example, Lichtenberg (1984) demonstrates that the programme of public contracts funding private sector research with state funds does not actually increase the amount spent by private companies on R&D (in the US in the 1960s and 1970s). Therefore, such a contract programme would not increase a country›s R&D and would simply lower costs for companies.

Another research, in this case on R&D aid programmes to 25 companies in the industrial sector, focusing on energy R&D, rejects the resource crowding out theory. Using data and surveys of the management in these companies, it finds that decreased public R&D funding also entails a significant reduction in company-funded R&D. Their results also do not support the resource crowding out hypothesis, and some of these companies› research projects would not even have been conducted without public participation (Mansfield & Switzer, 1984).

Another programme, the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR), which provides grant funding for small business R&D in the US, does not really have any effect on increasing small business R&D spending, but only crowds out the spending previously planned by small businesses for R&D purposes. This crowding out is practically one dollar for every dollar subsidised. Moreover, this public subsidy programme also has no impact on employment in the companies researched (Wallsten, 2000).

In Israel, a study using data from 1990 to 1995 has shown that public money spent on R&D in private firms substantially increases R&D investment by small firms but decreases R&D investment by large firms (although the latter is not statistically significant). However, as the vast majority of subsidies end up in the hands of large firms, in the end the total effect of the subsidy programme is much smaller than expected, and for every New Israeli Shekels (NIS) invested in the public programme, only the firms› R&D investment increased by 0.25 NIS (Lach, 2002).

In Sweden in the late 1990s, public R&D subsidies to companies succeeded in increasing the country›s total R&D efforts, but this increase could only be detected in small companies, since they are the ones with the least initial resources for research. The authors of this study were able to rule out the resource crowding out effect due to public funding in small firms but found that large firms did not alter their behaviour because of public subsidies (Heshmati and Lööf, 2005).

To sum up, empirical studies conducted during decades have failed to confirm the theory that the state intervention is required in the distribution of R&D resources to avoid non-achievement of social optima. However, they also do not confirm the hypothesis that this funding is unnecessary and leads to the crowding out of resources that would have been used anyway. There are still many contradictions and no clear conclusions can be drawn.

If we now shift our focus to military R&D, Kaempffert (1941) traces a path from Antiquity to the Modern Age, showing historical examples where military needs have led to great inventions used by society as a whole. From the sewing machine to modern synthetic chemistry, there are many historical examples of military investments that have generated great inventions for society. However, the fact that it is a very good promoter of R&D does not mean that it is a necessary condition as such. For example, biology has never been of primary interest to military research, apart from some branches of medicine, nevertheless society has made great discoveries and achieved important inventions related to biology. This is an example of a field where scientific progress has taken place without conflict-based drivers (Kaempffert, 1941). The aim of this paper is not to demonstrate whether military investment is a necessary or sufficient condition for developing R&D in a country, but only to explore whether it is a good indirect promoter of such R&D and whether it is sufficient to be considered as a possible public policy for increasing research.

Finally, in the literature on R&D, there is a very important concept that may be extrapolated from the new theories of growth: spillovers. In the Spanish version, I have opted to translate it as *derrames* instead of *excedente* or *externalidad* since I consider the former to denote a much more indirect and even unexpected origin than an externality, therefore, it is the term used in the rest of the article. A spillover is a flow of knowledge from one sector/company/country to another that was not previously expected or foreseen. This is also often referred to in economic terms as an externality. It means that the original owners of knowledge cannot appropriate and monopolise their research, as somebody else will also be positively affected by it. For example, a research group may borrow ideas from another group (Griliches, 1979; Griliches, 1991). Or the aerospace industry which, in turn, is closely related to the defence industry, generates beneficial spillovers from its R&D-related activities to the host country where these activities take place. This activity has additional effects such as the spread of knowledge, job creation, increased aggregate demand in the region or aircraft construction, which may be considered the primary objectives (López-Otero and García, 2020).

Spillovers are an even more important part of military R&D. First of all, it must be said that the outputs of defence spending are difficult to measure, due to some of their characteristics. The intangible economic value of national security, the lack of real markets and free competition in the environments in which it is carried out, the uncertainty surrounding the sector (Mowery, 2012), or even its associated moral hazards make it difficult to comprehensively measure its performance and its real utility to society. However, some studies have been able to find tangible economic results that may be attributed to such spending, such as employment, economic growth or international spill-over effects from defence R&D ones. They have also found a positive relationship between public defence R&D spending and productivity or technology growth (Okur, 2013; Moretti, Steinwender and Van Reenen, 2021).

Not surprisingly, I find that, in the previous literature, the main interest and focus is on the relationship between public R&D (military or otherwise) and general R&D. I find it intriguing that there are not many authors interested in finding out whether there is a relationship between overall public defence spending (not just military R&D) and the overall level of R&D in a given country. Not all defence-related R&D spending needs to come from public sources. For example, a government may spend billions of dollars on an arms programme via a direct purchase from a company. In this case, there would be no direct public expenditure on R&D, but the money spent by the government on the programme will end up in R&D in one way or another. The company in charge of the programme has to research new systems for the weapons it sells, so it shall hire researchers, fund experiments or purchase technical research equipment, in short, increasing its R&D investment. This is the aim of this article; to try to find a relationship between overall public defence spending and a country›s R&D. To summarise, the research question formulated to carry out the research would be as follows: How does public military spending affect a country›s R&D?

## 3. Theoretical discussion

My expectation regarding the above question is that public military spending will have a positive spillover effect on R&D. Thus, the hypothesis of the study will be the following: Public military spending has a positive effect on a country›s R&D, therefore increasing public military spending will encourage investment in R&D in that country.

The causal mechanisms affecting R&D are related to the concept introduced in the literature section: spillovers. These would work in a kind of butterfly effect where, for example, an initial purchase of tanks by the armed forces ends up increasing the country›s R&D. Let us discuss this further:

Public defence spending operates through two different types of investments: human capital and military assets (there may be others, such as certain contracted services, but the aforesaid two are the most responsible; see the 2023 budget of the Spanish Ministry of Defence where most of the expenditure is recorded either under salaries or under actual investments). The providers of these investments may be Armed Forces personnel or the defence-related industry. If we focus on the latter, when the defence industry receives supply contracts for goods and services to the armed forces, it has to develop its production capabilities. These capabilities may cover many different departments, but the one that is of interest here is R&D. This department will then require funding for research materials, for the facilities where experiments will be carried out and above all, for recruiting researchers and people with research-related careers, of which a high proportion are university students.

As a result, the demand for researchers will increase in the country (and not only thanks to the defence industry, but also to Armed Forces' investment in human capital that is not outsourced to private companies). This increased demand will also create an increased incentive for young people to opt for research jobs, as there will be increased vacancies and, due to higher demand, higher salaries. On the other hand, GDP per capita will increase due to the development of the defence industry, similar to any other industry. This increase in GDP per capita will boost the overall economy, which means that there will be even more funds available for other sectors to invest in more researchers, more education and, ultimately, in more R&D. In conclusion, the money spent by the government on certain defence-related programme will cause a snowball effect, where there will be spill-overs from one activity to another, creating a multiplier effect where the original spending which is not directly on R&D, has a positive effect on the country's R&D.

In summary, the three causal mechanisms are as follows:

– More public military spending More researchers More R&D.

– More public military spending More people with tertiary education More R&D.

– More public military spending More GDP per capita More R&D.

Arguably, these causal mechanisms are the same for all sectors of the economy; greater investment in health services leads to increased R&D; greater investment in agriculture leads to increased R&D; or greater investment in the energy industry leads to increased R&D. This is most likely true; however, this paper focuses only on the defence sector. It would be highly interesting for future research to examine whether, and to what extent, other economic sectors can also generate positive spillovers.

