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China and Eurasian Powers in a Multipolar World Order 2.0 Security, Diplomacy, Economy and Cyberspace

Mher Sahakyan

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Public Domain

Rethinking Asia and International Relations

CHINA AND EURASIAN POWERS IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD ORDER 2.0

**SECURITY, DIPLOMACY, ECONOMY AND
CYBERSPACE**

Edited by
Mher Sahakyan



The current context: Understanding China and Eurasia in the Multipolar World Order 2.0

A conventional assumption in geopolitics today is that the post-Cold War “unipolar moment” has passed, and that what has emerged is an international system in which the United States is no longer the dominant global power. This transition has played out over three decades, marked by signal events and trends that have given impetus and credence to the narrative: the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the American misadventures in Afghanistan and Iraq, the global financial crisis, the degradation of the American political system and democracy (so shockingly demonstrated by the January 6, 2021, coup attempt and insurrection on Capitol Hill), heightened tensions with China and Russia, the inept handling of Covid-19, and the bungled withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan.

Arguably the deterioration of American authority and influence began long before the collapse of the Soviet Union – the Watergate scandal that brought down a president in 1974 and the military retreat from Vietnam a year later being twin portents of imperial decay. Indeed, the slow-melt of American primacy has been prompted by its own actions and domestic deficiencies and dysfunctions, as well as by the drive and daring of challengers – mainly regional, such as Russia and Iran, but also global, China. Consider Fareed Zakaria’s (2008) assertion that the “rise of the rest” has diminished America’s ability to “dictate to this new world”, but not its ability to lead. The advent of Donald Trump and his disruptive approach to international relations, alliances, and partnerships seemed to confirm for much of the world that the United States was drifting downward, by its own devices hastening the arrival of a new world order.

The term “multipolar” has come into vogue to describe this new condition, the implication being that the US is now only one of three or more poles or centres of power in the world. This geopolitical imagery evokes the concept of “trilateralism”, an idea of three-sided global governance, still in currency as recently as the 1980s: North America, Western Europe and Japan, acting as a tribune for Asian countries – though certainly not on an equilateral basis. “Multipolarity” implies a world of regional powers, even hegemons, and a framework of balancing and/or bandwagoning – a fluid dynamic of non-alignment (not having to choose sides) and competition (among economies and clusters of economies).

But the idea of multipolarity does not fully capture the asymmetry of a constellation of clusters around, but at varying distances to, the two principal poles: the incumbent (the United States) and the ascendant (China). It is a complex system of relationships, partnerships, and alliances no longer roughly in the bifurcated Cold War arrangement. The US–China strategic competition and decoupling narrative, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the Ukraine war have fuelled the impression of a return to a take-sides power duopoly or an East–West dichotomy. But greater clarity is not likely; ultimate decoupling is not possible. Rather, uncertainty due to geopolitical, geo-economic and geotechnological contestation and shifting allegiances is the probable global steady state, however fuzzy and difficult to navigate.

In this context, *China and Eurasian Powers in the Multipolar World Order 2.0* is a significant contribution to the understanding of this complicated and still-evolving order. The use of the term “Multipolar World Order 2.0” is purposeful and critical, as the editor and authors adopt a more nuanced and textured understanding of multipolarity than conventional analysts. This predicate is an important aspect of this wide-ranging study. The context is current.

Indeed, coming after the publication in 2021 of *China and Eurasia Rethinking Cooperation and Contradictions in the Era of Changing World Order*, this new collection of papers moves forward the leading edge of scholarship on China and emerging Eurasia, what Kent Calder of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies dubbed the “super continent” (2019). As with the earlier volume, the book offers on-the-ground research and perspectives on the many different dimensions of China’s role in the Eurasia project, the shaping of what might arguably be the centre of gravity of the global economy.

This essential and comprehensive *tour d’horizon* of the region starts with an overview that presents the strategic and geopolitical landscape from Europe to the Indo-Pacific, an important effort to connect the dots in light of the Ukraine war, which has sparked discussions of risk and security comparisons and linkages between the transatlantic theatre and East Asia. Consider the landmark participation of the Japanese prime minister and the South Korean president in the NATO summit in Madrid in June 2022, the parallel (but unconnected) discussions and debates over the expansion of NATO and the evolving role of the Quad, and NATO’s (2021) geographic stretch in June 2021 to characterize “China’s stated ambitions and assertive behaviour” as “systemic challenges to the rules-based international order and to areas relevant to Alliance security.”

