

Shifting International Order

Historical Sensibility
for Uncertain Times

With contributions by
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“Given the complex and traumatic history of Russian colonialism, it is not surprising that Central Asian societies are divided into those who view Russian imperialism for what it is and those who support Russia’s self-victimization against the ‘evil West’.” Asef Doolotkeldieva

“Historians recognize the complex, human element, the one where perspective, chance, unintended consequences, and non-linear patterns matter. This is similar to the world the policymaker inhabits.”

Francis J. Gavin

“In this war, the European countries are learning the same lessons as the Baltic States: unity is critical, defense funding should be increased, and interdependencies with Russia must be reduced.” Margarita Šešelgytė

“The idea currently dominating the West in supporting Ukraine to fight off the Russian invaders and to strengthen it until the moment of negotiations comes misses the point – such a moment will simply never come.” Vasyl Cherepanyn

Editorial

In the early hours of June 6, 2023, a massive explosion destroyed the Kakhovka Dam in South-Eastern Ukraine, vast territories of the Kherson area were flooded. The breach added another catastrophe to the long list of war crimes since Russia invaded Ukraine last year.

In the afternoon of the same day, 60 international experts met at Lübbenau Castle for the annual Körber History Forum Retreat. Its focus was on the potential of historical thinking for a better understanding of the geopolitical challenges of our time. But the images of destruction and suffering in Ukraine (again) had a major impact on our debates on site and we asked ourselves how we as experts can act more effectively in civil society, science, and politics in a world where conflicts and crises are increasingly intertwined.

For us, as a German foundation, these questions have taken an even greater urgency since Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine. All the more so as Germany has lived under the illusion of an infinite peace dividend for too long. The high level of discussions among participants at the Retreat confirmed what is most important in this situation: looking at the role history and historical thinking can play to provide additional relevant contexts to global challenges and crises. This is also reflected in this third edition of our History Hotspot, which brings together selected contributions from experts at the Retreat.

In times of uncertainty and shifting international order, we often overlook the fact that people around the world perceive conflicts and challenges differently and may also provide different solutions. The case studies in this e-paper on Central Asia, Ukraine, the Baltic states, and the Arctic offer different and perhaps surprising perspectives – even on age-old questions of war and peace. Maintaining this space for diverse perspectives and in-depth debates remains our central task at Körber-Stiftung and in the Körber History Forum programme.

Florian Bigge, Anika Weinreich, Gabriele Woidelko,
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Shaping the Present

How Historians Illuminate the Complexities of Grand Strategy

History and Policy

Shifting global events are reshaping our understanding of policy and grand strategy, urging a re-evaluation of historical perspectives. Historical thinking can provide valuable insights for policymakers.

By *Francis J. Gavin*, Giovanni Agnelli Distinguished Professor, Director of the Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs, Johns Hopkins University

Why are historians less engaged in policy than they should be? Unfortunately, we typically do one of three things. We tell policymakers – and others – that they are doing it wrong. Or we say, history reveals that the world is complicated and uncertain and thus we hedge and focus on context and circumstances. Or we do the precise opposite: claim that this thing in the present is like such and such from the past, and our response should be clear.

We drop our appreciation of uniqueness and context and make bold grand strategic claims, which capture attention. In short, what we often offer as historians to grand strategy is often not appealing. Why is that? One hypothesis – we believe the process of historical thought and analysis is so different from the process of policymaking and grand strategy. But it is not.

The value of historical thought

Thinking historically, done well, provides a number of valuable insights and lessons. It helps analysts and policymakers to understand both spatial and temporal perspectives; to push back against the idea of inevitability and path dependence and to think about how structure and agency interact. It challenges core assumptions and beliefs, and surfaces unspoken ones, allowing us to ask better questions, and to recognize when history is being

misapplied or misused. Finally, it helps us develop a sense of epistemological humility and prudence while recognizing important opportunities and critical junctures, amongst many other virtues.

There are lots of reasons why historians don't make these arguments. One is a discomfort with proximity to power. Another is our uneasiness with contemporary history. Many of us, understandably, believe you need time and perspective – 20 years, 30 years, sometimes more – before you can make proper historical claims. Yet, like Carr and Croce, we do sense that all history is contemporary history.

A thought experiment: reimagining history

If you are skeptical, undertake this thought experiment. Imagine you were tasked, soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, with writing a 300-page history of international relations between 1945 and 1991, with the idea that the book would be used in college classrooms in the United States. How would you structure the textbook?

Writing in 1992, odds are that much of your book would be devoted to the Cold War and its consequences, especially as it unfolded in Europe. Now imagine you are asked to update the text every ten years, though the subject remains the same: world history from 1945 to 1991 – and most importantly, the length does not change – you only have 300 pages at your disposal. The next edition, updated in

2002, would be produced right after the 9/11 attacks on the United States, the war in Afghanistan, and the impending invasion of Iraq. Noticing how Middle East politics dominate the contemporary landscape, you might increase the space in your 300-page text devoted to past events in that region.

You might also observe that the European Union recently developed a single currency and increasingly robust political institutions, necessitating some additional pages on the origins and great success of the European project. The 2012 edition would be updated in the aftermath of a sharp global financial crisis and a fuller recognition of the meteoric economic rise of China, as well as the increased importance of India. Other pages might now be dedicated to the rise of the neoliberal order in the 1970s.

Evolving perspectives: Cold War to global crises

The 2022 volume, written after a devastating global pandemic and in the midst of a climate crisis, the Russian war against Ukraine and the return of great power politics, would demand further changes. The ubiquitous role of technology would be highlighted. Profound shifts in how human beings identify themselves, both individually and in relation to their local, national, and global communities, sends you off to understand movements for greater rights and recognition of gender, race, and sexual orientation.

Indeed, in the 2022 volume, the Cold War might not be the central focus. Other postwar historical phenomena, from decolonization and nation building to the rise of political Islam to a rights and identity revolution to technology and globalization were distinct historical forces, equal and perhaps more important than the Cold War in Europe that was the focus of your 1992 edition.

“History, like grand strategy, is messy.”

