Winter 2025-2026
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Volume 7 Issue 1

BRIQ

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The Climate-Water-Food Crisis

Caused by the North, the Solution Comes from the South

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Principles of Publication

At a time when U.S. ambitions for a unipolar world order have lost their appeal, a new order is taking shape thanks to the multipolarization of world politics and the acceleration of cooperation between developing countries, rejecting the globalism of imperialist states. Under these conditions, the new agenda of global cooperation should respond to the needs and aspirations of developing countries seeking joint development and solidarity under the guidance of public-driven projects. In particular, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) -put forward in 2013 by Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China- provides a suitable opportunity and a sound foundation for the implementation of this new agenda of global cooperation.

BRI is an epoch-making move to re-implement the concept of the Silk Road, which dates back 2,000 years, to a time when China was immensely contributing to global prosperity and the development of trade and cooperation. The revival of this concept entails a much more comprehensive approach that also incorporates rail and sea transport, and digital systems.

BRI proposes to bring together over 60 countries across Asia, Europe, Africa, and Latin America –together accounting for nearly half of the world's gross domestic product– for prosperity and development at the initiative of China. Unlike the Western-centered world order, BRI seeks peaceful collaboration for improving global trade and production towards common goals for humanity. It firmly rejects crude imperialist exploitation. Two thousand years ago, the Silk Road was a conduit for the flow of gunpowder, spices, silk, compasses and paper to the world. Today, it offers artificial intelligence, quantum computers, new energy and material technologies, and space-age visions to developing countries. In addition, the New Silk Road provides incentives and opportunities for the development and implementation of bio-economic schemes in stakeholder countries against the threat of climate change and other environmental threats that bring the entire ecosystem to the brink of extinction.

Türkiye has a significant role –real and potential– in accelerating South-South cooperation. Türkiye is conveniently located as Asia's farthest outpost to the West. It assumes a critical position as a pivotal country on BRI's North-South and East-West axes. However, China's development and BRI's contribution to the future of humanity have remained to a large extent underrecognized and superficially evaluated in Turkish academia, media, and politics. This is mainly because Türkiye's academics, media professionals, and policy makers have been observing China using Western sources. In the same manner, China and BRI's other potential partners have been viewing Türkiye through a Western lens.

BRIQ has committed itself to developing an in-depth understanding of the present era, with a particular emphasis on the new opportunities and obstacles on the road to the New Asian Century.

BRIQ assumes the task of providing direct exchange of views and information among Chinese and Turkish academics, intellectuals, and policy makers. In the meantime, this journal will serve as a platform to bring together the intellectual accumulation of the whole world, especially developing countries, on the basis of the Belt and Road Initiative, which presents a historic opportunity for the common future of humanity.

BRIQ is also devoted to publishing research and other intellectual contributions that underline the transformative power of public-driven economies, where popular interests are upheld as the basic principle, ahead of individual profit. The fundamental tasks of BRIQ are to demonstrate how BRI can contribute to the implementation of this public-driven model, and to help potential BRI partners -including Türkiye- to realize their real potential.

BRIQ stands for the unity of humanity and a fair world order. It will therefore be a publication for the world's distinguished intellectuals, especially those from Eurasia, Africa, and the Americas: the defenders of a new civilization rising from Asia on the basis of peace, fraternity, cooperation, prosperity, social benefit and common development.

Submission Guidelines

BRIQ features a broad range of content, from academic articles to book reviews, review essays, interviews, news reports, and feature articles.

The Editorial Board can issue calls for papers for special issues and invite authors to contribute manuscripts; however, it also welcomes unsolicited submissions.

Submissions are invited in English or Turkish. All submissions are to include a short biography (150-word limit) and should be sent as Microsoft Word attachments to briq@briqjournal.com Articles or other content that have been previously published or are under review by other journals will not be considered for publication.

BRIQ follows American Psychology Association (APA style, 7th edition, https://www.apastyle.org) and uses American English spelling.

BRIQ applies a double-blind review process for all academic articles.

Academic articles should be between 5000 and 9000 words in length, including abstracts, notes, references, and all other content. Please supply a cover page that includes complete author information, and a fully anonymized manuscript that also contains an abstract (200-word limit) and five keywords.

Book reviews should not exceed 1,000 words; review essays covering two or more works can be up to 3,000 words.