The book then drills down into the partnership between China and Russia, which its leaders, Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin, in February 2022 characterized as having “no limits”. The reality, captured in three key chapters, is more complex than that tagline suggests. The focus then shifts to regional cooperation – first, developments in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, an often overlooked mixed political, economic, security collaboration of its members, observers, and dialogue partners.

There follow two insightful updates on the Belt and Road Initiative, China's signature foreign economic policy program, focusing on the South Caucasus and on Bangladesh, a country that to some extent is torn by the classic choice between economic opportunities offered by Beijing and the logic of strategic alignment or association with regional power India. The book also includes two chapters on the Digital Silk Road, one that looks at developments in Eurasia, and the other presenting a case study of Italy, which signed a memorandum of understanding with China on the BRI in 2019.

The remaining survey chapters cover China's relations with Central and Eastern European countries and with the EU. Beijing's ties with the EU have become more fraught and tense, given sources of friction that led to the freezing of the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment and disappointment in Brussels over China's stance on the Ukraine war. There is a separate chapter on China-EU cybersecurity challenges, a notable discussion in light of the US-EU attempts to coordinate data governance and China's own efforts to set standards with neighbours, participants in the Digital Silk Road initiative, and partners in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, essentially the ten members of ASEAN and four other dialogue partners. The area of data governance and cybersecurity is notably an area on which the Quad members are aiming to collaborate.

The book ends with a concluding chapter that examines the "colliding interests" in Eurasia, by Mher Sahakyan, the editor, neatly tying up the threads of analysis that run through the volume. Sahakyan, who is fortuitously based in Yerevan, Armenia, and was with Heinz Gärtner (2021) the co-editor of the earlier book, is a rare scholar in the Eurasia space who has deep experience across the region, including China, where he earned his doctorate. It takes a specialist with a transregional background and expertise built from on-the-ground knowledge to get a handle of the fast-moving developments in the region, especially in the context of major global disruptions such as the pandemic and the Ukraine war.

Sahakyan asserts from the beginning the death of unipolarity, and he and his fellow contributors are firmly focused on setting their analysis within the parameters of the multipolar world order. Their contribution to the study of Eurasia within the global context *as it is*, however difficult it is to take an accurate snapshot of these volatile times, is invaluable to all scholars and analysts of China and how its continued surge in status, significance, and sway is changing the world.

Professor, Dr. Alejandro Reyes

Director, Knowledge Dissemination, Asia Global Institute,
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One of the main results of the “III Eurasian Research on Modern China and Eurasia” Conference in 2021 was the unification of the international team of scholars. In 2022 this team continued cooperation and prepared this book, *China and Eurasian Powers in a Multipolar World Order 2.0: Security, Diplomacy, Economy and Cyberspace*. The authors analyze China’s politics in the Asia-Pacific, Central Asia, South Caucasus, Middle East, and Central and Eastern Europe. They also discuss China’s relations with Russia, the United States, European Union, and other powers in the era of a Multipolar World Order 2.0. Special attention is provided to the great powers’ competition in Eurasian cyberspace, which has become one of the main engines of human life. This edited volume addresses core issues and priorities of interrelations between these two essential parts (China and Eurasia) of Geopolitics, raising points of mutual interests and benefit based on comprehensive analysis of the existing situation and perspectives for the future. Thanks to initiators, and in particular to editor Dr. Mher Sahakyan, this contribution gathers top-class researchers and analysts both from policy-making centres and academic institutions. This edited volume is highly appreciated and welcomed by policy advisors and professionals from the Eurasian states as well as China.

Professor, Dr. Armen Darbinyan, *Former Prime Minister of Republic of Armenia, Rector of Russian-Armenian University, Corresponding Member of the National Academy of Sciences of Armenia, and Foreign Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences.*



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China and Eurasian Powers in a Multipolar World Order 2.0

This book argues that the world order is no longer unipolar, and the war in Ukraine proves this fact. As this study describes and theorizes, it has been transformed into a Multipolar World Order 2.0 stage. This title critically examines Chinese, US, Russian, EU, Indian, and a number of other powers' cooperation and competition over security, diplomatic, economic and cyber-space issues.