A simplified form of the causal mechanisms described above are shown in the following figure:

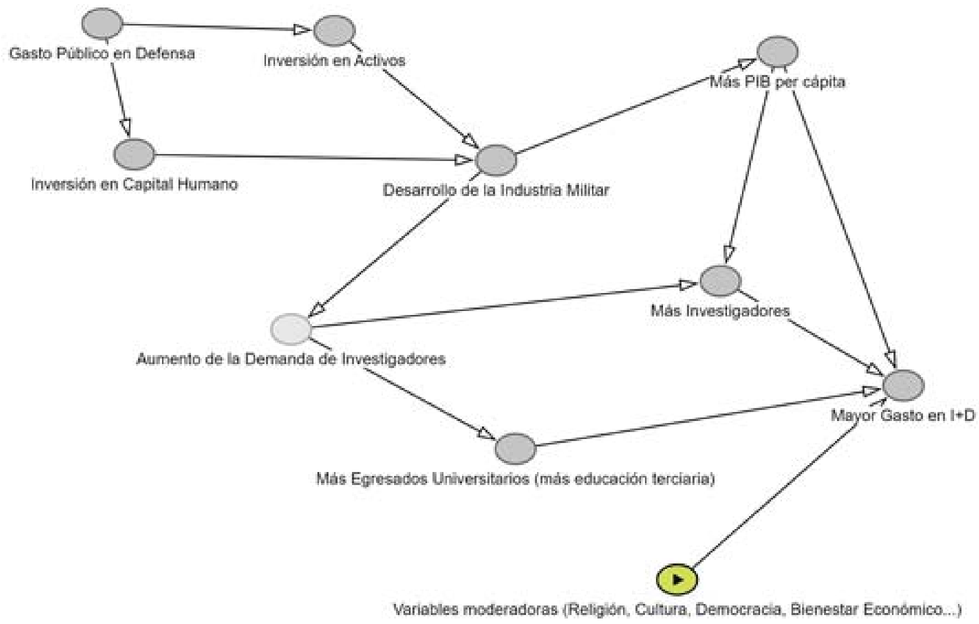


Image 1. Diagram of causal mechanisms

## 4. Data and method

This research conducts a linear regression with the OLS (Ordinary Least Squares) method. For readers unfamiliar with econometric techniques, a linear regression is a mathematical model used to find a relationship between a dependent variable, a set of independent variables, and an error term. The OLS method consists roughly of finding the parameters by minimising the squared errors. The unit of analysis used will be the country-year, for the period of years 1985 to 2020. The country group chosen consists of 34 OECD countries plus Argentina, the People's Republic of China, Romania, Russia, Taiwan and South Africa. The countries have been selected purely based on data availability and has no scientific basis. Moreover, due to a lack of data, many values are missing in many developing countries (China, Chile...) and there are other countries (Baltic Republics, Russia, Slovakia...) that were created after the start of the dataset compilation. For these reasons, the data used have a limitation: the excessive weight of Western developed countries. This may complicate the fact that this research is not applicable to all countries in the world, but only to developed countries. However, I believe that this does not change the purpose of this work nor its validity. The only thing to be done is to impose the condition that the results obtained are more valid for developed countries than for developing countries.

The dependent variable will be a country's R&D. The ideal operationalisation would be the total R&D expenditure of a country, however, there are several endogeneity problems associated with this approach: public defence expenditure also includes a percentage of public R&D expenditure, which would be endogenous to total R&D expenditure. To solve this problem, the dependent variable will be operationalised in two different ways: Private Gross Domestic Expenditure as a percentage of GDP (Priv_ID) and Patents per capita (Pat).

Gross Domestic Expenditure on R&D as a percentage of GDP is a variable showing all the money spent on R&D by private companies in the country. To operationalise it, the data on "Business gross domestic expenditure in R&D in PPP dollars of 2015" was extracted for each R&D type from the OECD data, and the percentage of GDP accounted for by this expenditure was calculated using the OECD GDP data.

To operationalise Pat, data on the total number of patents created in each country each year was extracted and this number was then divided by the total population of each country each year, taken from the OECD. As the numbers were logically very small and not very unevenly distributed, logarithms were taken of this variable, for a better distribution for the purposes of analysis. Thus, the coefficients given by the regression will be changes in percentages and not in absolute terms, which for this variable is probably more interesting.

The reason for taking two different variables for this concept is that Priv_ID has endogeneity problems (explained later in more detail) with one of the causal mechanisms (Researchers = Invs), and the regression of patents per capita is likely to be more valid. The sources for both variables are OECD datasets.

The independent variable will be public military expenditure as a percentage of GDP. In this case, adding lags to the variable to see if the effects are different over the years. Thus, a variable t-i is obtained, where i is the number of years that have passed since this expenditure was made. For example, if expenditure was 1 % in 1985, it will appear as follows: in 1985, t = 1; in 1986, t-1 = 1; in 1987, t-2 = 1; in 1988, t-3 = 1; in 1989, t-4 = 1. And, by doing this for each t, a dataset is created with lagged information up to four years. The source of this data is the SIPRI military expenditure database. It was decided to take logarithms for the OLS regressions, and therefore Iceland (which has 0 % expenditure, as it has no armed forces) disappears, making it a dataset of 39 countries. Point 6 of this article briefly discusses the special case of Iceland.

Figure 1 displays the trend in military spending for the group of forty countries that have been chosen, plus the average in bold. Iceland is displayed in pink to highlight its zero expenditure over the years. As the dataset starts in 1985, the end of the Cold War, the average has a decreasing trend until the turn of the millennium, and then stabilises at around 2 %, which makes sense as many of these countries are part of NATO, which imposes a 2 % public military expenditure for its members. Two lines persist above the rest: US (blue line) and Russia (red line). Until 2014, the US outspent Russia, and since the Invasion of the Crimean Peninsula, Russian spending has surpassed that of the US. Greece (purple line) overtook both powers in 2021, which is in the midst of a rearmament programme due to tensions in the Mediterranean Sea. On the other hand, Ireland (green line), Luxembourg (orange line) and Mexico (light blue) are countries that spend the least on defence as a percentage of GDP, and therefore their lines are permanently at the bottom of the graph. The pink line at the bottom is Iceland, which, as noted above, has no public defence spending.

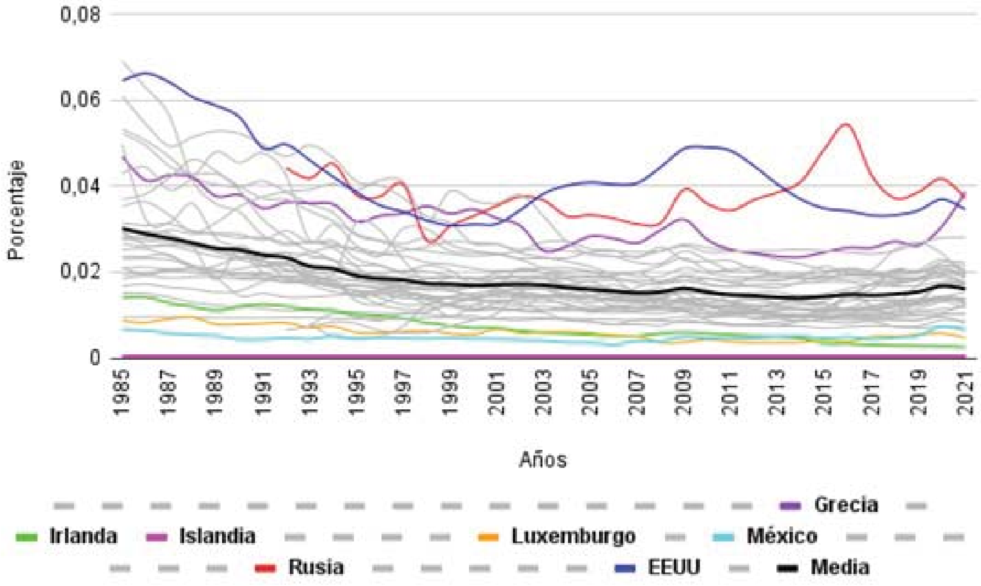


Image 2. Public Military Expenditure as a Percentage of GDP. Source: Author's own based on SIPRI data

In terms of domestic R&D spending, figure 2 shows that there are large differences in the trend across countries, with no clear trend as in military spending. It has increased in some countries such as Austria, China, Denmark, Taiwan; with South Korea standing out above the rest, also reaching the highest point of all the graphs at 5 % of GDP. What we do not see are downward trends, in countries without constant increases in recent years, the percentage has stabilised in each country according to its economic capacity and the distribution of sectors in its economy.