News reports consisting of brief analyses of news developments should not exceed 1,500 words; feature articles combining reporting and analysis can be up to 3,500 words.

Please contact the Editorial Board for interview proposals.

EDITORIAL

Green solutions are emerging from the Global South

Various international scientific institutions have projected that a severe water crisis and subsequent food shortages worldwide are likely to occur within the next 25 years. This issue is on the agenda of the United Nations, which aims to establish a common understanding of fundamental issues and maintain international order, as well as numerous other global and regional organizations. Meetings are held and decisions are made. However, no feasible, concrete solution that serves the common interests of all peoples against this enormous threat to humanity's future has yet been put forward. Furthermore, the decisions made at these meetings disadvantage developing countries due to current inequalities in the international system.

The crisis facing the world today is best understood by looking beyond Western-centric viewpoints and conducting an objective analysis. It becomes clear that the real culprit behind the crisis facing the world today is the system run by developed countries that destroys nature for private profit and gain. According to scientific calculations, the majority of greenhouse gas emissions that have caused global warming since the Industrial Revolution have originated in developed countries. However, it is developing countries that are most affected by the consequences. Given this, it is the developed countries of the Global North that should bear the most significant responsibility. Yet the Global North is attempting to shift the burden of this crisis onto the Global South.

In fact, the solution lies in an approach that aims to achieve harmony between humans and nature, based on the common good of all humanity. As with other global issues, solutions to this problem, which threatens humanity as a whole, are emerging from the developing world. Over the past decade, developing countries have been advancing cooperation for green, low-carbon development within the Global South cooperation platforms, led by the BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the Belt and Road Initiative. Nation-states in the Global South are uniting under a new understanding through these cooperation platforms. Given the stalling of the neoliberal economic and political international order, developing world states are converging based on shared development goals. At the same time, the groundwork is being laid for an alternative model based on domestic markets and production that will replace the current system of external debt financing and free markets. By coming together on this basis, Global South countries are advancing towards building a common future for humanity, increasing their cooperation for a 'green industry', and resisting imperialist impositions. Indeed, the situation can be summarized as 'the Global North brings destruction; the Global South brings solutions.'

FİKRET AKFIRAT
Editor-in-Chief

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ABSTRACT

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has consistently upheld green development as a fundamental principle and core philosophy, effectively promoting industrial green transformation, new energy development, environmental governance, and biodiversity conservation in BRI countries. The BRI has emerged as one of the world's most important platforms for green cooperation and a key global public good. However, new trends in low-carbon rules for international trade are emerging with introducing policies such as the carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM) and carbon labeling for imported and exported goods by the EU, the U.S., and Japan. These trends include cutthroat competition for first-mover advantage, the formation of coalitions for low-carbon trade barriers, the diversification of trade restrictions, the expansion of corporate low-carbon procurement, and the politicization of carbon-related trade rules. These evolving rules exert pressure on BRI countries' trade, industrial development, and new energy development through trade compliance demands, industrial carbon lock-in, carbon pricing limitations, and new energy integration controls, impacting the pace of green BRI advancement. To address these challenges, BRI countries must capitalize on the CBAM transition period by implementing coordinated measures, including collaborative development of carbon accounting standards, mutual recognition of carbon pricing mechanisms, and standardized carbon disclosure protocols, while participating in international rule-making processes to establish a low-carbon trade rule system that aligns with developmental realities and serves the collective interests of the majority of countries.

Keywords: BRI, carbon rules for international trade, CBAM, carbon labeling.

Introduction

PROMOTING CARBON NEUTRALITY has become a global consensus. However, in the context of the deep division of global industrial chains, disparities in carbon reduction policies between countries have led to the transfer of high-carbon industries or carbon-intensive segments of industrial chains to developing countries, resulting in "carbon leakage". Consequently, developed countries and regions, including the EU, the U.S., and Japan, have implemented trade restrictions such as CBAM, carbon tariffs, and carbon labeling. These measures ostensibly address carbon leakage while representing these countries' intention to gain control over international trade rules governing carbon emission accounting, offsetting, and taxation. The EU's issuance of CBAM transitional reporting rules on August 17, 2023, marked the mechanism's evolution from a proposal and trade negotiation stage to a substantive trade barrier.