Your 2022 volume looks much different than your 1992 volume, even though the subject, and the chronological period covered, are the same. No doubt, the 2032 and 2042 editions will look different as well. And needless to say, the whole textbook project would have an entirely different focus if the intended audience were students in Moscow, Beijing, Johannesburg, New Dehli, or Sao Paulo.



photo: Francis J. Gavin

Francis J. Gavin

is the Giovanni Agnelli Distinguished Professor and the inaugural director of the Henry A. Kissinger Center for Global Affairs at Johns Hopkins SAIS. Previously, he was the first Frank Stanton Chair in Nuclear Security Policy Studies at MIT and the Tom Slick Professor of International Affairs and the Director of the Robert S. Strauss Center for International Security and Law at the University of Texas. Gavin's writings include “Nuclear Statecraft: History and Strategy in America's Atomic Age” (Cornell University Press) and “Nuclear Weapons and American Grand Strategy” (Brookings Institution Press). His book, “Thinking Historically: A Guide to Statecraft and Strategy”, is forthcoming.

The role of historians in grand strategy

In a world burdened by an obsession with certainty and a desire to describe everything in sharp binaries, historians recognize the complex, human element, the one where perspective, chance, unintended consequences, and non-linear patterns matter. This is similar to the world the policymaker inhabits. History, like grand strategy, is messy.

To be clear, this does not mean to avoid taking a side in a terrible war or drifting off into a post-modern view where everything and nothing matters. Decision-makers still need to make hard, consequential choices, and not to choose in itself is a consequential choice. Historians, facing an infinite past, make their own hard choices about what to research, who or what to focus on, and why.

“It is why good history and good historians make for good grand strategy.”

Indeed, the world of the grand strategist – of complexity, perspective, radical uncertainty about the future, alternative pasts and alternative futures – is our world. It is why good history and good historians make for good grand strategy. We should continue to call out when people misuse history and avoid hedgehog-like certainty and moral indignation.

We should continue to highlight the importance of context, circumstance, and chance. But we should also not be shy about offering, if not our specific insights, then our ways of thinking about and understanding the world.

The Uncertain Path

War, Peace, and the
West's Urgency to Act

Perpetual War

Russia's war is existential for Ukraine and echoes World War I, with trenches and endless casualties. And with lessons of the past unheeded. But what comes after war?

By *Vasyl Cherepanyn*, Head of the Visual Culture Research Center based in Kyiv and organizer of the Kyiv Biennial.

Thinking of what comes after Russia's war against Ukraine and how to achieve a lasting post-war peace order amidst an atrocious war on the European continent, unprecedented over the last eighty years, is itself a privileged possibility uniquely granted by the Ukrainian lives that are holding the frontline and thus containing the warfare within the country's borders.

“But what actually comes after the war depends foremost on how we address the war and what we think is to be done while it's ongoing.”

Any political fantasy about “post-war” is psychologically very seductive as it allows to omit the harsh realities of the war itself, exactly because these realities are unbearably harsh and concentrate instead on what comes afterwards while the war still rages on without any end in sight. But what actually comes after the war depends foremost on how we address the war and what we think is to be done while it's ongoing, without wasting precious time that we simply borrow from the future as an unthinkable price is being paid for it every day.

Existential conflict: the outdated nature of Russia's war against Ukraine

The very first thing to understand about this war, in order to be able to tackle it, is that it's an existential conflict, a war of extermination, in which the Russian state, with the support and direct involvement of its population, deprives the Ukrainian people of the very right to exist. And the Western countries en masse allowed this war to happen and agreed beforehand that an independent European country today could be occupied militarily and wiped from the political map as a sovereign state. If there is any lesson from World War II, infamously dubbed as the “never again” slogan, it is never do exactly that – because if one does, this triggers a catastrophic domino effect as it's obviously much easier to prevent a war than to end it.

A striking feature of the Russian-Ukrainian war is how unexpectedly outdated this war appears to be – despite as well as due to the presence of modern military technologies. On the side of the Russian aggressor, in a practical sense this war resembles not so much World War II (contrary to the Kremlin's ideological claims) but rather World War I – constant stalemates on the frontline, thousand-miles-long trenches and fortifications, fields of corpses literally piled up in layers – a landscape reminiscent of Erich Maria Remarque's depictions of the war realities of more than a hundred years ago.

And as during World War I, the involvement and use of the new types of armament made human bodies pretty obsolete on the battlefield as they were simply incompatible with the capabilities of the weaponry, most of the casualties come from non-direct combat.

Russia's forever war

From the Ukrainian perspective, whatever advanced and smart tactics the country's military has been using, it is also an old-fashioned war. For Ukraine, it's about de-occupation, which practically means people for land: Ukrainians have to pay with their lives for liberating their territories and restoring the state borders.

It's a very pre-technological military setting compared with the war conflicts with Western involvement of the recent decades like in Iraq, Afghanistan or Kosovo, however, very much mirroring and caused by Russia's type of war of annihilation like in Syria and the two Chechen wars, the latter of which elevated Vladimir Putin to the presidency.

“The answer to what comes after this war is pretty clear at the moment – it's war.”

The answer to what comes after this war is pretty clear at the moment – it's war. The idea currently dominating the West in supporting Ukraine to fight off the Russian invaders and to strengthen it until the moment of negotiations comes misses the point – such a moment will simply never come. For Russia, it's a forever war – a new existential norm and an infinite process of sustaining the present regime. Since the war is essentially aimed at disrupting the Western political and institutional order and causing NATO and the EU to crack, it's even difficult to identify any specific goals that Russia might pursue in order to end the war.

As disruption has no limit, rather it is an endless process that can either be stopped or spread further, the Russian state has realigned itself towards not even attempting to win but just continuing to conduct the war on a permanent basis for the foreseeable future.

Securing a lasting peace order

As Immanuel Kant argued in his peace program, if a peace treaty tacitly reserves matter for a future war, it shall not be held valid, so any prospects of Europe's new peace order after the war against



photo: Diana Iwanowa

Vasyl Cherepanyn

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Ukraine depend foremost on whether and how Russia's war logic is disrupted through international efforts and stopped while the battlefield is still on Ukrainian territory.

If it goes on without interference, the present generation will live with and in war for the rest of their lives with a constant threat of its broadening and a continuous disorder on the continent. War always presupposes more wars, and politically speaking, it's a fertile ground not just for right-wing populists of all sorts, but for a stiffening of the present and a rise of new authoritarian governments as an ideological mainstream as well as an emergence of outright fascist regimes shamelessly ruling in the current Kremlin manner.

Nuclear threat: the need for a proactive approach

Russia's war has also proven that nuclear blackmail unfortunately does work as a means of deterrence and openly went nuclear from the very beginning – first with the seizure of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, then with the ongoing occupation and

mining of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant and with blowing up the Kakhovka dam.

