

Ukraine, sequencing and denial

7/2022 Albert Świdziński

The war in Ukraine unleashed by Russia represents the most serious challenge that has been faced by the United States since the end of the Cold War, a clear challenge to both the international order and the rules of the road established by Washington during the unipolar moment. In fact, the most important postulate that was part of the list of demands made by Russia against the collective West in December 2021 was the recognition of Russia's right to have its own sphere of influence - and thus accepting its imperial status.



(Source: Wikipedia)

The US could not agree to meet these demands, as this would mean voluntarily accepting the change of its status in the international system, not claiming the rights to the hegemonic status it obtained after the collapse of the USSR. And this - giving up the right to have spheres of influence - the United States is

not ready to do, neither vis-à-vis Russia or China - which, moreover, is the key difference in Washington's management of rivalry with Beijing compared to the period of rivalry with the USSR, when Washington did not question the fact that the USSR had its own sphere of influence and Moscow's prerogative to manage it, also by force - as happened in 1956 in Hungary, or 12 years later in Czechoslovakia.

At the same time, the unsuccessful course of the war in Ukraine for Russia gives the United States a unique opportunity to implement a strategy of sequencing rivalry with two countries that are trying to bring about a revision of the international order established by the United States - namely China and Russia. However, this strategy can only be implemented if Washington succeeds in bringing about a permanent halt to Russian expansionism in Europe.

Preventing Russia from gaining a sphere of influence is crucial for the United States for two reasons. Firstly, if Russia's plans were successful, US allied credibility would diminish and its role as a security guarantor would be undermined - both in Europe and in Asia. This, in turn, would mean there was no longer any real justification for a continued US presence in Europe. American security guarantees are not needed by France, the Netherlands or Spain. Russia is not able to threaten these countries militarily, any more than it is able to threaten Germany in this way - and there is no reason to try to do so.

The Russians wanted a sphere of influence and wanted to get it without consulting America. This would lead - after a necessary period of brief official mourning - to the emergence in Europe of conditions for a concert of powers. The energy policy pursued by Germany for years has created a powerful lever for Russia, because it was access to cheap energy from Russia that allowed Berlin to maintain the competitiveness of its own industry while maintaining a high standard of living and an extensive social system. In addition, European countries paid for this energy in euros (which can always be reprinted), which Russia could then reinvest in European securities. This created a kind of closed system, operating on principles similar to those that had been in force since the 1970s between the United States and Arab oil producers. The power of this lever is clearly visible now, when, facing the prospect of drastic gas shortages, the political leadership of the German state openly communicates that there is a high probability of gas rationing, not excluding possible interruptions in gas supplies to individual consumers. If Germany fails to bring the war to an end as soon as possible and to normalise relations with Russia, preferably on the basis of the status quo ante, the German economic model will collapse.

In this context, it is easier to understand Germany's gradual withdrawal from the most severe forms of economic sanctions imposed on Russia, or attempts to pacify Lithuania over the supply of goods to Kaliningrad, or Berlin's reluctance to supply arms to the Ukrainian armed forces. Berlin simply needs to do everything to bring relations with Russia back to business as usual. Germany's degree of dependence on the energy coming from Russia also explains why Vladimir Putin decided on February 24 on such a risky gambit as the attack on Ukraine. If the Kremlin's initial plan to launch a swift operation to neutralise the Ukrainian political leadership had been successful, the pressure from Western European countries to accept the status quo would have been enormous. At the same time, the United States would have found itself one foot outside the European system of the game for balance, remaining in it only because of the fears of the eastern flank countries. These in turn would then become - once again in their history - the buffer zone *par excellence* and the sole obstacle to further continental consolidation. The resulting balance of power would also allow Russia to increasingly question the status of Central and Eastern European countries, primarily the Baltic states, but also Poland - and who

knows if, observing the helplessness of the United States and being under pressure from Berlin, Paris or Brussels, they would not start to seriously consider compliance with it. There would also be no talk of Finland and Sweden joining NATO, or even the timid attempts to regain subjectivity by Belarus.

The United States would therefore become an unnecessary, even undesirable element of the political landscape, not only in Europe but even throughout Eurasia. History would start to rhyme again, and the game for balance would be between France, Germany and Russia, while Poland and other countries in the region would play the role of God's lining. Great Britain - perfidious Albion! - would once again try to practise offshore balancing, which London invented and patented. [It was only after defeat that they "outsourced" the USA.] Free from the pressures of the Americans, and perhaps their physical presence, the European Union under the leadership of Berlin could finally achieve its goal of strategic sovereignty. On the other hand, sovereignty allows for a fully independent setting of priorities, for example foreign policy. There is no reason to think that the independently determined directions and goals of the foreign policy of European countries would be similar to those set by the United States. Such coordination between Washington and Brussels is particularly unlikely in the case of China, which is not perceived by European capitals as a threat but as a business partner - both as a key element of European value chains and as a sales market. This was also expressed by Josep Borrell, who said in April that the EU is "very, very far from perceiving China as the same threat as Russia (...) Russia is certainly a serious threat to countries in its neighbourhood, while we do not consider China a military threat to the EU," and more recently VAG president Herbert Diess, who said that, "the extent to which German prosperity is dependent on China is underestimated."

