

Geopolitical Shifts Amid War in Europe, and the Cooperation Between Portugal and the US

Mudanças Geopolíticas no Contexto da Guerra na Europa e a Cooperação entre Portugal e os EUA

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Abstract

The article analyses the international order that emerged after the end of the Cold War and some of the challenges that it presently faces. In light of that, it also discusses several of the possibilities that lay ahead for a future order and engages in the ongoing debates. Indeed, the so-called international liberal order has been under challenge for some time. In all probability, that condition will not change in the near future and may even exacerbate. In fact, one of its more recent threats includes war in Europe, more specifically the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which further endangers its existence. Many, if not most, appear to believe that after the Russian invasion the world will never be the same again. Under these conditions, and independently of the type of ordering that we will see in the future, the article argues that given the historical and long-standing relationship between the US and Portugal the latter can play a significant role, as occurred during the Cold War, albeit this time with respect to energy.

Keywords: China, international order, Portugal, Russia, US.

Resumo

O presente artigo analisa a presente ordem internacional que emergiu após o fim da Guerra Fria e alguns dos principais desafios que presentemente enfrenta. Nesse âmbito, discute também as várias possibilidades existentes em relação a uma ordem futura e envolve-se nos debates existentes sobre a matéria. De facto, a chamada ordem internacional liberal tem sido desafiada desde há já algum tempo. Com toda a probabilidade, essa condição não se vai alterar num futuro próximo e pode até exacerbar-se. Com efeito, um dos mais recentes desafios inclui a guerra na Europa, mais concretamente, a invasão da Ucrânia pela Rússia, que poderá por ainda mais em perigo a sua existência. Muitos, se não a maior parte, consideram que o mundo não será mais como anteriormente. Independentemente do tipo de ordem que se estabeleça

no futuro, o artigo argumenta que, tendo em consideração a histórica relação de longa data entre os Estados Unidos da América e Portugal, este último pode ter um papel importante, como aconteceu durante a Guerra Fria, mas desta vez em relação à energia.

Palavras-chave: China, Estados Unidos, ordem Internacional, Portugal, Rússia.

1. Introduction

The international order that emerged after the end of the Cold War is generally defined as a liberal ruled-based order and one that has been led by the US (Ikenberry, 2011). It is based on values such as democracy, free trade and finance, and a significant network of international organizations. International order is here considered to be the set of norms, rules and arrangements that guide the interactions between states and, in particular, how major powers interact between them and with other states (Ikenberry, 2001, 2014). It can also be seen as the conditions of coexistence between states and the result of an ongoing process of balancing and adjustment under conditions of anarchy. Anarchy is here to be understood in the sense that there is no government, or a sovereign above all other sovereigns, notwithstanding the exact meaning of the word “anarchic” given by different authors (Fox, 1959).

Nevertheless, the world has been undergoing several important, but also dangerous, transformations over time (Zakaria, 2008; Kagan, 2013; Kissinger, 2014; Jacques, 2009; Posen, 2014). There are also many existing threats, namely climate change, risks of terrorism, demographic changes, population movements, changes in political structures, trade wars, financial crisis, and violent conflicts in many regions around the globe. In addition to all that there is also war that it is taking place in Europe, some would say against all odds given history since the end of WW II, and most notably since the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, and even more concerning there is a rising risk of war involving great powers and nuclear weapons.

The risk of war among great powers also suggests that realism is well among us as if to remind us of the nature of international politics, characterized by an anarchic world (Bull, 2002; Waltz, 1979). When studying the discipline of International Relations, it also takes us back to all the foundational texts in the field, namely Carr (1939) and Morgenthau (1948), amongst many others. This is not to say that the field of international relations evolves exclusively around power and security, but it is a reminder that studying this field while ignoring the struggle for power and the search for security is a mistake. In that sense, even today and over thirty years after the end of the Cold War we are still not yet at “the end of history” (Fukuyama, 1989). Instead, we are witnessing war and a transformational moment in terms of the international system that has not yet been completed. That war is having major and widespread consequences, namely