The current political approach of the West of non-escalation and not provoking Russia is counter-productive as it lacks the understanding of the Kremlin's nuclear logic and in fact works in its favor. The longer this war lasts, and the international community is getting more and more used to mass atrocities unthinkable before, the likelier the nuclear option becomes – we are just not there yet. The use of nuclear as a weapon in any form is actually less probable when it's prevented by force and becomes more possible if one doesn't intervene in the developments on the ground that will eventually lead to this option.

“(..) otherwise it will soon face not just another *Zeitenwende*, but a *Zeitenbruch*.”

If the West wants to win this war together with Ukraine, it should abandon its reactive *modus operandi*, give up its retreat and act in a forward mode – otherwise it will soon face not just another *Zeitenwende*, but a *Zeitenbruch*.

Pax in Bello: If You Want to Win the War, Prepare for Peace

Achieving lasting peace after war is a complex, deliberate process that should be meticulously planned and executed. It requires planning a strategy that is as demanding as war itself. The battle for a new international order will start at the negotiating table.

Stella Ghervas, Professor of History and the Eugen Weber Chair in Modern European History, University of California, Los Angeles

My recent book *Conquering Peace* (Harvard University Press, 2021) explored five key moments of history after great European wars were won against would-be continental empires, such as the Napoleonic Empire or the Third Reich. One of its big ideas is that the end of a defensive war (providing, of course, that it is victorious) will open a brief window of opportunity for establishing a new favourable international order, an opportunity not to be missed.

Indeed, a new struggle will open immediately after the cease-fire, which will determine the fate of future generations. As with a military battle, that instant must be carefully planned; a key difference as compared to warfare is, however, that this high-stakes game will be played by diplomats at the negotiating table instead of by soldiers on the battlefield.

Victory is not the end of the history

It is of course tempting, in the urgency of wartime, to focus only on the immediate and necessary preparations for surviving the aggression and winning battles. Unfortunately, the idea that peace

will somehow take care of itself after military victory repeatedly proved to be a pious wish leading to bitter disappointments. The error lies in the implicit belief in the cathartic virtues of V-Day, as if this great moment of victory was expected to bring some kind of end of history.

“Unfortunately, the idea that peace will somehow take care of itself after military victory repeatedly proved to be a pious wish leading to bitter disappointments.”

As the European experience shows, however, the wheel of time keeps turning unabated: the destructive but essential effort of fighting the war was merely the prelude to a vast and long process of peace-making. A necessary condition for reaping the benefits of a defensive war is thus to plan for the most desirable post-war outcome possible.

“A necessary condition for reaping the benefits of a defensive war is thus to plan for the most desirable post-war outcome possible”

Prepare for peace in times of war

A common metaphor to apprehend the international community has been to compare it to a living organism; each state being an organ or a cell. This organic metaphor (very different from a mechanistic model of a collection of self-seeking states) is not new at all since it can be found in the entry on “peace” in the French *Encyclopédie* of the eighteenth century. In that view, war is a convulsive disease of the body politic, or in modern terms, of the international community.

The article’s author, Étienne Noël Damilaville, challenged the Hobbesian fallacy of “perpetual wars”. To consider perpetual wars as being the normal condition of human communities is as fatalist and absurd as stating that sickness should be the ordinary condition of human bodies, as Damilaville argued.

Granted that war is a pathological condition of the international community, then what should be the state of good health? French author the Abbé de Saint-Pierre discussed in his 1713 *Projet pour rendre la paix universelle en Europe* an international condition that he did not consider healthy. He argued that the *balance of power*, a European configuration where two military coalitions always oppose each other, is never truly a state of peace, but a state of *armed truce*.

A balance of power is never a genuine state of peace

Saint-Pierre thought the risk high that these military coalitions would sooner or later restart the vicious cycle of an arms race, which might then degenerate into yet another conflict, leading to more destruction and general impoverishment. While Franklin D. Roosevelt stated on 11 December 1941 that “a rapid and united effort by all of the peoples of the world who are determined to remain free will insure a world victory of the forces of justice and of righteousness over the forces of savagery and of barbarism”, he and the allies did not envisage that such military effort should continue after the war.

The necessary promulgation of the 1948 Truman Doctrine was an admission that the actual goals which the US had pursued during World War II had not been met, since there was still an impending threat of invasion after the defeat of the Third Reich



photo: Diana Quintela

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with the presence of the Red Army in the heart of Europe. The US had to maintain a large military contingent on that continent for half a century. The continuation of that balance of power after 1945 in Europe was thus a *morbid* state of the international order, which had to be treated as such and cured.

The roadmap to lasting peace: a historical pattern

Lasting peace should be the *healthy* state the international community should aim for. That would mean a relatively harmonious interrelation among states; mutual trust; and the free and orderly circulation of people, goods and ideas. This begs the question: how to achieve that state? The study of five continental European wars shows that the process of establishing lasting peace has been a gradual process, which always followed more or less the same pattern.

“The study of five continental European wars shows that the process of establishing lasting peace has been a gradual process.”

The pattern develops from a state of open war to cease-fire (with two possible forms, armistice or capitulation), to a settlement treaty, then to a system for maintaining the peace through some form of international system or peace alliance; and eventually to reconciliation. Finally, lasting solidarity must be established through the easy circulation of people, goods and ideas. Montesquieu would have called this kind of solidarity the *moeurs* that will keep the peoples solidly bound together.

On the necessity of reconciliation after the conflict

Among peace-making steps, reconciliation of former foes is a crucial one. After WWII, bringing Germany and France back together was a major contribution to the construction of the European communities. Though it was symbolized by the images of French General Charles de Gaulle and West Germany's Chancellor Konrad Adenauer standing together at the Elysée Palace in 1963, as well as by French President François Mitterrand and West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl in Verdun in 1984, a much deeper phenomenon of popular mutual acceptance took place. This makes reconciliation not only a political process, but also a cultural and social one.

There seems to be no shortcut for reconciliation, since the wounds and resentments of two societies immersed in prolonged violence leave scars in the minds of former enemies. Re-establishing trust and understanding thus requires patient grassroots work. Exposing the painful, even horrific, past, acknowledging and understanding it, and revealing the truth of who did what, appear to be necessary steps to build solid foundations for future coexistence. These are the proven steps for a lasting peace in Europe.