Existing studies refer to trade restrictions implemented by different countries to address climate change and promote carbon neutrality as low-carbon rules for international trade (Hu et al., 2015). The original intention of low-carbon rules for international trade was to prevent carbon leakage resulting from differences in the stringency of climate policies among countries (Tu et al., 2023). However, most current low-carbon international trade rules are unilateral rather than multilateral agreements signed by multiple countries. This means that developed economies, such as the EU, the U.S., and Japan, can leverage their market dominance and position in the global industrial division of labor to formulate trade rules favorable to themselves under the guise of addressing climate change, while compelling other countries to accept them. Therefore, many scholars have questioned their legitimacy and justification, arguing that mechanisms such as carbon border adjustment taxes violate the WTO's principle of non-discrimination (Wang, 2023) and constitute trade protectionism under the banner of environmental protection (Zhang et al., 2025). Regarding rule design and actual effects, low-carbon rules for international trade have relatively minor impacts on Least Developed Countries (LDC) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Still, they will significantly impact manufacturing powerhouses such as China and energy and raw material exporters like Russia and Venezuela. Furthermore, provisions in these rules regarding product carbon footprint verification and carbon pricing requirements may also disrupt industrial relocation and foreign investment flows.

BRI participants, represented by Russia, ASEAN nations, and Venezuela, which primarily export carbon-intensive products, including industrial products, energy resources, and raw materials, face the most severe impacts from low-carbon rules for international trade.

China proposes that the BRI promote regional cooperation and is a vital platform for international and regional economic collaboration. China has conducted extensive economic cooperation with BRI partner countries in multiple areas, including energy infrastructure development and industrial collaboration. However, BRI participants, represented by Russia, ASEAN nations, and Venezuela, which primarily export carbon-intensive products, including industrial products, energy resources, and raw materials, face the most severe impacts from low-carbon rules for international trade. Furthermore, the evident shortcomings of BRI countries in low-carbon transition technologies, capital, and institutional frameworks have amplified the multifaceted effects of these low-carbon rules. With the formation of coalitions for low-carbon trade barriers, the diversification of trade restrictions, and the full

"Developed economies, such as the EU, the U.S., and Japan, can leverage their market dominance to formulate trade rules favorable to themselves under the guise of addressing climate change, while compelling other countries to accept them" (Cartoon: Global Times, 2023).

extension to the upstream and downstream of industrial chains, low-carbon rules for international trade will have increasingly more profound impacts on the economic and trade cooperation among the BRI countries, even to the extent of delaying or interrupting industrial investments and new energy development under the BRI. Hence, to advance the BRI's green development, it is essential to understand the evolving trends of low-carbon rules for international trade and their implications for BRI implementation.

This study draws on policy documents—namely the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), the European Green Deal, the U.S. Clean Competition Act, and the objectives and mandates of the G7 "Climate Club"—as well as on multinational corporate ESG disclosures (Apple, BMW, Boeing, etc.) and authoritative trade databases (the Environmental Provisions in Regional Trade Agreements Database, UN COMTRADE, and the WTO Integrated Database). The paper conducts quantitative and qualitative assessments of emerging low-carbon rules in international trade by employing content analysis, comparative policy analysis, and quantitative text analysis. It evaluates their implications for greening the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Evolving Trends in Low-Carbon Rules for International Trade

As developed countries transition from ambivalence to advocacy in their attitude toward carbon neutrality, the EU and the U.S. attempt to gain control over international low-carbon trade rules by accelerating the implementation of carbon tariffs and forming multinational low-carbon trade coalitions.

Cutthroat Competition for First-Mover Advantage

Current key strategies adopted by the EU and the U.S. to compete for control over low-carbon trade rules involve accelerating the substantive implementation of such regulations, such as CBAM, while leveraging their first-mover advantages and market positions to export these standards. Take the EU CBAM as an example. Compared to earlier proposals, the CBAM has narrowed the product coverage to six major categories, including steel and aluminum, while temporarily excluding organic chemicals and polymers to reduce opposition from raw materials exporters. Regarding the targets of carbon accounting, the current focus is on direct product emissions; for indirect emissions, only specific precursors and downstream products will be counted, thereby reducing accounting complexity and resistance from related companies. Regarding implementation scope, countries covered by the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) are excluded, mitigating opposition within the EU.