Accomplished scholars from various regions of the Eurasian continent consider the impact of the Russo–Ukrainian war, the Sino–Russian strategic partnership, China's relations with the United States and the European Union, the influence of the Belt and Road Initiative, the expansion of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Eurasian Economic Union, China's policies in the Middle East, Central Asia, Indo–Asia Pacific, the South Caucasus, Central and Eastern Europe, as well as focus on details of growing contradictions and collaboration in the Eurasian continent over markets, technologies, digital leadership, vaccine distribution, and financial institutions in the Era of Multipolar World Order 2.0.

Showing that the US-centred unipolar world order is replaced by Multipolar World Order 2.0 where conflicting powers fight to keep or extend their spheres of influence, this volume is of great interest to decision makers, diplomats, scholars and students of international relations, politics, global governance, Eurasian studies, Chinese studies, cybersecurity, and economics, and for those studying human security, international organizations, and geopolitics.

Mher Sahakyan is an 2022 AsiaGlobal Fellow of the Asia Global Institute of the University of Hong Kong. Mher holds a doctorate in international relations from China's Nanjing University. He is the founder and director of the China-Eurasia Council for Political and Strategic Research, a foundation in Armenia. Mher Sahakyan also founded the annual international conference, Eurasian Research on Modern China and Eurasia. He is an elected advisory board member of the International Institute for Peace, Austria, and the School of Liberal Arts & Humanities, Woxsen University, India. Mher is also a member of the British Association for Chinese Studies, the Asia Society of Hong Kong and the International Political Science Association. He is a lecturer at the

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Foreword

Great power conflict

Heinz Gärtner

The world once again is moving towards polarization. After the Second World War the world saw several periods of polarization. Polarization between big powers also affects smaller states. These are the states that might be entangled in a great power conflict.

Types of polarity

The bipolarity of the East–West conflict was about geopolitical blocks. Smaller neutral states managed to stay out of the great-power conflict. After the end of the Cold War the United States was striving towards unipolarity, what the political scientist Charles Krauthammer called the “unipolar moment”. These ambitions were not entirely successful. American global hegemony was not achieved, although several wars were fought in the Balkans, in Afghanistan and Iraq. Unipolarity would limit the room of maneuver of neutral states. Full hegemony is incompatible with neutrality.

Unipolarity was not successful because other world powers were emerging. Some speak of multipolarity, others of the “post-American world” or the “rise of the rest”. These expressions are euphemistic; in fact, what was developing was a great power competition between the United States, China and Russia. President Joseph Biden and his Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, stressed several times that no power in the world should catch up with the United States, let alone overtake it, neither militarily nor economically. China’s gross national product and military expenditures still do not equal those of the United States. The Russian economy is the size of Italy but its nuclear weapons roughly equal those of the United States.

Alliances and ideology

Polarization always comes with two features, with alliance building and with ideology.

The United States can rely on the traditional alliance with NATO, but it is also building new alliances in Asia and the Middle East. AUKUS consisting of Australia, the UK and United States; in the Quad, the United States, the

UK, India, and Japan are members; South Korea is considering joining. In the Middle East the Abraham Accords between Israel, the Arab Emirates, and Bahrain¹ under the auspices of the United States are an anti-Iranian alliance in the making.

Russia does not have strong alliances. The Collective Security Treaty Organization is a weak attempt to find a successor alliance to the Warsaw Treaty Organization. Russia has allies in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America rather than alliances. China leads the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which is rather an association than a security alliance. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a network of bilateral agreements; however, China sees the BRI as a multilateral undertaking. It brings economic advantages, especially in infrastructure building, to the participants, and sometimes economic and/or political dependencies are established.

In terms of the idealist and ideological dimension, President Biden is promoting a world divided into democracies and autocracies. It goes without saying, that US geopolitical interests always dominate this ideological claim. The United States does not hesitate to work with autocracies against its great power rivals. However, this ideological claim is attractive to some allies, especially in Europe. China's BRI has some soft power attraction, and the participation is voluntarily. China argues, as the United States does, the countries should be free to make their own choices. Russia, in contrast, does not have a good ideology. Communism during the East–West Conflict was to some extent attractive because its ideology was linked to the theoretical dimensions of Marxism and Leninism. The Russia of today lacks such an intellectual dimension. That is why President Putin is referring to far-fetched ideological elements, like anti-Nazism, Russification, or Peter the Great.