Conquering peace: the road ahead for Ukraine

Today, in the current war of Russia against Ukraine, we are far from this historical pattern, I described in *Conquering Peace*. The Russian Federation was rarely at peace with all its neighbours after the collapse of the USSR in December 1991. The occupation of Moldova's breakaway region of Transnistria occurred almost immediately in 1992. In 2008, the Kremlin launched an invasion of Georgia in support of separatist governments in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Six years later, Russia seized Crimea from

Ukraine and began supporting an insurgency of pro-Russian separatists in the Donbas. In February 2022, Russia militarily aggressed Ukraine, hence starting a new phase of the conflict.

Historians do not have a crystal ball but may bring to bear their knowledge of the past: in this instance, by warning that preparing the post-war order for Ukraine is an assignment that should be worked on starting now. It may indeed be necessary for the Russian army first to become mired down to a point where it realises that victory is impossible, and that the Russian state even risks disintegration, before any discussion for a fair and equitable peace becomes possible.

Alas, believing that applying mere diplomatic goodwill could solve the Ukrainian question today does not appear realistic – the disappointing attempts at Munich in 1938 and Yalta in 1945 suggest that appeasement is not an appropriate tool against a power whose plans of expansion had been drawn out over several years. Indeed the *fait accompli* of the annexation of Crimea in 2014 did not prevent a full-scale invasion of Ukraine eight years later.

“Winning the war will not be enough to guarantee the security and freedom of Ukraine. Peace will have to be conquered after the war, at the price of great and long efforts.”

Common sense indicates that Ukraine should not settle again, as in the years following the collapse of the USSR, for a political relationship with Russia that would merely lay a cover of ashes over the latter's ambers of revanchism (lust for military revenge) and irredentism (the desire to get lands back); with the risk that violence could spiral out of control again within our lifetimes. Achieving lasting peace in Europe will require that the Russian state changes its ways with its neighbours and unreservedly accepts the rule of international law. In short, winning the war will not be enough to guarantee the security and freedom of Ukraine. Peace will have to be conquered after the war, at the price of great and long efforts.

Central Asia's Geopolitical Crossroads

Navigating Between
Historical Ties and
Contemporary Challenges

How to Counter Great Power Politics? Perspectives from Central Asia

The Russian war on Ukraine has strongly affected Central Asian states in their struggle for autonomy. How do Central Asian societies navigate geopolitical changes and generational shifts while countering Russia's imperial claims?

By *Asel Doolotkeldieva*, Nonresidential Fellow, George Washington University

Western attempts to weaken Russia's military capacity and reduce its international standing have resulted in renewed attention focusing on Central Asia. The last time the region received similar interest was after 9/11, due to Central Asia's proximity to Afghanistan. Suffering from geopolitical marginalization, caused both by lingering Cold War-era perspectives on the region and Russia's neo-imperial politics, the Central Asian states continue to seek to assert their agency and reject the stereotype of being little more than "Russia's backyard". The invasion of Ukraine and the threats on the sovereignty of these states call into question the longstanding Western images of the region that associate it with terrorism, religious extremism, or a place of competition between "great powers".

Central Asia and the impossible geopolitical choice

The invasion of Ukraine has affected Central Asian societies and governments in multiple ways: a

major disruption of established trade routes and supply chains, the need to bypass Russia, and Western sanctions have created new challenges for businesses. Local people have protested against high inflation (up to 30% for some foods) and skyrocketing prices for housing caused by the massive migration of Russians fleeing Russia.¹ Perhaps, the most critical shift has occurred with regards to the regional security paradigm, where Russia used to play the role of a buffer between China and the Central Asian states.

However, not only has the Russian-led military CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) failed to address armed conflicts in the region,² but it has become clear that Russia cannot even prevent mutiny at home. Facing an impossible geopolitical choice, Central Asian governments nevertheless continue to maintain close partnerships with Russia while simultaneously cooperating with China and the West. Observing this strategy of neutrality, some international commentators have expressed disappointment at Central Asia's seeming inability to

1 "Russian Draft Dodgers Find a Mixed Reception in Central Asia", Carnegie Politika" 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/politika/88202>.

2 "Why Russia and China Aren't Intervening in Central Asia", Foreign Policy 2022, https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/10/04/tajikistan-kyrgyzstan-russia-china-intervention-central-asia/?tpcc=onboarding_trending.

distance itself from both its Soviet past and contemporary Russian politics.

“Central Asian governments nevertheless continue to maintain close partnerships with Russia while simultaneously cooperating with China and the West.”

Why ties with Russia are not easily cut

This normative expectation is, however, short-sighted in several regards: First, it ignores the real challenges the region faces – it is landlocked, remote from any access to the seas, and suffering ongoing issues of energy and food security – that cannot be remedied quickly.

Second, it fails to appreciate the historical links between Russian and Central Asian authoritarianisms. Putin is co-producing domestic regimes through military intervention,³ KGB networks, pressures on labor migrants, and the real possibility of staging coups against incumbent regimes. To expect these leaders to radically distance themselves from Russia is to neglect the logic of regime survival that links them to Putin.

Third, cutting off Russia entirely does not help to create an alternative future for the region. The volume of trade between Russia and Kazakhstan in January-August 2022 alone was \$15.9 billion,⁴ and trade turnover between China and Central Asia reached \$38.6 billion in 2020.⁵ Now, compare these numbers with the US investment of \$25 million for the entire region for 2022,⁶ designed as a strategy to help “the region diversify trade relationships [...] so they’re not dependent on any one country.”⁷

Complex history of Russian colonialism

So, how have Central Asian societies responded to the invasion of Ukraine and Russian politics in the



photo: Asel Doolotkeldieva

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region more generally? If attitudes towards Russia were very positive previously,⁸ how have these perceptions changed today? Are there any attempts to counter Russia’s imperial claims?