The concept of "implicit carbon pricing" regard-

Table 1. Changes in EU CBAM Proposals

	European Commission	Council of the European Union	European Parliament	Final Agreement	
Release Date	July 2021	June 2022	June 2022	April 2023	
Implementation Schedule	**Transition Period**	2023-2025	2023-2025	2023-2026	October 1, 2023 - December 31, 2025
	Start of Taxation	2026	2026	2027	2026
Product Coverage	Steel, aluminum, electricity, cement, fertilizers	Steel, aluminum, electricity, cement, fertilizers	Steel, aluminum, electricity, cement, fertilizers + organic chemicals, plastics, hydrogen, ammonia	Steel, cement, aluminum, fertilizers, electricity, hydrogen	
Type of Emissions	Direct emissions	Direct emissions	Direct emissions and indirect emissions	Direct emissions, indirect emissions under specific conditions, specific precursors, and certain downstream products (such as screws, bolts, and similar steel products)	
Free Allowances	Phase out completely by 2036	Phase out completely by 2036	Phase out completely by 2032	Phase out begins in 2026 and completes by 2034	
Carbon Cost Deduction	Only explicit carbon costs recognized	Only explicit carbon costs recognized	Only explicit carbon costs recognized	Only explicit costs recognized, implicit costs negotiable	

Table 1. Changes in EU CBAM Proposals (continued)

Carbon Cost Subsidies for EU Export Products	None		EU-made export products should continue receiving free emission allowances. The European Commission will propose legislation by the end of 2025 to compensate the top 10% lowest-emission EU exporters.	To be evaluated in 2025	
Executing Authority	Collected by individual countries	Collected by individual countries	Collected uniformly by the EU	Collected uniformly by the EU	
Export Rebates	Not considered	Evaluated and considered	Evaluated and considered	Negotiation room reserved for recognizing other countries' compliance costs	
Industry Coverage Expansion Plan	Collect relevant information for evaluation by 2025	Collect relevant information for evaluation by 2025	Establish a schedule for coverage expansion by the end of June 2025, prioritizing sectors with the highest carbon leakage risks and emission intensity. Include downstream products of currently CBAM-covered products by the end of 2025. Extend coverage to all EU ETS sectors by 2030.	By the end of the transition period, evaluate whether to expand coverage to other products with carbon leakage risks, including organic chemicals and polymers); indirect emission calculation methods; and the possibility of including more downstream products. Include all EU ETS-covered products and over 50% of their emissions by 2030.	

(Table: Wenbo & Quan, 2025).

ing carbon cost deduction rules has been recognized. The International Trade Committee (INTA) of the European Parliament has published the Amended Draft Opinion on the CBAM proposal, which not only extends the transition period but also emphasizes that the EU should establish an open, multilateral, global system for sustainable trade with its partners. This amendment leaves room for recognizing implicit carbon pricing (Hu et al., 2015). Additionally, the EU has added "equally effective carbon reduction measures beyond carbon pricing mechanisms" among the compliance costs deductible in carbon tariffs (Wu, 2022), reducing resistance from countries such as the U.S. and China, where carbon pricing mechanisms are not yet fully developed. Similarly, the U.S. has introduced the Clean Competition Act (CCA) despite lacking a unified carbon pricing mechanism and mature evaluation standards for carbon emission data. Currently, the EU and the U.S. are developing shared strategies, including relaxing rules and expanding the scope of exemptions, to reduce resistance to the substantive implementation of carbon tariffs, thereby gaining a first-mover advantage in low-carbon trade.

Formation of Coalitions for Low-Carbon Trade Barriers

Countries and regions represented by the EU and the U.S. have attempted to establish a "climate club" and low-carbon trade coalitions on the pretext of strengthening their motivation to participate in climate governance and reducing the transaction costs of global negotiations.

The "climate club" and low-carbon trade coalitions utilize carbon pricing-based tariffs as punitive measures against non-member countries while conferring exclusive advantages to members, including financial support, technological transfer, international collaboration, market entry privileges, and security assurances.

First, they have built a multinational "carbon club." In October 2021, the U.S. and the EU settled on steel and aluminum tariffs. They jointly established a "carbon club" targeting steel and aluminum products, setting carbon content and market economy status as dual entry barriers for steel and aluminum imports from non-member countries. On December 12, 2022, as proposed by Germany, the G7 released the objectives and mandate for the "climate club," planning to create a climate coalition centered on an "international target carbon price" and imposing a unified carbon tariff on imports from non-participating countries (Wu, 2022).

