

AI + IR

Politics, Diplomacy and Technology in a Shifting World

Clashing visions: sea power, rimlands, and the emergence of strategic bipolarity in the indo-pacific

Remedies for eco-technological catastrophe: re-envisioning psychedelics' potential for helping solve today's challenges

Bullets, bytes, and bots: confronting the multifaceted challenges of modern warfare



“How we gather, store, analyse, and communicate our information—in essence how we organize it—is closely related to how we organize our politics. So when a society develops strange and different technologies for information and communication, we should expect political changes as well.”

JAMIE SUSSKIND

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FOREWORD

Aristotle had famously said that a human is “by nature, a political animal” otherwise to be set aside as an outcast like a “bird which flies alone”. While Aristotle had attributed this to our ability to speak and moral reasoning, the increasingly connected world also sees humans exercise such abilities beyond their local communities at a global scale. The world becoming a global village has resulted in unprecedented economic prosperity, growth of multinational corporations, and the development global governance structures such as international organizations while try to promote cooperation and harmony. However, the brutalities of wars and conflict, geopolitical powerplays, and environmental degradation to maintain economic, political and military superiority have also been concurrent with these developments.

ONResearch issue 12 takes you from warfare to the perceived belonging to an influence zone, from an ethical desire for freedom to a pragmatic sense of managing the future of this planet. This is a special ONResearch issue, written by students and faculty, that focuses on the central topic of international relations. This theme is inspired by the EU Business School’s new program, Master in Digital International Relations & Diplomacy with Unitar, which bridges the gap between international business and diplomacy. Global corporations place their ambassadors at international organisations – such as UNCTAD, NATO and others – to anticipate multifold trends as well as to contribute to future developments. Consequently, various concepts like 3D reporting, ESG, and CRSD streamline responsible management, proven to generate value while also being consumer-driven and socially-oriented.

With the business and political spheres overlapping, this ONResearch issue emphasizes on this growing reality, and provides various insights into international relations: from war to business.

A first glance at global diplomacy is offered by Mihir Mahagaonkar, discussing the increasingly-important arena of sea power rimlands and strategic bi-polarity. By examining China’s recent reorientation of its maps from East-West to North South, changing its world vision once more, and India’s emergence as the world’s largest populated country, this article shows the building blocks of regional power zones in line with the transition from bipolarity to multipolarity. Sofya Nemirovskaya then extends this further by situating these notions in a more contemporary situation of Sweden’s accession to NATO, describing how power zones change when alliances evolve. Rob Green’s article on eco-technical catastrophes and their psychedelic remedies shows how an ‘anxious generation’, somewhat encouraged by drug policies, may influence the perception of the future, ecological or political. An interesting corollary thought emerges: the digital economy works like drugs.

Carol Flores turns the focus to the Middle East by exploring Saudi Arabia’s policies with respect to Yemen, to highlight a concept that Fichte described centuries ago, one which sparked several wars: empires need to expand their influential zone to be secure. Her article is not far from Mihir Mahadaonkar’s analysis, and compares to the NATO zone perspective. Suddha Chakravarti undertakes Fichte’s through history, when stating that the ‘Business of Business is Business’. Incorporating shareholders, stakeholders and beyond, business are shown to thrive through multifold valuations, with the shareholder still as the ultimate owner.

Fabien Goujon explores another area of moving influence zones: the Sahel. Global actors move – France, Russia, and China – old games with new rules. His analysis connects well with EUBS' conference on “the African Dream”. The African continent has a vision, which does not exclude active international relations, yet brings a new future. For those who want to take the pulse of the continent, “The African Dream II” conference is taking place in Geneva at the end of March 2025.

The next article by Juliette Torabian offers an interesting contraption: rather than war and influence zones, there could be a State of Freedom, an imaginary country, which incorporates jus cogens into the structures of peace and justice, until demanding to be a member of the EU! Cintia Franco turns to another continent, South America and more specifically Brazil, to demonstrate how zones of influence are not just continental or regional, but can also be global. The design and formulation of BRICS by Goldman Sachs was inspired by the concept that these fast growing countries would one day span their power all over the globe, with Brazil as a driving force. The circle is almost complete, when Mihir Mahagaonkar and Suddha Chakravartti revive the notion of war in the age of AI, beyond military engagement: “bullets, bytes and bots”.

The ever-changing sphere of influence is not a circle, but a spiral, as it evolves like the human DNA. Its dimensions are profitability – in a wide sense, creating value – and our planet, linked throughout by people. The ‘planet’ spiral in that DNA is expressed by the present global awakening where politics, international organizations and corporations meet, as in COP29, on which Mais Javafov and Aynur Asadli report from close: corporations are often way in front of nation states, exploring futures where human activities no longer contribute to a changing climate.

ONResearch 12 thus takes us from classical theory on the forming of influence zones to the future of climate management; it takes us from traditional blocks to a multipolar multilateralism, which shapes the new global order in an age dominated by AI, negotiations on survival and climate diplomacy. It is vital to detect when the notions of individual and collective consciousness and responsibility surge, where responsible policies predict the evolution of warfare vs. ethical standards.

The proliferation of the information age has given rise to novel arenas of citizenship, paving the way for the populace to generate bottom-up sensemaking and reframing of social and political issues. Such developments have already impacted corporate and global governance, with citizens reorienting their roles from mere consumers and voters to becoming actively engaged in putting pressure and directing the actions of global corporations and national governments. Greater connectivity and access to information extends individual consciousness beyond their surrounding to global issues and holds the potential to reframe collective consciousness beyond national identities to ideological identities. We see such collective efforts at display in the partisanship towards two ongoing conflicts: the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Gaza War.

Additionally, the intriguing dynamics of AI in leadership and followership, uncovers the transformative impact of AI on shaping our collective future. Understanding how AI technologies are transforming the field of public opinion is a crucial element to global politics. Digital platforms and the use of personal data have been shown to not just sway public opinion, but also lead to behavioural modification as mentioned by Shoshana Zuboff in her prominent book *Surveillance Capitalism*. Through the algorithm-driven platforms, citizens can be exposed to content that

reshapes their worldview and opinions. In this sense, such technologies hold the potential to not only undermine democracy (as indicated by the US election manipulation by Cambridge Analytica), but also weaken the stability of regimes. The sale of Zoom, the proposed American ban on TikTok for younger users, all point to such concerns. Another intriguing development is the emergence of tech billionaires, who may imperceptibly influence citizens' views and ethical stances to align with their own through targeting them with specific content and misinformation. The villainization of the likes of Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk (along with his purchase of X) point to this development. Given such significant ramifications, it is easy to understand why AI is considered the most important battlefield and a strong determinant for the next global superpower.

The same goes for diplomacy, as formation and transformation of dynamic blocks and alliances are shedding light on how evolving coalitions shape diplomatic strategies. The perception of communications and policies as they relate to a truth, unraveling the complexities of diplomatic narratives and the impact of stakeholder perception on international relations. In the era of information dissemination, it is vital to revisit social media and its pivotal role in shaping diplomatic discourse and public opinion.

ONResearch 12 takes us on a most passionate journey in the theory of influence zones and its recent developments, where the bridge between diplomacy and business is now constructed. Warfare is now multi-dimensional: AI provides people with opinions and allegiances, and multi-polarity spreads via politics into diplomacy, further into a complex world that inspires.

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CLASHING VISIONS

SEA POWER, RIMLANDS, AND THE EMERGENCE OF STRATEGIC BIPOLARITY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

Mihir Mahagaonkar

The twenty-first century's geopolitical landscape has been most significantly shaped by China's ascent both militarily and economically. The rising power is further attested as according to several parameters like purchasing power parity 'China's economy is already the largest in the world. China is the most important trading partner for most of the region's economies and a major investor, including in infrastructure' (Australian Government, 2017). While on the military front 'China continues to grow what is already the world's largest navy' (Lendon, 2023). But even though this fight seems a rivalry based on economic and military might it is also 'ideological, posing a serious threat to the US-led rules-based global order' (Barranco, 2022). This threat of China disrupting the America led world order is further accentuated by Chinese projects like the CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) and the Belt & Road Initiative commonly 'referred to as the New Silk Road, is one of the most ambitious infrastructure projects ever conceived' (Chatzky, McBride and Berman, 2023). This fear of the world-order disruption is further deepened through statements as 'President Xi Jinping, the most powerful Chinese leader since Mao Zedong, has called for China to lead the reform of the global governance system, transforming institutions and norms in ways that will reflect Beijing's values and priorities' (Council on Foreign Relations, 2020).

'On the larger canvas of history, when a rapidly rising power seriously threatens to displace a major ruling power, the rivalry most often ends in war. The past 500 years have seen sixteen cases of such Thucydidean rivalries. Twelve resulted in war'(Allison, 2022). In light of that Thucydidean trap (security dilemma) between the US and China the Indo-Pacific has emerged as the most crucial region, with many seeing it as the primary factor for China's aggressive ascent to global hegemony (Deb and Wilson, 2021). 'How likely is China to start a war? This may be the single-most important question in international affairs today'(Beckley and Brands, 2024), as this clash will be amongst two nuclear-armed superpowers brawling for hegemony in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. With the tumultuous Indo-Pacific in this geopolitical backdrop (Sahgal, 2023) along with the emergence of alliances like the QUAD (Marlow, 2023) and AUKUS to counter Chinese power projections in the region (Kahn, 2023), it is evident from the American perspective that 'maintaining the status quo ante in the Taiwan Strait is an integral part of the rules-based order. The United States and Japan have linked it to their own security' (Hashmi, 2023).

Apart from long-term geopolitical considerations, ideological and economic factors are driving forces in the intensifying power struggle between China and the United States. Using the frameworks of the Heartland, Rimland, and Sea Power theories, the study explores how geographical considerations affect the current strategic competition. It examines the importance of Central

Asia using Heartland Theory, as well as maritime Southeast Asia and sea routes using Rimland Theory. Finally, the Sea Power theory is utilised to investigate competitiveness in contested Indian-Pacific waters. A thorough examination of these perspectives seeks to comprehend both the intricacies and long-term geopolitical factors underlying this critical contest.

GEOPOLITICAL THEORIES

Heartland Theory

In 1904, geopolitical theorist Sir Halford Mackinder pontificated the Heartland Theory, which regarded Central Asia as a crucial geostrategic area. Mackinder enunciated, 'Who rules Eastern Europe commands the Heartland Who rules the Heartland commands the World Island Who rules the World Island commands the world' (Rosenberg, 2018). Mackinder viewed the Heartland as the pivotal region associated with the overall trajectory of global history. Conversely, this crucial area is mentioned without providing exact details about it (Lasserre, 2020). In 1919, however, Mackinder's book 'Democratic Ideals and Reality' recommended extending the boundaries of his 1904 'pivot area' and renaming it as the Heartland. Parts of modern-day Russia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus Mountains make up the geographical region known as the Heartland in Eurasia (Gill, 2020).



Figure 1: Image Source: Mackinder, 1904

Critics have pointed out that Mackinder fails to take into account the ever-changing nature of both geography and power as the theory ignores how the Heartland's strategic importance has changed due to technological developments like nuclear weapons and the proliferation of air power, making it inaccurate (The Geography Teacher, n.d.). 'Although Mackinder's theory has received a great deal of criticism in the decades since its publication' (Scott and Alcenat, 2008) its ongoing relevance is demonstrated by the significant power shifts that have occurred

in the Heartland region during the last century. The first being the Russian Revolution in 1917, which 'marked the end of the Romanov dynasty and centuries of Russian Imperial rule' (History, 2009) to the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 (Foltynova, 2021) and the recent Russia-Ukraine conflict (Brotman, 2022). Additionally, the Heartland 'is about the most multi-cultural region that you can imagine. Every major religion has passed through this area, such as Buddhism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, etc' (Rossabi, n.d.). While this emphasis on the Heartland might seem supererogatory for the landmass connecting Asia and Europe, the geographical and economic axials present an abundance of prospects to the claim (Roy, n.d.).

The foundation of Shanghai Cooperative Organisation in 2001 represents China's first attempt to harmonise Mackinder's heartland (Shinde, 2022). The ubiquitous Sino- Russian influence in the SCO, Alexei Voskressenski argues that political power is now framed in economic rather than military terms, to confront the US in Eurasia (Harper, 2017). 'As General Liu Yazhou of China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) once put it, Central Asia is the thickest piece of cake given to the modern Chinese by the heavens' (Herman and Hung, 2013). The Chinese policy of Heartland influence is pontificated by the Belt & Road Initiative, launched in 2013 by President Xi Jinping on a visit to Astana (Feingold, 2023) highlighting the pivotal aspect (economic axis) of their aspirations. The major motive behind the initiative is 'China's rivalry with the US. The vast majority of Chinese international trade passes by sea through the Malacca strait off the coast of Singapore which is a major US ally. The initiative is integral to China's efforts to create its own more secure trade routes. There is no doubt that China's intention is also to make participating nations interdependent with the Chinese economy, and thereby build economic and political influence for China' (Jie and Wallace, 2021). Through this stratagem China has emerged as the largest trading partner in Central Asia over Russia (eurasianet, 2023). There is significant opposition to the initiative as 'some countries that take on large amounts of debt to fund infrastructure upgrades, BRI money is seen as a potential poisoned chalice' (McBride, Berman and Chatzky, 2023). Through the BRI 'China has funded at least 112 projects in Central Asia' (Imamova, 2023), this economic cooperation enables the Heartland republics to upgrade their ageing infrastructure, while enabling Beijing to put pressure on them to align with China's aims and policies (Nurgozhayeva, 2020). As China's geopolitical influence grows in Central Asia enabling their power projection capabilities (Gill, 2020).

On the other hand, the Heartland theory is 'an essential and integral part of the U.S. presence east of the Atlantic Ocean became clear after the dissolution of the U.S.S.R. Perhaps nothing better than Mackinder's vision allows U.S. to understand the deployment and the actions of the U.S. in the Greater Heartland, including the Middle East' (Fabrizio, 2005). Since 1992, the United States has maintained a strong presence in the region through humanitarian assistance, military-to-military engagement programmes, and the development of energy resources (Yusupov, 2002). 'United States was one of the first countries to recognize the five newly independent states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan' (Stoll, 2023). But with the US focus on central Asia fizzled out in the aftermath of the 9/11 attack with the War on Terror (Brill Olcot, 2003). Though with the rise of China and the Ukraine- Russia conflict, the American focus has altered back to the Heartland, as highlighted through the Secretary of State Anthony Blinken's visit to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (Ali, 2023). This outreach has further culminated in the C5+1 (Central Asia & US) Summit gaining prominence, which 'represents a first for Central Asia-United States relations, as no U.S. president has ever met with these leaders in this format. High-level diplomatic meetings between the U.S. and Central Asia have historically been infrequent, in line with what political

scientist Edward Schatz has called hegemony from a distance' (Wood, 2023). In a region that both Russia and China regard as part of their spheres of influence, Washington is bolstering its military presence in Central Asia to safeguard what it regards as its long-term interests (Peuch, 2020).

Rimland Theory



Figure 2: Image Source: Vázquez Orbaiceta, 2022

'Spykman originated the (Eurasian) Rimland concept, which is of continuing political and strategic utility today. He was controversial and notably outspoken while his writings make it quite clear that his concern with the acquisition of power was contextualised by serious concerns for world order' (Gray, 2015). Spykman contended that control of Rimland, with its abundant resources and access to marine trade routes, shapes global power dynamics (The Geography Teacher, n.d.). Asiatic monsoon lands, which encompass India and China, the Middle East, and the European littoral states make up the three main sections of the rimland (Kumar, 2023). As 'Spykman himself wrote in 1938, Unless the dreams of European Confederation should materialize, it may well be that fifty years from now the quadrumvirate of world powers will be China, India, the United States, and the U.S.S.R' (Astarita and Marconi, 2021). He 'was convinced that Mackinder had overestimated the geopolitical significance of the Heartland' (Ismailov and Papava, 2010).

Spykman articulated that instead of adversarial relations of sea powers against land powers, conflicts between mixed alliances would decide who controls the Rimland, which meant control of the world. This was the exact situation that played out throughout both world wars (Dueck, 2019). Additionally, he 'considered that the control of coastal countries and the sea, gives an advantage over the control of the land itself. On the other hand, the critics argument was that Spykman did not take into account air control and nuclear warfare' (Kapo, 2021). The enormous oil and gas deposits, mostly in the Middle East, have been a major contributor to the Rimland's crucial role. In addition to meeting Europe's and North America's insatiable energy needs, the Middle East with their extensive petroleum reserves (Malachova, 2012), gives it a disproportionately large geo-economic role (Biceroglu, Canik and Dursun, 2023). Beyond energy generation, the Rimland has an outstanding agricultural output with Asia being the agricultural powerhouse (Business

Standard, 2016; Jingyi and Mingyang, 2023; Teng and Mcconville, 2016) with a major chunk of the global population (Ritchie et al., 2023). Rimland has gained a newfound prominence with the Russia-Ukraine conflict highlighting the adversarial interests over controlling the Heartland via the Rimland. This is enunciated through the sustained economic & military support being given to Ukraine (Al Jazeera, 2024), to tame a Heartland power (Russia).