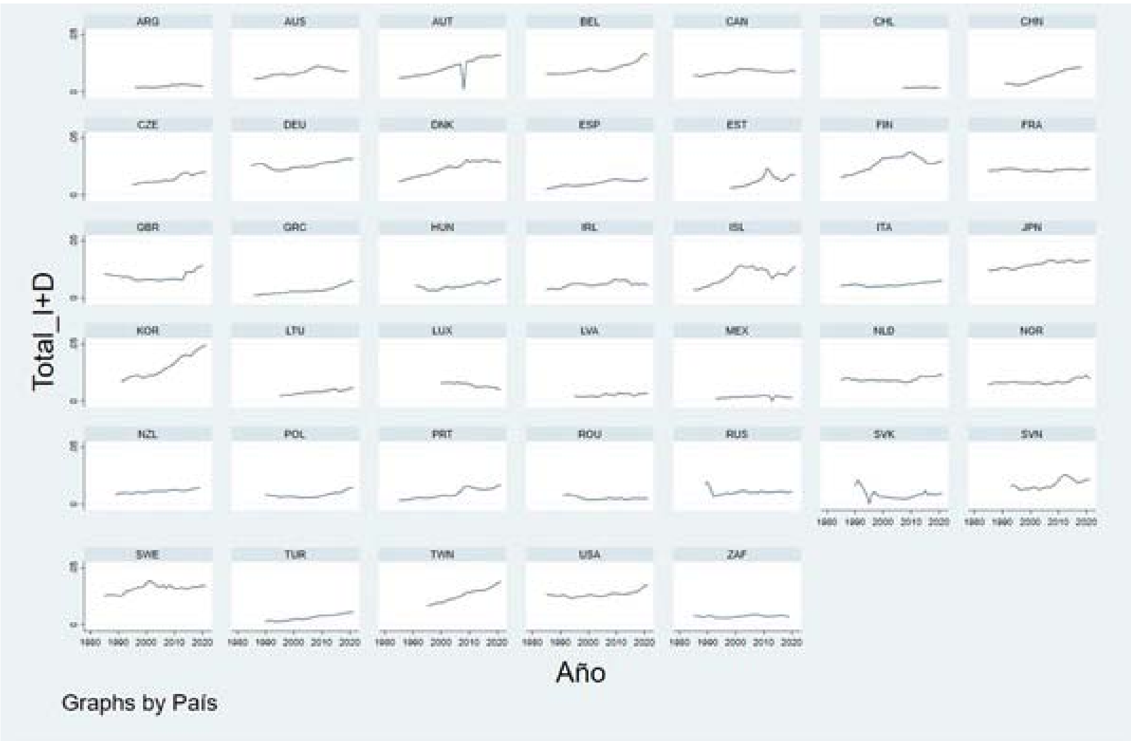


Image 3: Gross Domestic Expenditure on R&D as a Percentage of GDP. Source: Author's own based on OECD data

The three causal mechanisms that will serve as operationalisation of the spillover concept are the following, as mentioned above: A country›s tertiary education, operationalised as the percentage of adults aged 25-64 with tertiary education (Edu), a country›s GDP per capita divided by 1000 (Gdpc/1000), and a country›s number of researchers, operationalised as the number of researchers per 1000 employees in a country (Invs). The data are sourced from the OECD. Finally, some control variables which were found to be important in increasing a country›s R&D were added to the regression: labour productivity (ProdTra), Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and levels of democracy (Dem).

As this analysis works with percentages, it was decided that the OLS model to be used would be a log-log model, in order to view the effects of percentage increases in public military spending. For readers less accustomed to econometric models, if both the independent variable and the dependent variable are in logarithms, the coefficient ($_{\beta 1}$) that will emerge from the analysis may be interpreted as follows: if the independent variable increases by 1 %, the dependent variable will increase by$_{\beta 1\%}$. Absolute increases would be less interesting, as the normal way to explain state spending on defence is usually as a percentage of GDP.

It is also necessary to explain why there will be an OLS model for each lag of the independent variable and not a single model including all lags. There is strong multicollinearity (some variables are perfect transformations of others) between the different lags (for obvious reasons, as each lag is simply a perfect transformation of the previous lag) and no improvement in the results is obtained by placing them in separate regressions. What happens is that all the effects of military spending are shifted to the last lag, rendering them statistically insignificant. For this reason, there will be five different regressions for each dependent variable and the differences between them will be shown. Thus, the resulting OLS models for the analysis are as follows:

$$LPriv\_ID = \beta o + \beta i * Lt\text{-}I + \alpha_1 * Edu + \alpha_2 * Gdppc/1000 + \alpha_{3*} Invs + \gamma k * Ck$$

$$LPat = \beta_0 + \beta i_1 * Lt\text{-}I + \alpha_1 * Edu + \alpha_2 * Gdppc/1000 + \alpha_3 * Invs + \gamma_k * C_k$$

Where i{0,4}, k{1,3} and $C_k$ are the control variables.

## 5. Results

### *5.1. Dependent and independent variables*

In this section, the results of the OLS regressions on the collected data will be shown and interpreted. In both tables 1 and 2, the regressions are complete with all causal mechanisms and all controls included. The only difference between the different models is the independent variable used: from Lt (military expenditure in the current year) to Lt_4 (military expenditure four years before the current date). REG 1 and REG 6 use Lt and the rest go in the order shown in the tables.

Table 1 reveals that all the lags of military spending are statistically significant, and there are no major differences in either their coefficients or the R-squared of their models. The highest coefficient is 0.4229 and the lowest is 0.4081, a difference of only 0.0148. According to this model, a 1 % increase in public military spending in the current year would mean a 0.41 % increase in Gross Domestic Private R&D Expenditure as a percentage of GDP. For a 1 % increase in public military spending four years ahead of today's date, the increase in R&D will be 0.42 %.

Table 2 displays a similar situation. All lags are statistically significant and the R-squared are even higher, reaching 0.67 at REG 10. However, in the case of patents we can clearly see the effect of lags, as the difference between the coefficient of Lt and Lt_4 is 0.039 % which, translated into real values, means that for a 1 % increase in military spending, patents will increase that year by 0.36% and four years later there will be an increase of 0.40 %. Moreover, the R-squared of the models increase as we add more lags to the independent variable.

Tabla I: Modelo de Comparación con LPriv_ID

| | (1) REG1 | (2) REG2 | (3) REG3 | (4) REG4 | (5) REG5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lt | 0.4141*** | | | | |
| | (0.0459) | | | | |
| Edu | 0.4551 | 0.5183 | 0.5735 | 0.6455 | 0.6972 |
| | (0.3762) | (0.3733) | (0.3739) | (0.3681) | (0.3627) |
| Pibpc1000 | -0.0102*** | -0.0103*** | -0.0104*** | -0.0105*** | -0.0105*** |
| | (0.0030) | (0.0030) | (0.0031) | (0.0030) | (0.0030) |
| Invs | 0.1710*** | 0.1703*** | 0.1694*** | 0.1686*** | 0.1681*** |
| | (0.0142) | (0.0142) | (0.0142) | (0.0141) | (0.0140) |
| ProdTra | 0.0098*** | 0.0097*** | 0.0096*** | 0.0095*** | 0.0093** |
| | (0.0028) | (0.0028) | (0.0029) | (0.0029) | (0.0028) |
| IED | 0.0640 | 0.0453 | 0.0082 | -0.0131 | -0.0334 |
| | (0.2412) | (0.2400) | (0.2355) | (0.2401) | (0.2330) |
| Dem | 0.0111 | 0.0109 | 0.0105 | 0.0104 | 0.0115 |
| | (0.0240) | (0.0237) | (0.0242) | (0.0242) | (0.0241) |
| Lt_1 | | 0.4126*** | | | |
| | | (0.0461) | | | |
| Lt_2 | | | 0.4081*** | | |
| | | | (0.0457) | | |
| Lt_3 | | | | 0.4120*** | |
| | | | | (0.0458) | |
| Lt_4 | | | | | 0.4229*** |
| | | | | | (0.0455) |
| _cons | -4.5868*** | -4.5991*** | -4.6193*** | -4.6149*** | -4.5880*** |
| | (0.3153) | (0.3180) | (0.3176) | (0.3175) | (0.3148) |
| N | 546 | 546 | 546 | 545 | 545 |
| r2 | 0.5816 | 0.5818 | 0.5812 | 0.5834 | 0.5868 |
| F | 131.8519 | 133.7481 | 134.1840 | 136.1027 | 140.5015 |
| ll | -494.8653 | -494.7120 | -495.1257 | -493.2626 | -491.0449 |

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table I. LPriv_ID Comparison Model

These results confirm the initial hypothesis of this research and also add an interesting extra point to the results. The impact of public military spending on a country's R&D increases over the years, so it is not an immediate effect, but a delayed effect. This is clearly logical. Investments do not usually have immediate results and it often takes some time from the time a project is funded to the time it begins to yield returns, whether economic, military or research.