the loss of life, the destruction of property and infrastructures, disruption in supply chains, and considerable negative effects with regards to energy with all its negative consequences. The above-mentioned process of reordering of the international system that is taking place is still full of uncertainty with several outcomes being possible amongst several different possibilities that can be considered. Noteworthy, the war in Ukraine is not the cause of that reordering, but most probably a consequence of it. Amid all this, the article argues that given the historical and long-standing relationship between the US and Portugal the latter can play a significant role, as occurred during the Cold War, albeit this time with respect to energy.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows: After a brief introduction, I present the existing international order that took shape after the end of the Cold War along with the concurrent debates. Following that, I examine what are considered to be the main challenges to the present order and that existed even prior to the war in Ukraine. After that, I lay out the expected changes to the international system according to the main debates over the subject. Next, I discuss more specifically the prospects of a multi-order system. The last section focuses on the long-standing relationship between Portugal and the US and the possibility of energy cooperation under the present conditions — the war in Ukraine — which may renew the geostrategic importance of Portugal following the end of the Cold War. The article concludes with a brief presentation of the main conclusions.

2. The post-Cold War system and concurrent debates

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War gave rise to a unipolar order, in the sense of Waltz (1979), which is characterised by the existence of a single hegemonic power in the system. The collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in an international system dominated by a single state differently from previous eras, such as was the case during the 19th and part of the 20th centuries when the distribution of capabilities was shared between several states — a multipolar order — or a bipolar one, as occurred during the Cold War when capabilities were shared between two superpowers. Following the end of the Cold War, Francis Fukuyama announced the “end of history” and the triumph of liberalism and of democratic values over other rival ideologies and forms of government, namely fascism and communism (Fukuyama, 1989).

However, that level of power imbalance between the US and other countries also triggered much debate with regards to what that would mean exactly in terms of its impact on relations among states (Ikenberry, Mastanduno, & Wohlforth 2009; Ikenberry, Mastanduno, & Wohlforth 2011). Until then little attention had been given to the question regarding the durability of such a system, which is hardly a surprise given that at the time it was largely unanticipated as most

expected a return to a multipolar order. But soon after many started to address this issue with most analysts considering that unipolarity was not a stable system and, therefore, was not durable. Krauthammer (1990/1991) was one of the prevalent authors to question the durability of the unipolar order, naming it as a “unipolar moment”. Other realist authors, such as Waltz (1993) argued that unipolarity was not durable because a balance of power would soon occur. Others made similar claims at the time, such as Layne (1993), and even revisited the issue later restating that US hegemony could not last indefinitely (Layne, 2006). To a large extent it may be argued that this type of reasoning resulted from the surprising effect of the end of the Cold War and the inability to predict it but also, and very much so, from the inherent belief in the balance of power concept in realist international relations theory.

However, the discussion about unipolarity started to shift towards the end of the 1990s. This was particularly the case due to Wohlforth (1999) who argued that the unipolar system was stable and bound to last given that the U.S power preponderance had reached such a level that it was very hard to counter for many decades to come. Furthermore, the same author argued that in addition to being durable because of the unlikely emergence of another hegemon the unipolar order was peaceful and led to cooperation. Still, at the turn of the century Kupchan (2003) argued that a transition to a multipolar world was likely to come about in the following years. His main argument at the time was that the challenge would be brought about by a rising Western Europe and EU geopolitical ambitions.

Then there was also 9/11. With the terrorist attacks the debate shifted essentially towards a discussion between those who argued for an increase in US involvement in world affairs to maintain its dominance, albeit in a soft manner, and the “neoconservatives” that argued in favour of a more active role and of a reshaping of the system using military force if necessary. The latter position was set in play during the George W. Bush administrations (2001-08), notably with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It then became clear that the Bush administration considered the American hegemony and unipolarity as an opportunity to expand US power, often neglecting multilateralism, and sending shock waves throughout the liberal order. At the time, many continued to believe that the US power predominance would continue (Kagan, 2008).