The strategic interests of United States in the Rimland, especially in East Asia and the Middle East, persisted even after the Cold War ended. U.S. military actions and interventions in the region include the Iraq War, the Gulf War, and the War in Afghanistan, among others (Zaheer, 2023). The American policy further asserts over the Rimland ‘with hundreds of thousands of US troops in the Eurasian rimlands and with an administration constantly explaining why it has to stay the course’ (Kennedy, 2004). Even from the European part of the Rimland, which is largely dominated by America through the mechanisms of NATO (Lind, 2023), it has seen a pivot to the Indo-Pacific in an effort to balance China (Lo, 2023). ‘In June 2022, for the first time ever, NATO included China in its Strategic Concept, signaling a radical shift in the bloc’s security outlook’ (Bekkevold, 2023). America further asserts influence over the Rimland through mobilising of the QUAD (US, Australia, Japan, India), enabling it to counter the Chinese threat while also keeping China cornered within Asia (Thornton, 2021). It has also capitalised on the Rimland through the I2U2 Alliance (India, Israel, US & UAE), which is focused on the economic side rather than on the military side (Markey, 2022). ‘Yet geopolitics loom behind economics. Jake Sullivan, Mr. Biden’s national security adviser, compared I2U2 to the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue’ (Gurfinkiel, 2022) which signals the intent of not only economic balancing but a security balance against China in the Middle East. While the American influence in Middle East is waning (Khoury, 2023), it still remains influential given the recent operations in the Gulf of Aden (O’Donnell, 2024) as well as its military prowess in safeguarding its ally Israel (Borger and Wintour, 2024). The American influence is further highlighted through the thousands of troops deployed within the Rimland as articulated in the picture below.



Figure 3: Image Source: Friedman, 2022

While America dominates the Rimland with its military might, China has expanded its presence through its economic prowess with the Belt & Road Initiative, which ‘To date, 147 countries—accounting for two-thirds of the world’s population and 40 percent of global GDP—have signed on to projects or indicated an interest in doing so’ (McBride, Berman and Chatzky, 2023). The picture below elucidates the tactful strategy that China has inculcated to supplant the American dominance over the Rimland. Regarding its near vicinity, ‘China’s astonishing expansion into the South China Sea’s 1.35 million square miles and its subsequent militarization of the region over the past several years has cultivated a complex security environment’ (Romaniuk and Burgers, 2019), which has led to the formation of QUAD. There are several reasons to be concerned about the islands and the influence they grant to China. Not only do they bolster China’s military might overall, but they also solidify China’s dominance of the South China Sea (Seyfort, 2021). While India & Japan have joined the US dominated QUAD, China further counters their alliance by outreach to East Asia (Yang, 2024).



Figure 4: Image Source: Leiden Asia Centre, 2021

Sea Power

Alfred Thayer Mahan served as a lecturer in naval history and held the position of president at the United States Naval War College, ‘In his book *Influence of Sea Power upon History* published in 1890, he argued that naval power could make a state a superpower. This is because 71% of the

earth's surface is covered by seas and a state with a strong navy can dominate the world. Mahan's strategy was instrumental in World War I (Muqadas, 2024). Sea power, in this context refers to a country's capacity to utilise the oceans to advance its political, economic, and military goals in order to accomplish its national objectives (Carney, 1955). The rather paradoxical role of the US government in the international system during the 1880s and 1890s inspired Mahan to develop his theory. The primary message was to highlight the disparity between the expanding economic might of the United States and its relatively weak navy (Jamison, 2022). Naval power is necessary for an aspirant hegemon who is ready to adopt an expansionist foreign policy or for a nation attempting to stop rivals from expanding. Mahan focused on the rivalries between the great powers in building battleships and the strategic doctrines that shaped how their fleets were used when he looked at how world politics were changing (Maurer, 2022). *'In the 18th and 19th centuries Britain rose to a position in which it controlled the world's oceans'* (Snow, 2010), culminating in the growth and consolidation of its empire (Garber, 2018). Based on the British naval supremacy, Mahan pontificated three characteristics for a nation to acquire the status of seapower; a merchant navy (to carry their goods to new markets through the high seas), a battleship navy (to deter and destroy rival fleets), and a large network of naval bases (to keep the lines of communication open) (Office of the Historian, n.d.). *'More broadly, navies can exert influence by their mere presence and normal operations'* (Masters, 2019). Today, the *'vast majority of global trade today moves by sea, so control of the world's oceans has become critical for both commerce and security'* (Jones and Dollar, 2021), further asserting the vitality of Mahan's prognosis. In contemporary times, the command over the Asian Mediterranean, or what is now known as the South China Sea, is crucial for regional domination (Germond, 2024), as Spykman had predicted.

With the inculcation of Mahan's theory into the American statecraft since the Spanish-American War (Office of the Historian, n.d.), today *'the U.S. Navy has a command of the sea that affords the United States unrivaled international influence. For decades, its size and sophistication have enabled leaders in Washington to project American power over much of the earth, during times of both war and peace'* (Masters, 2019). Although, *'Today, only 25 percent of America's 114 commissioned surface combatants (cruisers, destroyers, and littoral combat ships) are less than a decade old. By comparison more than 80 percent of China's 141 destroyers, frigates, and corvettes have been commissioned in the past decade. In the same time period, the United States commissioned 30 surface combatants. Earlier this year, the Navy began decommissioning some of the littoral combat ships. China, by contrast, mass-produced 120 surface combatants. U.S. ships are operating, in some cases, with decades-old technology'* (Berube, 2021). Although, even with this differential America continues to balance rising tensions *'with U.S. allies or partners forming a crescent surrounding the Chinese coast, from South Korea and Japan through the Philippines and down through Southeast Asia and Australia'* (Baker, 2020). This allows America to corner China to the South China sea, which *'is the girdle of the marginal seas. Control of the margin sea will not only act as a protective buffer against any belligerent seapower, but also allow China to project its seapower further in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean region'* (Singh, 2016). America's utilisation of the seapower doctrine is further highlighted by its previous operations in Afghanistan, 2001-2002 (Bereiter, 2016) to Iran, 1998 (Wise, 2013) to Korea 1950-1953 (Marolda, 2010) to the contemporary power projection in the Gulf of Aden (O'Donnell, 2024) or in the case of mobilisation of aircraft carriers to safeguard its ally Israel (Vincent, 2023). China continues stirring up disputes in the south China sea (Layton, 2023) disrupting the American hegemony, to counter balance these tactics America has further mobilised QUAD (US, India, Japan, Australia) through

its exercises (Mahadzir, 2023). Apart from these instances America further stresses on Mahan's theory by deploying fleets connected through naval bases all around the globe which has allowed it to project power way beyond its immediate vicinity.



Figure 5: Key U.S. Naval Installations

Image Source: Callender, 2019

Conversely, China has well capitalised its ambitions through Mahan's thesis. This inculcation is highlighted by the fact that it has the world's largest navy, elucidating to its ambitions of being a blue water navy (McCarthy, 2023). 'The People's Liberation Army Navy has 355 front-line ships in three fleets arrayed along the Chinese coast. The U.S. Navy, by contrast, has 305 front-line ships, divided roughly 60-40 between the Pacific and Atlantic Fleets' (Axe, 2021). Apart from the military angle it also has the world's largest merchant fleet by gross tonnage terms (Chambers, 2023). China pontificates its blue water ambition through the creation of artificial islands in the South China sea amassing almost 3200 acres since 2014 (Seyfort, 2021). While America remains stretched too thin with its focus on other conflicts (Russia-Ukraine, Israel etc) (Levantovscaia, 2024), China has further started militarisation of these artificial islands (Aquilino, 2022). It further asserts Mahan's thoughts as 'Beijing's primary strategy in the South China Sea is to use civilian and paramilitary pressure to coerce its Southeast Asian neighbors into abandoning their rights' (Poling, 2020), further challenging America's hegemony.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For China

- China should use the Belt and Road Initiative as an adaptable instrument for economic, diplomatic, and cultural outreach, while focussing on naval modernisation and military projection capabilities to protect critical trade lines and global interests.

- China can avoid inciting stronger resistance from the US and other regional powers by implementing sophisticated measures in the South China Sea, such as reaching tactical agreements and employing legal and diplomatic manoeuvres.
- Strengthening strategic ties with regional powers such as Russia, Pakistan, and Iran remains critical for securing Heartland connectivity, gaining influence over the West, and presenting China's Indo-Pacific agenda as an alternative to the US-led order.

For United States

- To combat China's expanding influence, the US should seek out & develop more coastal alliances and security partnerships through joint exercises, information sharing, and capacity building. Deterring Chinese adventurism will require maintaining decisive naval superiority in strategic hotspots such as the Taiwan Strait and the Malacca Strait through the allocation of resources, innovation, and resilient force posture.
- The US should offer incentives to Heartland governments to align with the US-centric rules-based order, such as infrastructure financing, digital connectivity, and governance partnerships, while also presenting a positive picture of shared prosperity and democratic principles.
- To offset China's increasing economic influence in the Indo-Pacific region, the United States may take the lead in establishing new standards for connectivity through programs like the Blue Dot Network, Clean Network, and Quad.

A Pax Americana 2.0 or a Pax Sinica would eventually underwrite the emerging regional order, and this is the crux of the strategic rivalry in the Indo-Pacific. In order to protect their interests and shape the future power balance, the United States and China will have to make use of the Heartland's economic potential, the Rimland's geopolitical importance, and Sea Power's military value. It will be crucial to employ complex techniques that combine economic and normative instruments with coercion and co-option, unilateralism and multilateralism. Who will emerge as the dominant powerbroker of the 21st century in an ever-changing geopolitical scene depends on careful planning, swift adaptation, and methodical execution.

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ON SWEDEN'S ACCESSION TO NATO

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Sweden's very long and persistent policy of neutrality was interrupted by its decision to apply for NATO membership. This was primarily precipitated due to the active and ongoing war in Ukraine. Such changes only signal that the ability of countries to guarantee, control and maintain security is deteriorating throughout Europe and the West, and this has serious consequences for Sweden, NATO, Europe and Russia.

Sweden's accession to NATO is one of the significant actions aimed at intensifying and strengthening collective security, and also has strong implications on the geopolitical dynamics in Europe, especially in the Nordic and Baltic regions. This article will aim to delve deeper into the understanding of Sweden's decision to join NATO, the unfolding security issues, the military-industrial complex, the integration of Sweden's military capabilities into NATO, and the results and consequences for European and Russian foreign policy.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND SECURITY IMPLICATIONS FOR SWEDEN

Sweden has maintained a policy of military neutrality for many years, refusing to participate in any military political blocs and actions, formal alliances. This began in 1814, when peace was concluded with Norway after the signing of the Moss Convention. According to the King Charles XIV - Sweden adhered to the principle of "non-participation in blocs in peacetime in order to maintain neutrality in wartime." That is why Sweden did not take an active part during the two world wars of the previous century, as well as the Cold War, and remained neutral when NATO was created in 1949 (Dzen, 2024). Sweden refused to join NATO and strictly followed the course of a strong national political consensus.

Despite this, since 1994, Sweden began to cooperate with the NATO bloc, and became a member of the Partnership for Peace program, aimed at creating and strengthening ties and cooperation with non-NATO member states. Moreover, in 1997, Sweden became a member of the North Atlantic Partnership Council, where consultations on security issues between NATO members and other NATO-friendly states were held.

Sweden then participated in the joint operations and actions undertaken by NATO, such as, for example, in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq (Regeringskansliet, 2024).

The unpredictable nature of Russia's foreign policy, accompanied by potential dangers and threats, as well as its close geographical location to Russia and strategic position in the Baltic Sea, have increased the level of concern several times. This has put Sweden in a more vulnerable position due to the risk of potential aggression, which forced the country to change its approach to national security. Seeing Russia as a possible serious threat, Sweden began to build up its military potential,

investing more in the military sector, which included modernizing the armed forces, stimulating greater defense spending, and strengthening ties, cooperation, and support with NATO countries and neighbours.

The year 2014 was marked by the Russian invasion of Crimea and its annexation by Russia. This event raised concerns and sowed the seeds of security dilemma in many European states. *Ex post*, relations between Russia and NATO deteriorated significantly, followed by multiple sanctions against the Russian Federation and various individuals on its territory. Therefore, during this period, Sweden decided to strengthen ties with NATO and acquired the status of an "Enhanced Opportunities Partner," and then a few years later a mutual support agreement was signed between Sweden and NATO (Regeringskansliet, 2024).

The start of the military operation on the territory of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, called into question the desire to continue the policy of neutrality of Sweden, and based on statistics, more than 50% of the country's population expressed a desire to join NATO. Therefore, in 2022, Sweden applied for accession to NATO together with Finland.

While Finland was accepted into the bloc in 2023, the approval of Sweden's accession was delayed until 2024. This was caused by accusations from Turkey and the reluctance to give consent to Sweden's accession – since President Erdogan of Turkey was against the accession of a country that shelters people belonging to anti-Turkish Kurdish associations. This caused a huge wave of resentment in Sweden, manifested in mass demonstrations and anti-Turkish sentiments. However, after negotiations between Turkey and Sweden, an agreement was reached. Sweden has committed to helping Turkey join the European Union, and to improving the customs union, as well as strengthening the fight against terrorists on Swedish territory. Therefore, 2024 is also marked by Sweden's accession to NATO. Therefore, by joining NATO, Sweden simply continued on a course that now gave it access to collective security guarantees that it had not previously had, such as the fact that Article 5 of the NATO treaty now extends to Sweden, providing reassurance along with the guarantee that an attack on one member will be considered an attack on all. This guarantee creates and secures mutual defense obligations, which ultimately helps to deter Russia and its aggression. It also bolsters NATO's northern flank and makes it more powerful, increasing the likelihood of ensuring the security of the Baltic Sea region and leading to greater stability (Regeringskansliet, 2024).

INTEGRATION OF THE SWEDISH MILITARY SECTOR INTO NATO

For NATO, it is quite an advantage to have a country with a technologically advanced and modern defense industry in its ranks. The inclusion of military capabilities in the NATO command structure will entail important consequences for Sweden and for the bloc.

Firstly, standardization - this means that Sweden will have to follow NATO operational procedures, communication protocols and equipment standards so that Swedish and bloc forces can operate together according to the same standards. *Interoperability* is necessary for joint operations to be even more productive, and for Sweden to make an equal and sufficient contribution to NATO's collective security and defense efforts.

Secondly, joint operations and exercises between NATO and Sweden. As mentioned above, Sweden became a NATO partner a few years ago, so it took part in some operations and exercises. Now that it is a NATO member, Sweden will be able to delve deeper into the policies and actions taken by the bloc, expand its capabilities, technologies and knowledge, and contribute to various areas such as air defense, cyber security, and Arctic warfare. With Sweden's participation in exercises, both NATO and Sweden will be more prepared for potential threats and able to respond.

Thirdly, changes are also expected in the spending needed for defense and military development to improve capabilities. NATO countries aim to reach 2% of GDP on defense, and Sweden can make a strong contribution to this by becoming one of NATO's important assets, thanks to its increased defense spending and military industry development over the past few years. Sweden's fairly stable investments in its defense have allowed it, unlike for example Switzerland (a country that has also maintained neutrality for a long time), to modernize its armed forces using advanced technologies, and to provide a more reliable guarantee of maintaining defense and the ability to defend itself, which was and remains especially important for Sweden due to its territorial proximity to the Russian Federation. These actions, in turn, will now improve and strengthen the collective security of the alliance (Regeringskansliet, 2024).

Fourthly, the problem of cybersecurity is becoming more and more relevant these days, and naturally, countries want more access to various intelligence data. Sweden is a country with strong resources and capabilities to establish cybersecurity, at least to try to guarantee it and prevent most threats. This will be a significant plus for the bloc's defense infrastructure. In addition, Sweden's inclusion in NATO entails a more active and detailed exchange of intelligence, which will be very useful for NATO's situational awareness and will help to anticipate possible dangers. (Mishra, 2024)

Fifth, Sweden, being in the Baltic Sea region, is of strategic importance to NATO. The Alliance's defense planning will now be able to include air bases, naval ports and logistics infrastructure in Sweden, which significantly increases NATO's capabilities in the Nordic and Baltic regions. Sweden is a country that, due to its ability to help with NATO's rapid reaction forces and with the protection of important sea routes in the Baltic, is a major new advantage for NATO (Mishra, 2024).

IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPEAN SECURITY

European security will also undergo some changes due to Sweden's accession to NATO, especially in regions such as the Nordic and Baltic. It will enable NATO to increase its presence there, thereby creating a more unified and secure Northern Europe which will subsequently help reduce the likelihood of regional conflicts, as well as prevent potential aggression, especially from Russia.

Strengthening the Nordic and Baltic Security Landscape

Before Sweden and Finland joined NATO, there was a gap in the European northern flank that prevented NATO from receiving additional resources and assistance, as well as ensuring its own security from this side. With Sweden and Finland joining, the Nordic and Baltic security architecture has strengthened its capabilities and have become stronger. Now, one can say, a

continuous association from North America to the Baltic is being created and that is aimed at containing Russia and more seriously protecting the regions in the event of various disagreements and conflicts.