Russia was about to lose the great power conflict. NATO is coming closer and closer to Russia's borders in the West and China's BRI is much more attractive for many countries in the East and South. President Putin thought he could restore his influence by starting the war with Ukraine. He achieved the opposite. NATO is deploying more and more troops in the Baltic States and in Poland; on top of it, Finland and Sweden decided to join NATO. Russia's economy will be further weakened by the war and by the sanctions. Russia probably has lost the great power competition by now, and for a long time to come. It will be able to define its great-power status only by the possession of nuclear weapons, which is a very dangerous situation.

Polarization and smaller states

Smaller states under the conditions of great-power polarization have only two choices: they can join an alliance and bandwagon with a big power or they can stay neutral. A decision for an alliance and to "bandwagon" is based on the promises that they would get protection. It is driven by the fear of abandonment in the case of conflict. Those promises are, for example, enshrined in Article V of the NATO Treaty. This is the reason why Ukraine wanted to join NATO and

Finland and Sweden are joining. Bandwagoning is also accompanied by potential entanglement. Security commitments request that all member states come to the aid of other members of an alliance, if attacked or threatened by attack. Smaller states easily can be drawn into a great-power war, however.

States that decide to stay neutral want to avoid being involved in great-power conflicts. Austria was very successful in this during the Cold War. After Austria adopted its permanent neutrality in 1955, the troops of all occupying powers, the United States, UK, France, and the Soviet Union, left the country. Finland's neutrality prevented it being drawn into the Warsaw Pact. Neutrality itself is a very good security guarantee as long as a neutral state credibly demonstrates, already in peace time, that it will not join an alliance, deploy foreign troops on its soil, or participate in foreign wars. In an historical perspective, credible neutrality was only violated in the context of major wars, such as Belgium during the two world wars.

Cooperative security

Polarization between great powers is not God-given. In history there are several models that mitigate great-power conflict. The Congress of Vienna after 1815 brought peace in Europe for hundred years, with the exception of the Crimean War and the wars of unification in the middle of the nineteenth century. The Congress of Vienna also gave birth to two neutral states, Switzerland and Belgium. Another analogy is the Helsinki summit of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1975. It took place at the height of the East–West conflict and was the core of the *détente* policy of the two military blocks. The document does not mention terms like enemy, foe, rival, competitor but speaks of cooperative security and the indivisibility of security.

Europe should think about these models for the future before a new Iron Court and Cordon Sanitaire will divide it for a long time – much longer than president Putin will remain in office.

Notes

- 1 Sudan and Morocco are members outside the Middle East.



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Preface in Chinese

中文序言

Yuntian Zheng

《多级世界秩序2.0时代的中国与欧亚大陆》的问世令人欣喜而振奋。本书旨在集结欧亚各国学者智慧，围绕“新的世界秩序变革下中国与欧亚大陆向何处去”的主题，展开富有建设性的思索与交流，让全球读者收获有益参考。书名中“2.0”巧妙蕴含着大变局下学者们的时代关照与人文关怀，意味深沉、深刻而深远。

“2.0”体现出前所未有的世界之变、时代之变与历史之变。在百年未有之大变局加速演进、世界进入新的动荡变革期的背景下，人类尚未走出疫情阴霾，又面临新的传统安全风险。大变局正不断给人类提出新的世界之问和时代之问。

“2.0”反映了中国与欧亚大陆更加唇齿相依、休戚与共。“一带一路”倡议实施至今已近十年，对比依旧纷乱复杂的西方世界，“丝绸之路经济带”沿线国家都充分感受到中国发展带来的红利，新时代的中国与欧亚各国越来越被人类文明交汇地带研究者们所热议。

“2.0”标志着编者与作者团队进一步通力协作、提质升级。本书是2021年出版的《百年未有之大变局下中国与欧亚大陆合作与矛盾的再思考》一书的接续之作，聚焦于安全、外交、经贸和网络等重大议题，视角独到，结构严谨，内容丰富，观点鲜明。作者遍及亚美尼亚、奥地利、孟加拉国、中国、希腊、意大利、波兰、俄罗斯、塞尔维亚、西班牙和土耳其等国。从某种意义上，这些学者正通过不懈努力与合作，构筑起新时代欧亚大陆的学术共同体。