Second, stopping Russian expansionism towards the West is, as Wess Mitchell argues, a key element in the strategy of "sequencing" US rivalry with China and Russia. According to Mitchell, at the present stage of relations in the Washington-Beijing-Moscow triangle, it is impossible to manage the rivalry with the two aforementioned countries other than by selective (because only in the West) defeating Russia and permanently breaking its potential for westward expansion, and then proposing its specific kind of reset, consisting in presenting it with an alternative to ever closer cooperation with China. The United States must therefore bring about a situation in which they provide Russia with arguments - in the form of both a stick and a carrot - so that it abandons its ambitions to become a European power and focuses on developing the traditionally underdeveloped eastern parts of the country.

In this context, it is worth mentioning the vision of simultaneous management by the United States of the rivalry with China and Russia presented by Wess Mitchell in July last year in the pages of National Interest. Incidentally, the text in NI is a short description of a much longer study by Mitchell, which was published on The Marathon Initiative website, but commissioned by the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment (ONA), in which Mitchell describes it using historical examples (from the Byzantine Empire through the Republic of Venice to Austria-Hungary) of ways of sequencing by these state organisms emerging rivals appearing at the same time. Mitchell's text is an extremely rare occasion to read a study written for the Office of Net Assessment - and, surprisingly, it does not contain any secret knowledge, spy secrets about the maximum speed of the MiG-29 or the thickness of the tank's armour. Instead, it is a historical study, written in a balanced academic language: an anthology of the problems of dead empires. And such a text, not detailed, technical and full of top secret information (this is how we imagine secret documents in Poland, right?), WAS needed - because it is an appropriate query, selection and application of commonly known knowledge in order to present analogies to problems facing the United States. This is the essence of knowledge. Such knowledge, when properly used, can be a powerful

weapon and the basis of a competitive strategy. Dakota Wood, who used to work for ONA himself, explained to me that this is most often what the studies prepared for the Office of Net Assessment look like.

Mitchell states that at this stage of the competition it is impossible to use more classic forms of sequencing of opponents, such as "inverting" the weaker one. [See Nixon's manoeuvre.] This is because the partial granting of concessions to Russia (such as the transfer to it of Ukraine) would not guarantee that it would turn away from China, but would instead create the danger that its expansionist tendencies towards the West would only be strengthened further. It can be added that this is especially probable in the face of close ties, due to the above-discussed close cooperation in the field of energy, and the interests of Germany and Russia. An attempt by the US to grant a concession to Russia would only bring closer the vision of Washington's final pushing out of Europe (and Eurasia), and thus the consolidation of the continental project, perhaps taking the form of a Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok. In this architecture, the US presence is simply undesirable.

Mitchell also argues that the second classic form of rival sequencing that is impossible in the current geopolitical configuration is to postpone competition with the stronger opponent (as the Republic of Venice did, focusing on rivalling Milan at the expense of clashing with the Ottoman Empire). This path is closed, laconically speaking, because the Washington-Beijing rivalry has already gone too far, entering a phase of acute, fairly open conflict. An attempt to soften the rhetoric towards Beijing could therefore not improve relations, but could instead be seen as a symptom of weakness and would encourage the PRC to adopt a more aggressive policy towards, for example, Taiwan. The third and most elegant solution would be to co-opt, and thus convince both China and Russia that it is in their best interest to maintain the current international order, and thus to make them abandon their revisionist ambitions. Of course, this is impossible, because both Beijing and Moscow believe that the current international order - in which the United States is *primus inter pares* - creates fundamental constraints on their further development. This is especially true of China, which realises it is gaining momentum while the United States is in relative decline.

Therefore, as Mitchell argues, the US must employ a different strategy, a kind of modification of Nixon's "reversal" of the weaker tandem of opponents. This is possible due to the fact that Russia, which is economically and demographically weak, should feel the fear of becoming excessively dependent on Beijing, especially with the growing assertiveness of the Middle Kingdom. The United States should therefore "sharpen the dilemmas facing Russia and make sure that as concerns about China's might grow, it is presented with other options for pursuing a foreign policy focused on aggression against the West." This does not mean, however, that the US should attempt to appease Russia at all costs. "On the contrary, it should be done on the assumption that any reduction in tensions will result from Moscow's cool calculation that a *détente* with the West will serve their interests better than continuing the current aggressive policy. Instead of asking 'at what price' we can achieve *détente* with Russia, we should ask, 'under what conditions' we can imagine Russia taking the same path - and establish these conditions." The United States should therefore permanently prevent Russia from expanding to the West, forcibly breaking its ambitions in this strategic direction, because "the more Russia is aware of the impossibility of pursuing its ambitions in Europe and the more it begins to see an alternative to surrendering to Chinese domination in the East," the less Moscow's and Washington's interests will become contradictory. To successfully implement this strategy, two conditions must be met: first, the Russians must break their teeth when attempting to expand to the West, because "as history proves, the Russians

begin to seriously consider *détente* with the enemy only in the face of a serious defeat." Secondly, having blocked Russia's path to expansion in Europe, the United States, together with its Asian allies (primarily Japan), should offer Moscow a real alternative to Chinese investments in the Far East, Siberia and Central Asia, which would limit the synergy effect between China and Russia, instead creating potential trouble spots in the relations between the two countries.