Sweden's accession to NATO gives the alliance access to advanced air defense systems and the navy of Sweden, which, for example, has scattered one of the most technologically advanced non-nuclear submarines - A26, as well as the Saab JAS 39 Gripen fighter jet, which shows the importance for Sweden to have the most advanced technology. This will ensure its presence in the Baltic Sea, and enable it to have a faster reaction in the region, thereby improving deterrence and defense planning (Dzen, 2024).

It will also provide Sweden with the prospect of improving relations with other European countries, creating various cooperations, diplomatic ties, which will help to maintain greater stability, provide necessary emergency assistance, and guarantee security. Furthermore, Sweden will continue to participate in various defense activities of the European Union, such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), as well as the European Defense Fund (EDF). As a member of both NATO and the EU, Sweden, along with other countries, helps to ensure better coordination between both organizations, which, in the future, can make the strategy for the defense of Europe more developed and integrated (RBS,2024).

On one hand, Sweden and its defense-oriented companies will benefit from joining NATO, as they will be given greater access to procurement markets, which will give impetus to the development of various cooperations, interactions and contracts, and will also open up new business opportunities. On the other hand, Sweden has previously mainly focused on and spent its resources on the domestic security sector, i.e. expanding its capabilities and technologies. Now it will also have to follow NATO standards and work closer with defense contractors of other member states, which can also increase competition for the domestic military industry and increase pressure on local companies and organizations.

There are some opinions that the acceptance of Sweden to NATO can have very non-beneficial repercussions for the Swedish economy and that the country may lose its independence and sovereignty over defense issues. For instance, a former scout of the USA Scott Ritter commented on that: *"Say goodbye to your economy, Sweden. And to your sovereignty. You are now officially a colony of the United States. All idiots..."* (Dzen, 2024).

CONSEQUENCES FOR RUSSIA

The accession of both Finland and Sweden to NATO is seen from Russia's point of view as NATO measures to expand its strategic capabilities in order to create a threat to the security and sphere of influence of the Russian Federation. Moscow has repeatedly expressed its displeasure and treated negatively the potential expansion of NATO especially to the East. Therefore, both Sweden and Finland (that borders Russia) adds fuel to the fire and worsens the already existing tensions between Russia and the West.

NATO's active and targeted encirclement of the western borders of the Russian Federation (the land border of NATO members and Russia has increased from 1,215 to 2,600 km) is what Russia believes NATO has done to encircle it (RBC, 2024). The result of this is already the activation and intensification of Russia's military presence in the Baltic Sea. This is happening with the help of naval patrols, military exercises, and air incursions. All this can ultimately lead to even greater tension, greater risks, and potential clashes and conflicts between the Russian Federation and NATO. According to Dmitry Peskov, the press secretary of the President of the Russian Federation, Sweden's accession to NATO is a mistake in misunderstanding the risks that lead to NATO's military infrastructure approaching the Russian borders. So, this will have negative consequences for Stockholm, similar to the measures being planned against Helsinki.

Strengthening NATO means that Russia must also strengthen and expand its capabilities. Therefore, it is actively seeking to bolster its military alliances and guarantors of assistance and security with countries such as Belarus and China – that would potentially pose a strong threat to NATO, among other things. (RBC,2024) Such relationships aimed at strengthening cooperation may consist of various military exercises, intelligence, arms sales, and others. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov warned that the Russian Federation has created the Moscow and Leningrad military districts, which will contain additional weapons. Russia, in turn, can also take serious measures to destabilize the region, using hybrid warfare tactics - cyberattacks, disinformation, and covert operations. Moreover, according to Russian military and political analyst Alexander Perendzhinva, NATO shows by its actions that it is starting a full-scale confrontation with the Russian Federation for Arctic resources, so the Russian Federation will strengthen its military lines in the Arctic (Mishra, 2024). Sweden's accession to NATO also has serious consequences for the domestic policy of the Russian Federation. Moscow can and will interpret Sweden's entry into the bloc as a reason and pretext to increase its spending on militarization.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the aggressive actions taken by Russia mainly towards Ukraine and the geopolitical proximity to Sweden have forced Sweden to abandon its policy of neutrality and join NATO in order to ensure a safer environment for itself and be prepared for any confrontations, conflicts, or threats. The NATO bloc, thanks to new members and their advanced technologies in the military sector, has received the opportunity to strengthen and ensure the security of Northern Europe. According to the expert of the GIS center: *“Now that the entire Nordic region has become part of NATO, Europe will be able to take greater responsibility for its own security and act as a more powerful defense partner for the United States and Canada,”* so together NATO countries will be more prepared and united to solve pressing problems (RBC,2024)

At the same time, these actions entail possible negative consequences such as worsening tensions between Russia and NATO, and the risk of creating an even less stable and secure situation in Europe. Sweden, in turn, must make efforts to be able to find a balance between compliance with its new course and new standards of collective security, and attempts not to worsen relations with Russia.

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REMEDIES FOR ECO-TECHNOLOGICAL CATASTROPHE: RE-ENVISIONING PSYCHEDELICS' POTENTIAL FOR HELPING SOLVE TODAY'S CHALLENGES

Robert Green

With the world currently facing many conflicting ecological and technological issues, works of psychedelic literature may offer alternative concepts for dealing with the challenges. However, much of the global populace still lacks knowledge regarding potential benefits of psychedelics, partly resulting from social stigma associated with psychotomimetic use during the 1960s and reinforced by former U.S. president Richard Nixon's 1971 "War on Drugs," which politically legitimized their illegalization and misrepresentation. While clinical studies began to re-emerge during the 1990s and scholarly papers have iterated positive results for psychoactive treatments of various health factors, deeper reflection can show how psychedelics could potentially do more, offering greater insights that could (albeit indirectly) help to heal the entire planet.

The path toward realizing these perspectives involves re-imagining psychedelics grounded on empathy and enjoyable purpose, two human characteristics altered states have provided when immersed in the right set and setting, repeatedly emphasized throughout much of the literature associated with altered states of consciousness. At a time when digital technologies are impacting users in unprecedented ways, psychedelic research can be a catalyst for drawing "users" out of their screen haze to recognize that we are all connected as a whole beyond a digitally sampled reality.

For scholars who have actively engaged in the subject of psychedelics and psychedelic therapy, it comes as little surprise how these subjects have endured mixed opinions over the past eight decades, notably since Albert Hoffman's initial use of Lysergic Acid Diethylamide 25 (LSD) in 1943¹. Pursuing research into related studies can often involve confusion on the part of readers as well as potentially negative media uproar, in part due to the illegalization of many psychedelics including LSD in the United States in 1966, followed by former U.S. President Richard Nixon's 1971 "War on Drug's" and the resulting classification of psychedelics as Schedule I substances by 1973, essentially declaring there was no specific medical use or purpose for these drugs². As a result,

¹ Chris Letheby covers some of the other initial discoveries and experiments of psychedelics in his book *Philosophy of Psychedelics* (2021) on p. 9. Complete source in the Bibliography.

² More details on these dates and the rationale for Schedule I substances can be found in the National Library of Medicine's online article, "Two Models of Legalization of Psychedelic Substances" (2022) as well as by visiting the United States Drug Enforcement Agency's website explaining "Drug Scheduling" at the following link: <https://www.dea.gov/drug-information/drug-scheduling#:~:text=Schedule%20I%20drugs%2C%20substances%2C%20or,a%20high%20potential%20for%20abuse>.

investigations into psychedelic use have frequently been politically illegitimated while labeling the scientists, researchers, and users as merely left-leaning drug fanatics or irresponsible practitioners.

Since the re-emergence of clinical studies during the 1990s, however, there have been efforts toward not only decriminalizing psychedelic use in some countries, but of demonstrating an array of medicinal benefits some psychedelics have at helping patients in clinical settings suffering from issues ranging from terminal illness to depression, addiction, and anxiety. Moreover, there has been significant evidence that the use of certain psychedelics correlates with positive behavioral changes such as decreasing levels of criminal activity, suicide, and violence, while enhancing “pro-environmental” behavior³. In short, the stigmatization allotted to psychedelics during the latter half of the 20th century and into the 21st century has reduced with the increase in clinical studies carried out which show evident benefits for their use.

This paper argues that while advancements in psychedelic therapy and research have shown positive results thus far, there are numerous other possibilities that can be explored toward improving the current stasis in the world, specifically regarding ecological responsibility to heal the planet and the elimination of incessant technological dependency threatening future generations’ abilities to navigate conflicts and challenges. To be sure, this work does not discount the notable benefits computers have had on allowing scientists and medical practitioners to perform monumental operations in industries like healthcare, where more elegant data patterns and computational processing capabilities have provided optimistic perspectives for imagining a better future. However, to understand some of the current effects immersive digital technologies have on multiple global crises like climate change and digital pollution demands reassessing the role computer technologies ultimately play in day-to-day life and how they have also become a significant cause of human disparities and a potential risk to human prosperity.

The first part of this work focuses on outlining some of the most serious concerns pertaining to digital technologies today and provides a brief overview of specific behavioral conditions resulting from tech dependency. The second part of the work emphasizes psychedelic therapies discussed in Chris Letheby’s *Philosophy of Psychedelics* (2021) and other similar studies to explain how the research, in conjunction with non-digitally dependent expressions and spaces, may offer solutions toward re-imagining a future devoid of ecological crises. By broadly observing both technology and psychedelics together, there may be evidence that the latter of these could be an answer to dealing with some of the world’s problems, in part, the result of the former.

The past few years following the most severe spread of Covid have borne witness to a substantial degree of literature and articles that deal with technological effects on children, adolescents, and adults alike, albeit for different reasons. While Artificial Intelligence has instigated worries over rising unemployment levels for adults in the workforce, increasing evidence has shown that what was once only thought to be a correlation between smart phone use and declining health issues among adolescents and children is a demonstrable fact. Jonathan Haidt explains in his recent book, *The Anxious Generation* (2024) how multiple studies and experiments have been carried out confirming that social media “is a *cause* of anxiety, depression, and other ailments, not just

³ See Letheby (2021), p. 16

a *correlate*” (Haidt, 148). More specifically, he defines the period between 2010 and 2015 as the “Great Rewiring,” whereby, beginning in the first part of the early 2010s, social media was “carried into schools... on smart phones in students’ pockets... [which] quickly changed the culture of everyone” (ibid). One of the repercussions of this development is that the level of distraction Haidt is referring to implies that less people are cognizant of their surroundings as well as more serious societal issues taking place outside of their algorithmically determined media appetites.

For younger, less developed minds, the risks of digital technologies like smart phones are even more profound. For example, the release of the first phones with front-facing cameras to enable *selfies*, accompanied by face *filters* to enhance superficial physical appearance while perfecting facial blemishes spelled psychological ruin for many preteens and teenagers, especially among girls, while addictive phone use for boys began to involve excessive screentime viewing pornography or being hooked on video games.⁴ Of the multiple problems that have resulted, depression and mental illness cases have skyrocketed and basic human to human interaction has been sacrificed in exchange for solitary, endless (and mindless) scrolling which have torn apart abilities to feel ‘real’ community and intimate family and friend relationships.

In her book *Dopamine Nation* (2021), Anna Lembke discusses the increase in media relating to wellness and the pursuit of happiness, explaining how even “acts of kindness are framed as a strategy for personal happiness. Altruism no longer merely a good in itself has become a vehicle for our own “well-being” (Lembke, 34). In other words, the ability for youth as well as adults to engage in congenial communication and meaningful kinship toward each other has been debilitated through compulsive screen time. Haidt (2024) argues that even though many parents would undoubtedly want their children to avoid becoming excessively immersed into a screen, another issue that is considerably concerning for those same parents is that their kids potentially become socially isolated by not having a phone *like their other friends*.⁵ For wealthier developed countries worldwide, the result of the prolific spread of mobile phones coupled with socio-economic pressure to use them to perform virtually all interpersonal and intrapersonal communication transactions does not help, especially when big tech companies, consciously deploy a ““social validation feedback loop”... [to] exploit “a vulnerability in human psychology”” (Haidt, 2024; 227). In short, it should come as little surprise why so many people today feel lost or disconnected from one another and their natural surroundings, which increasingly go unnoticed when so many people prefer gazing into their screens rather than looking out the window or acknowledging the world around them during their daily commutes.

One potential solution for curing some of these technologically influenced ailments is psychedelic therapy. Because of the cultural stigma that has traditionally surrounded psychedelics since the 1960s and 1970s, it may seem like a radical approach to adopt psychedelics as a primary catalyst for healing people and the planet. However, since the reemergence of clinical research on psychedelics during the 1990s, there have been promising studies that have been carried out which demonstrate the power of different forms of psychedelics to help people suffering from behavioral issues. Chris Letheby’s work in *Philosophy of Psychedelics* (2021) provides substantial insight into some of these developments. Citing other researchers in the field, Letheby explains, “Clinicians

⁴ See Haidt (2024), pp. 6 and 35 for new hardware development for smartphone cameras. Also, pp- 31 and 174.

⁵ See p. 223

and researchers are becoming increasingly interested in a ‘new’ experimental treatment, with some suggesting it might herald a ‘new paradigm’ in treatment of disorders such as anxiety, depression, and addiction” (Letheby, 2021; 1, Nichols et al., 2017, Schenberg, 2018). While traditional forms of treatment have involved prescribing antidepressant medication, one of the main problems with these drugs is that they can lead to dependencies, often requiring patients to take them for lengthy durations of time. Despite the negative media messages surrounding psychedelics however, the fact is that as a drug treatment, “there is no daily dosing regimen of the kind familiar from existing antidepressant and antipsychotic medications” (Letheby, 2021; 1). For those who have actually experienced a psilocybin or LSD trip, they may have noticed that not only are they non-addictive in the sense of tobacco, alcohol, or opioid use, but the effects when attempting to ingest these drugs directly following an experience are extremely low, making it undesirable to try and achieve consecutively intense experiences. This is a critical detail when debating the safety of psychedelics and their impact on health.

Letheby (2021) engages quite extensively with the subject of psychedelics’ health effects. For example, he highlights evidence that members of the Native American Church and Santo Daime were in good health both mentally and physically in comparison to the broader populace.⁶ The rationale for emphasizing this group is due to the fact that they regularly use peyote and ayahuasca in rituals. In term of negative media effects, Letheby also includes an excerpt of a 2008 study published in the *Journal of Psychopharmacology*, where the authors address claims of chromosomal damage from LSD use and point out that not only is it untrue, but the claim was the result of an “anti-LSD media campaign by the USA government in the late 1960s” (Letheby, 2021; 14).

Although it can be understandable why the general public may, broadly speaking, negatively perceive psychedelics, individual ideologies relating to institutionalized religious views as well as certain medical experts have naïvely grouped psychedelics with other drugs like opioids and stimulants. An example of this can be found in Anna Lembke’s (M.D.) New York Times Bestseller *Dopamine Nation* (2021), where she lists LSD among other “gateway” drugs one of her patients used before eventually getting hooked on heroin.⁷ At another point in her work, she discusses psychedelics as being used for thousands of years and then refers to their popularity during the 1960s, stating that once “hallucinogens became popular and widely available as recreational drugs in the counterculture movement of the 1960s... harms multiplied, leading to LSD being made illegal in most parts of the world” (Lembke, 2021; 114). While it is true that bad actors were evident during the counterculture, the case Lembke makes is both potentially biased and overly reductive, notably because the general perception of LSD was, in fact, reinforced by negative media campaigns without presenting any significant data to clearly show that LSD was the indisputable cause of increased “harms.” Interestingly, Letheby’s research published the same year as Lembke’s book underscores the reality that “Political discourse and media coverage surrounding LSD, in particular, painted an alarming picture of a substance capable of causing instant and permanent insanity, genetic defects, and moral corruption” (Letheby, 2021; 13, citing Masters and Houston 1966, Dyck 2010, Mangini 1998). He emphasizes that while psychedelics “are no more risk-free than any other intervention, the danger of psychedelics seem to have been greatly exaggerated” (ibid). These considerations are important for realizing the flawed, negative hype overshadowing

⁶ See p. 14 from *Philosophy of Psychedelics* (2021)

⁷ See p. 22 from *Dopamine Nation* (2021). Complete source in Bibliography.

the benefits psychedelics have provided therapists and clinicians carrying out actual research into health effects.

Given the increasing evidence from clinical studies demonstrating positive impacts of psychedelic therapy, it is worth questioning how psychedelics may serve to improve human conditions and help usher in a future where more people can feel an interconnectedness between all humans and planetary species. Returning to Letheby's (2021) research, he cites further studies that have shown correlations between the use of psychedelics and heightened levels of "pro-environmental behavior" (16). In one excerpt, a man describes how using psilocybin allowed him to take notice of clouds in the sky.⁸ In another study, Benny Shanon reports that he could feel as if he were "actually seeing the nurturing sustenance of the solar light" (Letheby, 2021; 185) as it glared on the plants and vegetation in his surroundings.