3. Challenges to the existing international order

Notwithstanding, although the US still is the most powerful state in the world the current international system has been challenged in the past on a number of occasions and continues to be challenged. The rise of China has been notorious and that in itself constitutes a challenge to the international order as China wishes to push its interests forward. China may not yet be the first power in the world, or a superpower, but that may well happen in the near future. That would mean

that world power would be shared between the US and China at some future point in time. In that respect, it will be important to watch how the relationship between these two countries, notwithstanding others, will evolve. Largely, it will also be about the relationship between China and the liberal Western order that emerged after World War II through the leadership of the US (Ikenberry, 2013).

Noteworthy, the diplomacy of Beijing has sometimes been considered more than just challenging and somewhat disturbing, even disrupting on several occasions (Christensen, 2011; Shambaugh, 2011). There is also some scepticism on what concerns the relationship between powerful states and international organizations as powerful states often bend many of the international organization's norms to their will. Membership of these organizations and adherence to the norms that they embody can also be used as a way to demonstrate power and gain advantage. That being the case, China will continue to try to limit and set boundaries on US power and international organizations can be effective institutions for that purpose as well. But some are less optimistic. Lim (2015) considers that China is a highly dissatisfied power, particularly with the situation in East Asia. In that respect, the growth of its military expenditure points to the possibility of a more aggressive challenge in the near term and the case of Taiwan is considered by many as the main source of a potential conflict between the US and China (Tucker & Glaser 2011).

However, the most obvious and immediate challenge seems to come from Russia. Indeed, most analysts seem to agree that Russia seeks to undermine the Western liberal international order. There seems to be multiple evidence that provides support to that idea. More specifically, during the Munich Security Conference in 2007 President Putin made several comments contesting the present unipolar order and considering it unacceptable in the current world (Kremlin, 2007). In Putin's perspective, the unipolar world has become more dangerous than before and a more multilateral diplomacy is required, which in essence also means a multipolar order, although technically they are not exactly the same. Putin's 2007 speech may be considered somewhat of a trigger-point in relation to much of what followed. However, there is other evidence, namely the joint creation between Russia and China of institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Eurasian Economic Union, and the New Development Bank within the group of countries that goes by the name of BRICS. Their aim seems to be to counter the existing Western-led institutions and organizations (Bolt & Cross, 2018). But the most extreme examples are probably Russia's war with Georgia in 2008, the use of various types of economic pressure and/or military operations in countries such as Lithuania, Moldova, Syria, and Ukraine, namely in the Donbass region and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Payne & Foster, 2017). More recently, there is also the Russian invasion of Ukraine that began on February 24 2022 and that is still an ongoing war at the time of writing.

Be that as it may, there is much disagreement over the nature and the extent of that challenge (Kanet, 2018; Lo, 2015). Analysts have different views as to what exactly motivates Russia and what lies behind Russia's interests and ambitions. Some analysts consider that Russia wishes to overturn the present order with the ultimate goal of restoring complete control and influence on the territories of the former Soviet Union. The idea would be to become the regional hegemon and dominant power in Eurasia (Kagan, 2008). To that effect, Russia seeks to exploit all of the West's vulnerabilities and weaknesses, creating divisions within the Euro-Atlantic community and interfering in all possible ways in the domestic affairs of those countries. Simply stated, the main idea is to overturn the US-led liberal order.

Nevertheless, there are other analysts that believe that Russia is simply reacting to external factors and point to a somewhat irresponsible and destabilizing behaviour of some Western countries, namely the US, but also NATO. This behaviour has materialized in actions that may be considered aggressive to Russia and endangering its security. In that sense, Russia is not a revisionist power that seeks to overturn the existing international order but a neo-revisionist one that is merely reacting in defensive terms and that wishes rules and norms to be applied to all countries alike (Sakwa, 2015, 2017). That would also allow Russia to regain what is considered to be its legitimate status in the present order (Romanova, 2018). In essence, the end of the Cold War did not generate the cooperation and partnership that Russian leaders anticipated, particularly following NATO's eastern enlargement and the debates concerning the promise by the West that NATO would not expand eastward (Kramer, 2009; Shifrinson, 2016). The general idea is that the West's actions have essentially generated distrust between the parties that have led to a defensive stance on the part of Russia.