How to block Russian expansion to the west? Well, as Mitchell wrote in July 2021, the United States should deal Russia with a defeat similar to that experienced by imperial Russia during the war with Japan. "Today the equivalent of Port Arthur or Afghanistan," Mitchell writes, "is Ukraine." "The United States should strive for Russia to suffer such a military defeat in Ukraine to force its political leadership to reconsider" the viability of Western expansion. "America can achieve this goal in the same way as in Afghanistan: by providing local people with the tools to resist Russia more effectively, and by encouraging Europeans to do the same." "Every pivot needs a fulcrum - for us it is Ukraine," Mitchell concludes.

The very way in which the US managed the situation around Ukraine, both before the outbreak of the war and during it, is also interesting. First, the United States - whose leadership was convinced of the inevitability of a Russian invasion in the autumn of last year - decided not to appease Russia. Despite signalling a readiness to make certain concessions, including limiting the exercises of NATO forces on the eastern flank of the Alliance, the White House was not ready to accept all Russia's demands, including, in particular, the declaration that Ukraine would not join NATO - so they were not ready to accept Russia's right to have a sphere of influence - which was a *sine qua non* condition for avoiding war. At the same time, the Americans did not take steps to effectively deter Russians from invading Ukraine - they did not provide the country with adequate measures to think about effective repulsion of the Russian offensive, they did not decide to deploy their own armed forces to Ukraine, nor did they provide Ukraine with binding security guarantees. As a result of these two factors, Washington led to a deterrence failure and thus created a situation in which the Kremlin decided to enter the war. Third, a unique and unprecedented element of American policy in the months leading up to the outbreak of the war was the policy of full disclosure and open communication of information obtained by American intelligence and diplomacy regarding Russian preparations for the war, combined with *urbi et orbi* communication of the belief that the Russians are determined to attack Ukraine. This kind of action also knows no precedent. If the Americans wanted to warn Kyiv or European capitals about the coming war, they could pass this information through diplomatic channels. If they would like to induce a reaction, for example in European capitals, they should lead, pull the undecided with them, and thus avoid the failure of deterrence. However, they did not. Instead, they made their assessment of the situation publicly stating that war was inevitable, limiting Russia's own room for manoeuvre.

It is not this author's intention to claim that the Americans deliberately provoked the deterrence and war in Ukraine in order to start implementing Mitchell's strategy of sequencing US strategic rivals. Such a thesis would be a classic example of conspiracy theory, with all the problems that they are usually burdened with; aside from the sheer difficulty in carrying out such a plan, the States would not be able to control the behaviour of a number of players in the game; Russia might not have chosen to attack; alternatively, the initial phase of the operation could have been successful, Zelenskiy could have accepted an offer, as he called it, a "ride" presented to him by the Americans, which would have resulted in the Russians overthrowing the authorities in Kyiv (which, after all, would not undermine the "Afghan" scenario presented by Mitchell). In any case, the fact is that due to the failure of the Russian

war, the Americans found themselves in a position to implement Mitchell's threat sequencing strategy. At the same time, Russia's military weakness, on the one hand, and fears of a possible escalation (including the use of nuclear weapons) on the other, pose a dilemma for the United States, which can be described by the question: how much is enough? That is why the Americans probably do not want to provide Ukraine with such forces that would allow it to think realistically not about not losing the conflict, but about victory and regaining the territories lost in 2014.

If the United States really wanted to permanently concrete the road for Russian expansion in Europe, it should abandon the deterrence by punishment strategy it has so far preferred, i.e. deploying trip-wire forces and the promise to reclaim the territories lost to Russia, in favour of deterrence by denial. Thus placing forces on the eastern flank that would make it possible to think about preventing Russia from succeeding. Until recently, it seemed that it would be impossible in the face of the conventional strength of the Russian armed forces, but in the aftermath of the war in Ukraine, it seems that it could be within the reach of US forces, even if Washington continued to treat competition with China as a priority - especially since the military capabilities of US ground forces are not crucial in the context of a potential war in the Pacific. It is not certain, however, whether Washington will actually decide to apply such force posture. However, it is becoming more and more certain that the possible form of cooperation in strengthening the defence potential of the eastern flank countries will take place not within NATO structures - but in cooperation within a coalition of the willing. It is worth noting here that despite the triumphal announcements, the recent NATO summit in Madrid did not bring any breakthrough decisions, but rather emphasised the trend of transforming NATO into a political, not a military alliance. This could be seen in the statements of representatives of the American administration (including, for example, Celeste Wallander, who emphasised the importance of bilateral relations with Warsaw). By the way - is there a better example that it is not values and morality but geopolitical realities that determine the shape of state policy, such as the diplomatic intensification between Washington and Warsaw? Does anyone remember the information that the Polish authorities did not congratulate Joe Biden on winning the elections in dozens of ways? Or that Biden did not speak to President Duda for months? The fact that the White House has reservations about compliance with the rule of law in Poland? All these factoids, so thoroughly discussed by all sorts of experts, turned out to be completely irrelevant in the end.