Perhaps, of equal importance to one's abilities to be more attentive to the natural world are the numerous reports involving ego dissolution and reduced anxiety. One study carried out with psilocybin showed that it "induced positively valenced experiences of ego dissolution and oceanic boundlessness, with low levels of anxiety" (Letheby, 2021; 92). When considering how social media has caused so many *Generation Zers* and *Millennials* (among other generations) to become self-absorbed with filtered faces and selfies, the prospects that psilocybin experiences could bring them out of their digital fog is a compelling thought. The big idea here is that the damage smart phones have caused by creating massive disconnect and distraction from the physical world is likely going to require radical measures to benevolently counteract. By exposing more people to psychedelic therapy, it could be possible to develop a culture that can, in Letheby's (2021) terms, access "new knowledge of old facts" (188), a phenomenon that would imply reestablishing the natural environment as a principal priority, enabling more people have a firmer grasp on the ecologically disastrous effects caused by a compulsive dependency on digital technologies.

To conclude, it is important to note that while technological addiction, ecological crises, and psychedelics may all be separate subjects with no apparent connection to each other, the hope is that this work sheds some light on their relationship. Regardless of the notable advantages technology offers, big tech has massively contributed to dismantling present generations' mental faculties, leading many to experience lack of self-worth, depression, anxiety, and even some semblance of cognitive dissonance, by believing that the solution to all of life's problems can be achieved by continued reliance on digital technologies to manage every single interpersonal, intrapersonal, and professional human transaction. This dependency has costly ecological impacts in terms of mining, carbon emissions, and digital pollution from hyper connectivity.

While psychedelics, as catalysts for expanding minds, may seem reckless to an increasingly predictable society (thanks in large part to big data collection by tech firms) content on the status quo and influenced by government media campaigns once aimed at demonizing their use, evidence continues to emerge regarding their profound, transformative benefits at a time when mental illness, depression, and anxiety among youth are higher than ever. A new direction needs to be taken that can encourage these broken hearts and minds to recognize that their lives have

⁸ See p. 178

greater meaning and are critical to helping establish a more balanced planet. With psychedelics, according to Letheby (2021), “profoundly positive emotions such as forgiveness, peace, joy, and love can feature centrally too, and often follow the acceptance of difficult or painful feelings” (59). Psychedelic therapy has the potential to redirect empathy and energy into the complex challenges facing the world while repairing algorithmic discord among populations that have experienced extreme polarization as a result of social media. There is a life outside of the smart phone that is in dire need of being nurtured and these recent developments in psychedelic studies show positive signs for a regenerative, healthier way to live.

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SAUDI ARABIA'S GAME PLAN IN THE RED SEA CRISIS: A CASE STUDY ON ITS ROLE WITH THE YEMEN WAR

Carol Flores

The Red Sea holds immense geopolitical power and significance towards its surrounding crossroads between Asia, Africa and the Middle East. It serves as a maritime connection that links the Mediterranean Sea to the entirety of the Indian Ocean. Among these is the country of Saudi Arabia (KSA), strategically placing its foreign policy in the Red Sea region to fulfil its ultimate goal for security and influence in the region. Specifically noting the country's involvement in the Yemeni civil war that began in 2015, its stance grew deeper than intended as the conflict rose in several forms; these include separatist tensions, a multiplex of ethnic rivalries and other geopolitical manoeuvring, as competition for Yemen's location became more apparent during its time of weakness. This case study dives into the geopolitics of the Middle East, emphasising the calculated tactics of Saudi Arabia's foreign policies placed in the Red Sea region and its rivals. A mix of interdisciplinary approaches such as international relations, international law and political science are used to provide a further understanding of the intricacies the Yemeni civil war has caused and its implications on regional stability. The case comprises of Saudi Arabia's conflicting attitude to the Yemeni conflict by examining the beginning of its involvement with their military intervention, following their coalition strategies and humanitarian efforts, its diplomatic gambits and cooperation for security, and lastly - a bit of their attempts for economic development. The theoretical frameworks implemented in this paper are the following; balance of power, realpolitik, and humanitarian intervention. These serve as tools to situate the kingdom's motivations and calculations behind their behaviour towards Yemen involving the Red Sea region. This structure functions under the assumption that the country's role in the Yemeni war gives insights towards the evolving nature of regional dynamics and geopolitics in the Middle East, and the belief that Saudi Arabia's foreign policy is formed by security deliberations, humanitarian distress, and geopolitical edicts.

MILITARY INTERVENTION AND THE BUILDING OF COALITION

It all starts in 1982, when the YAR, back then commonly known as North Yemen, declares national sovereignty under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea over all the islands in the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea, "...which have been its dependencies since the period when the Yemen and the Arab countries were under Turkish administration, (UNCLOS, 1982)." After its declaration, a merger between the North (YAR) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY), South, created the establishment of the Republic of Yemen in 1990. According to a Cambridge University article, the now unified republic takes up the southwest corner of the Arabian Peninsula and, "shares roughly half of its landward border with Saudi Arabia (Burrowes, 1991)." Then 12 June, 2000, the *International Boundary Treaty Between the Republic of Yemen and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia* was signed, creating a historical bind between the two states by, "invoking the norms and principles of the Islamic

faith they share, (International Boundary Treaty Between the Republic of Yemen and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia).” The treaty aimed to provide a solution to their ongoing trading and maritime disputes in the questioning of their neighbouring land and boundaries. As it “apparently” resolved disputes over the Saudi-Yemeni boundary in the Red Sea, an emphasis on the word “apparently” in respect of their uncertain terminus in the signing of the Treaty of Taif in 1939, the unclear sovereignty of the islands and the reported “killing of Saudi and Yemeni soldiers during July clashes on Duwayyimah Island, (Dzurek, 3),” lead to discussions in 1986 and eventually the agreement in 1990.

All was well until the rebellion of the Houthis, a Shia Islamist political group, and their seizure of the capital, Sanaa, in September 2014. Former Yemeni allies, the United States and Saudi Arabia became weary over the Houthi or Ansarallah movement due to their ties with rival Iran and the help of northern Yemenis tribes. As a result, Yemen’s President Abd-Rabbuh Mansour Al-Hadi was heavily pressured to restore a national unity government and was, “*humiliatingly rendered to share power with the Houthis*, (Jan, Mahid, 193).” Hence the allies’ strategic decision in 2015 to create *Operation Decisive Storm*, in support of Sunni Muslim countries to push back the Houthis and bring back the internationally recognised ally Hadi government. Further analysing their plan, Yemen also encountered challenges in urban warfare and terrain complexities aside from the Houthi’s resilience. Applying the theory of military intervention, complicated conflicts like the Yemen civil war are likely to be costly and high risk to resolve, in addition to the coalition made. One of these members being the United Arab Emirates (UAE), who’s interests clashed with KSA’s motives which led to a division of their anti-Houthi coalition and continuous fight between their militia establishments in Yemen that backtracked any progress in defeating the Houthis. As the UAE backed and financed local militias like the Southern Transitional Council (STC), the country established significant leverage over the maritime outposts. As a counterstrategy, “*Saudi Arabia established and supported several local militias of its own* (Baabood, 2023).” Their established Shabwani and Hadrami Elite Forces allowed the UAE to gain control over Aden and several other areas in Yemen. But UAE-backed sectarian militias started clashing with Saudi-backed governmental forces “*by dividing and destabilising coalition-controlled areas* (Baabood, 2023).” This huge backtrack was meant to be resolved in the signing of the Riyadh Agreement in 2019, initially succeeding in calling ceasefires between the two. Although little improvement was made due to the STC declaring self-rule in 2020 and the failure to follow its deadlines and implement its main delivery. The underlying problem with Saudi Arabia’s military intervention strategy lies in the sustainability and the effectiveness of the plan. The ground operations and airstrikes by the Saudi-led coalition caused many civilian fatalities and overall damage towards their infrastructure. This emerged the rise of a new conflict between Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

DIPLOMATIC GAMBITS AND HUMANITARIAN EFFORTS

KSA’s interests in Yemen aspire the kingdom’s orientation towards its foreign aid. In a case study on Saudi aid to Yemen, researchers Javier Bordón and Eyad Alrefai state that, “*a neoclassical realist framework can provide useful guidance to unpack such transformations of Saudi aid as a foreign policy tool* (Bordón & Alrefai, 2023).” The Saudi-led military intervention released an

outbreak of political movements for supporting the country's stance on political stability. One of many being the Friends of Yemen group, which "*suspended any further development and economic aid to Yemen as long as Saleh refused to resign* (Bordón & Alrefai, 2023)." This worked in favour of the coalition as a sign of loss of international support from the US and KSA to the former president. This resulted in the overthrow of President Saleh and led to Vice President Hadi's appointment as the new head of government in 2012. Saudi aid immediately resumed after his inauguration and, "*the kingdom arranged a \$1 billion deposit to Yemen's Central Bank and several rounds of budgetary support in 2012 and 2013* (KSRelief, 2022)." Additionally, a total estimate of four billion dollars in Saudi aid was directed towards the new government between 2012 and 2014. Several problems rose from this, Saudi Arabia's primary goal was to maintain the favourable status quo and regional stability in Yemen, but at the same time, "*sub-state geographical distribution of aid between 2010 and 2013 in Yemen was largely allocated to high-population areas in the north and west* (Bordón & Alrefai, 2023)," which arguably distinguishes their true motives of satisfying domestic grievances rather than solving long-term poverty. Another instance of Saudi aid is their peace talks and participation in the United Nations. The organisation helped guarantee Saudi Arabia's role in aiding Hadi in the war when they, "*enshrined the status of internationally recognised government (IRG)* (Bordón & Alrefai, 2023)," after its military intervention in 2015. KSRelief, created that same year, aimed for a monopolised handling of aid and stated by the authorities that KSRelief is, "*the sole authority responsible for receiving relief, charitable or humanitarian donations [...] and delivering them to beneficiaries abroad*" (Saudi Press Agency, 2020). For all their aid provisions, the ongoing blockade in Yemen hinders their deliveries of assistance, causing harm and suffering towards civilians. Along with their diminishing diplomatic efforts towards alleviating humanitarian suffrage and progressing towards a tactful solution.

COOPERATION FOR SECURITY AND COUNTERTERRORISM

The shared interest between the US, UAE and KSA is normal against an Iran-ruled Yemen due to their claims that Iran is planning to promote its ideology and, "*establish a Shia Empire throughout the Middle East* (Esfandiary & Tabatabai, 155)." Allegations that the Iran government was directly involved with aiding the Houthis surfaces from the parties. Although the Houthis themselves denied this fact, the kingdom, Yemen and Iran included stated that, "*Tehran had supplied money, weapons and training to the Houthis* (Jan & Majid, 193)." The cause was the sanctions relief to Tehran and the removal of several barriers towards Iran's reintegration attempts into international relations. But as the Houthis made their way into weakened Yemen and its then capital, Sanaa, the Saudi-led coalition and military intervention enforced a proxy war between the two countries, making the already wary Gulf Arabs fearful of a resurrected Persian Empire by the Irani government. Another priority is the emerging extremist groups and the ongoing persistence of Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups in the Arabian Peninsula, causing serious security challenges in the Red Sea region. "*The absence of effective regional and sub-regional institutions puts constraints on peace-building in the [Middle East & North Africa] MENA region* (Hoetjes, 2021)." KSA had additionally initiated their major Red Sea tourism project in 2019 in efforts of their Vision 2030 plan to, "*establish itself as a global tourism and logistics hub* (Baabood, 2023)," attracting foreign investment and attention to common security threats among its neighbouring countries in the Red Sea region. The Red Sea Alliance was also initiated in intent to discuss security

issues involving smuggling and piracy in the area. It consisted of “*a regional council involving eight countries* (Baabood, 3),” which did not include some major competitors in the Red Sea like the UAE, Iran, Turkey and Qatar.

The Yemen civil war complicates the efforts made by Saudi Arabia towards security cooperation and counterterrorism to fully create a more stable region in the Red Sea. A reevaluation is needed in KSA’s approach towards promoting these issues.

DISCUSSIONS

Firstly, the Saudi-led military intervention in 2015 in support of the Arab states coalition utterly failed to achieve its intentional approach to release Houthi control over Yemen, and resulted in a major consequence of humanitarian crisis. Instead of conforming to an attack as the first tactic, political negotiations and ceasefires must take place beforehand to not only prevent further humanitarian suffering, but to de-escalate the dispute. On the other hand, this approach can make way to compromise that could draw out the process and create a mistrust among the parties involved. Secondly, as the KSA efforts for humanitarian aid remain elusive. Yemen’s humanitarian crisis carries on and it doesn’t seem to be leading to a solution or end anytime soon. Improving their efforts by providing easier access for humanitarian organisations to enter, deliver resources, and assist the affected populations in Yemen is a must. Lastly, big terrorist groups like AQAP posing threats in the Red Sea region continue even after all the efforts from multiple countries beside Saudi Arabia approaches to enhance security cooperation. The development of a counter-terrorist strategy that disrupts their networks and reduces risk of attacks in the kingdom could also result in security risks when attempting access in conflict areas.

Highlighting the strategic implementation of political negotiations and diplomatic processes in attempt to avoid security risks and humanitarian crisis should be the main focus. Populations are at stake of suffering, and the rest of the considerations are impracticable due to the complexity of the Yemen war.

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THE BUSINESS OF BUSINESS IS BUSINESS IN DEFENSE OF MILTON FRIEDMAN'S DOCTRINE

Suddha Chakravartti

We [certainly] live in interesting times. Often, our primary response to global events and disruptions speak more about our psychological predisposition than reality. One such narrative that we have brought within the ambit of our intellectual discourse, and one that has found traction once again in the current global economic, political, financial, and legal environment is the notion of stakeholder capitalism. I write 'once again' because the concept of stakeholder capitalism is neither novel nor unique. The concept was first introduced in *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (Berle and Means 1932), and its popularity soared during the post-war reconstruction period of the 1950s and the 1960s as a management theory that sought to create value for all its constituent stakeholders - and not just for its shareholders (Sundheim & Starr, 2020). The main proposition of the above study was that the managers of modern corporation should balance the needs of different stakeholders based on public interest (Denning 2020a; Dodd and Berle 1933). Today, this has once again become the new mantra for invigorating and reshaping corporate agendas - as both capitalism and free market ideologies have come under attack for various corners for their alleged role in the societal malaise that we face today.

WHAT IS STAKEHOLDER CAPITALISM?

There is neither single nor official definition of stakeholder capitalism, or what it stands for. Loosely, it means that a firm's main purpose is to increase long term-value for society at large, and its organization should not be limited to increasing profits and maximizing short-term shareholder value. Therefore, stakeholder capitalism can be broadly defined as a system where the responsibility of a corporation is directed towards all its stakeholders, namely – employees, suppliers, customers, shareholders, and local communities (Bolger 2020). The ambiguity in defining stakeholder capitalism can be resolved by dissecting the concept into two propositions, and then taking each for closer inspection. One way to look at stakeholder capitalism is to view it as the right of every stakeholder, practically every individual in society, to voice their concerns regarding how their society is managed. The second way to inspect it is that companies should be redesigned and reorganized so that the stakeholders mentioned above have a say in their decision making (Gamble and Kelly 1996). While there is no concern with the first proposition as it advances democratic participation, the second proposition is the root of all vagueness that creates the miasma of myth surrounding stakeholder capitalism. However, stakeholder capitalism mirrors the current political polarization and temper manifested in the popular sentiments on the discontents with globalization, the failure of capitalism, Wall Street gyrations, depletion of resources, the concerns for the climate, the widening income inequalities, the stagnation of wealth, and the collapse of trust in our systems.

As mentioned, the origins of stakeholder capitalism can be traced back to the post-war period, when there was a widespread belief that private enterprises could only be successful if the whole society around it functioned. Historically, early corporations were chartered for public purposes (Pearlstein, 2014) and were firmly embedded in their societies and institutions. This was the prevalent thinking in the West - that corporate executives were not just beholden to maximizing shareholder value, but to everyone who had a “*stake*” in it (Schwab and Vanham 2021). In fact, Frank Abrams, chairman of Standard Oil of New Jersey stated in 1951:

“the job of management is to maintain an equitable and working balance among the claims of the various directly interested groups . . . stockholders, employees, customers and the public at large” (Reich 1996).

Earlier, Robert Wood Johnson, chairman of Johnson & Johnson, created its “Our Credo” in 1943 - whereby “*Our Credo challenges us to put the needs and well-being of the people we serve first*” (Johnson & Johnson, n.d.). What changed this account of corporate responsibility was competition and survival. Corporate America came under immense pressure in the 1960s and early 1970s as they began facing competition from globalization for the first time in the post-war period. American goods and services now had to compete for global markets with German and Japanese goods. Furthermore, the effects of the deep recession of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the overstretched welfare state under the Lyndon Johnson administration, and the failure of state capitalism - warranted corrective and free market measures (as were initiated by during the Reagan-Thatcher era) to be rolled out to maintain corporate competitive advantage in the new globalized world. It was too expensive and uncompetitive, given the situation, for corporations to continue to be invested primarily in public purpose. A new narrative was called for to save Corporate America that necessitated changes in legal theory, corporate governance, and business ethics.

THE PURPOSE OF BUSINESS?

Although stakeholder capitalism was a common historical practice for corporations, it is pertinent to note that a *contra* legal opinion on the issue of corporate social responsibility can be traced back to the decision in *Dodge v. Ford Motor Co.* (1919), where the Michigan Supreme Court held that the purpose and organization of a business corporation should primarily be carried out for the interest of the shareholders (Bainbridge 2015). The decision rested on the premise of shareholder primacy aimed at preventing corporate executives from having too much discretionary powers when arguing for public interest - that could allow them to hide their own self-interest.