There is also another perspective that considers that Russia does neither have the will nor the capacity to reshape the present international order. The argument is that Russia is a declining power weakened by complex economic and social problems. However, although Russia may not have the capacity to change the existing international order it does not wish to fully integrate it either. As a result, it considers its best option to act as a spoiler and to avoid outside influences that it considers negative. These may include the spreading of democratic values or other conditions that may weaken its current political leadership and system, and that may endanger what it considers to be its nationalistic and conservative values. Some analysts characterize this type of behaviour as a form of "aggressive isolationism" (Krajev & Holmes, 2015).

4. Expected changes in the international system

Indeed, there is little disagreement among analysts that the current international order is changing as a result of the existing challenges. In spite of that, and the

fact that the pace of change may even accelerate over the coming years, there are different perspectives concerning what the future will look like. All the existing views focus on issues related to the future of the present liberal international order in the sense of how it will evolve. However, they all display different ideas relative to those issues and, in particular, on what concerns the role that the US will play in that future international order.

Following the current unipolar order, the most common belief seems to be that the world is evolving towards a multipolar order. In such a system, by definition, there would be, at least, three major powers, although it is not hard to imagine that the relation between China and the US would be the most important one (Blagden, 2015). Under this situation, one possibility would be a typical multipolar system where states look after their respective national interests with the traditional balance of power as its ordering mechanism. In such a situation the question concerning the role of the US deserves to be raised. And, as usual in US foreign policy debates there are essentially two different views. One that favours a more interventionist role by means of active balancing power against potential rivals — more specifically trying to prevent the rise of regional powers such as China and Russia — and at the same time adopting a strategic policy of alliances with traditional partners and allies. Noteworthy, this would be a very similar policy to the present situation where the objective is to preserve unipolarity.

The alternative policy stance would be one of offshore balancing, which would entail a reduction of US commitments and abandoning the present policy of engagement that started under President Clinton after the end of the Cold War (Posen, 2014; Mearsheimer, 2018; Walt, 2018). The fundamental idea is that the continuing military and otherwise efforts to pursuit and advance liberal hegemony are a counterproductive and expensive policy that is not in the interest of the US. It does not lead to an increase in international security nor even just of the US.

However, there is a different perspective concerning this multipolar order. It can be found in those considering that with the emergence of new powers and the creation of a multipolar order that need not lead to a traditional system of power politics. Instead, this view argues that although there would be a need to some form of balancing against powers such as China, the US would still have a very significant role to play given that it would remain the most important and the strongest power in the system. There would still be need for engagement and leadership by the US for the maintenance of the international order (Ikenberry, 2011; Jones, 2014). In that sense and given that there is a belief of an existence of shared values and norms the US would still have a major part to play and should continue to fulfil its responsibilities in maintaining order. This view also places a high value on the importance of international institutions and organizations, norms and multilateralism and, in fact, shares common ground with the liberal hegemony strategy observed under unipolarity. The significant difference would

be that under multipolarity the US would need to adapt to the other powers' interests. Having said that, it would not be a liberal international order given that such an order can only arise in a unipolar system where the leading power is a liberal democracy (Mearsheimer, 2019).

There is also another perspective that differs quite significantly from the previous two above. It focuses more on historical issues and cultural characteristics, and what that means and implies for the world. It tends to view the present liberal order as the product of political, economic and social conditions related to Europe and the West in general. In that sense, it associates the current liberal international order to a particular set of historical conditions that enabled the West to gain preponderance over time. More specifically, Kupchan (2012) argues that the world is changing and that within that change the West is losing power in material terms but also with regards to ideology. In his view, the West is characterized by certain defining attributes, such as liberal democracy, industrial capitalism, and secular nationalism. Those defining attributes are the result of the West's journey to modernity, but other developing countries and regions do not seem to share them. The new international system will likely have several other regions and powerful states that will also undergo different processes to modernity with different defining attributes. As a result, as power shifts within the system and new powers rise, the material and ideological dominance that the West has enjoyed will fade, with Asia being the region that will most benefit from these changes. Nevertheless, it would seem unlikely that any region will dominate such a system. In this new system, the biggest challenge will be how the different parties will relate to one another and establish consensus as this transformation takes place to a new order.