本书研究团队致力于突破西方思维与话语的藩篱，密切关注“一带一路”倡议带动效应，对中国与欧亚大陆各国关系前景秉持谨慎乐观的态度，其认知不断演进的动因既源自东西方力量对比的持续变化，也基于欧亚大陆特殊地缘政治的现实考虑，同时更彰显出古丝绸之路的当代价值。

谨此由衷感谢亚美尼亚“中国—欧亚战略研究中心”主任麦哈尔·萨哈基扬（Mher Sahakyan）博士多年来无私而辛劳的奉献，感谢学术共同体成员们的精诚团结，感谢劳特利奇（Routledge）出版集团的大力支持。

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Introduction

China, Eurasia, and the Multipolar World Order 2.0

Mher Sahakyan

The world is no more unipolar (US-centred); it has been transformed into a Multipolar World Order 2.0 stage, and the war in Ukraine proves this fact. In Eurasia the main actors are the collective West (the United States, European Union (EU), and their allies) and the Sino-Russian tandem, which consists of two parts. One segment is Russia with its allies and regional organizations, such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO); and the other is China with its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), financial institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), high-tech companies, and comprehensive strategic partners in different regions of Eurasia. China will continue its march westward through its BRI, strengthening its positions in Central Asia, South Caucasus, Middle East, and Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). In turn, because of the Ukrainian war and Western sanctions, Russia will fasten its decisive pivot towards the East. The result of this development will be the final alignment of China and Russia, still declared a comprehensive strategic partnership. In the Sino-Russian tandem Beijing will stand stronger, as the Russian economy is shrinking because of the war in Ukraine and the Western sanctions. Beijing is not providing full military or political support to Russia in its war with Ukraine, but it provides and will provide economic help, so that Russia does not lose its position. Beijing is sure that if Putin's Russia is defeated, China will remain alone against the West. For this reason, China shares Russia's viewpoint that the US-led NATO must not be extended towards the East.

It is worth mentioning, that, for strengthening interconnection with Eurasian countries, China's BRI was successful in the first phase by the help of which Beijing improved its relations with both partners and adversaries and spread its influence. For instance, Sino-Turkish relations transformed from competition to strategic partnership. By the conjunction of BRI and EAEU, China and Russia have found ways for cooperation over competition in Central Asia. These developments mean that Beijing will continue building its BRI and, in the second phase, it will try to involve more countries and regions in both parts of the continent, Europe and Asia.

Eurasian great, middle and small powers are joining or will join the West or Sino-Russian tandem. For instance, Iran also strengthens its interconnection with the Sino-Russian tandem, implementing its "Look to East" policy. The

main argument of this hypothesis is that on 19 September 2021 the Chinese and Russian-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) gave a green light to Iran to become a full member. Before that, on 27 March 2021 China and Iran signed a document of comprehensive cooperation, which aims to strengthen the strategic partnership (Sahakyan, 2022). On May 17, 2018, Iran also signed the Russian-led EAEU interim agreement leading to formation of a free trade area. Additionally, Iran is also a regional member of China's AIIB. In turn, Finland and Sweden announced their desire to become NATO members, which will strengthen the West's military capabilities (Niinistö, 2022). Georgia also has a desire to join NATO, but the organization is not ready to accept Tbilisi – as it was not and is not ready to admit Kiev.

There is also another rising power, India, which will try to keep its own political and economic agendas and stand as a separate centre. Recently, because of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, India's economy has been hit hard, but it still strongly competes with China for the countries which are involved in BRI's so called Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar and China-Indochina Peninsula economic corridors. Taking into consideration India's economic, political, and demographic potential, it appears that step by step it will stand as one of the important actors in the chessboard of the Eurasian continent. Russia and China will try to use SCO, RIC (Russia, India, China) and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) formats for taking India into the Eastern pole. In turn the United States uses its Indo-Asia Pacific strategy for biding India, as only the rising India can check China's power in the Asia-Pacific region. For deterring China, the US-initiated the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), where Washington united India, Japan, and Australia. The US established the AUKUS format, where Australia and the UK are also involved with their naval forces. In short, if NATO is the main tool of the West for deterring Russia in Europe, in the Asia-Pacific region AUKUS and Quad will play the same role for deterring China. Actually, President Biden could unite divided Western pole and raise simultaneous pressure on China and Russia in both Europe and Asia. It is true that geographically the United States is not a Eurasian power, but is still very strong with its alignments with many countries in different regions of the Eurasian continent. Therefore, the United States will continue its efforts through its "New Silk Road" strategy for ousting Russia and China from Central Asia and the South Caucasus and will try to involve Turkey and other allies in this process, as these regions have huge reserves of energy and are at a key crossroads connecting Asia with the Middle East and Europe.