Everything indicates that Poland and the United States will be doomed to each other. The war in Ukraine revealed the key role that access to cheap energy sources plays for the political director of the European Union, Germany, and what concessions Berlin would be ready to make in order to maintain its current status of relations with Russia. The US, on the other hand, must be aware that its presence in Europe is desired above all, if not exclusively, by countries in the crush zone between Germany and Russia. This fact should counter the arguments of some American strategists, who quite short-sightedly demand that the administration in the White House fully focus on the rivalry with China. For if Mitchell is right, effective rivalry with China will only be possible if Russia permanently loses its appetite for attempts to establish a zone of influence on its western frontiers - and this is only possible if the United States is there.

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Poland in Ukraine – a Strategy&Future project

8/2022 Marek Budzisz

We have long proposed at Strategy&Future to increase Poland's activity "in the eastern direction", in particular in Ukraine. We've written about the importance of a policy aimed at keeping Russia outside the European system, which Poland would not be able to achieve on its own without Ukraine's participation. We've emphasised the importance of supply chains and control over the flows of goods and commodities.

Last summer, we called for the development of a Polish strategy in connection with the law adopted by the Verkhovna Rada releasing the land market in Ukraine, and we described the announcements of a great privatisation formulated by Zelensky's team. If the authorities of the Polish Republic had picked up at least some of our proposals and started taking action, today the situation, including Polish interests, could have looked a bit better.

The war changed a lot, also by abruptly improving Poland's strategic and political position in relations with Kyiv, as evidenced by, for example, the law adopted by the Verkhovna Rada granting citizens of the Polish Republic a special, privileged status. Thousands of personal testimonies and public opinion polls show that Poland and Poles, in the eyes of Ukrainian citizens, have become the closest, unique, partner, ally and friend. It is also obvious that without the military and logistical support of Poland, the continuation of the fight by the Ukrainian armed forces would be much more difficult, if at all possible. This is one of the important lessons of the war in Ukraine. Currently, Ukrainian entrepreneurs, preparing for the reconstruction of the country, talk about the need to build alternative logistics channels to those that have so far led through the Black Sea ports. For obvious reasons this also increases the importance of Poland. The ties of sympathy, political capital, logistical importance and direct military support are all factors that can increase the possibilities for Polish entrepreneurs during the upcoming reconstruction of Ukraine. Already now, as noted by one *Financial Times* commentator, we should begin to prepare for this, because reconstruction plans must be drawn up before there is even peace. Such, in his opinion, was the way during the Second World War, when the framework of the Marshall Plan was being built. Similar actions were taken during the Korean War. However, the difference between the present situation in which Ukraine has found itself and historical reconstruction plans is fundamental. The authorities in Kyiv calculate that the recovery of the country from the present devastation will "cost" at least \$750 billion, while the scale of the economic involvement of the West, both in connection with the Marshall Plan and the reconstruction of the potential in South Korea after the war was much smaller. *Financial Times* analysts have calculated that in the reconstruction of Europe after the devastation of World War II, the Americans under the so-called Marshall Plan committed \$156 billion in today's prices. Various forms of aid for Afghanistan have reached a total value of \$195 billion,

and for Iraq \$292 billion. This means that the scale of needs will be greater than ever in history, and this means both greater opportunities and much more serious challenges.

At Strategy&Future, we are convinced that Poland cannot miss this opportunity. The reconstruction of Ukraine, in which we should engage, gives us the opportunity to overcome the geostrategic consequences of the fall of the First Polish Republic, which can only be achieved by permanently pushing Russia out of European politics, and from a generational perspective, it enables us to make an economic and civilisational leap, offering a chance to rebuild relations with the EU so that they are more partnership-based and for our homeland to enter into the group of 20 most powerful economies in the world.

For this reason, we decided to initiate a new project within the framework of S&F, which we have tentatively titled Poland in Ukraine. We appeal to our subscribers, readers and listeners, especially entrepreneurs, to formulate tasks for public administration when describing the realities of the industries in which they operate and the previous experience related to attempts to enter the Ukrainian market. We want to show that Polish companies, both private and public, are already large players on a European scale that, independently or by creating capital consortia, can think about permanently establishing themselves on the Ukrainian market. We have experience, we have knowledge, we have capital and staff. What we lack, compared to our rivals from Germany or France, is that usually we are not, I mean our entrepreneurs, consistently supported by the Polish state. And that's what we want to change. We want to write what the public administration in Poland, our state, should change in its policy, but specifically without a general ideology, so that the participation of Polish companies in the reconstruction of Ukraine would be beneficial, both from the perspective of Kyiv and for our economy to become a factor accelerating the development, modernisation and growth. Therefore, we appeal for participation in our project.