Other authors share similar views. The idea is that no single power is likely to have preponderance and dominance over the others as the world is more likely to resemble a multiplex, such as is the case of movie theatres where different films and actors play, and different audiences can watch (Acharya, 2014). That is, the world is becoming a diverse and complex world where different powers and regional institutions coexist, and where the most relevant is not the number of powers but the interdependence among them. This multiplex model has two possible approaches to order once unipolarity comes to an end. One is a concert model, and here the great powers have the responsibility of managing the international order, but the US would continue to play a significant role albeit sharing its power and authority with other countries. The other is a regional model which considers that regional institutions, such as the ASEAN and the EU, play a very significant role in addressing global challenges, such as climate change, trade liberalization, financial crisis and cooperation, humanitarian assistance and intervention, but also conflict. Importantly, this regional model also carries risks given the capacity of these regional institutions to address problems. As a

result, the regional model would need to be open and complementary to the UN system, and that would also require a reform of these global institutions.

5. Prospects of a multi-order system

There is also the possibility that we end up with a system that differs from all of the above although it may seem similar to the previous one. This would be a multi-order system. It would be a significant change compared to the present situation because what that means is that the dynamics that take place are not just between different sovereign states that interact within a certain order, but also how different international orders in the system work within each one and between themselves. Noteworthy, that may already be the case to some extent, and at certain levels and moments in time, namely in periods of crisis, change, and contestation of the present order (Adler-Nissen & Zarakol, 2021; Lake, 2020; Lake, Martin, & Risse, 2021). At least, it can be argued that changes towards such a system may already be taking place. Concerning the latter there has been much attention paid to the rise of China and what that means in terms of shifts in power (Jacques, 2009). What that may imply is that the existing changes would not just be a crisis of the current international liberal order. Such a system would be different because we would have different orders with each own's workings and the relations between those different orders.

Be that as it may, orders tend to privilege different types of regimes, norms, and cultures. In the West we tend to identify order with the liberal order. This is particularly noticeable since the end of the Cold War. It is also identified as the Western-led hegemony or US-led hegemony, which is associated with democracy, multilateralism, norms, rules, and institutions. Furthermore, the liberal order is also seen as producing economic and security advantages (Gilpin, 1981). Ultimately, the belief in the West has probably been that there is only one order, or at least a legitimate one. In that sense, challenges to that order are often seen as disorder. But as power shifts within the existing international order there may be changes to that order. Or there may be even more than one regional order with each one having its set of norms of coexistence. What that would mean is that the existing international liberal order would be one among others. For instance, we may have a Western liberal order, but in addition a Belt & Road order, a Shanghai Cooperation Organization order, a Eurasian order, a Middle East order, and so on. And power may shift within these orders from time to time. And as those power transitions occur, they can create and exacerbate tensions generating winners and losers, generating order contestation and the possibility of war (Allison, 2017). We could also have revisionist powers, changes to the existing global order, and even the wish to create a new world order. But these order transformations and power shifts need not only occur between great powers. There may be other processes through which orders unravel (Cooley & Nexon, 2020).

6. Risks of the war and the cooperation between Portugal and the US

Shortly after the war in Ukraine began, and given all of its consequences, sanctions against Russia were adopted by the US and the EU to try and stop the war. But there were great difficulties in stopping the conflict, even and particularly through diplomacy. In fact, at the time of writing this war is still ongoing and there is even a risk of escalation, talk of nuclear war and a possibility of WW III. In any case, it seems that in all likelihood the world as we see it will not be the same from now on. Time will tell how events will unfold but at some future point in time the war will come to an end. And then it will probably be possible to better understand in greater detail what the world will look like. Somehow, it seems reasonable to argue that, presently, the multi-order scenario appears increasingly likely. And if that happens to be the case, on the one hand, it remains unknown what countries would be part of each order and, on the other, what factors will sustain each order. The only exception that is presently well-understood is the liberal order, that would coexist with others, albeit with some adjustments.