Given the complex and traumatic history of Russian colonialism, it is not surprising that Central Asian societies are divided into those who view Russian

- 3 The first ever Russian-led CSTO intervention was launched to quell a massive anti-government uprising in Kazakhstan in January 2022, known as the “Qantar events”. Peaceful demonstrations that took place in many cities and villages were initially provoked by the rise in price of liquefied gas but grew into a critical political contestation in contemporary history of Kazakhstan. The CSTO intervention helped safeguard Toqaev’s incumbent regime.
- 4 “Пути обхода санкций: небывалый рост (ре)экспорта из стран Центральной Азии в Россию”, November 15, 2022, [Azattyk.org](https://rus.azattyk.org/a/32131171.html): <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/32131171.html>.
- 5 “China promises more investment at Central Asia summit”, January 26, 2022, Eurasianet.org: <https://eurasianet.org/china-promises-more-investment-at-central-asia-summit>.
- 6 “Blinken strikes reassuring tone in dialogue with Central Asian partners”, March 2, 2023, Eurasianet.org: <https://eurasianet.org/blinken-strikes-reassuring-tone-in-dialogue-with-central-asian-partners>.
- 7 “Economic resilience in Central Asia Initiative”, February 28, 2023, US Department of State: <https://www.state.gov/economic-resilience-in-central-asia-initiative/>.
- 8 Support for Russian leadership drops in post-Soviet countries after Ukraine invasion, but support in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, traditionally pro-Russian, still remains at 63%: <https://www.euronews.com/2023/05/25/support-for-russia-drops-in-post-soviet-countries-after-ukraine-invasion>.

imperialism for what it is and those who support Russia's self-victimization against the "evil West". For the latter, nostalgia for the Soviet Union helps to create strong bonds with Russia. Aligning with Putin means being part of a bigger geopolitical project than what individual independent states can achieve. Victims of both the painful transition of the 90s and of Russian propaganda, the elder generation continues to show loyalty to Russia across the post-Soviet space.

"Nostalgia for the Soviet Union helps to create strong bonds with Russia."

Young Central Asians: challenging imperialism

However, for young Central Asians, Russian imperialism seems to pose a threat to national sovereignty and the freedom to conduct politics independently. This generation has rallied against Russian-led regional military and economic organizations and provided humanitarian aid to Ukrainians. Younger Central Asians also seek to better understand the consequences of colonialism and Soviet repression, demanding recognition of the massive famine and suppression of the anti-colonial revolt in 1916.

Young people also seek to use decolonizing language to restore the dignity of their societies and to empower local language and culture away from the hegemony of the Russian language. The generational shift currently at work may therefore set the stage for a shift also in consciousness and more emancipated images of oneself throughout the region.

The Baltic Strategy towards Russia

Forging Resilience

Confronting Russia: Lessons Learned in Dealing with a Complex Adversary

The Baltic States' relationship with Russia is intricate and holds hard-earned lessons in security, interdependency, and resilience. The following analysis offers a timely look at geopolitics in an era of escalating tensions.

By *Margarita Šešelgytė*, Professor and Head of the Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University

As geopolitical tensions escalated and Russia invaded Ukraine, the Baltic States found themselves at the forefront of the storm. Ever since regaining their independence, particularly after Russian attacks on Georgia 2008 and Ukraine in 2014, these nations had been alerting their Western allies about the increasing Russian assertiveness. Their persistent pleas often fell on deaf ears, with many dismissing their concerns as mere paranoia. However, as events unfolded in Ukraine, the Baltic States could not help but echo a resolute, albeit somber, refrain to their Western partners: “We told you so.”

“Their persistent pleas often fell on deaf ears, with many dismissing their concerns as mere paranoia.”

Through years of experience and hard-earned wisdom, the Baltic States have come to recognize the essential terms for fostering a sustainable coexistence with their big, unpredictable and

assertive neighbor. First and foremost, “soft” power does not deter Russia. Therefore, from the early days of their independence, all three states aspired to become members of NATO. Despite many fears in the West of provoking Russia and causing instability, Baltic membership in NATO has proved to be an essential precondition for security and peace in the region.

Interdependency risks and Russian interference

The second lesson the Baltic States have learned – any interdependency with Russia is dangerous because one might be subjected to manipulation and weaponization and used to assert Russia's political interests. One of the most illustrative examples of Russian interference in the Baltic States was the case of the impeachment of former Lithuanian president Rolandas Paksas. This political scandal evolved in 2003 on the eve of Lithuanian accession to the EU and NATO. A few months after the president's inauguration, Lithuanian intelligence services released information on people in the president's environment they suspected of maintaining links with Russian intelligence. The investigation resulted in a successful impeachment.

Another illustration was to be seen in an unprecedented cyber-attack on Estonian state institutions, banks and media outlets in 2007 as a reaction to replacing the Soviet-era war memorial. As an energy island, 100 per cent dependable on Russian energy resources, Lithuania was constantly subjected to energy blackmail and paid the highest price for gas in Europe. The LNG vessel “Independence”, which started operating in 2014, essentially transformed a negative energy balance and limited any opportunities for Russia to interfere.

“Also, where the EU stood united, Russia found it most challenging to achieve its goals.”

It should be noted that despite the perennial lack of unity within the European Union (EU) on how Russia must be approached, it has been instrumental in helping the Baltic States gradually build resilience against Russian interference. The EU has helped them to keep their commitment to upholding democratic values, the rule of law, and a thriving civil society, which became critical elements of resilience. Also, where the EU stood united, Russia found it most challenging to achieve its goals.

Historical context: opportunities and Soviet legacy

It must be admitted that the Baltic States were lucky to join both organizations (EU and NATO), as they managed to make use of a relatively narrow window of opportunity, when the United States was at its strongest and Russia was at its weakest. This window of opportunity shut down for the other applicants in 2008 at the Bucharest NATO summit. A famous vision of G. Bush Senior of “a Europe whole and free” came to a halt at the borders of the Baltic states.

Arguably, the rest of the Soviet empire has never been fully dismantled. Some of its territories have been lost, but the main idea remained strong. It was further strengthened over the years in the minds of the ruling elite of independent Russia and the minds and hearts of most Russian citizens. A short period of democratization was followed by a significant backslide and the increasing belief that the dissolution of the Soviet Union was a great mistake.

Contrary to a common belief in the West, the stronger Russia became economically, the less space remained for democracy and the more aggressive the foreign policy it pursued. A self-perception of Russia in international affairs relied on



photo: Vilnius University

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the opposition derived from the Cold War: us versus the “West” and geopolitical thinking based on the concepts of great power rivalry, zero-sum games and zones of influence.

The new divide: freedom vs. autocracy

Another form of “Berlin Wall” resurrected along the borders of the EU and NATO. Across this wall, perpetual fights continued to be waged between freedom and slavery, autocracy and democracy. Several wake-up calls of increasing Russian assertiveness (Russian attack on Georgia, war in Ukraine in 2014) did not sober Western powers. They continued to believe that if one does not annoy Russia too much, one gives in to its requests once in a while, one can continue to coexist with it on relatively amicable terms. However, Russia had been preparing for war – it had enfolded the Western countries with a high level of interdependency and hoped that this would help restrain the West upon the invasion of Ukraine.