The effect of military expenditure on R&D may be deemed significant. A 100 % increase in the defence budget increases private R&D by 42.3 % and patents by 40 % in four years. This may not seem very high, as the increase is smaller than the investment, but it should be borne in mind that the main purpose of military spending is to increase military capabilities. This means that R&D increases are nothing more than indirect effects or positive externalities, and an increase of 40 % can be considered high.

Tabla II: Modelo de Comparación con LPat

| | (1) REG6 | (2) REG7 | (3) REG8 | (4) REG9 | (5) REG10 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lt | 0.3621*** | | | | |
| | (0.0804) | | | | |
| Edu | 1.3555* | 1.4120* | 1.4611* | 1.5047* | 1.5532** |
| | (0.5926) | (0.5901) | (0.5894) | (0.5852) | (0.5815) |
| Pibpc1000 | 0.0329*** | 0.0328*** | 0.0328*** | 0.0329*** | 0.0330*** |
| | (0.0051) | (0.0051) | (0.0051) | (0.0051) | (0.0050) |
| Invs | 0.2211*** | 0.2203*** | 0.2193*** | 0.2184*** | 0.2181*** |
| | (0.0216) | (0.0215) | (0.0215) | (0.0214) | (0.0213) |
| ProdTra | 0.0140** | 0.0138** | 0.0137** | 0.0135** | 0.0132** |
| | (0.0051) | (0.0051) | (0.0051) | (0.0051) | (0.0051) |
| IED | -0.0989 | -0.1069 | -0.1308 | -0.1379 | -0.1476 |
| | (0.4122) | (0.4128) | (0.4085) | (0.4079) | (0.4002) |
| Dem | 0.1605** | 0.1601** | 0.1594** | 0.1597** | 0.1603** |
| | (0.0519) | (0.0518) | (0.0522) | (0.0522) | (0.0520) |
| Lt_1 | | 0.3666*** | | | |
| | | (0.0785) | | | |
| Lt_2 | | | 0.3675*** | | |
| | | | (0.0762) | | |
| Lt_3 | | | | 0.3836*** | |
| | | | | (0.0737) | |
| Lt_4 | | | | | 0.4014*** |
| | | | | | (0.0720) |
| _cons | -13.8462*** | -13.8305*** | -13.8241*** | -13.7592*** | -13.6995*** |
| | (0.6451) | (0.6444) | (0.6373) | (0.6327) | (0.6278) |
| N | 705 | 705 | 705 | 704 | 704 |
| r2 | 0.6686 | 0.6691 | 0.6692 | 0.6696 | 0.6709 |
| F | 242.2672 | 245.2270 | 242.1665 | 238.0562 | 239.8552 |
| ll | -1035.8094 | -1035.3160 | -1035.1480 | -1032.5395 | -1031.2337 |

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table II: LPat Comparison Model

For readers less accustomed to econometric models, the summary of the results in Section 5.1 is as follows: using both L_Priv_ID and LPat, this research finds that public defence spending positively affects a country's R&D, with 99 % confidence. The R-squared (the coefficient measuring the quality of the regression) is greater than 0.5, which implies good research quality.

## *5.2. Causal mechanisms*

With regard to causal mechanisms, the following analysis may be made. In all models for both dependent variables, GDP per capita and researchers are statistically significant at the 99.9 % level. These two clearly function as causal mechanisms, i.e. spillovers, for our regression. However, education level is significant at 5 % only in models with patents as the dependent variable. There may be various reasons for this, for example, the increasing proportion of skilled workers who have undergone vocational training rather than a university-based one. These workers are often more necessary than ones with university education, but they are not included in the tertiary education statistics. In any case, this question requires a separate investigation and is not part of the purpose of this article. The conclusion regarding causal mechanisms is that GDP per capita and the number of researchers per 1000 employees can be considered good spillovers for the effect of public military spending on R&D, but not the share of adults aged 25-64 with tertiary education.

To understand which causal mechanism is stronger, new regressions were run for both dependent variables (LPriv_ID in REG 11, REG 13, REG 15; and LPat in REG 12, REG 14, REG 16). These regressions are the same as those done before, but in each regression, one of the causal mechanisms disappears, and then they are all compared to each other to see the changes that occur. The independent variable chosen for these regressions is Lt, without any lag. However, because the rest of the Lt-i are transformations of Lt, the results reached in this part are the same.

The results, in table III, show that, in the case of patents, the strongest causal mechanisms (those that most reduce the R-squared when removed from the regression) are education level and researchers. The difference in R-squared is almost 0.06 for researchers and 0.045 for educational level. GDP per capita makes a minor difference, as the R-squared only drops by 0.025 when it disappears from the regression. It is, thus, concluded that, in the case of patents, the most efficient causal mechanisms are the level of education and the number of researchers, although GDP per capita is not far behind.

For private R&D, GDP per capita is again the least decreasing R-squared when taken out of the regression. Its effect is now even smaller, as the R-squared drops by 0.01. For education, the drop is around 0.056, which means that it is a stronger causal mechanism for private R&D than for patents. However, where we can see a clear difference is with researchers. When researchers are removed from the regression, the R-squared drops to 0.15. This means that researchers per 1000 employees is a very good predictor of private R&D in a country.

However, this is not as bright as it might seem, as it is very likely that there is endogeneity between researchers and Priv_ID. When there are more researchers in a country, there will be more research output and therefore the percentage of GDP made up by private R&D will be higher. However, the reason why there would be more researchers employed in a country is probably because there has been a prior increase in R&D investment and therefore the increase in the share of GDP has preceded the increase in researchers. In the end, it is not possible to know in which direction the causality is headed or which action came first (at least with these regressions). As endogeneity is only related to a causal mechanism and not to the independent variable, the model with LPriv_ID need not be discarded, but this detail makes the model with LPat more reliable.

Concluding the results, it may be stated that the model with LPat as the dependent variable is better overall, as the R-squared is higher, does not suffer from endogeneity problems, and allows us to see the lagged effect of military spending. This effect is significant and increases over the years. For a 100 % increase in military expenditure, the number of patents in a country increases by 36.21 % in the same year, or by 36.66 %, 36.75 %, 38.36 % and 40.14 % if the expenditure was made one, two, three or four years earlier respectively. This is a very strong spillover effect because, as previously mentioned, the original intention of military spending is to increase military capabilities, and the whole effect on R&D is just a positive externality. With these results, it may be said that the initial hypothesis of this study is confirmed, as it shows that military public spending does indeed have a positive effect on a country›s R&D, and indeed, increasing military public spending will increase R&D investment in the country.