Interestingly, one striking feature within the current situation is that, if anything, the liberal order seems to have strengthened after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, with NATO even enlarging further as additional countries wish to become members of the organization and others that may also do so in the coming future. That is a sign of unity and resilience but one that will not prevent the existence of other orders in the system. It will also be relevant to know how these orders will coexist in such a system as the system will continue to operate under the conditions of anarchy in the International Relations sense, and many different possibilities may occur in time and space. The relations between those orders may be of cooperation, competition, but also of conflict (Wendt, 1999; Wendt, 1992). The present situation suggest that the latter is more likely than the former two, but only time will tell. Not less important, there are also different possibilities of relations within each given order, in terms of being more of an anarchic or a hierarchical structure, more liberal or interest-based, more democratic or autocratic.

Within this environment and the still ongoing war in Ukraine, one of the major present and urgent concerns is Europe's energy supply and, in particular, how some of these countries can become less dependent of Russian gas given their high dependence in recent history. What is at stake is that irrespective of when the war in Ukraine will come to an end there is a clear will on the part of the EU to reduce its Russian energy dependence over the long haul. Significantly, the EU has been Russian energy largest market until the start of the war in Ukraine. So, for obvious reasons, energy security is a must as its production, transport and distribution have to be maintained and secured. In addition, there is also a concern over its price given that an accelerating inflation has often been triggered by rising energy prices. That was the case until not so long ago with dire

consequences. Rising inflation tends to lead Central Banks to raise interest rates to fight inflation. The ensuing impact of higher interest rates is a slowdown of economic activity, but other effects, notably the stability of the financial sector cannot be ignored, as liquidity and insolvency problems may occur. Much has been done with respect to all that, but the concern remains.

With respect to these concerns, Portugal could play an important role in the future. Portugal had significant geopolitical importance during the Cold War although that somewhat diminished after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. But the Portugal – US cooperation has been a long-standing one: Portugal has been a member of NATO since 1949, the Lajes Field in Azores was of the utmost importance during the Cold War and still remains most relevant for the US and European security. There is also the situation in the Gulf of Guinea. With regards to the supply of energy, and natural gas more specifically, the Port of Sines deserves special attention. To begin with, it is the largest artificial port in Portugal. It is a deep-sea multipurpose water port to which adds the fact that it has been operating as an LNG terminal since 2003. Presently, it handles about 60% of the natural gas consumed in Portugal and it has also been used for other energy products, such as oil. Consequently, it can be used for natural gas coming from several regions. In 2020, according to Eurostat, about 6,5% of the EU natural imports came from the US and 7.7% from Algeria. Despite alternative means of energy transport, using the Port of Sines can be a viable option, eventually safer compared to others, to transport natural gas from Norway and the UK, from which the EU imported around 16.4% and 3.2%, respectively, of its total non-EU imports. These numbers may even increase in the coming future given the current circumstances. The end result of this would be Portugal regaining a level of strategic importance in the current environment due to the war in Ukraine, which would only be comparable, albeit with its substantial differences and due proportions, to what was the case with the Lajes Field in Azores during the Cold War.

7. Conclusion

We are clearly living in strange and difficult times with mounting uncertainties. There has been a sentiment that things have been changing for some time and that they will never be the same again. The international system has been changing over time since the end of the Cold War and there is talk of a new order with several concurrent debates. There was the emergence of Daesh — the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant — , then there was the presidency of Donald Trump and his “America First” agenda, which has a high degree of probability of happening again under the MAGA (Make America Great Again) slogan following the US presidential election next November. In addition, there was Brexit with the UK’s decision to leave the EU amid an increase of populist movements and political

parties, particularly in Europe. The rise of China has also triggered several concerns, and more recently Russia invaded Ukraine, also generating fears amongst several European countries. Amid all this there are also other concerns related to population movements and climate change that have global consequences.

As power shifts it will generate winners and losers. Those power transitions upset the established order, and they tend to exacerbate order contestation. Revisionist powers consider those periods as opportunities to change the existing order. In all likelihood, matters will not go back to what they were before, even after the end of the war in Ukraine. Under those circumstances, particularly the war in Ukraine, and bearing in mind the long-standing cooperation between Portugal and the US, there is room for Portugal to play an important geopolitical role in terms of energy security.

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