European lessons and the future of Russia

In this war, the European countries are learning the same lessons as the Baltic States: unity is critical, defense funding should be increased, and interdependencies with Russia must be reduced. Those lessons are also valuable for dealing with other authoritarian powers. However, whether these lessons will result in long-term and irreversible change remains to be seen. It is still essential to be open to political advice from the Baltic States, Poland, and Ukraine about the future of Russia.

“In this war, the European countries are learning the same lessons as the Baltic States”

Transformation in Russia is improbable in the foreseeable future. The change within the regime is possible if Putin loses the war, but not the change of the regime itself. The regime transformation can only take place if there is a mental change in the minds of most Russian citizens – the realization that the Soviet empire has finally been defeated, dissolved and cannot be restored, and the understanding of the evils that it has produced.

Furthermore, for this to happen, the Ukrainian victory on the battlefield is vital as well as a political victory. Now history presents Europe with another window of opportunity to finally dissolve the Soviet Union by integrating the aspiring countries into the Euro-Atlantic institutions when Russia is still weak and the unity and resolve in the West are at their highest.

The Complexity of Arctic Politics

Reordering the High North

Arctic Politics: From Cooperation to Competition – and Back Again?

For a long time, the Arctic had a kind of exceptional character as an international peace zone. But that now seems to be a thing of the past, as the region has become the new frontier for the geopolitical power play of major global and small regional powers.

By *Kristina Spohr*, Professor of International History, London School of Economics and Political Sciences

If we lose the Arctic, we lose the whole world,” Finnish president Sauli Niinistö observed in 2017. What he meant was obvious: Global warming – more severe in the northern reaches of the globe than anywhere else – will affect all of humanity. Humanity, however, remains subdivided into states with competing interests.

Relations among the eight Arctic powers – countries with territory north of the Arctic circle (that is Russia, USA, Canada, Denmark/Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Finland) – are today less harmonious than at any time in the post-Cold War era; in particular, the currently heightened tensions between Russia and the seven Western countries have direct implications for the Arctic region itself.

The fact that external actors, notably China, have been pushing into the North, through unilateral actions but also through Beijing’s close partnership with the Kremlin, in order both to underscore its status as a power with global reach and to challenge the US-led world order, has further deepened uncertainty in the region.

Arctic diplomacy: key to the post-war order?

Despite the massive power differentials, politico-ideological divergence, and competing interests, the years since the end of the Cold War have seen multilateral engagement among the Arctic Eight at all levels – local, regional, and national – mediated through both inter-governmental and transnational non-governmental cooperation. The region became known for a shared commitment to keeping the peace and continuing to talk, even when there were crises and clashes farther afield.

But today, thanks to Russia’s War in Ukraine, these multilateral fora and initiatives – hallmarks of the Arctic’s “exceptionalism” – are effectively suspended. There is just one hopeful sign: the eight-country “Arctic Council” whose rotating chairmanship just passed from Russia to Norway in an orderly manner, remains in operation. And this may prove to be important. Because the Arctic now lies in the eye of a global climatic storm. This region, once a neglected margin, shrouded in mystery, could be the place where common ground is found and constructive engagement renewed. If a new

post-war global order is coming, it may well be born here.

“This region, once a neglected margin, shrouded in mystery, could be the place where common ground is found and constructive engagement renewed.”

Fostering Arctic Cooperation during the Cold War

Cooperative engagement in the High North had its roots in the years of the Cold War’s denouement. It was hoped, even expected, that despite conflicts elsewhere in the world, the Arctic region could become a model space for international governance and an exemplary “territory of dialogue” between the regional stakeholder states. The notions of “high north low tensions” and of “Arctic exceptionalism” that emerged were grounded precisely in these assumptions.

It all began with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev’s Murmansk speech in 1987. As he sought to defuse the East-West conflict, he vowed to transform the Arctic into a nuclear-free area and international “zone of peace.” Keen on disarmament, he called for an end to nuclear testing and restrictions on naval activities while urging joint development of resources and co-operation to safeguard the Arctic ecosystem.

Gorbachev’s personal initiative complemented other international systemic shifts during the 1980s. His words resonated with the concerns of the growing green movements in the West (and East) and spoke to a mounting awareness of the effects of pollution and climate change. They also fitted with the long-term aspirations for peace, security, and environmental protection in the Arctic as articulated by the small NATO and neutral Nordic countries, and demanded by increasingly politically assertive Northern indigenous peoples, from the North American and Greenland Inuit to the Sami in Northern Europe and the Nenets and Chukchi in Siberia.

The Arctic Council and its genesis

Gorbachev did not outlast the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. But his “new thinking” opened up a new era in the Arctic. In June that year, the eight circumpolar countries (USA, USSR, Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Finland) under Finnish leadership announced the so-called Rovaniemi process, a joint Arctic Environ-



photo: Dermot Tatlow

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mental Protection Strategy. Two years later, in 1993, Norway launched the intergovernmental Barents Euro-Arctic Council and cross-border county level Barents Regional Council, before the most significant and thematically broadest forum of all, the Arctic Council, was founded in 1996 under Canadian initiative.

In the Arctic Council, unusually, the governments of the “Arctic Eight” set out to work together with six so-called permanent participants – organisations representing Arctic Indigenous Peoples – as equal partners in all the areas of “soft power”, from culture to ecology, from tourism to trade. Yet, the contested subject of military affairs was expressly left out. Crucially, until 2022, the Council managed to largely shield its fruitful regional cooperation from any encroachment by negative global dynamics or external crises.

The impact of climate change

The climate emergency is changing all that. As global awareness of climate change has grown, so has the visibility of the Arctic. This was first epitomised at the UN Rio Earth Summit in 1992, then followed with the signing of the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 and the Paris Climate Accord in 2015, before in late 2020 the UN SG declared a “triple planetary emergency” – a climate crisis, a nature crisis, and a pollution crisis.

Nowhere is the planet’s warming more palpable than in the Arctic. Alarming new climatological patterns reflect the realities of a region warming much faster than the rest of the earth – four times more quickly, according to the latest scientific data, than the global average around the North Pole; seven times faster in the North-European Barents Sea region.