Tabla III: Comparación de derrames/mecanismos causales

| | (1) REG11 | (2) REG12 | (3) REG13 | (4) REG14 | (5) REG15 | (6) REG16 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lt | 0.3988*** | 0.2752*** | 0.4659*** | 0.2196** | 0.3994*** | 0.2950** |
| | (0.0482) | (0.0813) | (0.0518) | (0.0807) | (0.0564) | (0.0901) |
| Pibpc1000 | -0.0067 | 0.0426*** | | | -0.0148*** | 0.0277*** |
| | (0.0035) | (0.0070) | | | (0.0040) | (0.0063) |
| Invs | 0.1809*** | 0.2218*** | 0.1763*** | 0.2084*** | | |
| | (0.0111) | (0.0182) | (0.0149) | (0.0212) | | |
| ProdTra | 0.0107*** | 0.0181** | 0.0040* | 0.0328*** | 0.0213*** | 0.0298*** |
| | (0.0030) | (0.0057) | (0.0020) | (0.0044) | (0.0036) | (0.0058) |
| IED | -0.0776 | -0.5786 | 0.0047 | 0.0672 | -0.0797 | -0.3827 |
| | (0.3018) | (0.6024) | (0.3494) | (0.2866) | (0.3649) | (0.5461) |
| Dem | -0.0655*** | 0.0344 | 0.0019 | 0.1891*** | 0.0599 | 0.2102*** |
| | (0.0121) | (0.0289) | (0.0223) | (0.0562) | (0.0311) | (0.0587) |
| Edu | | | 0.1307 | 2.1983*** | 3.2249*** | 4.8025*** |
| | | | (0.3782) | (0.5854) | (0.3481) | (0.5578) |
| _cons | -4.0423*** | -13.1400*** | -4.3419*** | -14.5170*** | -5.0683*** | -14.5936*** |
| | (0.2258) | (0.4417) | (0.3267) | (0.6585) | (0.3921) | (0.7215) |
| N | 672 | 930 | 546 | 705 | 573 | 771 |
| r2 | 0.5256 | 0.6232 | 0.5699 | 0.6434 | 0.4318 | 0.6041 |
| F | 141.7268 | 239.9469 | 158.3684 | 172.8914 | 66.3689 | 144.2739 |
| ll | -680.3957 | -1468.8877 | -502.4002 | -1061.6075 | -605.3103 | -1194.5886 |

Standard errors in parentheses
* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table III: Comparison of spill-overs/causal mechanisms

## 6. The case of Iceland

Although the aim of this study is not to explore why Iceland has no military spending, but instead high levels of R&D, the following section provides some guidelines that will be used to assert a final point to be made. This study does not seek to find the necessary and/or sufficient conditions for R&D to develop in a country, but simply to demonstrate that military spending is a plus, an addition that positively affects R&D.

Iceland is a fairly innovative country, exceeding the OECD and EU average. The biggest drivers of its R&D are mainly the energy and fisheries sectors, with a clear focus on sustainable fisheries and clean energy generation processes, although it has other sectors spearheading innovation such as health, agri-food and ICT (Koutsogeorgopoulou and Cho, 2021).

From 2019 onwards, the Icelandic government has been implementing a 10-year innovation plan called The Innovative Iceland. The main pillars of this plan are to improve the finances of innovative companies, with a clear focus on start-ups; promoting education and training of the workforce, in order to create new professional skills and attracting qualified personnel to the island; improve the country›s infrastructure, market access and legal framework; and, above all, to create a sense of innovation in the Icelandic mindset. The Icelandic government perceives individual ingenuity as one of the focal points of the country›s scientific progress. This will be achieved by teaching school students to develop this feeling and by disseminating scientific achievements to the general public (Koutsogeorgopoulou & Cho, 2021).

On the other hand, Iceland›s population is around 375 000 and unemployment is close to 3 %. This means that, in order to foster growth, it is vital to increase productivity, as very large growth cannot be fostered based on population growth or on the inclusion of the unemployed in the labour market. A final issue explaining their large R&D investment as a percentage of GDP is the relatively small size of GDP in absolute terms. This means that R&D as a percentage of GDP is likely to be higher.

This small section of the article was mainly intended to add that public military spending is a highly important source of R&D for a country, thanks to spillovers, but that it is not, however, a necessary condition. A country can have very high levels of innovation and R&D and spend nothing on defence, Iceland being a clear example of this.

## 7. Conclusions

The initial purpose of this research was to contribute to the discussion on public defence spending. The original idea was to find out whether this expenditure has an impact on a country›s R&D. To this end, a thorough literature review shed light on the concept of spillovers or, indirect flows of knowledge between sectors.

In the case of this research, spillovers from increased public defence spending to R&D would be driven by three causal mechanisms: university education, the number of researchers in the labour force, and GDP per capita. To find out whether this is really the case, this study ran a linear regression on data from more than forty OECD countries over 35 years.

The econometric results confirm the initial hypothesis and show that a 100 % increase in public military spending leads to increases of 36-42 % in R&D, the stronger the further back in time the investment was made. Furthermore, the best model for finding this effect is the one using the logarithm of patents per capita and that the most important causal mechanisms are researchers and GDP per capita.

For future research, it would be interesting to further explore the idea of these causal mechanisms and try to find some others that could explain this relationship, or even attempt to find the reason why these causal mechanisms work as observed. It would even be interesting to examine after many lags does the effect of military spending on R&D start to fade.

Moreover, as already discussed in the theoretical framework, it may be interesting to apply this same research model to other expenditures in the country: does the agricultural industry generate R&D? does health spending influence R&D? does a country›s audiovisual production influence R&D? After the effect of each sector is individually studied, it would be interesting to predict a whole index to detect the sectors with the greatest impact on R&D, in order to predict the direction to be taken by public policies seeking to increase R&D.

The importance of this research lies in its novelty, as theoretical models on this topic had previously been discussed, but large-scale empirical studies had not yet been carried out. Thus, this work provides an empirical confirmation of theories that predict military investment as a major promoter of scientific development. This topic is hotly debated in society today, and the results obtained may be of great interest to advocates of defence investment, who will be able to argue that governments have another reason to continue funding military programmes without a purely warlike objective, but rather with a broader vision.

Further empirical studies should be conducted to find out what other sectors are positively affected by such military investment. For example, it would be interesting to research impacts of public military spending on other factors such as social welfare, economic performance, happiness, health and so on. Public investment in defence has many utilities beyond national security, and it is our job to uncover them.

## Index of acronyms (in order of appearance)

| | |
|---|---|
| I+D | Research and Development |
| OCDE | Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| SIPRI | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute |
| PIB | Gross Domestic Product |
| MCO | Ordinary Least Squares (econometric technique to find the parameters of a linear regression) |
| Priv_ID | One of the variables dependent on the study: Gross Domestic Private Expenditure as a percentage of GDP |
| Pat | One of the study dependent variables: Patents per capita |
| PPP | Purchasing Power Parity |
| t-i | The independent variable of the study: Military public expenditure as a percentage of GDP. To check the time effect, the variable is delayed, making each i one year backward. |
| OTAN | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| Edu | One of the causal mechanisms: Percentage of adults aged 25-64 with tertiary education |
| Pibpc/1000 | One causal mechanism: GDP per capita of a country divided by 1000 |
| Invs | One causal mechanism: Number of researchers per 1000 employees in a country |
| ProdTra | One of the controls: Labour productivity |
| IED | One of the controls: Foreign direct investment |
| Dem | One of the controls: Level of democracy |
| L(variable) | The logarithm of a variable. LPat for example would be the logarithm of Pat |
| R-cuadrado | A statistical coefficient that determines the quality of the model. Its value determines the percentage change in the model-attributable dependent variable. |
| TICs | Information and Communication Technologies |

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# *REVIEW*

***La privacidad es poder: datos, vigilancia y libertad en la era digital (privacy is power: data, surveillance and freedom in the digital age)***

*Carissa Véliz*

*Published by: Debate, 2021 (304) pages*

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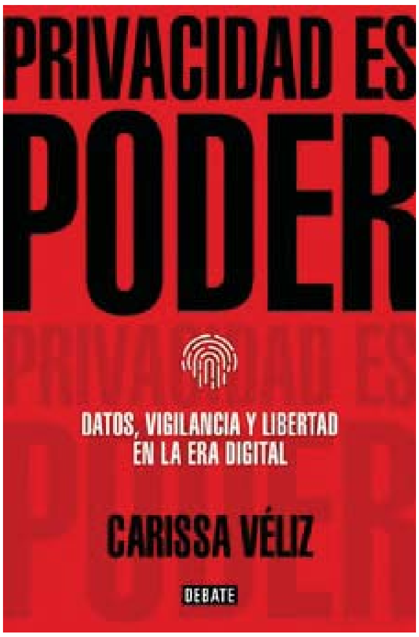

Data has become a major strategic resource, as underlined in the National Security Strategy (NSS) 2021. The NSS stresses that:

> "[…] the debate on ethics and the defence of digital rights has intensified and is especially determined by the concentration of information in major tech companies and by abuse of such information by certain political actors. The right to privacy of the users of digital services is at the centre of this debate and it has led to judicial pronouncements that may condition technological development".