The SCO stands as an important part of the Eurasian Multipolar World Order 2.0, where at least Asian great powers collaborate with each other in different fields. The role of this organization is crucial to secure the Central Asian region because NATO withdrew its troops from Afghanistan, letting its arsenal fall into the hands of the Taliban. Will SCO be able to secure stability in Central Asia and Xinjiang or not? Time will tell. Just as whether it is possible to close and jointly monitor borders for stopping the entrance of combatants from the Middle East, in the era of Digital Age it will be difficult to close

fundamental Islamic ideologies coming from Afghanistan and the Middle East through cyberspace. However, the developments in Kazakhstan in January 2022 have shown that even the most stable and economically wealthy country in Central Asia – which plays an important role in the SCO, and is the main bridge for the conjunction of the EAEU and the BRI – can stand as the battlefield for internal and external actors. Kazakhstani developments, after the war situation in Karabakh (Artsakh), where Moscow has located its peacekeepers, have shown that Russia and CSTO still play important, stabilizing roles in South Caucasus and Central Asia, but time is working for the stronger and rising China. Beijing continues to successfully strengthen its positions in these regions through collaboration and investments in the framework of the development of BRI's China–Central Asia–West Asia Economic Corridor (CCAWEAC). There are still threats, which limits China's investments in this corridor. For instance, the Armenian–Azerbaijani dispute over Nagorno–Karabakh is not settled yet, and a new war is possible in the South Caucasus. On the other hand, if Armenia and Azerbaijan find ways for peaceful coexistence, new transportation routes through CCAWEAC will be settled, in which China is interested in taking into consideration the fact that the New Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor (NEALBEC), which is step by step connecting China with Europe, will lose its operability because of Russia's confrontation with the EU.

Further in a Multipolar World Order 2.0 stage, Western and Eastern actors will continue their struggle mostly for the Asia-Pacific, Central Asian, South Caucasian, Southern and Eastern Asian, Central and Eastern European, Middle Eastern regions, and countries of the Eurasian continent. In some fragile regions this struggle can bring proxy or total wars as are happening in Ukraine and Syria. International norms and laws will be interpreted in different ways. New states recognized by only one centre and not recognized by other centres will emerge. In some cases, the great powers will use territorial integrity for justifying their actions in various regions of Eurasia, and in some cases self-determination theories. In general, international law will play a secondary role, and the powers generated from economic, political, and military capabilities of states will play the decisive role. Tough competition with usage of weaponized sanctions on markets for technologies, vaccine distribution, and spheres of influences between great and middle powers and their financial institutions and international organizations will continue to create unstable situations in the continent. These kinds of developments can stand as a reason for continuation of a “new cold war”, a reason for military clashes in different regions of dynamic Eurasia. The market access for companies of various states will be limited in the spheres of influences on the poles where their states are involved. The Eurasian cyberspace will be another battlefield, where great and middle powers will compete for spheres of influence. Small and middle states will not have more opportunities to choose or manoeuvre. They will have to, or will be forced to, choose one of the poles for maintaining their security. The independence of these states will be reduced. During Multipolar World Order 2.0, main poles will try to cut economic interconnection, because

of political issues, as is happening between the West and Russia. The continuation of these kinds of developments will bring new conflicts, as was warned by Heinz Gärtner (2021, p.21): “A multipolar world is emerging which implies polarization, arms races, trade wars, mutual demonization of adversaries, the fight for domination with the danger of war. No hegemon power can provide stability. At the same time multilateralism is declining. Multipolarity without multilateralism is a dangerous mix in the world.”