The historical shift in Arctic dynamics

But while some warn of an impending climate catastrophe others focus on the immense opportunities opening up as icescape turns to seascape: newly navigable sea lanes are fuelling a rush for resources. That Arctic affairs have appeared near the top of the international agenda over the last 5–10 years is precisely because climate change has raised the economic and political stakes. Local leaders and international decision-makers now face the task of balancing long-term ecological challenges with the new economic opportunities exposed by the big melt. Reconciling these imperatives is not likely to be easy.

“This threatens to unsettle the already shaky regional equilibrium and to disrupt the collaborative Arctic regime of the 1990s.”

At the same time, potentially cooperative regional approaches have come under pressure from conflict between states erupting elsewhere. And, to make matters even worse, the buzz around those new opportunities for development have drawn geographically remote actors into the regional game, most importantly China. This threatens to unsettle the already shaky regional equilibrium and to disrupt the collaborative Arctic regime of the 1990s. Tensions over territorial claims, regional control, and governance of the Arctic region are rising.

Russia’s reach for Arctic dominance

“Arctic exceptionalism” ended abruptly last year, when Putin went to war with Ukraine. Faced with Putin’s challenge to the post-Wall European peace-order, the West placed the belligerent Russians under a regime of sanctions. From March 2022, the Western Seven of the Arctic Eight also suspended their participation on the Arctic Council. As it happened, Russia held the rotating chairmanship when the Council stopped functioning in its consensus-based format. From then onward, any hope that it might serve to pursue a regional common cause was gone. The transition was less sudden than it seemed. For some years, under Putin’s “second reign”, Russia had been intensifying its military build-up from the Barents Sea to the Bering Strait. And beyond the reopening of hundreds of new and former Soviet-era Arctic military sites, the Kremlin had also started to use the high north “as a testbed for the most advanced weapons including hypersonic missiles” – some of which Putin fired on Ukraine.

“‘Arctic exceptionalism’ ended abruptly last year, when Putin went to war with Ukraine.”

Was the “zone of peace” an illusion?

Looking back, it seems that Russia was systematically using the paradigm of “Arctic exceptionalism” as a smokescreen to conceal its efforts to outmanoeuvre the West in the circumpolar North. The key long-term strategic goal was to gain a relative military advantage in the area, while simultaneously limiting NATO’s and Western military development in the area. It was this growing Russian “security challenge”, Jens Stoltenberg warned of in 2022, that required a fundamental rethink of NATO’s Arctic posture. NATO, he argued, ought to respond through an increased allied military presence and serious investment in new capabilities.

For too long, Western countries had worked towards Arctic cooperation while Russia focused instead on military competition. Especially the small Nordic neighbours had sought to minimize tensions, sticking to military non-alignment while conducting important collaborative work on environmental issues. At the very latest, Russia ceased to be a cooperative stakeholder in Arctic and European security in 2022, when President Putin openly declared the collective West a “strategic enemy”.

The Arctic without Russia is not an option

As we look to the future, some form of communicative engagement with Russia is obviously necessary. This is required in order to handle technical-level connections, as well as to avoid misunderstandings or miscalculations especially regarding military exercises or border control. Yet, genuine cooperation or even staking out measures designed to ease tensions over the medium term is largely out of the question, because all trust is gone.

The challenge of Putin's Russia has turned out to be systemic in nature. For Putin, the driving factor in world politics is the constant struggle between sovereign great powers, and Russia's own ontological and deep-rooted antipathy towards the "liberal West", underpinned by a strategic culture marked by militarism and violent imperialism.

How Western cooperation bolstered Russia's Arctic ambitions

Arctic economic and military resources continue to play an essential role in Russia's ability to conduct aggression and its quest to achieve its grand strategic goal, the restoration of its quality as a great power (державность). Since the end of the Cold War, the West has facilitated this capability through its post-Cold War regional cooperative practices, helping Russia gain access to international research projects and Western money to improve infrastructure and living conditions in the Far North.

Collaboration also catalysed the energy sector, which in turn helped create the impression of a stable investment area. Foreign capital flows followed for state-run Arctic mega-projects, such as Novatek's Sabetta port and Gazprom's gas extraction on the Yamal Peninsula; and these helped Russia to maintain its position as an energy superpower, allowing it ultimately to use oil and gas as a political weapon against the West.

Russia vs. NATO – but what about China?

With the cessation of Arctic cooperation, Russia has forfeited access to the multilateral leverage that enabled it to pursue its objectives in the region. Moreover, with Finland a new NATO member since April 2023 and Sweden hoping to gain Alliance membership soon, Russia – though it spans roughly half of the Arctic coastline – will soon be the only circumpolar nation outside the Alliance.

“Russia has sought to compensate for this loss of regional clout by looking to China.”

The drift into isolation and the renewal of East-West antagonism in the region, unimaginable even 18 months ago, is a direct consequence of Russia's own actions, which drove Finns and Swedes to seek NATO membership. Russia has sought to compensate for this loss of regional clout by looking to China.

China's future plans

Bizarre as it may seem, Xi's China with its self-declared goal of becoming the world's leading power by 2049, considers itself a “near-Arctic state”. Beijing has used its status as an observer-state on the Arctic Council (since 2013) to shape Arctic governance to its own advantage by pressing for the region's “internationalization”. China has also made significant efforts under Xi Jinping's “one belt one road” initiative – specifically the Polar Silk Road (PSR) project as presented in 2018 – to expand its influence within this strategically valuable region.

In late August 2022 NATO SG Stoltenberg warned of the threat posed to regional security by Beijing's designs on the Arctic, highlighting the PRC's spending of tens of billions of dollars on energy, infrastructure, and scientific research projects, and its plans to build the world's largest icebreaker fleet. Worse from NATO's perspective, just before Putin began its Ukraine campaign, Beijing and Moscow “pledged” to “intensify practical cooperation in the Arctic”.

China's challenge in the Arctic

While it remains unclear whether the Polar Silk Road will really be the harbinger of a closer Sino-Russian Arctic security pact (as part of their challenge to American “hegemony” in the international system), it is notable that the Ukraine war appears, momentarily at least, to have resulted in a general slowdown of joint Sino-Russian activities in the North.

“After three decades on the outer margins, Arctic policy has begun to move up Washington's priority list.”