The document does not hesitate to describe it as "[…]new sphere of power, affecting both the relationship between States and between the public and private sectors, given that tech companies have the greatest access to data", considering it a "[…] key aspect of national security, with a direct impact on personal privacy".

This view is corroborated by the European Union's (EU) Strategic Compass, which states that after three decades of strong economic interdependence that was supposed to reduce tensions, the return to power politics and even armed aggression is the most significant change in international relations. Interdependence is increasingly conflictual and soft power is used as a weapon: vaccines, data and technological standards are all instruments of political competition. In this regard, the EU Commission has set up the Observatory of Critical Technologies to coordinate and obtain a comprehensive view of critical facilities, such as semiconductors, cloud and edge technologies, quantum computing and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Additionally, the Biden-Harris Administration's National Security Strategy 2022 does not hesitate to place data at the centre of gravity of an international technological ecosystem, where trust between the various actors must protect the integrity of the development of standards that enable the free flow of ideas, goods and services. Data becomes the new source of power at the apex of geopolitical tension with China.

Additionally, the NATO Secretary General's Annual Report 2022 (AR2022) highlights the 1-billion-euro innovation and data funding over fifteen years to be invested in start-up companies developing advanced technologies in the field. Also, in October of the same year, the Allied Defence Ministers endorsed the establishment of the Data and Artificial Intelligence Review Board to implement the principles of responsible use. In the same vein, NATO's Data Exploitation Framework Strategic Plan examines data culture as key to making NATO a data-centric organisation.

Undoubtedly, the second decade of the 21st century, which opened in the midst of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, has brought us fully and with unprecedented speed into the new digital age, where geopolitical competition for the new source of power, data, places citizens and our privacy on the front line of a battle of all against all, as Thomas Hobbes warned us in his indispensable systematic treatise on the theory of the State: *Leviathan*, and which Carissa Véliz discusses in a stark and unvarnished manner in the book under review.

Carissa Véliz is a philosopher who graduated from Salamanca and holds a PhD from Oxford University, where she is currently an Associate Professor. From the very first pages of the book, the author envelops us in an intricate web of networks. A vision that she had also previously conveyed, together with the journalist Franganillo, in the documentary series: *10 000 days*, in Episode 2, "Observed", which masterfully depicts the suffocating atmosphere of surveillance that hangs over us.

In the first two chapters: "Data Vultures" and "How did it come to this?" reveals how tech giants, especially Facebook, "[…] have violated our right to privacy so many times that discussing them all would require an entire new book". The author reminds us that Facebook's entire revenue depends on the exploitation of our personal data. She also highlights, how one of the most reiterated driving ideas of tech giants to overcome privacy as a social norm, is to treat it "[…] with repeated insistence as a hindrance to progress" and to consider the incessant flow of information being shared "[…] more openly and with more people" as something inevitable. In this regard, on December 4, 2023, the Spanish media reported on the lawsuit against Meta, parent company of Facebook and Instagram, by the Media Association on behalf of more than eighty newspapers for systematic and massive non-compliance with European data protection regulations in the management of their social networks. Back in January of this year, the Irish Data Protection Commission imposed two fines of 210 million euros on Facebook and 180 million euros on Instagram for breaching EU user privacy rules.

Another trend highlighted by the author is the ambivalent stance of the State. Thus, from the moment the State began to take an interest in our personal data, it no longer had any incentive to regulate privacy protection. On the contrary: the more data collected by companies, the more powerful could government surveillance be. In this sense, another oft-repeated driving idea is the fight for the right to privacy is motivated by the desire to conceal illicit activities and attitudes.

In the following two chapters: "Privacy is power" and "Toxic data", the author seeks to remind us "that the battle for our privacy is a power struggle, and that personal data are toxic" In this regard, she insists that:

- We have a body that many institutions want to learn more about and even experiment.
- An identity that criminals want to use to commit crimes.
- Contacts and connections to access through us.
- A voice that may be used as a loudspeaker.
- Vote that may be manipulated.
- "As you can see, you're a very important person. You are a source of power".

One of the key aspects of power is knowledge-based influence. A knowledge that is conveyed by means of data sometimes given "[…] more or less voluntarily and which is also stolen from us when we try to resist".

That power may be executed through the force of narratives, whether true, false or manipulated, through sorting algorithms, persuasive apps, personalised ads, fake news, fake groups and accounts, as well as the reiteration of narratives that characterise technologies as the solution to all our problems. It's what we call soft power.

Or by brute force, hard power, especially when "data is taken from us, even if we try to resist". This is not physical violence, but a violation of our rights, even more so when these personal data are treated as a commodity, as in the era of slavery when States and large landowners used their power to trade in people. A hard power that seems to grow from year to year, with the "ruthless imposition of all rules —state or private— inscribed in the computer code" and which is augmented by new applications of Artificial Intelligence.

A well-known case that the author analyses in depth is that of Cambridge Analytica, "the company that helped Trump win the US presidency and which also collaborated with Leave supporters in the Brexit referendum campaign (albeit through an associated political firm, AggregateIQ [AIQ]". This brings us to a concept to which the author attaches great importance and which is the title of one of her sections, privacy is collective. Just as national security challenges today have a global dimension: "[…] when you expose privacy, you put us all at risk... The collective nature of privacy has profound implications for our understanding of so-called 'personal data'... The culture of displaying that which is private harms society. It damages the social fabric, poses a risk to national security, allows discrimination and endangers democracy".

The author believes that mismanagement of personal data can poison societies and thus compromise national security. Data theft from large companies which fundamentally affects brand reputation and, of course, that of the state of which they are the image, is one of the aspects it covers. Moreover, the information we are accustomed to sharing or using may also reveal details compromising the security of classified material, such as when the tech company Strava uploaded their interactive map which included the routes taken by US military personnel when they went on daily runs from their military bases. In short, according to the author, "there are three guardians of truth, justice and fairness whose independence must be defended for healthy liberal democracies: the press, the judiciary and the academic world. An important part of redressing power asymmetries in the digital age is to support these guardians".

In an article published on December 19, 2022 under the title "Surveillance scam", the author warns that the amount of personal data collected on people around the world has increased steadily over the past two decades due to a number of factors: firstly, the development of data analysis tools has made it easier than ever to collect personal data; secondly, as we interact more than ever with computers (and computers interact with us), more personal data is created than ever before; thirdly, regardless of whether institutions operate in the technology sector, every organisation has an incentive to collect personal data because it can be sold to third parties, and therefore personal data has become an easy way to make money.

The data economy (the buying and selling of personal data) has given rise to companies that specialise in the commodification of data, i.e., data brokers. In this regard, on November 6, 2023, *CincoDías* reported that: "[…] large funds are bidding for Asterión and Telefónica's data centres. The management and the telecommunications companies are launching the sale of Nabiax, which has half a dozen data centres in Spain totalling 23 MW of power and occupying 22 000 square metres, valued at 1 billion euros".

And on November 27, 2023, the *Heraldo de Aragón* reported that Microsoft had acquired 84.4 h in La Muela (Zaragoza) for its second data centre. Microsoft 7724 Spain SL, is the special purpose vehicle set up by the multinational company two years ago in order to centralise its plans for the expansion and operation in Spain of its data centre business and the cloud services it provides to individuals, companies and administrations. An investment of 2.2 billion euros is earmarked for each of the three data centres planned in Aragón, for a total planned investment of 6.6 billion euros.

In conclusion, we may cite the Centre for Governance and Change of the IE University which, in its document titled Data policy: a conceptual framework dated June 2023, points out that data represent a true fifth element in addition to fire, air, land and water.

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# *RECENSION*

***La guerra. Teoría para comprender los conflictos del siglo XXI***
***(war: theory for understanding 21st** century conflicts)*

*Published by: El Viejo Topo, 2024, (567) pages*

*ISBN 978-84-19778-95-6*

Federico Aznar Fernández-Montesinos is an excellent military man, an experienced analyst of the historical and current complexities of geopolitics and a profound thinker on questions of violence, the phenomenon of war and the ethics of combatants. Federico is all of this and much more. For those who are acquainted with him and have had the good fortune to work alongside him, the military man, the analyst and the thinker meld into the figure of a wise communicator, with whom one is never bored but always comes away better informed after a conversation with him.