The creation of the concept, Multipolar World Order 2.0, has stood as a main motivator for uniting this team of accomplished international scholars from Armenia, Austria, Bangladesh, China, Greece, Italy, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Spain, and Turkey, and for discussing and analysing China’s affairs with Eurasian great, middle, and small powers. The title, *China and Eurasian Powers in the Multipolar World Order 2.0: Security, Diplomacy, Economy and Cyberspace*, has been chosen because it introduces multiple but interconnected themes, such as: the establishment of Multipolar World Order 2.0, China’s cooperation and contradictions with other great powers and Eurasian security; the Sino–Russian strategic partnership in Eurasia: politics, economy, trade and interregional interaction in the time of COVID–19; the role and prospects of SCO, developments in BRI’s China–Central Asia–West Asia and Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar economic corridors; the impact of the Ukrainian war on the interconnection of Asia and Europe, the European subcontinent, and China, cyberspace and cybersecurity challenges, Digital Silk Road (DSR), and innovations in Eurasia. It also covers the strategy of the Communist Party of China, which examines historical experience and a roadmap for the future. This book is the logical continuation of *China and Eurasia Rethinking Cooperation and Contradictions in the Era of Changing World Order*, published by Routledge in 2021.

An overview of the book

The book is divided into seven parts. Part I examines “China, great powers and Eurasian security”, where, in Chapter 1 Alexander S. Korolev argues that in the collaboration between the great powers of Eurasia on countering the COVID–19 crisis, sanctions, and trade wars, the powers differ from each other, and it is mostly “chaotic and asymmetric”. Korolev states that Eurasian great powers “periodically resort to ‘coercive diplomacy’ and use discriminatory measures against each other, which leads to a conflict of interests and reduces the quality of interaction”. He concludes that, in the era of Multipolar World Order 2.0, it can be said that “there is no international society in Eurasia concerning ensuring political and economic security”.

Gina Panagopoulou, in Chapter 2, provides a comparative analysis between the Eurasian continent (mainland) and the Pacific region (maritime.) She investigates Afghanistan’s crisis and the war in Ukraine in the Eurasian mainland, and the emergence of the Quad and AUKUS in the Pacific. She argues that, in the era of Multipolar World Order 2.0, the Pacific Ocean has become a theatre for a Great Powers’ struggle, just like the mainland.

In Chapter 3, Süha Atatüre introduces competition between two main superpowers of the World – the United States and China in the Middle East. He argues that, in the Middle East the United States loses its hegemonic position, while to the contrary, because of the BRI, China is strengthening its role. He presents the importance of the harmonization of the BRI with the Turkish Trans-Caspian East-West-Middle Corridor Initiative (Middle Corridor) for Eurasian interconnectivity. He also recommends establishing a new Eurasian organization, which will stand as the main platform for all Eurasian powers for strengthening the security of the continent.

Part II of the book, titled “Sino-Russian strategic partnership in Eurasia: Politics, economy, trade and interregional interaction” comprises three chapters. It discusses political and economic cooperation between China and Russia, which is the main engine for creation of the Multipolar World Order 2.0. Orazio Maria Gnerre, in Chapter 4, writes that after the end of the Cold War, Russia and China strengthened their comprehensive strategic cooperation in the diplomatic, economic, and military spheres. He argues that Moscow and Beijing have developed a certain unity of purpose and a common vision on global issues. On the Ukrainian crisis, he writes, China’s position is “moderate”, but Beijing is also trying to support Russia economically, so that it does not collapse because of Western sanctions.

In Chapter 5 Sergey Lukonin analyses the main results and challenges of Russo-Chinese trade. Lukonin says Russia and China achieved progress in bilateral trade, where energy resources play a crucial role. As he writes, on one hand sanctions imposed by the West on China and Russia create problems for Moscow and Beijing, but on the other hand unites them for further cooperation. Lukonin also analyses several problems that create misunderstandings in the Russo-Chinese comprehensive strategic partnership. For instance, he writes that China does not recognize the Crimean referendum, organized by Russia in 2014. This fact creates misunderstanding in bilateral political relations.

Olga Zalesskaia explains in Chapter 6 that COVID-19 has created problems for further developing Russo-Chinese relations. She warns that closed borders and the pause in people-to-people contacts between the two nations will continue to create obstacles, and will have a negative impact on interregional economic relations, which are crucial for the development of the Russian Far East.