This may be because Beijing still aspires to balance its Russian and Western interests while presenting itself as new international peace broker. On the one hand, Xi has refused to condemn the Ukraine invasion or to join in the sanctions against the Putin regime; on the other, he has sought to avoid irreparably damaging Sino-European relations by drawing too close to Moscow.

Crucially, China has not been able to use the dormant platform of the Arctic Council. Nor has it managed to push through some of its prestige PSR (Polar Silk Road) projects in North European and North American Arctic territories – from a railway connection between northern Finland and Norway, to land acquisition in Iceland and a uranium and rare earths mining site in Greenland to stakes in Alaskan LNG. The deepening regional awareness of financial and security risks has turned the tide against Chinese money.

America's renewed interest

After three decades on the outer margins, Arctic policy has begun to move up Washington's priority list. Last September, the US Pentagon established a novel Arctic Strategy and Global Resilience Office; one month later, in the first update since 2013, the White House released its new US Arctic strategy. Combating climate change, protecting the environment, and new investments in sustainable development, were listed as core objectives over the next 10 years. But it was Russia and China that were singled out as the two main competitors in the region.

Foreseeing increased rivalry in this area of “growing strategic importance”, America vowed to “refine and advance military presence in the Arctic in support of our homeland defense, global military and power projection, and deterrence goals”. The Arctic hence has become the new frontier for geopolitical power play among the Big Three. It is a frontier like no other, because climatic and geopolitical threats converge here in a unique way.

How to move on? Future scenarios

In the light of this deepening geo- and climate-political deadlock, how might we move on? There is the danger that the Arctic Council's exemplary cooperative regime, due to Russia's War and under China's pressure, be swept away as the area becomes a globally strategic testing ground for the Big Three – to the detriment of European state actors, indigenous peoples and the environment? How might we preserve the togetherness of the Arctic Eight and rebuild the capacity and the political will required to deal with the region's burning issues?

To avoid zero sum games, stalemates and escalations, we might once again explore the possibilities of the Arctic Council, the premier forum of international cooperation on “soft” issues (i.e. not on security and defence) in the Arctic and see what can be rescued by operational engagement.

Echoes of the Cold War

To be sure, as a prisoner of geopolitics, it is currently stuck and unable to evolve, even as successive climatic tipping points slip by. And Russia's small

European neighbours worry about sliding back into the times when the “high north equalled high tensions” – most notably the Cold War, when the antagonistic politics built around the nuclear standoff that came with the extreme militarisation of the Arctic seas and lands, with atomic weapons testing and storage sites shrouded secrecy, represented a serious danger to flora, fauna, and mankind alike. The sheer size of the Russian presence in the North, militarily of course, but also geographically, is a factor whose importance can scarcely be overstated. The neighbours may hope to check Russian ambitions, but they also have to live with the Northern giant.

“The Arctic area might become a zone of unmediated competition involving not just the circumpolar states but possibly also a major Asian non-Arctic power.”

For all its shortcomings, allowing the Arctic Council to collapse or enter into a permanent state of suspended animation would bring new dangers. Bereft of the only effective regional body, the Arctic area might become a zone of unmediated competition involving not just the circumpolar states but possibly also a major Asian non-Arctic power. And this might well bring serious consequences, not just for the ecology and the environment, but also crucially for the indigenous populations dispersed along the arctic littoral who first found representation on the Council only 30 years ago.

Climate cooperation as a spark of hope

So, it is surely a positive signal that Russia's hand-over of the Arctic Council chairmanship to Norway this May followed ordinary diplomatic procedures. A step welcomed by all members, it indicated that despite the suspension of high-level meetings of the Arctic Eight and the impasse in unanimous decision-making since 2022, there was a common desire for the Council to continue to formally exist, indeed to resume its work. Because for all – especially the circumpolar member-states and participant groups but also the Council observers, from the EU to the PRC – this tool of Arctic governance carries enduring value.

After all, the Council's firm strategic aspiration is to advance sustainable development and environmental protection of the Arctic through cooperation in scientific monitoring and assessment as well as by supporting concrete measures. The latter include

the reduction of greenhouse gases and black carbon emissions, slowing down the development of hydrocarbon in the region, and boosting renewable energy supplies e. g. through offshore off grid initiatives, to mitigate, if not combat, global warming and climate change.

Navigating Arctic governance amidst Russian aggression

The imminent political problem for the West is that the steadfast defence of international law that drives its opposition to the Russian invasion of Ukraine also saddles Western actors with an obligation to preserve the rule of law and the post-Cold War normative regime in the Arctic without which true cross-border cooperation at all levels will remain a chimera.

The situation thus imposes conflicting demands: oppose Russian aggression in Ukraine and its unilateral destruction of the Helsinki principles of 1975 while building (or at least preserving) a multilateral architecture in the North with the Arctic Council as central tool of governance. In both spheres, the pursuit of a peace order must be underpinned by credible deterrence. But we must keep open the possibility of returning to a more complete approach to Arctic governance when Russia is ready to abide by the international legal standards to which it is itself a signatory.

Who takes the first step? Reviving bilateral relations

Then trust will have to be rebuilt between Russia and Western stakeholders at all levels in a policy of small steps. As in the 1980s, bilateral relations will have to be repaired, communication channels reopened, before any multilateral collaborative work can restart in earnest. This will be as essential to regional security as it will be to mastering the challenges posed by the climate crisis.

In the early 1990s, it was the small Nordic neighbours who did much of the leg work, pressing for new cooperative fora and transnational regional initiatives – in the political, economic and cultural domains – but also, with a specifically post-Chernobyl environmental awareness, keen to protect highly sensitive and fragile Arctic ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as to help Russia with its clean-up of radioactive contamination of Arctic soil and waters.

When all-power collaboration in the Arctic revives, they will surely once again be at the forefront in the quest for creative solutions. As the Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre put it in February 2023: “We must deal with Russia, now and in the future, as we have in the past”.



Körper History Forum Retreat 2023

Shifting International Order – Historical Sensibility for Uncertain Times

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Given the emerging post-Western order and the ongoing war in Ukraine, taking a historical perspective on geopolitics and strategy is key: What are the implications of a struggle for a new international order for politics and society? How do narratives of the past shape our understanding of order today? How to achieve a lasting peace order?

These and other questions were at the center of discussions at the Körper History Forum Retreat 2023. The conference took place on 5–6 June at Lübbenau Castle in the Spree Forest. For two days, the Retreat provided a space for debates with selected experts on our present historical and geopolitical challenges.

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