Given this background and vagueness, it brings us to the germane question on the *raison d'être* of a firm? What is the main purpose of a business? Are they to be organized in furtherance of public interest, or to maximize profits for its shareholders? Peter Drucker (1954) is his famous magnum opus *The Practice of Management*, laid the fundamentals on the main purposes of businesses, that is, to create customers. Although Drucker delivered his moral foundations of “customer capitalism,” where businesses are embedded in society and should heed to the interests of workers, working conditions, the environment, adherence to societal laws, community, profitability, etc., the overriding purpose of business was solely in the creation of customers (Denning 2020b). Also,

Drucker, in *Theory of Business* (1994), adopts a *Schumpeterian* view on the role and incentives of entrepreneurs in society, whereby the entrepreneur is an “economic agent of capitalism” who seeks profit from his/her innovation, and it is the quest for profits that maintains the innovative process (Maciariello 2013). But the fact of the matter is that most of the philosophy on business ethics and corporate governance subscribe mainly to communitarian and utilitarian principles, and a few disparagingly attempt to contribute towards adopting an individualistic approach for analysis (McGee 1992). Although there exist some frameworks on individualistic and objective approaches, no philosophical framework subscribing to individualistic approaches has had an impact on modern corporate governance, corporate law, and ethics, in the last 50 years as that of Milton Friedman’s doctrine of shareholder primacy.

WHAT IS STAKEHOLDER CAPITALISM?

The doctrine of shareholder primacy came to prominence in the 1970s, influenced by the ideas of Milton Friedman, a proponent of the Chicago School of Economics. Friedman’s doctrine on shareholder primacy was enshrined more than five decades ago in his landmark *New York Times Magazine* article entitled *A Friedman doctrine – The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits* (Friedman 1970). Although the article is barely 3,000 words, it transformed the face of corporate governance, and emboldened changes in corporate ethics and legislations for decades to come. Friedman provided a powerful legal and moral framework and a narrative on corporate responsibility. His position was that the only social responsibility of a business is to organize its activities in such ways that it increases profits, and hence shareholder value (moral responsibility). Corporate executives (managers) are trustees of shareholders (owners) and hold a fiduciary duty of trust and care (legal responsibility). However, Friedman does posit a caveat that is often ignored by his critics. He states that while the primary focus of corporations is solely to focus on shareholder primacy over any other social responsibilities, they must do so by conforming to the laws and rules of the society. Note that Friedman’s support for shareholder primacy should not be read as one to be achieved through fraudulent and unlawful means.

Friedman’s doctrine provides two very strong arguments for favoring shareholder value. First, promoting shareholder value is a *moral imperative*. Here, Friedman attributes his moral argument to Adam Smith’s “invisible hand of the market,” whereby prosperity is borne not out of charity and altruism, but through entrepreneurship. It postulates that the common good can only be achieved when every individual act out of self-interest in a free market characterized by the voluntary exchange of goods and services. Indeed, few can argue against the fact that free market principles have been the backbone of economic and social prosperity around the world.

Second, following this free market ideology, the moral minimum for corporations is to follow and comply with the law. Corporations, as legal persons, are incorporated in ways whereby its members are bound to the corporation; the corporation is bound to its members; and its members are bound to each other. However, legally, neither the corporation nor its members are bound to outsiders. There exists no social contract between a corporation and any private citizen or the society apart from following the laws prescribed by the society. Furthermore, Friedman argues that instead of corporate executives directing their energy towards social purposes, they should focus solely on increasing profits for its shareholders – who then can decide to spend it more

appropriately and efficiently on social and public causes they hold dear. Otherwise, company executives who promote social responsibility over profitability would be wrongly imposing a 'tax' on people for it to spend it on social ventures where it does not enjoy competence nor any special expertise (Levitz 2019; Posner 2019).

However, there is an oft repeated argument nowadays that it is *more* profitable for businesses to pursue social objectives, whereby critics such Klaus Schwab and the World Economic Forum have repeatedly prophesized that the future lies with "*stakeholder capitalism*." (and not shareholder capitalism and state capitalism) But there is nothing contained in Friedman's doctrine that would oppose businesses from pursuing any social or charitable objectives that would further maximize its shareholder value (Edmans 2020). Hence, if a business maximizes its competitive advantage by investing in green technologies and increases its shareholder value, it is permitted within the doctrine. However, it would be morally incorrect to suppose this investment in green technologies or making charitable donations at the cost of shareholder value. This argument is a strong counter to stakeholder capitalism and upholds the age-old adage that - *if you (corporate executives) are responsible to everyone, then you are responsible to none*.

The criticisms to shareholder capitalism began way back in the 1980s, but it has come to the forefront in the last decade with rigorous zeal. The financial crisis followed by the global recession, rising wealth gap and inequalities, and concerns for the environment, have charged political sentiments globally on debunking shareholder capitalism, and pinning most of our societal evils on Friedman's doctrine. Joseph Stiglitz has even branded the system as "*winner take all*" and has been calling for a revision to a new social contract (Lashitew 2020). Harvard's Michael Porter has called on corporations to "*create shared value*," and for the re-invention of capitalism as corporations prosper at the expense of societies (Porter and Kramer 2011). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) make a call for corporations to adopt the triple-bottom line (people, planet, and profit), as businesses cannot be successful today without responding to "*our common future*." Colin Mayer from the University of Oxford has even extended this disenfranchisement by stating that the purpose of business is not profit creation, but in the creation of profitable solutions for the world (Lashitew 2020). In fact, in 2019, the highly influential Business Roundtable announced for reforms in corporate governance in its one-page manifesto entitled "*New Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation*" (Business Roundtable 2019a). The statement was then signed by 181 CEOs in their pursuit of redefining the economy that works for all, and commitment to all stakeholder (Business Roundtable 2019b). Stakeholder capitalism the main theme for World Economic Forum's 2020 *Davos Manifesto*, as Klaus Schwab – once again lamented that elites had betrayed the people (Cann 2019). Stakeholder capitalism has also found its champions from within the corporate world, such as Blackrock, Apple, Amazon, Exxon Mobil, General Motors, Pepsi, Walmart and Salesforce. Jack Welch, erstwhile a strong proponent of shareholder primacy and former Chairman and CEO of General Electrics, has called shareholder capitalism "*the dumbest idea in the world*" (Denning 2020a).

EXTOLLING THE VIRTUES OF THE SHAREHOLDER MODEL

How far can we take these calls for a renewed social contract for businesses seriously? While the intentions behind stakeholder capitalism may be noble, they are not strong nor consistent enough

to really debunk Friedman's doctrine. Shareholder primacy *will* and *should* remain the main value and goal for corporations to aspire. This is not to say that nothing should be done by corporations to meet the societal demands of today. In today's competitive environment, businesses must adhere to changing tastes and preferences of consumers, shareholders, and employees' concerns - who nowadays are more aware of the impacts of their consumptions. But this argument completely complies with Friedman's proposition as - due to fears of market and reputational loss, shareholder value cannot be maximized by businesses by neglecting consumers and employees (Mackintosh 2020). Hence it must pursue interests that shareholders and consumers will not forsake.

Second, the notion of stakeholder capitalism could give corporate executives immense discretionary powers, as well as a veil to hide their incompetence and shirk their fiduciary duties. This is a dangerous proposition - as it could lead executives to stray away from the primary purpose of the business to rather focus on other societal ventures. This distraction could result not just in decreasing innovation and competitiveness; executives could now defend the diminished returns for their shareholders on their stakeholder responsibilities.

Third, another danger today with stakeholder capitalism is the fact that corporations (particularly small businesses) are forced to inevitably chase arbitrary and whimsical societal goals to score more points on their ESG metrics. But do they really deliver? The experience with the Business Roundtable shows that not much has been achieved in reality by the corporations which have signed it. From every angle, we witness more and more "*greenwashing*" by these businesses. Therefore, such visions merely become tools to sometimes mislead the broader societal stakeholders to buy into their green, environmental, and inclusive rhetoric.

The final and most devious concern regarding stakeholder capitalism is that of *corporate activism*. Businesses will merely join this bandwagon to hijack social causes to promote their own businesses. There is a fear that support to *stakeholderism* may just be "*rhetorical gestures*" by corporate executives against popular sentiments (Stiglitz 2019). The fears are not unjustified. Corporate involvement in "*woke politics*" is real. Businesses today are forced to prostrate themselves in the cacophony of woke politics. Countless examples exist where businesses, in their quest for scoring more ESG points, have taken up political causes like the Black Lives Matter (BLM), LGBTQ++, Planned Parenthood, etc. - many with catastrophic results for their shareholders. The worst was probably Disney, that saw a 45% decrease in their value in 2022 after its President openly supported for the incorporation of at least 50% of its characters from sexual and racial minorities (Schweppe 2023). Stakeholder capitalism could place enormous political powers in the hands of businesses to shape public discourse. Furthermore, businesses can now be instrumentalized by the State (by providing them incentives) to promote their own illiberal and undemocratic agendas.

CONCLUSION

What is the *real* purpose of business then? How should they be *measured*? Who are they *responsible* to? In our support for popular myths like stakeholder capitalism, we must err on the side of caution. Our careful introspection should be mandated against the tide of popular myths, where inconvenient truths are obscured by expediency. This certainly does not bode well for *liberty* nor *justice*, when real discourse is obfuscated by popular sentiments. Friedmans clarion call in 1970

that placed the responsibility of businesses to create shareholder value still rings good. Businesses, as an organism of society, are not measured by their intended virtue, altruism, or charity – but by what they deliver to society. The purpose of a business is to create a “consumer” and their activities should be confined within the bounds of the law – but on no account is it morally warranted that businesses relegate themselves to public interest over shareholder value. In fact, the quest for profit maximization is at the heart of business innovation. Stakeholder capitalism, in short, is a dangerous plea that misplaces societal responsibility and imposes the agenda of virtue positioning in society. Businesses should be judged on the value it creates for its customer. In short, the business of business is *in fact* business.

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REGIONAL CONFLICT IN THE SAHEL REGION BETWEEN FRANCE AND RUSSIA

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These days, the Sahel region of the African continent has become the center of geopolitical tensions due to terrorist jihadist organization like Al-Qaeda and the strategic interests of foreign powers utilizing the anarchy of the region to make profits. Millions of people have been forced to escape their homes as a result of these violences, making the humanitarian aspect a catastrophe. In this report, we will see how France and Russia are trying to get the most out of those “colonies” by using any of strategic and tactical tools to gain influence in the territory and expel the other out of the region.

DYNAMICS OF THE REGION

The Sahel region has always been at the center of conflicts due to the actions of the jihadist organizations; compounded by the involvement of foreign powers. The competing powers of France, Russia, and China interact with each other for its own strategic interests, that has influenced a lot the recent dynamics in the region. A major factor contributing to the chaos occurring in these areas is the jihadist insurgency led by the Islamic State (IS) in the Greater Sahara, which is affiliated to Al-Qaeda. To increase their power and stronghold, these groups are targeting military installations and civilians on a regular basis to take advantages of the socio-economic difficulties and the bad governance manifested in each country. This strategy employed by those organization by reigning in the chaos is a great way to take over a state - since no one can go against it. Because of this situation, millions of people had to evacuate their homes and livelihoods, which is making the humanitarian situation even worse (Nsaibia, 2024).

France, the dominant international power in the region, has been in the Sahel since its colonial era legacy of the late 19th century, and plays a major role to encounter those terrorists' attacks with *Operation Barkhane*. But because of the anti-French movement in those countries, partially due to the fact they were former French colonies, French forces had to leave Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso recently. Thanks to this retreat, there is a “power vacuum” that parties like Russia is trying to fill (Gain, 2023). Recently, Russia is trying to increase its influence in the Sahel by using both military and diplomatic tactics, as well as anti-French propaganda with their private paramilitary firm *Wagner*. The group is actually playing a crucial role in Mali in assisting the local military operations, but they often use harsh methods resulting in large-scale civilian casualties and displacement. The same as what France was doing until now, Russia is involved in those regions because they want access to the natural resources of those countries like the oil, uranium, and gold, as well as strategic footholds (Nsaibia, 2024). In contrast, China has put more strength into their network and economic investments by building infrastructure that boosts both regional economies and solidifies China's geopolitical position in the area. Since these countries cannot afford to make, for

example, infrastructure like ports, China's tactic is to build it for them through loans that are almost impossible for those nations to pay it back. Their economic efforts in the Sahel also aim to secure resources and develop long-term influence, even if it is not as militarily involved as France or Russia (Sandnes & Carrozza, 2023).

FRANCE'S INVOLVEMENT

France is the major player in the Sahel region particularly with its military operations post colonial era. Historically, France has been interested in the Sahel because of its colonial connections to several of the region's nations such as Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. But after the World War II, the U.S. put pressure on the U.K. And France to free their colonies for moral reasons. While the U.K. released all of their colonies without keeping any influence on any of them, for France it was a little bit more difficult. They certainly do not have any colonies after WW II but they try to keep connections and influences in their former colonies, especially in the African continent with the "*Françafrique*". So, France's policy and continuous presence in the region have been shaped by this historical relationship. After the self determination of the region, Africa has been the French army's preferred area for operations. Despite a decline in manpower over the decades, in 2013, this security policy has led to France's biggest external operation since the Algerian War, the *Operation Serval*. With over 4500 French troops deployed in Mali, the aim of this operation was to support the Malian army against the growing power of Jihadist groups, allied at that time with the Tuareg independence fighters in the north of the country (Le Monde, 2024). This mission was a success which led later, in 2014, to an enlargement of the operation - renamed Operation Barkhane, with the intention of fighting terrorism in the larger Sahel region. Approximately 5100 French troops collaborated with local forces during the peak of Operation Barkhane to stabilize the area and stop the rise of extremist organizations (Samaan, 2022). However, there have been many difficulties with France's military engagement. Tensions between these countries and France emerged as a result of the establishment of military government in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, which totally changed the political landscape. In Mali things got worse, especially when the President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita was overthrown in a *coup d'état* in 2020. This coup was followed by another in 2021, further complicating France's mission. Since Mali realized that France was not really eligible to fulfill its mission, the government invited Russian mercenaries from the Wagner group as an alternative security partner and expelled the French Ambassador as a result of the country's new military rulers increasingly distancing themselves from France (Petrini, 2022).

The expulsion of French forces from Mali, and the Malian government's shift toward Russia had a huge impact on the local population's growing an anti-French feeling - particularly due to the propaganda generated by the Wagner group. Despite the withdrawal, France has continued to help the other Sahelian countries focusing on training and supporting the local forces rather than engaging direct combat. The goal of this reconfiguration is to remain somewhat influential towards the region and regain stability in those countries for further business (Nsaibia, 2024). The Sahel region is essential for the French and European interests in order to stop terrorism from spreading towards Europe. Except for countering terrorism, France has other strategic objectives in the Sahel including the defense of its economic interests, and regional stability. But France's goals and presence in the region are still under threat from the instability in these areas adding to the emergence of alternative foreign forces like Russia.

RUSSIA'S INVOLVEMENT

After the withdrawal of Western Forces in the Sahel region, notably by France, Russia has taken it as an opportunity to spread its influence for strategic and economical interests by deploying the Wagner Group, a private military company known for its controversial operations. As mentioned above, Russia has succeeded by developing a strong military presence in Mali by helping the government after the coup in 2021. It was also the best time to thwart the French presence out of the country. The Wagner Groups presence and the arrival of Russian military advisors in the country are a part of Moscow's larger plan to support authoritarian regimes and expand power. But even after this shift, the security situation in Mali is actually getting worse with rising levels of violence and terrorist assaults. Those countries are proclaiming Russia as their liberator from the French neo-colonialism, but since Russia is influencing Mali and other countries with their Wagner group, multiple incidences involving civilian casualties have been linked to Russian forces, which is actually a consistent pattern seen in other areas where the Wagner Group works (Stronski, 2023).

For economic interests, Russia wants to have the same access to resources like gold or Uranium as France used to do. Therefore they are supporting military governments in countries like Burkina Faso or Mali to create an alternative economic alliance giving the former colonies the choice to choose between the Russia or the West. This strategy helps Russia to resist Western sanctions from the ongoing Ukraine war while simultaneously advancing Russia's economic goals (ISW Press, 2024). Russia's attempts to take advantage of security weaknesses and weak governance in the Sahel is another characteristic of its involvement in the Region. The Wagner Group had initially started its operation with the Central African Republic giving their government protection in exchange of a greater influence on politics inside the country and the access to profitable mining resources such as gold and diamond. Currently, the Russian are trying to replicate this model in all over the Sahel region to increase strategic and economic advantages in return for military assistance and protection (Naranjo, 2024).

From a geopolitical point of view, the implication of Russia in the Sahel opposes Western, especially French dominance in the region by standing in solidarity with the local military regimes and offering them the choice to choose "their new colonizer". This dynamic is also complicated by the local populations brain washed by the Russian with this anti-Western propaganda, increasing Russia's influence.