Why is the prudent involvement of the Polish state in this work of supporting private capital investment in Ukraine necessary? Let's start with the theoretical issues. Michael J. Mazarr, a former researcher at the US Army War College, now at RAND, has — for the past 15 months, along with a group of other researchers — been looking for answers to the question of what makes certain nations grow faster, achieve a better position on a global scale and win the ongoing competition as others lose. These analyses were commissioned by the Office of Net Assessment, a key unit of American strategic planning, which, incidentally, makes us realise that Anglo-Saxon strategy is much more than just military matters. The result of their work is a very extensive report, 406 pages long,¹ which means that probably hardly anyone in Poland will read this work, and in political circles, both governmental and the more oppositionist, certainly no one, but Mazarr has published² in the prestigious Foreign Affairs magazine, a much shorter article on the same topic, the reading of which is a convenient starting point for looking for an answer to the question of what causes some nations to win in international, historical competition, while others fail. The main conclusion drawn by American scientists in their report is as follows - in their opinion, "In the fight for supremacy between world powers, it is not military or economic power that is of decisive importance, but the basic features of society: the characteristics of the nation that generate economic productivity, technological innovation, social cohesion and national will." Historical winners, Michael Mazarr argues, can lose battles, even wars. They can lose allies, they

¹ https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA499-1.html

² <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2022-06-21/what-makes-a-power-great>

can fight alone, and yet they can ultimately turn out to be winners. According to the RAND experts, who for this purpose conducted a series of analyses of historical cases, political science and economic research, the historical advantage is determined by a combination of several, and precisely seven factors that play a key role. These are: ambitions and will to act, strong identity and national cohesion, a common view on opportunities and areas of success, an active state, effective institutions (both social and state), a society that learns and easily adapts to new situations, as well as a culture of competition and pluralism. Each of these factors is important and it is a suitable mixture of them, in which synergistic effects will lead to increasing the possibilities of a given nation. A society internally at odds and divisive in terms of diagnosing the best political strategy in the long run, not temporarily, will not achieve much in historical competition. But even the greatest degree of unification of national goals and efforts will not do much if we do not have an efficient, modern state that will actively and intelligently strengthen and promote national goals.

The Americans strongly emphasise the well-structured balance of these factors, arguing that "competitive societies tend to be open, tolerant, full of intellectual energy and commitment to science; have a strong sense of their role in the world and a sense of mission or will to act; they almost always use strong public and private institutions, as well as a state apparatus that actively promotes their advantage; they embody the pluralistic clash of ideas and the ability of people from all walks of life to offer their talents and be successful. We call this specific mixture of features the spirit of the Renaissance." If the energy and ambition of society is not accompanied by a strong and active state, the chances of success in international competition in the historical dimension will be lower. Thus, what counts is the area of will, the sense of a community of goals and aspirations, as well as political and national ambitions that must support strong and efficient public institutions. This mix is just the beginning of success, of course: not its guarantee, but the lack of a sense of community, divisions, internal conflicts, lack of agreement as to the most optimal great national strategy, is a sure source of failure.

As Mazarr argues in his article, "perhaps the basis of all forms of relative national strength is some version of national ambition." It is about a sense of mission that motivates individuals and the whole society, the common pursuit of a goal that binds the nation and the will to achieve success. Of course, it is easy to get led astray in this area. History knows many examples where the belief in one's own uniqueness and striving to take a privileged place in the family of nations led to tragedy on a global dimension. These dangers must always be kept in mind, but that is not what this is about. I think the American researchers mean a common goal that unites the efforts of an entire generation and motivates society to make greater efforts. Mazarr writes that "to develop national ambitions requires the involvement of the entire nation in gaining knowledge about the world and a common will to influence it: discovering and controlling, understanding and guiding. This impulse can easily go wrong. Excessive national ambition is a common path to defeat, be it through destructive wars of choice or imperial conquests that unduly distract the nation's resources and provoke negative reactions. But without such ambitions, countries rarely build efficient "economic" and technological engines or win the competition for power." Ambitions do not guarantee success if it is not accompanied by an inclusive, open society that creates favourable conditions for the development of human capital. Excessive hierarchy, systems of inheritance of influence, importance and position, the advantage of the corporate approach, but also excessive income inequality in the long run reduce social vitality, preserving the structures of power and influence, and thus weaken the power of the state. As the RAND analysts argue, "highly competitive societies also benefit from some version of an active state: a cohesive, powerful, goal-oriented and

effective government that invests in national capabilities and beneficial social characteristics." Thus, it is not the "free hand of the market", the liquidation of the state, or its gradual withdrawal to the position of the "night watchman" that is the source of historical success, but on the contrary — an active state defending national interests (although not necessarily omnipotent, wishing to solve all problems) is the source of success. And again, as in the previous areas, it is about finding the best, individual model in which synergies can be realised, meaning that the strength and dynamism of society would be supported and not limited by a strong and efficient state. Such a rational system of equilibrium must be based on efficient institutions, both social (family, school) and public, although not necessarily the domain of the state or administration (parliament, the judicial system, the financial system). This should be accompanied by social respect and appreciation for learning and the learning process itself.