A prolific author who has published several monographs and dozens of articles at the *Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies*, as well as in other prestigious journals, in this book *War: theory for understanding 21st century conflicts*, a complete compendium of his thoughts and erudition on the subject of war, not in terms of data and names of battles, generals or years, but in terms of its intrinsically human essence and the multiple perspectives on it that have existed since the world came into being; arising from technological change, towards greater lethality, but also discussing its religious implications, above all, the moral and political justifications as posited by man to explain destruction and war. "Glory is fleeting, but darkness is eternal", is one of the maxims attributed to Napoleon about the battlefield. In this monumental book (600 pages), based on dozens of sources and a profound reflection, Federico Aznar deals not so much with glory —if there by any in war— rather, he seeks to offer us a light amidst its darkness.

The book is an authentic manual for reflecting on war as a political activity, there is no other definition because it is not a compendium of strategies, tactics or means of warfare throughout history, but rather how the battlefield is a reflection of political motivation. For this reason, and like war itself, the book is timeless, as it offers us an analysis with references from authors belonging to different eras, including our own where everything is more complex but almost nothing has been invented: hybrid warfare, the grey zone, disinformation, post-truth, manipulation of the narrative and technology. It is the latter, applied to the realm of warfare, that has truly made warfare more sophisticated with its advances, but in essence, it is a soldier and his rifle that symbolise victory or defeat. We see this, for example, in Ukraine.

The work begins with an introduction, *Apología de la imperfección* (*An apologia for imperfection*), essential reading if we are to understand the rest of the narrative. In it, the author justifies his approach and reveals his aspect of humanist military man in its fullness, vindicating imperfection as liberating and closer to the truth than bureaucratically impeccable poses that are bereft of actual intellectual content. Similar to Edward Thorndike on the theory of war, for Federico Aznar, learning by trial and error defines not only combat, but is also the way to approach any subject from a scientific perspective. More specifically, one sees the polemicist who, like Gaston Bouthoul decades ago, perceives war as a phenomenon that may be analysed and shaped as another terrible but no less true means, of resolving disputes and conflicts.

The ten chapters that make up the work do not follow a specific structure, although they are ordered chronologically. They are presented according to the different themes that Federico Aznar explores in relation to war. The first is a reflection on the philosophy of war, from its vision in the narrative and mythology of classical Greece to the formation of Polemology at the end of the 20th century, all of this in order to determine the author's definition of the phenomenon of war. An honest and clear definition: war is a social activity whose modes vary over time, but whose limits are highly imprecise, within a confrontation between different powers, which are not usually asymmetrical, on the other hand.

How a war starts and evolves is also the subject of Federico Aznar's analysis. It goes back to what is undoubtedly the greatest work on war, at least in the West, Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War*, perhaps the first history and polemological handbook of a war, thought in the 5th century BCE to be global. "War [...] brings most men's passions to the same level as their circumstances", Thucydides wrote, in a definition that could be applied to any era. In *Slaughterhouse Five*, which evokes the brutal Allied bombing of Dresden during World War II and which the author himself survived as a German POW, Kurt Vonnegut has a character state something very similar to Thucydides, but in an updated form: "You can't say anything intelligent about a massacre".

The author also immerses us in the debate about the humanity or inhumanity of war: what is its limit?, the number of victims?, their helplessness?, the fairness or unfairness of the arguments for making war, and can other phenomena such as the genocide of non-combatant civilian populations be considered war? Much of this also has to do with how acts of war are portrayed to the public and the ability of power to convince the public of the appropriateness of war not for the outside world, but for their own societies. The use of language, for example, talking about conflict rather than war or the terms crisis and resilience show that mastery of the message can lead to mastery of the story, but not of reality: "conceal the plans you have in mind", wrote Sun Tzu in his famous *Art of War*.

The third section is dedicated to the vision of war from the two very different cultural approaches of the West and the East, each with its own intrahistory and historical trajectory. Nor are there two monolithic definitions, but different nuances marked by the passage of time and political events. In Europe, Romantic idealism and later pragmatic realism regarding the fact of war is countered by a certain ambiguity in its evaluation by Islam, linking the warlike with the religious around the Jihad and its different perceptions, plus Eastern cultural perspectives, especially Chinese and Japanese, where war becomes the disturbing element of a celestial order transferred to the social order with the ruler at its head. Sun Tzu has his own epigraph, for Federico Aznar he is essential for his thoughts on multiple matters, not solely on war.

But if war is a unique phenomenon of the confrontation of powers throughout history, what types of war are detectable over time? Beyond his classifications according to causes, reasons or technologies specific to each era, Federico Aznar offers us a compendium based on the studies of William Lind (1989) and his four generations of wars —we are in the last stage, that of globalisation—, the three waves of Alvin and Heidi Toffler (1993), as well as the work of Lt. Col. Andrés González Martín, an important specialist and, like the author, an analyst at the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies.

Ultimately, the typology of warfare is closely related to its expansion throughout society from an earlier time when the battlefield was reserved for a specialised minority of combatants. Today, society as a whole is both an aggressor and a victim of war, a phenomenon that may be traced back to the revolutionary wars of the late 18th century. When we speak of total war as characterising the two world conflicts of the 20th century, we should not forget that the concept of total war emerged in the debates of the French Convention of 1793 on the external war of the monarchies against the young republic and the internal war between the latter and its traditionalist opponents in the Vendée, alongside the concept of nation in arms.

As previously stated, today we are facing fourth-generation wars and Federico Aznar dedicates his 5th chapter to them. Since the 1990s, rather than national, wars have tended to be local and popular, spurred on by tremendous technological advances and, in the West at least, the emergence of new social values that influence the phenomenon of war. This confusion is compounded by the plurality of actors involved. No longer just states, they involve transnational and non-state armed groups that bring violence in a way that is as surprising as it is terrifying into the hearts of our supposedly safe societies, and even to countries officially declared non-combatant.

The phenomenon of terrorism is the subject of chapter 6, recalling that its concept emerged during the French revolutionary process under the ascendancy of Robespierre, when his great friend Saint-Just placed terror on the agenda of the National Assembly. However, more than two hundred years later, there is no unanimous and accepted definition and terrorism has sometimes been confused with asymmetric and insurgent warfare, for example, with certain forms of struggle against the French invaders in Spain during the Peninsular War, i.e., the famed guerrillas. The section concludes with interesting analyses and case studies of jihadism and the lone wolf phenomenon that have recently hit Western societies so hard.

Chapter 7 introduces us to the relationship between geopolitics and war, which are complementary from a historical point of view, yet highly perceptible in the current situation marked by globalisation as the keystone. Federico Aznar highlights some intrinsic factors of current geopolitics, such as the perception of disorder common to processes of transition and crisis, which tends to degenerate into insecurity; the participation of multiple actors beyond the state; the confusion between internal and external violence; and, above all, the involvement of society as a whole, whether wanted or not, but which is no longer oblivious to geopolitical ups and downs, although it may seem otherwise. A society today is increasingly permeated by a warmongering hysteria, as Edgar Morin rightly points out in his work *De guerre en guerre*.

On the other hand, to speak of contemporary geopolitics is to explain certain concepts associated with it. This is what Federico Aznar does when he explains the origins and meanings of terms such as hard power, soft power, smart power, the grey zone and hybrid warfare, which, although its definition was consolidated in 2005, owes much to the groundbreaking work *Unrestricted Warfare* by Chinese colonels Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui (1999), which had already highlighted the importance of narrative, propaganda and fake news, factors that jointly pose a serious problem for the credibility of messages in global geopolitical dialectics. The author closes the section with a case study of the current war in Ukraine.

The eighth section is the most voluminous and is devoted to the relationship between war and technology, which has become the key to conflicts, from the development of the bow and arrow and cavalry in ancient times to nuclear weapons and cybernetics today. Technology brings great disruptive value to warfare, often tipping the balance one way or the other, and even today, great powers aspire to win a conflict without actually engaging in combat, minimising risks through technological difference. For the author, outer space has become, in connection with cyberspace, the new framework of technological competition for warfare, as any event will have enormous economic, social and security consequences.

The penultimate chapter, chapter 9, harks back to the beginning of the book: is war another way to achieve peace? Although it may seem a dialectical contradiction, this is the case, a harmful path possibly, but one with a theoretical ultimate goal, which would be to reach a pre-war starting point marked by peace. Nevertheless, Benjamin Franklin is credited as having declared that a bad peace is always preferable to a good war.