IMPACT ON THE SAHEL REGION

Unfortunately, because of the ongoing conflict in the Sahel, it has had a catastrophic effect in local populations and on humanitarian issues. Million of people have lost their homes due to violence and instability in the country. For example, it was estimated that by 2024, the effects of the conflict will require immediate humanitarian aid for over 32 million people in countries like Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. Because of increasing violence, 2 million people have left their homes only in Burkina Faso since 2018, to be housed in temporary camps with limited access to food, water, and medical treatment. These conflicts are also involving neighboring countries that are hosting these immigrants, further straining their resources which has raised tensions and added instability

there as well (UNHCR, 2023). Children are also one of the main targets of these conflicts by being recruited as child's soldiers. The Sahel saw a 70% increase in child abuse cases between late 2023 and early 2024 which shows how urgent those countries need humanitarian aid and protective measures to preserve the rights of children (UN, 2024). Obviously, poverty and food insecurity are getting worse due to food shortages and price increases everywhere in the region. A large portion of the population struggle with simply making enough to survive, which adds to poverty and increases reliance on charity (WHO, 2022).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the ongoing conflict and the worsening humanitarian situation in the Sahel is essentially because of the operations of terrorist organizations as well as calculated interventions of foreign nations like France and Russia. Due to the growing resentment and the ouster of French influence in the region, the West has left a power vacuum that Russia has capitalized quickly through Wagner. Both countries present their involvement as humanitarian aid and stabilizing efforts, but rather than addressing the underlying causes of instability, these actions frequently act as a means of retaining power. Whether France or Russia, this dynamic clearly highlights a form of neocolonialism in which the geopolitical and economical interests of international powers overshadow the actual needs of the people of the Sahel. In order to achieve true stability in the Sahel, international cooperation focused on sustainable development will be necessary, as opposed to the current exploitation and geopolitical manipulation

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A MEMO ON INTERNATIONAL LAW: A SIMULATION IN THE CASE OF THE STATE OF FREEDOM

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The current memo seeks to respond to the concerns and queries raised by an imaginary State called Freedom questioning the benefits of compliance with the international law as part of its intentions for European membership. The arguments in this memo draw on the 1945 Charter of United Nations and the statute of the International Court of Justice (hereafter ICJ) and the principles of international law; recognizing the importance of the 1933 Montevideo convention on rights and duties of states and the 1970, 2625 (XXV) declaration on principles of friendly relations and co-operation among states; and the 1991 declaration on the recognition of the states (Annex 1).

The benefits that the State of Freedom will enjoy as a result of its compliance with the international law are discussed by responding to the following questions:

- Is international law mere politics of real law?
- Why should Freedom comply with international law?

IS INTERNATIONAL LAW MERE POLITICS OR LAW?

The nature of the international law and obligations has long been a subject of ontological debates. Whether international law is a legal and therefore an objective framework rather than a political instrument in the hands of the states has been a recurring question- dating back to the time when it was primarily formed following the 1649 Treaty of Westphalia. This dichotomy recurs, on the one hand, as the controversies between 'positivism and naturalism', 'consent and justice', 'autonomy vs. Community' and 'process/ rule' seize to exist (Kennedy, 1987). On the other hand, its recurrence may be due to the sources of international law that dilute the objectivity and normativity of international law as a legal framework and accommodate the political subjectivism of the states.

Here, a brief discussion is provided on two of the main sources of international law as set forth in Article 38 (1) of the 1946 Statute of the International Court of Justice, i.e., *treaties & customary law* to which states abide. This shall clarify the legal or political nature of international law.

Treaties in international law are considered as contracts and thus 'hard law', yet they may potentially add to the complexity of the international law as a legal framework. Firstly, the concern is with the word 'treaty' itself as a title for an international instrument. Treaties are defined in article 2 of Vienna Convention and are usually used for international matters with certain degree of gravity, e.g., peace, extradition, or delimitation treaties; however, the UN General assembly does not define the word precisely. This explains why article 1 of the general assembly regulations attempts to compensate for this ambiguity by giving effect to article 102 of UN charter to register all treaties 'whatever its form

and descriptive name.' Second, is the fact that article 38 (1) (a) of the ICJ considers treaties as sources of contractual rather than legal obligations only for the parties involved in bilateral or multilateral contracts. Thus, even if treaties are considered as binding obligations, their effectiveness relies on the consent of states and the political willingness of global community to ratify them. The 1949 Geneva Convention for the protection of War Victims is one example of treaties ratified as such. And finally, treaties may seem subjective and less concrete since agreements may be arrived at orally through diplomatic discussions, e.g., Eastern Greenland Case, or unilateral public declarations, e.g., nuclear tests case. In addition, treaties may seem more political than legal as they serve a range of different purposes. For instance, treaties may be motivated by basic political interests such as bilateral alliances or border settings, serve as economic accords for tariffs or income tax, and be less politically motivated as in the cases of foreign aids.

Nonetheless, treaties do remain binding and less controversial as opposed to the customary laws as we shall review below. They are not completely left to the interpretation or reservation of the states and are generally pursued based on states' good faith and *pacta sunt servanda principle* (agreements must be kept) and prescribe specific obligations for states involved, e.g., the 1933 Vienna Declaration of the World Conference on Human Rights or the 1950 Council of Europe Convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedom. Treaties remain applicable unless they are overridden in cases of fundamental changes foreseen in the 1969 Vienna Convention on the law of treaties: *Clausula rebus sic stantibus* (things thus standing); or if in contrast with the peremptory norms of *Jus Cogens* (article 53, Vienna Convention on Law of Treaties).

Aside from treaties, the prevalent controversies regarding the nature of international law are mostly due to the customary law. The existence of customary law as 'evidence of a general practice of states' is acknowledged in article 38 (1) (b) of the ICJ and article 92 of UN charter. The fact that customary law is discerned by states' practice and their legal obligation (*opinion juris*) has two implications. Firstly, customs seem to be left within the realm of the sovereignty, i.e., the political will and consent of the states and thus inherently non-legal and lacking enforcement or superior authority to ensure states' binding. Secondly, customs are considered as 'soft laws' as they partially fall in the descriptive and not the prescriptive categories of law that are traditionally believed to be binding and thus hard. Many of UN conventions and EU guidelines reflect customary law as they declare, crystallize or generate (*de lege ferende*) new norms.

However, the significance of customary laws lies in their acceptance by the international community. All *Jus Cogens* or peremptory norms that are binding and non-derogatory customary laws rooted from natural law principles e.g., the customary law of crimes against humanity defined in the 1998 Rome statute of international Criminal Court. Likewise, laws of war such as *jus in bello* codified in the 1907 Hague Convention and the 1949 Geneva Convention and its 1977 Protocol, I are all customary laws. Once treaties and laws are codified and set forth as customary law, for example in the case of the UN Security Council adaptation of Geneva Convention in 1993, all states are bound by the law based on UN charter article 2 (2), i.e., states' good faith.

Indeed, international law reflects the political will and consent of member states, but it also promotes legal obligations and duties. Drawing a distinctive line between its political and legal frames may have

been a valid claim in traditional naturalism but such a distinction fails to serve today's constructivist processes of the international law that seek to modify and reshape international and domestic laws based on increased equity and justice for all.

WHY SHOULD FREEDOM COMPLY WITH INTERNATIONAL LAW?

Before responding to this question, it is necessary to review the theories and approaches towards reasons of the States' compliance with international law. The question of States' compliance with the international law has been overlapping with its controversial nature since the 19th century. A strand of thought following Austin⁵'s positivistic realism suggests that since international law is not 'real law' states do not comply with it. On the other hand, a school of thought following Hobbs⁶' utilitarian rationalism stated that nations sometimes follow international law when and if it serves their self-interest; while a liberal Kantian⁷ perspective held that states generally comply with international law guided by their sense of ethical and moral obligations. A later process-based thinking proposed by Bentham suggested that nations are encouraged to obey international law based on solidarity with other nations and as they engage in the discursive legal processes. These four schools of thought formed the basis of subsequent compliance analysis theories that lasted till the end of WWII.

By the 1970s-80s, as the international legal landscape drastically changed to accommodate the proliferating number of international organizations and players, the question of compliance was set forth again. That is, international law which was primarily a system constituted by sovereign states as 'legal personalities' had to appropriate a new regime to 'cover relations between states.... and regulate the operations of the many international institutions' (Shaw, 2008:218). The response to the compliance question of this era lied in the 'legitimacy' perspective adapted by Franck who drew on theories of Ronald Dworkin, John Rawls, Jurgen Habermas. According to his idea, legitimacy and quality of international norms motivated states' compliance.

In recent years the compliance literature has basically followed the similar pathways mentioned above. These are explained by Koh (1997) as: a) the rationalistic instrumentalist school where international laws are states' instruments to attain their interests; b) liberal Kantian strand that includes Franck's idea of 'legitimacy' and the 'liberal identity' of the state that allows democracies to comply with international rule of law; and c) the constructivist school that argues norms, discourses and identities are socially constructed and 'constitute' the international actors and rules of the game; d) trans-national legal process theories that hold that international actors generate, interpret and then internalize norms- the successful internalization of norms then determine nations' compliance with international law in future instances.

Thus, the reasons of international society's compliance with the international law transcend ideas such as 'states' interest', 'national identity' or 'legitimacy of norms' and incorporates interactions, interpretations and domestic internationalization of international law. The 1997 Hebron disengagement agreement between Israel and Palestine is an example of states' compliance with international law based on the interactive legal processes mentioned above.

APPLICATIONS FOR THE STATE OF FREEDOM

Based on the above arguments and the fact that Freedom seeks to be recognized as a member of the UN and the EU, it shall not conduct itself exclusively and refrain from compliance with international law. Some of the most significant reasons for Freedom's compliance are:

The de facto existence of Freedom can be legally (de jure) recognized by the international community. Based on article 1 of the Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States and the Arbitration Commission of the European Conference on Yugoslavia in Opinion 1, criteria of statehood include: a permanent population, territory, government and the capacity to enter into relations with other states. Since Freedom meets all above criteria, the recognition of its statehood endows its legal personality and facilitates its engagement with the international community. In fact, the de jure recognition entails that the state of Freedom satisfies legal criteria and thus indicates its capacity to integrate into the system of international law.

Once recognized as a state, Freedom shall benefit from all seven principles of the Declaration on Friendly Relations and Co-operation Among States in Accordance with the UN Charter adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1970 as resolution 2625 (X-XV). As Freedom is in its early stages of statehood and may be vulnerable to external and internal forces, principles of 'the prohibition on the threat or use of force', 'the duty to settle disputes peacefully', and 'the duty of non-intervention' will ensure its security and safety. Also, the principle of 'equal rights and self-determination of people' would facilitate observance of human rights in the state of Freedom and ensure its recognition as a 'peace-loving' state in compliance with article 4 of UN charter. The principles of 'sovereign equality of states' and 'duty to co-operate' would provide Freedom with equal opportunities of cooperation with other states in economic, military, political and legal domains. The principle of 'good faith' guarantees fulfillment of bilateral and multilateral treaties of which Freedom is a party of.

Being recognized by some states maybe an acknowledgement of Freedom's legal personality and its readiness and capacity to assume diplomatic relations with a wider number of states. Building on such peaceful and equally respectful co-operations, Freedom may appropriate the affirmative votes of 9 of the 15 members of the Security Council and ensure the required two third of majority votes of the General Assembly to ensure its membership in the UN. To this end, Freedom shall, at all times, ensure compliance with UN charter article 4 and recognize the paramount importance of articles 5 and 6.

To attain EU membership, Freedom shall meet the criteria set by the European Council in 1993 known as the 'Copenhagen Criteria.' This means Freedom shall be able to guarantee stable democratic institutions to ensure human rights and the rule of law, possess a functioning competitive market economy, and be able to pursue EU's political, economic and monetary aims. Additionally, it shall have the consent of its citizen prior to application to the EU membership.

As a member of international community, Freedom shall enjoy legal and political consequences of its recognition. Based on the 1949 Declaration on Rights and Duties of States, Freedom will have the right to independent jurisdiction over its territory and people, right to equality in law with other states, and the right to individual or collective self-defense against armed conflict. Likewise, Freedom's

recognition would translate into legal consequences such as accorded privileges and immunities of its official envoys and possession of property belonging in other states (Shaw, 2008:472).

As freedom endeavors towards compliance with international law, its nationals shall also benefit from certain legal consequences set forth in the 'international minimum standard of treatment for aliens' and be treated with respect and dignity and equality in other states. In case of the violation of the law and injury to its citizens' legal and individual personalities, Freedom may choose to resort to diplomatic actions on their behalf and ensure their rights according to the international law.

As a member of UN, Freedom is ipso facto party to the International Court. Therefore, in case of legal disputes or violation of obligations, Freedom is entitled to refer its case to the Court and benefit from its rulings that may include apologies or compensations.

Last but not the least, Freedom shall recognize that non-compliance with the international law will be to its disadvantage and may create frictions in the international relations it seeks to establish with the states and international community. Avoiding such disadvantages, therefore, Freedom shall maintain participation in the transnational legal processes of interaction, interpretation and internalization of international law. That participation will help Freedom to reconstitute its identity through legal mechanisms of customary law and treaties and will provide it with vertical and horizontal political strategies towards bargaining and negotiations with a network of global actors bound by international law and as a new member of the EU.

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AN ANALYSIS OF BRAZIL FROM THE BRICS PERSPECTIVE

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Brazil has become synonymous with vibrancy on the world's cultural and sporting stage, from the World Cup to the Olympics. Much more than vibrant events, Nusratullin et al. (2020) identifies Brazil as a founding member of BRICS, the leading bloc of emerging economies comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. Brazil has emerged as one of the biggest and most industrialised of all the BRICS countries since its consolidation in 2006, thanks to ever-increasing trade and interdependence between itself and its peers. Nevertheless, Houghton et al. (2020) unveil that beneath the surface of Brazil's newfound economic strength are festering social fissures. Through a cross-referencing of economic indicators and metrics for gender equality, education, health, and multidimensional development, this paper examines Brazil's development trajectory as a BRICS country. Unlike Brazil's economy, which has strengthened dramatically in the past two decades, its record of advancing human development goals has been much more uneven, with gaps in well-being continuing to separate socioeconomic classes within the country.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Houghton et al. (2020) state that Brazil's economic size and output have considerably increased over the last couple of decades, illustrating that from 2000 to 2020, the average growth rate of Brazil's GDP reached an average annual rate of 2.3%, and in 2020, the number was 1.8 trillion USD. Millions of people entering the middle class, the vast growth in commodity and manufactured product exports, direct investment by BRICS countries to utilize rich natural resources, and Brazil's representation in dynamic consumer markets are some of the main reasons for this, as noted by Nusratullin et al. (2020).

According to Da Silva (2020), trade and economic cooperation with BRICS peers have played a significant role in the country's rise. The third-biggest economy in the group did more than \$29 billion worth of two-way trade with fellow BRICS members last year. In contrast, according to data from the International Monetary Fund, China bought a staggering \$34 billion worth of Brazilian exports. Sharma (2021) identifies mining, agriculture, and fuel as major sectors pushing up trade. Also, integrating with BRICS peers has helped diversify the country's export base beyond traditional partners in the Americas and Europe.

According to Senna & Serra (2021), Brazil is currently one of the world's ten largest economies in terms of size. Despite the country's GDP growth, the distribution of wealth and opportunities remains highly asymmetrical. Because of this growth, deep inequality remains very high. Questions

also arise, as stated by Biroli (2020, April), about Brazil's ability to sustain long-term growth solely on its exhaustible natural resources and whether additional structural economic reforms are necessary to foster diversification and boost productivity from other emerging industries.

GENDER EQUALITY

Batista Pereira & Porto (2020) state that the data on women's participation in the workforce in Brazil over the past two decades reveals some positive developments but also maintains critical imbalances compared to men. According to World Bank information, the participation of women of working age who are economically active in Brazil increased from 53 percent in 2000 to more than 62 percent in 2020. However, most women work in informal and unstable jobs, often earning lower wages (Houghton et al., 2020). On average, women's salaries remain some 20% below what men draw for equal work.

According to Sharma (2021), there has been progress insofar as women's political leadership is concerned, but discrimination persists. Gender quotas and other reforms have increased the number of women representatives in Congress and local councils. However, women hold only 15% of national congress positions and less than a quarter of council seats. Based on these figures, official government indicators reveal a disproportionate dominance on one side despite the advancements made in decision-making positions (Da Silva, 2020). We need to take further steps to ensure balanced participation on both sides.

Biroli (2020, April) strongly asserts that curtailing violence against women also remains a problem. Data shows that femicide claimed the lives of over 4,000 Brazilian women in 2019. Other than that, pandemic lockdowns led to reports of domestic violence going up. While the legal and social program changes have been comparatively helpful in this direction, Senna & Serra (2021) state that persistently high rates of criminal activities disproportionately harming women are an indication that a lot more needs to be done to ensure their safety since the present efforts have not stemmed from stubbornly entrenched threats faced by females.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Fortunately, Da Silva (2020) finds that even though enrolment in primary and secondary education has grown only moderately in Brazil over the past two decades, over 95% of primary-aged children are enrolled today, and some 85% of secondary students, according to UNESCO. There are severe issues of quality and equity. Inequality is stark, mainly because the system fails to deliver anything like fair outcomes (Houghton et al., 2020). Less than 20% of 25- to 34-year-olds have completed their first degrees, a finding that reflects deep flaws that stratify attainment by socioeconomic status and inhibit social mobility.