In this context, we must also see the announcements of positive changes in Ukraine, the awareness of the fundamental decisions facing the local political class and the numerous opportunities that, if properly used by us, can program the development of both Poland and Ukraine for years. I've written recently at S&F about the reform plans announced by Deputy Prime Minister Julia Swidirienco, which, if successful, will be a free-market breakthrough.³ Now the Ukrainian government is announcing the acceleration of its universal privatisation program.⁴ The Supreme Council passed a law on rapid privatisation,⁵ and already this month the government announced the liquidation or sale of 420 enterprises. Ultimately, out of the current 3.5 thousand state-owned enterprises (1.8 thousand of which are no longer working, although they still have assets) about a hundred are to remain in state hands. Julia Swidirienco also declared the government's readiness to accept, in the case of new foreign investors, the jurisdiction of the British legal system in order to guarantee the security of trading and investments. It should also be noted that Ukrainian journalists specialising in economic issues, supporting the privatisation plans of Zelensky's team, justify the necessary radicalism and the need to carry out deep and not mock changes with the needs of the country's reconstruction. Gleb Kanewskij, head of the StateWatch organisation, wrote⁶, that the privatisation of public property should be a method of mobilising Ukraine's own resources in connection with the reconstruction needs and fears, or the international funds that Kyiv is going to obtain will prove to be adequate to the needs. Balázs Romhányi, director of the Budapest Fiscal Responsibility Institute, published an article in *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*, which aroused a discussion in the Ukrainian expert and political environment, and the presented proposals were taken seriously, as one of the possible institutional options for how Ukraine should start reconstruction and win the favour of capital markets. Romhanyi proposed that Ukraine relinquish some of its economic sovereignty for a while.⁷ He meant Kyiv's voluntary submission to the supervision of international "steering committees" composed of representatives of countries providing aid to Ukraine, as well as the adoption of all EU regulations, mainly anti-corruption ones. In this case, it is not about implementing all the proposals of the Hungarian financier into the Ukrainian legal system, but about the willingness of the political class in Kyiv to consider such far-reaching ideas in terms of rational political options. The war also changed the way Ukrainians themselves think about the future of their country. They want to be firmly rooted in the institutional world of the West, to move away from the oligarchic system, to equalise development opportunities, also in the social sense, and to break

³ <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/columns/2022/07/8/7357131/>

⁴ <https://www.epravda.com.ua/rus/columns/2022/07/30/689818/>

⁵ <https://www.epravda.com.ua/news/2022/07/28/689753/>

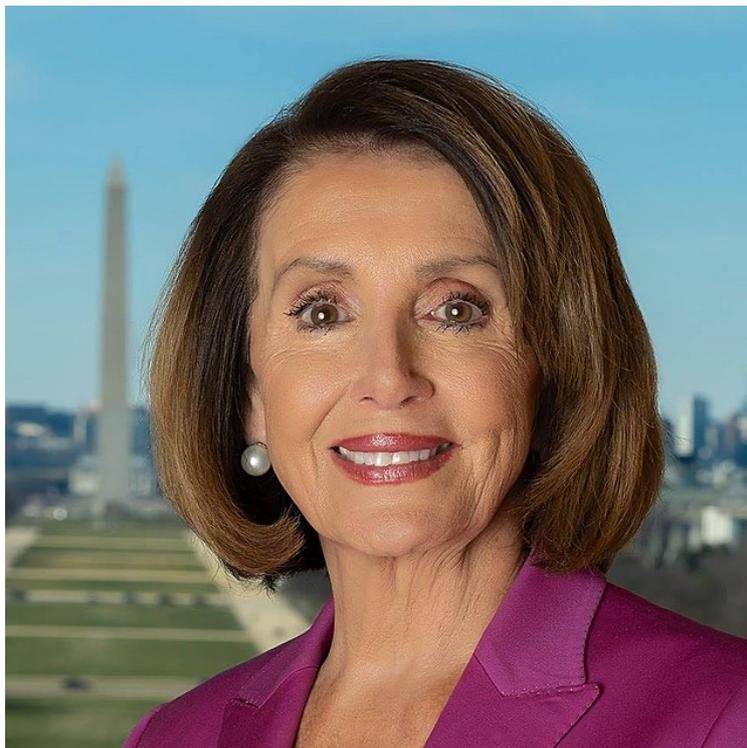
⁶ <https://www.epravda.com.ua/rus/columns/2022/08/2/689906/>

⁷ <https://zn.ua/macrolevel/ekonomicheskij-suverenitet-poslevoennoj-ukrainy-ni-shaha-nazad.html>

The scalable world war ahead

8/2022 Jacek Bartosiak

Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan begins a new era of confrontation between the US and China, and with it, marks the beginning of an already open conflict over Eurasia, this unique place where world history takes place and world wars are fought. It begins an era of war slightly different than the previous world wars, because it is scalable. Each of the subsequent system wars was obviously different from the previous one, so there is no surprise here. This time, in a scalable clash, each side will try to force its interests through various domains of contemporary dependencies in a densely globalised world that will be violently split open before our eyes.