Part III is entitled “Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRI’s China-Central Asia-West Asia and Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar economic corridors”. It starts with Chapter 7, which researches aims, features, results and prospects of China’s policy in Central Asia, and the role of SCO and the BRI. Elżbieta Proń writes that China successfully uses SCO to achieve its main political and foreign policy goals in Central Asia. She also argues that the BRI allows Central Asian states to improve their connectivities and are positioned as bridges between China and Europe.

I analyse in Chapter 8 China’s policy in the South Caucasus region through its BRI. I argue that, because of the Ukrainian war, EU countries will mostly not cross territory of Russia for their trade with China. They will mostly use

the infrastructure of CCAWAEC, which passes through Azerbaijan and Georgia as well. I conclude that, in the era of Multipolar World Order 2.0, the interests of the great powers will collide in the South Caucasus. This will bring new challenges to Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia; therefore, they need to solve their interregional conflicts in order to not become battlefields. The stabilization of the region will open new transportation routes and bring additional Chinese investments. I conclude that time is working in favour of China as Beijing's growing economic presence will also give it greater political influence, which will strengthen its position in this strategically important region.

Shanjida Shahab Uddin, in Chapter 9, analyses Sino-Bangladeshi relations in the framework of the BRI's Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIMEC). As she argues, "BRI has enormous potential for a developing country like Bangladesh", but she notes that India's opposition to Chinese initiatives creates some obstacles for Dhaka. Therefore, Bangladesh needs "to design its 'balancing mechanism' while dealing with both China and India".

In Part IV, entitled "European subcontinent and China" the authors focus on some aspects of the relations between China and the European states. It starts with Chapter 10, where Sebastian Contin Trillo-Figueroa argues that the US is a historical ally with still many dependences (political, security), while China is a European trade partner and systemic rival in a Multipolar World Order 2.0. The EU would like to collaborate and compete with China as an equal, but its present institutional architecture and previous Chinese assertiveness avoided further steps.

Trillo-Figueroa states that the development of EU 'strategic sovereignty' could work it out. Contin Trillo-Figueroa also puts it that the "EU needs to raise as a peer with both China and the US, being respected as a sharp ally, never sidelined".

Sanja Arežina, in Chapter 11, focuses on relations between China and the Central and Eastern European countries. She argues that the escalation of the geopolitical rivalry between the great powers and the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic created obstacles for development of the BRI in the region. Although, she concludes, it will be possible to find solutions for the problems and continue productive cooperation even in the era of challenging Multipolar World Order 2.0.

Part V, entitled "Cybersecurity challenges, Digital Silk Road and innovations in Eurasia", starts with Chapter 12, where Anahit Parzyan observes China's DSR and its president Xi Jinping's strategy to turn China into a "Digital Power" of the Multipolar World Order 2.0. She concludes that Beijing implements "strongly focused cyber policy through its DSR in Eurasia to be one of the main leaders on a new, human-developed sphere".

Giorgio Caridi, in Chapter 13, explores the importance of BRI's DSR for EU member Italy. Caridi conducted field work researching 300 companies in Northern, Central and Southern Italy. He concludes, "as long as there is a growing demand from Italian and EU small and medium-sized enterprises

(SMEs) towards digitalization and innovation, coupled with a serious initiative (BRI) aimed at empowering the connection of the Chinese and EU economies, the world will likely shift to a Multipolar World Order 2.0 that will grant wealth and prosperity”.

In Chapter 14, Annita Larissa Sciacovelli provides recommendations for easing tensions between China and the EU in cyberspace. She argues that EU–China collaboration in cyberspace will “reduce tensions and minimize damage”.

In Chapter 15 of Part VI Yuntian Zheng analyses theoretical bases of the *Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party Over the Past Century*. He argues that, for strengthening relations between China and Eurasian states in the era of Multipolar World Order 2.0, Beijing needs to “uphold the Party’s leadership”, “remain committed to self-reform”, “maintain stability”, “advance theoretical innovation”, “keep development”, “stay independent”, “follow the Chinese path”, “put the people first”, and “pursue harmony”.

Part VII is the conclusion, where I tie up the main findings and arguments of this book and also analyse colliding interests in Ukraine, Eurasia, and cyberspace in the era of Multipolar World Order 2.0.

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