According to Oliveira & Silva (2020), Brazil's education system is among the countries whose learning standards differ widely by income and geography. For instance, the significant discrepancy in assessment scores between students from wealthy urban regions and impoverished rural areas is unsurprising due to numerous resource-related issues. Hone et al. (2021) state that poorer schools have inadequate funding and infrastructural deficits characterized by poor sanitation and

understaffing. These are inequalities that negate equal opportunities for upward mobility among poor populations.

Access to education is something that comes with profound risks. Indeed, McCowan & Bertolin (2020) found that the budgets are only 2.2% of GDP, according to the World Bank, which will not redress inequities. Studies suggest an intensification of investments to recruit more qualified teachers, modernize curricula and technology, and increase enrolments in tertiary education. However, Dyngeland et al. (2020) state that Brazil's long-term future remains uncertain due to the absence of political will for structural reform and significant increases in public spending. Likely, the country will not overcome its deep human capital constraints, which will impede socio-economic mobility for its marginalized population by limiting their access to skills and opportunities.

THE STATE OF PUBLIC HEALTH

According to the WHO and the World Bank, Batista Pereira Porto (2020) states Brazil has shown good public health results during the last two decades. Its life expectancy increased significantly, from 68 to more than 75 years. Its infant mortality rate has fallen sharply from 26 to 16 per 1,000 live births. However, da Silva & Pena (2021) state that the COVID-19 developments have brought this progress to a complete halt. It requires urgent steps because, as sources claim, the pandemic shortened life expectancy by 1.5 years, undermined health security, and erased hard-won gains in the length and quality of Brazilian life.

Houghton et al. (2020) state that Brazil's public health infrastructure remains lacking, especially in areas away from large urban centers and poor neighbourhoods. Underfunding the universal SUS system puts undue strain on the state's patchwork facilities, forcing citizens to rely on underfunded primary care clinics and hospitals in their regions. According to Stankiewicz Serra et al. (2021), a lack of mosquito abatement and proper sanitation leaves poor neighbourhoods more vulnerable to tropical diseases. High private costs also block quality access for those without reliable access to overtaxed public options, further exacerbating disparities in treatment and outcome.

Meanwhile, geographical and socioeconomic disparities in health access remain. As noted by Hone et al. (2021), government statistics show isolated Northeastern regions such

as Maranhão still have average life expectancies below 70 years due to a lack of essential services, a world away from the more than 78 years for the country's wealthy Southern Brazilians. Experts warn that without decisive action to reinforce funding and monitor increased equalitarian provision through SUS, socioeconomic welfare gaps could continue to widen, leaving millions with inadequate care (Brazil, 2022). Brazil's full potential remains unrealized in a situation incompatible with the goals of an inclusive society.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Dyngeland et al. (2020) note that although Brazil achieved middle-income status through enormous growth in GDP in the last decades, development in its holistic sense has not shown up, as increases in wealth could not cure social evils. Enormous inequality and a lack of basic welfare continue to

plague vast areas. Oliveira & Silva (2020) also state that despite the World Bank's efforts to lift over 30 million people out of poverty from 2001 to 2009, the COVID-19 pandemic erased a decade of progress, highlighting the inadequacy of mere economic growth without implementing policies that promote benefit-sharing within a company. We need targeted interventions to harness wealth creation for widespread improvement.

There are strong links between wealth creation and investment in people. Stankiewicz Serra et al. (2021) state that education yields better learning outcomes that lead to higher productivity and earnings capacity over time, while good health enables individuals to live entire lives. However, vast inequalities in access to quality schools and medical care across regions and social groups currently limit development prospects. Finally, McCowan & Bertolin (2020) encourage that they must make concerted efforts to eradicate myriad forms of destitution through boosted, universally available social services, thereby creating a comprehensively balanced prosperity that enhances all sections of society.

According to Brazil (2022), there is an equally substantial need to address cross-cutting weaknesses, such as disparities in infrastructure, environmental risks, and territorial factors that seem unshakable. Gigantic slums and small hamlets alike live without clean water and a decent roof over their heads. Untangling this Gordian knot of mutually reinforcing deprivations demands integrated strategies that address each set of mutually reinforcing shortcomings. Transforming poverty's deep, stubborn character is possible only with public-sector leadership, private-sector investments, and community participation. That is possible through public-private-community collaboration (da Silva & Pena, 2021). Clever multi-stakeholder collaboration optimizes these outcomes.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Brazil's significant financial growth, elevating it to a prominent position among the BRICS nations, has not coincided with sufficient social progress, as poverty, inequality, and human development deficiencies persist. As this essay has demonstrated in analyzing events related to education, health, and multidimensional challenges, Brazil's rise has been neither uniform, inclusive, nor equitable. Material wealth has increased, but opportunities and well-being are still unacceptable differences between regions and socioeconomic classes.

That dynamic of growth with inclusiveness, maximizing human potential at the national level, would demand that Brazil reduce the width of its social gaps through strategic pro-poor public investments, universal social programs, and targeted poverty reduction initiatives. Social Brazil can only achieve multidimensional development that equitably benefits all its citizens if it leverages the economic expansion more comprehensively into gains in living standards, human capability, and mobility.

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BULLETS, BYTES, AND BOTS: CONFRONTING THE MULTIFACETED CHALLENGES OF MODERN WARFARE

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An ever-present feature of human history is warfare, interpreted as the systematic use of force for the advancement of political, economic, or ideological goals. In fact, in the arena of international affairs scholarship, possibly the largest body of work relates to that of understanding war and peace.¹ For millennia, scholars, philosophers, historians, and social scientists have attempted to investigate the origins, frequency, and lethality of warfare (Lopez, 2019, p. 1).

Even with the ubiquitous nature of warfare throughout human history, there is no consensus as to what war actually means. Cicero defines war broadly as a *contention by force*. Hugo Grotius adds that *war is the state of contending parties, considered as such*. Thomas Hobbes notes that *war is also an attitude: By war is meant a state of affairs, which may exist even while its operations are not continued*. Niccolo Machiavelli refrained that *there is no avoiding war; it can only be postponed to the advantage of other*. Denis Diderot comments that *war is a convulsive and violent disease of the body politic*. And, for Karl von Clausewitz, *war is the continuation of politics by other means, and so on* (Moseley, n.d.). The ambiguity concerning warfare exists because of two reasons. As Lopez (2019, p. 1) points out, first, the archaeological evidence of warfare is lacking, and second, there is no consensus on its definition and how to separate it from other forms of violence.

While the confusion persists with the definition, it is clear that war and civilization both emerged at around the same period and in numerous aspects are almost related (Bowden, 2013). Additionally, the Melian Dialogue, as chronicled by Thucydides in his magnum opus "*History of the Peloponnesian War*", underscores the fundamental nature of power in armed conflicts across time and serves as an illustrative case of the harsh realities of warfare - the powerful imposing their will upon the feeble (Gale, 2024). The paradox that war, surprisingly, has brought peace and prosperity for societies is a direct outcome of the inherent complexity of human nature, which MacMillan (2020) astutely highlights. The ancient Hindu text *Atharvaveda*, sublimely elucidates (Bloomfield, 1897) to dictum in the UNESCO preamble stating, "*wars begin in the minds of men*" (UNESCO, 1945). This provides an explanation for the development of recognisable elements of combative conduct, such as gang warfare along with the capacity to collaborate towards a shared objective, which has evolved from the cooperative abilities that humanity honed to be effective warriors (ABC News, 2008).

¹ The first recorded war in history is that between Sumer and Elam in Mesopotamia in 2700 BCE in which Sumer was victorious, and the first peace treaty ever signed ending hostilities between nations was between Rameses II (the Great) of the Empire of Egypt and Hattusili III of the Hittite Empire in 1258 BCE" (Mark, 2009).

With the interaction of technological developments, social shifts, structural changes in the international system, and changing geopolitical environments, the nature and the objectives of warfare has evolved significantly. Emerging trends like the changing nature of insurgency along with urbanisation, and information warfare are challenging old conceptions of battlefield superiority and radically altering the face of armed conflict in the 21st century. The paper aims to investigate the ramifications of these shifts for military doctrines, international security, and the future of combat. It is critical to address these emerging concerns and adjust the perspective of armed conflict considering the increase in global connectivity and the blurring of lines between war and peace.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF INSURGENCY

The idea of insurgency is not new; it dates back thousands of years. The conceptual relevance can be pontificated through the fall of the Akkadian empire, which in its heyday (2334 BC- 2279 BC) under King Sargan, who reigned over a vast empire stretching from Sothern Iraq to Southern Turkey. Yet, the downfall of the mighty Akkadians was not due to a more powerful empire, but rather to a relentless, guerrilla-style insurgency by the primitive tribal groups in their vicinity. This culminated in the collapse of Akkad in 2190 BC (McDermott, 2016). *“Insurgency, like war, has an enduring nature and a changing character. It remains a strategy entailing violence used by the weak and desperate against a power system. Often (but not always), this pits a nonstate or proto-state organization against a state”* (Metz, 2012). This definitive aspect of insurgency is highlighted through the various Goliath's that have fallen to the David's; the Japanese in China, Germany in war time Yugoslavia, Britain in Israel, France in Algeria (Hobsbawm, 1965). These examples enunciate to the adage that insurgencies persist and gain momentum not through the defeat of government forces in large-scale conventional military confrontations, but rather by successfully garnering sufficient support and sympathy from the population. This enables insurgents to disguise themselves, receive assistance, recruit new members, and carry out guerrilla-style operations against governments over a long period (Bennett, 2008).

One can classify insurgencies according to their level of organisation: politically, militarily, traditionally, or urban. Although, several insurgencies exhibit characteristics of multiple types (CIA, 2011). *“Insurgents are motivated by a variety of factors, but probably. the strongest is idealism. ... “true believers.” They are willing to live in discomfort and sometimes risk death in an effort to destroy the system denying them their wishes”* (Daskal, 1986). Therefore, insurgencies can be termed as continuation of political/social conflicts through violent means; that demonstrates the complexity of “ideas” associated with it. This leads to the question whether a military campaign against an insurgency can be triumphant while the idea remains at large. *“In fact, successful insurgents continue to identify and leverage underlying tensions in a society as part of their cause to further the movement and expand participation”* (Cox and Ryan, 2017). Yet, to put an end to the bloodshed caused by insurgency, it is necessary to tackle the underlying causes of the disputes, which are often the social, political, and economic shortcomings of the dispensation in charge (Sepp, 2006).

As conventional models of international relations are built on a worldview that is focused on states (Hernandez, 2021), the study of non-state actors does not fit well into these models. Concerning armed groups, non-state actors have generally been seen as challengers who don't have formal responsibility while state actors remain responsible for maintaining order and security and providing

public goods (DCAF and Geneva Call, 2015). *“Armed non-state actors are extremely diverse. They include ideologically, religiously and ethnically motivated groups from pro-Communist to Islamist extremists and secessionist movements; rent seeking groups such as warlords, rebel forces, pirates, clans and gangs; and outright criminal organizations such as transnational crime syndicates, drug and arms cartels and human traffickers”* (von der Schulenburg, n.d.). This elucidates to the dictum that *“insurgencies are extremely difficult to defeat once they become entrenched”* (Bensahel, 2006) and can morph into many forms. This transformative aspect can be observed through the Khalistan insurgency in the Indian state of Punjab, which was at its peak in the 1980's (Bhatnagar, 2023), and has morphed into a drug running cartel in North America & the Indian subcontinent (Gupta, 2024; Mishra, 2022).

Since the conclusion of the second world war, there have been over 181 insurgencies. However, in the past decade, there has been a notable change in the nature of these insurgencies, with a substantial rise in the frequency of insurgencies involving extremist Islamic groups (Jones, 2017). Though *“much of the international community looked the other way during the post-World War II anticolonial movements, but today, states are far less tolerant of regional instability created by violent insurgencies”* (Switzer, 2022). To put things in perspective, this change is attributable to the rise of Islamic insurgencies. While there were no military confrontations within a single state that were waged specifically for Islamist aims in 1975, by 2015, 56 percent (28 out of the 50 armed conflicts) met the criteria for being classified as an Islamist war (Nilsson and Svensson, 2017). *“The globalization of jihad has proceeded in different phases for the past four decades. Early jihadis in Egypt and Syria prioritized their willingness to establish Islamic states in their countries, although they also made references to the restoration of the Caliphate in the Muslim world”* (Drevon & Haenni, 2022). The distinguishing element of modern Islamic insurgency (global jihad) is its transnationality, as it is not limited to any specific country. From being present in Afghanistan to Syria, from Indonesia to Mali as well as in immigrant communities like Birmingham, Marseilles, and Detroit (Barkawi, 2012). The element of transnationality further threatens the idea of the Westphalian system, which *“refers to the conception of global politics as a system of independent sovereign states, all of which are equal to each other under law”* (Vergerio, 2021).

“With the rise of non-state conflict, the ways in which war is fought has become unpredictable to a great extent” (Ravichandran, 2011). This pivotal trend in warfare is built on the technological advancements in the past few decades. This can be specifically attributed to the advances in information and communication technology in an increasingly globalizing world. For instance, *“when U.S. Special Forces entered Afghanistan in 2001, Facebook didn't exist, the iPhone had yet to be invented, and “A.I.” often referred to an NBA star”* (Meserole, 2018). Contemporarily, a slew of exciting and terrifying new developments is shaping the world; great power competition, cyber warfare, 3D printing, artificial intelligence, and robotics (Singer, 2019). While all these trends largely fall under the ambit of technology, *“we are actually discussing three separate but closely linked items: technology, systems for utilizing this technology, and a culture that influences how technology and systems operate”* (Metz, 2012). This highlights how modern insurgencies operate flexibly to utilise cutting-edge technologies, tactics, and methods of resistance. Consequently, counterinsurgency forces must have the most advanced technologies to provide a flexible and effective response (Okpaleke, 2023). *“Thus, the picture of the modern counterinsurgent is that of a soldier on the streets of Baghdad, dressed in an Advanced Combat Uniform, protected by ceramic*

body armor, communicating with a satellite phone, and armed with an M-4 carbine and a fistful of reconstruction dollars” (Ford, 2007).

In conclusion, governments and security forces face a complicated and multidimensional problem owing to the changing nature of insurgency. A new dynamic has emerged in insurgent warfare: the emergence of Islamic insurgencies with transnational ambitions, accompanied by a proliferation of sophisticated technology and adaptable strategies. To effectively combat insurgencies, which are becoming increasingly complex and taking on new forms like criminal organisations or drug cartels, it is necessary to tackle the social, political, and economic problems that are at the root of the conflicts. Counterinsurgency strategies *“must avoid alienating the general population with excessive violence or repression, relying, instead, upon mobility, training and developing a well-publicized program for “rallying” repentant rebels back to the government”* (Daskal, 1986), further bolstering the legitimacy of the state.

URBANISATION

The term *“urbanisation”* describes the process by which cities undergo physical transformation as a result of people migrating from rural to urban areas in large numbers (Kuddus, Tynan & McBryde, 2020). Cities represent the cultural, economic, and social acceleration that we have witnessed in contemporary history. *“Humanity is a social species and our greatest gift is our ability to learn from one another. Cities thrive by enabling that learning, and they have become only more important as knowledge has become more valuable”* (Glaeser, 2010). To put this in perspective the population of the city of Tokyo (about 38 million) exceeds the total population of Saudi Arabia (Banerjee, 2023; The World Factbook, 2024). The historical shift which has led to the trend can be witnessed by the fact that in 1950’s about two-thirds of the world’s population resided in rural areas while one-third lived in metropolitan areas (MORPHOCODE, 2014). Contrarily, today more than half of the world’s population, nearly 4.2 billion people live in urban areas (García-Peñalosa and Vinchon, 2024).

“However, urban settings are a relatively new phenomenon in human history. This transition has transformed the way we live, work, travel, and build networks” (Ritchie, Roser & Samborska, 2018). The trend of urbanisation continues to be a catharsis in the human evolution through its sustained momentum as by 2050 around 2/3rd of the global population will be in urban areas (UNCTAD, 2023). This trend *“resonates strongly with the notion that in the future we will no longer think of cities simply as distinct physical hubs in a rural landscape but as patterns of digital movement, crisscrossing the planet over many scales from the megacity down to the local neighbourhood. Boundaries will no longer have the same meaning as they did before the first industrial revolution in Britain in 1830”* (Cheshire and Batty, 2022). This catharsis is further enunciated by the rise of *‘megacities’*, which are described as cities with populations surpassing 10 million and high levels of urban density, leading in congested living conditions and significant demand for resources and services (Ellis, n.d.).