(Source: Wikimedia Commons)

Pelosi's visit accelerates the process of sharp and violent decoupling of global globalisation, i.e. breaking, for geopolitical reasons, all the networks of financial, investment, capital, trade, commodity, internet and human (etc.) connections that have been a sign of the peaceful globalisation period and the result of Pax Americana in the last 30 years. It turned out that the great powers do not agree on the principles on which the world operates and on which they cooperate with each other. China, the US and Russia believe that the old model of global cooperation no longer serves their interests, that

they deserve more, so they demand that the interests of other countries and powers be matched with "their" desires, which does not suit others. Only old Europe would like everything to be the old way, naively thinking that the "old" will come back. Completely unprepared for the return of geopolitics, it is on the way to becoming the subject of the game of the three above-mentioned powers, a place of struggle, also a place of kinetic wars, and not the main actor of the war for the world with ambitions and strategic initiative.

The time of conflict is coming. War in many domains will be a constant issue on the agenda: trade, technology, finance, raw materials, currency market, data and internet, cyber attacks, point terror, attacks on infrastructure, operations of special services, drone attacks, executions, kidnappings and murders, fighting the information domain, the struggle for oceans and lands, for the control of communication nodes where strategic flows accumulate, even outer space. Finally, hot proxy wars, coups, revolutions and collapses of governments, and the quite likely direct clash between China and the USA in the Western Pacific, or a war of some NATO countries with Russia in our region.

The main focus of the conflict will be the manipulation of strategic flows and thus influencing the opponent's stability and social contract: banning the sale of microprocessors necessary in a modern economy to China and, in return, banning the export of sand to Taiwan necessary for the production of modern components and the existence of the construction industry; a ban on capital investments in China and, in return, expropriation of large American companies with production in China. And so on.

In addition, all kinds of sanctions, blockades, embargoes on trade and raw materials, false failures of energy transmission systems, attacks on infrastructure and various military demonstrations intended to disrupt the enemy's economy. A good example will be the effective sea and air quarantine of Taiwan in the course of the Chinese sea-air exercises or the unilateral announcement of the ban on flights by Russia over Lithuania or Poland, which may be broken one day, if the Russians want to prove that they won't be dictated to us with regards to what planes they fly and how come to Poland.

In this clash for the world, a kinetic war between the US and China in the Western Pacific regrettably becomes very likely, even seems to have to break out sooner rather than later, given the irreconcilable structural differences of interest between the two powers. For a critical imbalance in the world system has already arisen, which will be difficult perhaps impossible to correct in the foreseeable future without resorting to violence or force, and such an escalation naturally leads to war. The situation around Taiwan in connection with Pelosi's visit, and earlier Russia's ultimatum towards Ukraine, is a clear proof of this.

Fortunately, the existence of a thermonuclear weapon lowers the willingness of each side to enter into an uncontrolled conflict without reflection. It forces the obligation to escalate tensions, but to obtain something by using or threatening to use violence without stupidly starting a thermonuclear war. This makes the coming world war scalable and this is what sets it apart from previous world wars.

When entering the hot phase of system wars such as the Napoleonic wars, World War I or II, the attacking side immediately sent corps, fleet, infantry divisions, artillery, armoured divisions and air force, all that was necessary to defeat the enemy, conquer the capital by manoeuvring to paralyse the decision-making and political system. For then there were no weapons, the use of which destroys entire cities, states and nations.

Weapons such as thermonuclear weapons and their use on a strategic level (as to the tactical use of nuclear weapons, it can be discussed: who knows, maybe they will be used soon, and we will get used to it as we got used to the war in Ukraine and its brutality) neutralises the political goal of the war, which is political submission to the will of the loser. So it is useless for the realisation of a political goal, as it is for them to establish principles of cooperation that are convenient for one side. Thus, it destroys the strategy of securing a favourable set of interests in the future by war. This is the real cause of wars, they are not emotions and values, and certainly not the bad characters of leaders.

Above all, strategic thermonuclear weapons mobilise the potential of an automatic retaliatory attack on a strategic level between the great powers, taking the last rung of the escalation ladder with a big "boom". This was not the case in previous world wars. There was no need to think about calibrated actions and potential responses of the opponent on the multi-level escalation ladder, because sides wanted to immediately take a dominant position in the application of violence and take care only at the operational level for its effectiveness on the real battlefield. That was the way of the German *Blitzkrieg*, whose initial phenomenal operational efficiency diminished over time, leaving Hitler to look for a variety of *Wunderwaffen* at the end of the war.