Federico Aznar analyses other questions regarding the consequences of an imperfect peace, and depending on the nature of the peace, the loser's narrative, which is largely explained by the arrogant attitude of the winner. It is the image of the injustice of a peace imposed by the former. The clearest example may be the German desire for revenge after World War I against the Versailles Diktat. This narrative influences future conflicts. In his *Stellar Moments of Humankind*, Stefan Zweig devotes a chapter to US President Woodrow Wilson's unsuccessful attempts to get the French and British to temper their hatred of the Germans in the negotiations leading up to the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. The section concludes by analysing peace operations, a contemporary phenomenon that also brings its contradictions as well as serious consequences for both countries: the one providing troops and the one receiving them in the guise of international aid. It includes a case study on peace processes in Colombia.

Lastly, chapter 10 offers us the author's conclusions and final reflections on the phenomenon of war as a political fact but one that has indelible social and cultural factors without which it would not be understood. Thus, war is a means of settling, through violence, a conflict between powers:

> "War is first and foremost a clash of powers, a clash in all its dimensions. And it is neither ethical, nor just, nor economic, nor medical (it may be defined in such terms as an epidemic of polytrauma)... nor even military. It is a political act, an act of power management, so that any analysis made without taking this fact into account, that is, referring solely to one of the levels, is incomplete, and therefore false and profoundly erroneous. War is a function, an instrument of politic".

The book includes a glossary of terms and an extensive bibliography, which are particularly interesting and enriching. The glossary offers clear and concise definitions of the key terms used throughout the text, facilitating the understanding of concepts, while the bibliography is exhaustive and demonstrates the extensive documentation and references with which Federico Aznar delves into all the topics addressed with his usual rigour and erudition. He is to be congratulated on this extensive and indispensable work.

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# *REVIEW*

***Observar el arroz crecer: como habitar un mundo liderado por China (watching rice grow: how to inhabit a world led by China)***

*Published by: Ariel, 2023, (512) pages*

*ISBN 978-969-84-34436022*

China's development in recent decades —to the West's surprise— has led to a new reality where the Asian power will play a fundamental role in establishing a new world order. This raises the question of whether the West is ready for this process or not.

We can no longer live on the sidelines of China's rise in the 21$^{st}$ century given that will influence all areas of our lives. Therefore, it is necessary to understand and approach this country in an objective manner, to comprehend how the Chinese think, how they view the world, and what their customs are. After all, they know more about the West than we know about them.

This is precisely the purpose of this book by Julio Ceballos. After seventeen years of experience living in China as a business consultant, Ceballos' story brings us closer to this country in a pleasant, empathetic and friendly way. Based on experience, the humour of comparisons and the awareness that, in certain aspects, the West is going to shrink, the author sets out his vision of the aspects that the Western population should at least know about China, ones that are both removed and yet so close to our lives.

The book's title is worth discussing. Rice is the staple food of the Chinese. Although now largely mechanised, rice cultivation is a tough process where both planting and harvesting involves maintaining a stooped posture with feet sunk into the insect and leech-infested mud. Through this agricultural practice, the Chinese have not only succeeded in alleviating hunger but have also acquired a philosophy of life in which they have also learned to cultivate patience.

In 88 chapters with attractive titles, Ceballos entertainingly and fluidly introduces the reader to the complex world of China. Based on the author's vision that "China is as it is and not as we would like it to be", the book contains personal anecdotes and numerous examples of very different cultural aspects that can cause great perplexity in Westerners, such as the practice of traditional fishing, tea, the metaphysical dimension of food, festivities, funerary curiosities, greetings, language, family celebrations, the non-verbal language of the Chinese at negotiation tables where they appear to say yes but are saying no, the willingness to change the rules of the game established in a negotiation, or the justification that copying is not copying, it is adapting. This is the very least that anyone interested in approaching the Asian giant should consider.

The book also describes what Chinese society is like today and how the Communist Party of China (CPC) is determined to ensure that its people have the resources they need to achieve development and stability. China's growing population of 1.4 billion people is increasingly urban, increasingly competitive and increasingly monitored by a system of cameras that have been integrated into every aspect of daily life. This method, although difficult to conceive from the perspective of our Western freedoms, is nevertheless an effective system for managing these growing cities. At least this is how the Chinese see it and how they assume it, according to Ceballos.

From a technological standpoint, the author defines China as "the global laboratory from which the trends of the future emerge". And the figures corroborate this assertion. China ranks second in the list of countries investing in R&D, and the leader in registering new technology patents. In this sense, from a Western point of view, it is striking to explore how a country deprived of the freedom to express a different opinion can still develop all this potential for creativity. But this is where the highly competitive nature of the Chinese population, whose public offices are chosen through a system of meritocracy, comes into play. To get ahead in life or to study at university, the Chinese people have a tough road ahead of them where it is not enough to be good, they must be better than the rest. If, as the author assumes, China will lead the world, Western professionals will have to see how to coexist with Chinese professionals who have the competitive gene in their DNA. Once again, this highlights the importance of understanding the reality of China, which is the goal of this book.

According to the author, China regards the hegemony of the West —specifically the US— as a historical anomaly. Deeply rooted in its traditions, China claims its place as the power it once was thousands of years ago. From a geopolitical point of view, Ceballos believes that the best thing that can happen to the world is a powerful China in balance with the US. Although considered a threat by US policymakers, if China were to collapse, so would the entire planet. The bonds between them are so strong that it will be difficult to completely decouple the two powers. Perhaps the right strategy to avoid provoking a global catastrophe with unforeseeable consequences should focus not so much on derailing China as on finding a formula to coexist with it, the author argues.

China's long-term strategic vision clashes squarely with the electoral short-termism of established Western democracies. While the US and the EU are undergoing one of the critical periods of social conflict, polarisation and internal crisis, Ceballos argues that China's future is tied to the survival of the CCP. To this end, the long-term strategy is based on nation-building, sustained economic progress, security and social peace. This vision serves to explain the implementation of any CCP policy, be it domestic, foreign, defence, education, demographic, industrial or environmental. All of these efforts are headed in the same direction, which is why China has slowly and patiently brought about its great change over the past decades.

In such a disruptive time as the 21$^{st}$ century, China has a useful pliability, flexibility and resilience to deal with new threats. These qualities-which the author equates with traditional bamboo-represent a great advantage over the West. According to Ceballos, China is calling for progress with the awareness of its past strength and of an available future, as it continues with the long-term implementation of its plans. Within this future, Ceballos also mentions China's plans for the conquest of space, defence policy, monetary decoupling, and artificial intelligence. All of these trends have been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

The work also discusses the issue of Taiwan. Any discussion of China must include a reference to the reunification process with the island. World peace depends on it. The Indo-Pacific region is the most populous and has the highest growth potential in the world, but its economic and geopolitical stability will depend on how the Taiwan situation is resolved.

For Ceballos, China is a work in progress, capable of adapting economic systems such as capitalism or communism as well as religions such as Buddhism, to its own way of seeing the world. With this capacity for adaptation, we are facing a challenge that has never been faced before: the interdependence and rivalry between East and West. Two world views that clash but are not incompatible, and which cannot turn their backs on each other, as the author points out. In a highly stressed global system, the Chinese model of governance, coexistence and survival based on collectives emerges as an alternative to the US model of democratic values and may be very attractive to other developing countries. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a test to see which system is more competent to face an uncertain future where the only constant is change, as stated in the philosophy of the *I Ching* or the *Book of Changes*.

The future is highly complex, and China seeks to re-establish its historic position at the centre of the geopolitical chessboard. According to Ceballos, we shall all recede sooner or later, in one way or another, and for this reason, we require considerable cultural intelligence as regards China. The solution does not lie in waiting for China's decline, but rather in valuing and claiming how competitive, innovative and valid the West continues to be despite its smaller population and despite possibly losing its leading position in the world economy in the coming years.

This book helps us to objectively explore this panorama, with the aim of helping to understand without justifying the Chinese reality, using a pleasant language that brings a smile to the reader's face. All of the above without the audacity to pretend to offer in-depth knowledge because, as Ceballos points out, not even China, for all its magnitude, knows itself completely.

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