“The sovereignty of a nation derives from the ability to protect its populace, making cities an unavoidable strategic target” (Parrott, 2020), which was highlighted from the attack on New York City on September 11, 2001 (Pelitz & Matthews, 2023) as well as the gruesome attack on Mumbai on November 26, 2008 (Fernandes, 2023). Yet, urban warfare is not a recent development; cities

have been arenas for violence ever since humankind first began constructing them. This relevance of the concept is seen through the Peloponnesian Wars fought between the city states in Greece (McCarthy, 2018) to the modern-day conflict in Ukrainian urban centres (Spencer and Collins, 2023), highlights the strategic value attached to cities (Graham, 2008). The urban environment is intricate and challenging. Notable instances of urban warfare, such as the conflicts in Stalingrad in World War II (Hasselbach, 2023), Fallujah in the Iraq War (Dyhouse & Clark, 2019), and Aleppo in the Syrian Civil War (Ekkanath, 2017), have underscored the brutal and protracted nature of combat within urban areas. Additionally, the snapshots of Aleppo, Mosul, Sana'a, Marawi, Mogadishu, Donetsk, and Mekelle leave little room for doubt that cities and towns will continue to be the primary sites of future armed conflicts (Gisel et al., 2021).

The intricate architecture, cramped streets, and towering buildings that are typical of these areas present considerable tactical obstacles for military forces. The proximity of civilians to the combat zone adds complexity to targeting decisions and heightens the likelihood of accidental deaths. Additionally, *“urban warfare requires massive amounts of manpower and resources—vastly exceeding the doctrinal 3-to-1 attacker-to-defender manpower ratio standard and requiring up to four times the ammunition consumption compared to rural operations, as well as similarly extreme sustainment demands for water, food, special equipment like precision-guided munitions, explosive ordnance disposal gear, mine-resistant vehicles, and more”* (Williams and Cheng, 2023). Strategically, it puts a burden on communication, overwhelms sensory capacity, and delegates decision-making responsibility to the lowest level. The complexity stems from the fact that tactical actions are magnified, and information reaches local and global audiences at an unprecedented pace. *“The political consequences of civilian casualties in warfare, for example, have dramatically increased. If one is to compare the urban warfare of antiquity to that of today, analysts should ensure their readers know that the killing of men with little regard to their combatant status and the enslavement of women and children was the norm for centuries”* (Betz and Stanford-Tuck, 2019). One such instance is of the intensive scrutiny of the Israeli Defence Forces following the ground campaign in Gaza (Gutman et al., 2024).

Conversely, urban warfare isn't only about utilisation of weapons in the urban context but also entails subversion to exploit fissures within societies, as highlighted through the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014. In this case, *“in the run-up to the referendum, the little green men took up key positions throughout the peninsula. They blocked access to Ukrainian military bases and, with the help of local “self-defense” units, suppressed public protests against the referendum and illegally imprisoned pro-Ukrainian activists”* (Sergatskova, 2024). While these tactics may highlight the combative nature of urban warfare, but its genesis is in its subversive nature as was pontificated by the disinformation campaign by Russia's military spy agency GRU (Nakashima, 2017), which culminated in a *“remarkable, quick and mostly bloodless coup d'etat”* (Simpson, 2014) in Crimea. Another noteworthy illustration of the coercive character of urban warfare is the October 2020 power outage in Mumbai, which *“stranded thousands of commuters across the city of 20 million, where local trains are generally packed to the full, moving more than seven million people a day to their offices and factories”* (Al Jazeera, 2020). The outage has been alleged to be a retaliation against India by the Chinese, amid ongoing standoff over their Himalayan borders (Sanger & Schmall, 2021). Additionally, both the aforementioned cases of subversion emphasise how the dismantling of vital infrastructure (both physical and digital) may be utilised as an element of urban warfare.

Given the likelihood of battles taking place in urban areas in the future, armed forces must constantly innovate and create new strategies for urban warfare that put the safety of civilians first while successfully eliminating threats. A novel military doctrine for urban warfare must inculcate *“a multi-dimensional manoeuvre warfare that leverages technology to outmatch the opponent. Theoretically, this concept may lead to the defeat of small groups of defenders, with minimal collateral damage to the city’s livelihood and infrastructure”* (Eshel, 2022). Military forces in contemporary urbanised world have a considerably greater chance of accomplishing their strategic goals and retaining public support if they acknowledge and tackle the specific difficulties of urban warfare.

INFORMATION WARFARE

Albeit not an entirely novel concept, information warfare has become a key component of waging modern war. In fact, Marshall McLuhan forecasted that *“World War II will be a guerrilla information war, with no divisions between military and civilian participation”* (Chessen, 2017). Information warfare is all about achieving an information advantage over the other through overt or covert means. This means that one must not only protect and be in control of one’s information space, but be in control of the information of others. This entails acquiring the information, controlling the information, defining the narrative, as well as disrupting and destroying the information systems of others – as and when required. (NATO, 2014). As mentioned, that while information or cognitive warfare is nothing novel, and can be traced to the writings ranging from Sun Tzu and Kautilya to George Kenna, the proliferation of technology has brought it to the core of modern warfare.

Take for instance the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. Russia and Russian media ran its own information campaign to influence both the international community, as well as Ukraine, to its version of events (NATO, 2014). This was achieved both by state owned Russian media, as well as with the aid of social media and troll factories. In fact, Russian troll factories have been accused of targeting world leaders online, and creating a narrative for support for Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine. A plethora of tools, such as websites, blogs, and social media (TikTok, Telegram, X) have been used to spread such narratives. Such troll factories in Russia have even been accused on interfering with the US Presidential elections that witnessed the victory of Donald Trump in 2016 (The Guardian, 2022). Clearly, Russia has been using information warfare as a key instrument and approach to competition between states. This is clearly manifested by Putin’s statement *“we must take into account the plans and directions of development of the armed forces of other countries... Our responses must be based on intellectual superiority, they will be asymmetric, and less expensive* (Giles, 2016. P. 3).

The same could be said about various ongoing conflicts. In the current Israel-Hamas case, Israel has been using state and other advocacy groups to paint a narrative of the events of October 07, 2023. Images of mass-atrocities committed by Hamas, as well as paid advertisements and videos on X and Youtube were distributed widely on social media and other outlets to divert public sentiments towards the Israeli cause (Accorsi, 2024). On the other hand, Israel also suffers from information warfare targeted against it. Since October 2023, Israel has also been subjected to organized global campaigns from states and other non-state actors, whereby the targeted efforts seek to challenge Israel’s right to defend itself against the attacks, and to portray Palestinians as the true victims of war

crimes and of an illegal occupation (Dostri, 2024). Hence, the conflict is not just fought physically in Gaza and elsewhere, but also online, where perceptions on the conflict are fomented.

The above two current cases demonstrate how victory is achieved not just on the battlefield, but by how certain narratives are perceived by the successful shaping of public perception and sentiments on a given set of events. Indeed, information or cognitive warfare has become an omnipotent weapon in framing, psychological distortions, and circulating narratives (Jensen & Ramjee, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Interactions between insurgency, urbanisation, and information warfare signal a sea change in military strategy and international relations in the evolving theatre of modern warfare. This analysis demonstrates that the old state-centric paradigm of warfare is gradually being replaced by a complex web of non-state actors who use technical breakthroughs and transnational networks to challenge established powers. The insurgents, who are proficient in the art of asymmetrical warfare, necessitate that we reconsider the fundamental principles of military engagement. With expansive metropolises assuming the role of future battlegrounds, urban warfare is a prominent characteristic of this contemporary age. An intricate balancing act between military goals and humanitarian concerns must be maintained in the complex metropolitan environments, which are brimming with civilian life and vital infrastructure. Comprehending the sociopolitical currents that drive resistance and conflict is just as difficult as negotiating these physical terrains.

Concurrently, the growing prevalence of information as a tool of warfare highlights the paramount significance of managing narratives and public perception. Currently, the fight for minds and hearts doesn't just happen on the battlefield; it also happens in the vast digital world. Modern military strategy cannot be complete without information warfare, since the capacity to construct narratives and affect public perception can significantly change the outcome of conflicts. Consequently, traditional military paradigms will not suffice for the future of combat; an integrated strategy is required. A combination of strong military capabilities, astute political judgement, and innovative technology is essential for success. As we enter a new era, the task before military strategists and policy makers is to create a unified plan that takes into account the complex character of modern conflicts while maintaining credibility and safety in a globally interdependent society.

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COP29: BUSINESS LESSONS FOR FOSSIL FUEL-EXPORTING ECONOMIES IN THE PATH TO SUSTAINABILITY

Aynur Asadli & Mais Najafov

The Conference of the Parties (COP) provides a formal platform bringing together governments, businesses, academia, and the civil society to shape international climate change policy (UNFCCC, n.d.a). Held in Baku, Azerbaijan, COP29 was a strategic milestone in advancing this agenda (Dodson, 2024). As a developing country heavily reliant on fossil fuel exports, Azerbaijan's hosting role highlighted the challenge of transitioning away from fossil fuels while maintaining economic stability. This event also offered Azerbaijan a platform to showcase its commitment to achieving climate objectives and to engage in discussions on potential pathways for economic diversification (Gamkrelidze & Covatariu, 2024).

COP29 built on the outcomes of COP28, which took place in the Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE) – another fossil fuel-dependent economy. While COP28 concluded the first Global Stocktake, a process to evaluate the collective progress towards limiting global warming (UNFCCC, n.d.b), COP29 focused on climate finance and the creation of a global carbon market (Veliyev, 2024). This market offers innovation opportunities for the private sector while strategically aligning with the global climate goals (Veliyev, 2024).

This article explores key business outcomes from COP29 and discusses how innovative financing mechanisms can mobilize the private sector capital to support the energy transition in fossil fuel-reliant economies like Azerbaijan and UAE while contributing to the broader global sustainability agenda. Prior to these discussions, the article will first provide a brief background on the history and role of the COP in climate action, including its emergence and key milestones. It will also provide context on the sustainability transitions of fossil fuel-reliant economies like Azerbaijan and the UAE.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The COP's History and Role in Climate Action

The COP's role as a key platform for addressing climate change emerged over decades. The 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, "the first world conference to make the environment a major issue", served as a starting point and established the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (UN, n.d.a, para. 1). In 1988, the UNEP and the World Meteorological Organization founded the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, whose First Assessment Report "played a decisive role" in creating the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change or shortly, UN Climate Change (IPCC, n.d., para. 2).

In 1992, UN Climate Change (UNFCCC) was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (UN, n.d.b). Its ultimate objective is “to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic (human-induced) interference with the climate system” (UN, n.d.c, para. 2). With 198 members – 197 states and 1 regional organization – the COP serves as the Convention’s supreme decision-making body, evaluating the progress of Parties in achieving its objectives (UNFCCC, n.d.c).

The COP's key milestones include the Kyoto Protocol, which set emission reduction targets for industrialized and transition economies (UNFCCC, n.d.d); the Paris Agreement, a binding pact to combat climate change and adapt to its effects (UNFCCC, n.d.e); and the Loss and Damage Fund, which supports vulnerable developing countries affected by climate change (UNFCCC, n.d.f). While the Kyoto Protocol focused on binding commitments to emission reductions, the Paris Agreement shifted the focus to voluntary, nationally determined contributions (NDCs). Over time, the COP’s scope expanded to address the financial and technological challenges of sustainability transitions. Consequently, COP29 was branded as the "Finance COP," emphasizing the critical role of the private sector capital in driving climate action (Barbara & Hadap, 2024).

The Sustainability Transition in Fossil Fuel-Dependent Economies: Azerbaijan and the UAE

The sustainability transition of economies strongly dependent on fossil-fuel exports, such as Azerbaijan and the UAE, presents distinctive challenges. These countries face the double imperative of maintaining economic stability while progressively transitioning toward green energy.

Azerbaijan’s economy heavily relies on the oil and gas sector, with fossil fuels accounting for approximately 90% of the country’s export value and the petroleum industry contributing around 50% of the gross domestic product (GDP) (IEA, 2024). This dependency makes the country’s economic stability highly susceptible to global trends and the ongoing transition towards decarbonization, as the demand for fossil fuel products continues to decline. Azerbaijan’s existing economic structure requires a shift toward diversification to hedge against fluctuating oil prices and global climate agreements (Staff, 2024a). Recognizing this imperative, the Azerbaijani government has committed to increase the efficiency of renewable energy use, with a target of generating 30% of the nation’s electricity from renewable sources by 2030 (Aimee et al., 2020).

Similarly, the UAE, the previous host of the COP, is an economy with significant reliance on fossil fuels, yet it has made concerted efforts to restructure its economic framework. Over the years, the UAE has sought to diversify its energy mix in a bid to quit depending so much on its oil revenues and to follow the trend of embracing renewable energy sources (We Mean Business Coalition, 2024). This economic diversification also serves the purpose of moving away from “a conventional, labor-intensive economy to one based on knowledge, technology and skilled labor” (UAE MoEA, n.d., para. 5).

KEY BUSINESS OUTCOMES FROM COP29

The UNFCCC's *Whole-of-society* (2024a) emphasizes the collective role of “businesses, financiers, subnational governments, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and all of parts of civil society” in achieving “a net-zero, nature-positive, equitable, inclusive and climate-resilient future” (p. 1). Simon Stiell, UN Climate Change Executive Secretary, highlighted at COP29's closing that “[w]hole of economy, whole of society plans are crucial” (UNFCCC, 2024b). This statement further underscores the importance of businesses aligning strategies with global climate goals – not only to advance sustainability, but also mitigate risks like fossil fuel dependency and leveraging opportunities in climate finance and renewable energy.

COP29 introduced several significant business outcomes that are expected to shape the global business landscape. One of the most notable outcomes of COP29 was setting a new global climate finance target (Valdre & Barbarà, 2024). Annually, developed countries agreed to mobilise \$300 billion through public and private sources and \$1.3 trillion would be enabled by all actors to support developing countries by 2035 (Valdre & Barbarà, 2024). This financial commitment is designed to support climate change adaptation and mitigate its effects in developing regions, thereby strengthening efforts to promote green financing and facilitating new business opportunities in clean energy projects (We Mean Business Coalition, 2024).

Additionally, COP29 marked a significant development with the implementation of the mechanisms outlined in the Paris Agreement's carbon market. The conference finalised the rules on Article 6, which enables the direct buying and selling of carbon credits between nations, forming a unified global carbon marketplace under the auspices of the United Nations (Staff, 2024b). This framework opens new investment opportunities for business in carbon offset projects and international carbon trading, promoting alignment with global emissions reduction targets.

However, COP29 did not ensure commitment to the elimination of fossil fuel subsidies, a key obstacle to achieving global decarbonisation goals (Valdre & Barbarà, 2024). The absence of a clear directive regarding a transition away from fossil fuels remains a significant gap, carrying over from COP28. This issue represents a critical challenge in the development of national policies aimed at meeting global decarbonisation objectives. In contrast, COP28 established ambitious targets for phasing out fossil fuels and tripling the installed capacity of renewable energy sources by 2030 (Cornforth, 2024). In comparison, the outcomes of COP29 appear to be more of a continuation of these goals, with a stronger emphasis on financial mechanisms rather than concrete commitments to reduce fossil fuel reliance (Cornforth, 2024).

INNOVATIVE FINANCING MECHANISMS

Climate finance, as defined by UNFCCC, encompasses “local, national or transnational financing – drawn from public, private and alternative sources of financing – that seeks to support mitigation and adaptation actions that will address climate change” (n.d.g, para. 1). It comprises four key components: bilateral public climate finance, multilateral public climate finance, climate-related export credits, and private finance (OECD, 2023). Among these, private finance is anticipated to

play a critical role in achieving the \$300 billion financial goal intended for investment in renewable energy and infrastructure projects in developing countries (Dodson, 2024).

The private sector's engagement is particularly vital in achieving global climate change targets due to its ability to mobilise the large-scale capital needed to support sustainability transitions. Innovative financing mechanisms are increasingly recognised as essential tools to catalyse private sector investment in climate change mitigation and adaptation (IISD, 2023). Although no universally accepted definition of innovative financing exists, it is broadly understood as “mechanisms and solutions that mobilise, govern, or distribute funds beyond Official Development Assistance (ODA) (Davies & Palacin, n.d., p. 2). These mechanisms complement traditional funding sources, thereby enabling the advancement of sustainable development goals (ILO, 2018).

Key innovative financial instruments include blended finance, public-private partnerships (PPPs), sustainable bonds, and specialised debt instruments such as debt-for-nature and debt-for-climate swaps (IISD, 2023). These instruments facilitate risk-sharing between public and private actors, thereby encouraging the private sector to invest in initiatives that might otherwise be deemed too risky or not meet the required rate of return. By leveraging these tools, the private sector can significantly contribute to bridging the climate finance gap, thus playing an indispensable role in the energy transition of fossil fuel-dependent economies and the achievement of global climate policy objectives.

CONCLUSION

The COP has evolved into a cornerstone of global climate action, bringing together governments, businesses, academia, and civil society to address the pressing challenges of climate change. Although fossil fuel-dependent economies like Azerbaijan and the UAE tackle with the dual imperative of sustainability transition and maintaining economic stability, they invest in renewable energy sources and restructuring their economic frameworks.

COP29 highlighted several key business outcomes that emphasise the critical role of private sector involvement and signal a shift towards integrating climate action into mainstream economic and business strategies. Innovative financing mechanisms, as briefly explored, offer a pathway to mobilise private sector capital to achieve energy transition of fossil fuel-dependent economies and broader global climate objectives. In conclusion, achieving global climate targets requires combining actionable business outcomes and financial innovation. The private sector, empowered by innovative financing and driven by the outcomes of events like COP29, is positioned to be a transformative force in the journey toward a sustainable future.

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“There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance”.

Socrates

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