I am not saying that nuclear weapons will not be used in the coming war. There are many indications (especially in the Russian strategic and military literature) that it is possible to "disenchant" the use of nuclear weapons, but even then the militant parties will always remember that at the strategic level they can mutually annihilate, which hampers the decision-making process and emphasises the management of an escalation ladder or truss. This is already evident in Washington's dealings with Ukraine and the Americans' reserve in providing Kyiv with the equipment that Ukraine could use to attack targets in Russia by climbing a higher step of the escalation ladder.

Therefore, the technological development and the existence of thermonuclear weapons mean that the war must be scalable. Sides cannot immediately reach (or threaten to reach) for the highest level of the escalation ladder, which was an armoured division or even a B-29 Superforteca strategic bomber with the first copies of the atomic bomb in 1945, to quickly force the opponent to the desired behaviour.

At the same time, the accumulation of mutual interactions between states is greater today than in the world wars of the past: trade, the global division of labour, global supply chains, and supra-regional flows of raw materials are larger and more intensified and diversified. So there are plenty of means of applying pressure or leverage in the endless game of agency. Just as there are more cases where violence can be used. Destruction of transshipment terminals, attacks on gas terminals in the USA,

attacks on transshipment ports in Europe, explosions in refineries in Russia, attack on terminals in Świnoujście, the kidnapping of decision makers, executions and other means of destabilisation, even terrorist actions against cities and societies that would affect the situation in the internal territory of the attacked country; the destruction of observation systems in space and the emerging competition in space, not forgetting about selective artillery or rocket fire, acts of sabotage or actions cutting off raw materials, etc.

Thus, there will be more need to ensure the resistance of the state to manipulation of strategic flows and less discussion about the number of soldiers from the 20th century. The real capabilities of the military to modern war and the application of violence, often remotely, and the resilience of the state will be more important than empty numbers of soldiers and equipment shown (as if being shown to schoolchildren) in parallel tables. The ability to effectively manipulate strategic flows, the country's resilience to such manipulation of enemies, and modern armed forces will be the basis of the state's political strength in the new era, the era of the scalable war for Eurasia.

The war that has already begun is a scalable war and therefore different from previous world wars. It is already changing the global geopolitical system. As in the last world war, new methods and technologies will emerge. All innovation accelerates in times of human wars. This is the dark - militant and competitive - nature of man. During World War II, we saw the first German maneuvering and ballistic missiles, at the end of it the first German primitive guided missiles, the jet engine, the technological miracle for those times of the American B29 strategic bomber flying sky-high and far, and the Allied computer needed to constantly break the German Enigma. Now, during the world war, automation and robotics will certainly develop. Personally, I'm betting that artificial intelligence developed for war and human competition will change our civil lives beyond recognition before the war is over.

In all of this, our dear Europe still refuses to understand that the war is already underway. Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, the uproar he caused, and the imminent elections to Congress will lead the US to focus on the Pacific. Therefore, I believe that Pelosi's visit to Taiwan is a mistake, very unfavourable for Poland, because it accelerates the Americans' perspective of a war on two fronts in Eurasia, which must always be avoided. And it pushes China into helping Russia on the Western (European) front, even if this aid is or will be hidden for some time, just as Roosevelt's decision to help the British was hidden from world opinion, made after the fall of Paris in 1940, and therefore long before US open entry into the war.

It means that we will be left here with Russia largely alone. Perhaps a slight correction - with Europeans who do not have significant military capabilities or excessive determination to confront Russia, apart from Finland, Sweden and Great Britain. As the war for Eurasia will be scalable, the conflict with us does not have to be the same as with Ukraine. It can be terror, destruction of infrastructure, kidnappings and killings, destabilisation and low-scale impact. However, there can also be a full war like in Ukraine, depending on the capabilities of the Russians and the geopolitical need in

a given system and time, largely dependent also on our own capabilities, resilience and preparations. The Russians will adjust their strategy to this.

It is important that Russia wants to gain agency in Europe. There is a way to do this by pushing the Americans out of Europe and weakening Europe's cohesion as part of the transatlantic world. This road leads through the corpse of the agency of the Polish state and over the corpse of NATO security architecture.

What is happening in the Pacific is therefore of paramount importance for Europe and Poland. Let's get ready for a war, even if it is a scalable war, which sounds somehow scary to me. We have to move efficiently on the escalation ladder, although it may be better to say the escalation truss - because the change of the pace and intensity of the clash does not have to be linear in today's complex world of connections.

The world system has become unstable, the balance has been broken. A new equilibrium will arise after the war that seems inevitable today. Somewhat comfortingly, it seems to be a scalable war. In the case of Poland, located at the junction of the World Ocean and the Continent, it can be anything: from terrorist attacks to manipulating the supply of raw materials to us (which may end in rationing raw materials and destroying our economy and competitiveness), by kidnapping people, destroying infrastructure and even conventional war - like in Ukraine, even with the use of tactical nuclear weapons.

The world has become more complex, but no less deadly.

Let's get ready for what's coming.

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