Second, they are increasing the weight of carbon-related clauses in free trade agreements. In the Plan for a Clean Energy Revolution and Environmental Justice, the U.S. proposed negotiating future bilateral trade agreements based on climate commitments made by partners, including the EU, Japan, and Canada. It also proposed imposing carbon taxes or quota controls on certain high-emission export products (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2020; U.S. State Department, 2021), gradually integrating carbon-related issues into the sustainable development provisions of free trade agreements. The framework of a developed-world low-carbon trade coalition is taking shape faster.

The "climate club" and low-carbon trade coalitions utilize carbon pricing-based tariffs as punitive measures against non-member countries while conferring exclusive advantages to members, including financial support, technological transfer, international collaboration, market entry privileges, and security assurances. While these coalitions demonstrate specific multilateral attributes when compared with the CBAM (Guan & Li, 2023), their highly restricted membership, designed to ensure the effectiveness of exclusive rewards for members and punitive mechanisms against non-members, ultimately renders them incapable of addressing the global short supply of public goods for climate governance. In essence, they constitute an alternative manifestation of tariff barriers.

Diversification of Trade Restrictions

The EU and the U.S. have also proactively established trade rules based on product life-cycle carbon footprints, such as carbon labeling and low-carbon product certification. Since 2020, the EU has successively updated or introduced a series of regulations, including the Circular Economy Action Plan, the Packaging and Packaging Waste Directive (PPWD), the new EU Battery Regulation, and the EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles. These regulations specify the targets and methods of calculations for product life-cycle carbon footprints, laying the groundwork for adopting low-carbon trade measures such as carbon labeling and low-carbon product certification. Furthermore, the European Parliament on June 21 adopted the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD). This regulation expands and defines the scope of ESG reporting and adds requirements for the audit and due diligence of disclosures. It is anticipated that implementing the CBAM in China will either follow the CSRD framework or work in tandem with it. In the future, these measures will coordinate with the CBAM to create diverse forms of low-carbon trade barriers.

Table 2. Some EU Trade Policies Based on Product Life-cycle Carbon Emissions

Release Date	Action	Key Points
2020	Updated the *Circular Economy Action Plan*	Focused on seven key areas including electronics & ICT products, batteries & vehicles, packaging, plastics, textiles
November 2022	Updated the PPWD	It is required that by 2030, all plastic packaging on the EU market contain a minimum of 30% recycled content; by 2040, the percentage shall increase to 65%; by 2030, all packaging must be designed for recyclability (applicable to all product manufacturers).
July 10, 2023	Adopted the new EU *Battery Regulation*	Overhaul of EU regulations on batteries and waste batteries, with new carbon footprint requirements for electric vehicle batteries and rechargeable industrial batteries
June 9, 2023	*EU Strategy for Sustainable and Circular Textiles*	Requiring manufacturers to be accountable for the whole life cycle of textiles
June 21, 2023	CSRD	This regulation expands and defines the scope of ESG reporting and adds requirements for the audit and due diligence of disclosures.

(Table: Wenbo & Quan, 2025).

Expansion of Corporate Low-Carbon Procurement

Certain dominant firms in supply chains have extended net-zero emission mandates to their upstream and downstream partners in an attempt to shape low-carbon supply chain rules at the corporate level. First, they set up "green procurement clubs." At COP27 in 2022, 65 corporations, including Apple, Microsoft, Boeing, and Airbus, established the First Movers Coalition (FMC), committing to $12 billion in green procurement by 2030. Second, supply chain leaders impose low-carbon transformation requirements on suppliers. Lead firms in the supply chain, including Apple and BMW, have instituted carbon-neutral supply chain commitments with stricter emissions requirements for vendors, securing technological and informational dominance in green and low-carbon areas.

Fragmentation of Carbon-related Trade Rules

The EU CBAM, climate clubs, and corporate low-carbon procurement coalitions represent trade rules dominated by a minority of countries or corporations. These initiatives challenge and undermine the effectiveness of global frameworks such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Paris Agreement, and WTO regulations. The series of measures taken by the EU and the U.S. will trigger a new round of competition for global climate governance leadership and accelerate the fragmentation and realignment of governance authority in the international community (Guan & Li, 2023). Prominent climate governance actors, including China, the U.S., the EU, India, and Russia, may respond by establishing multiple climate clubs and low-carbon trade coalitions, further splitting the global climate governance system.

Progress and Achievements of the Green Belt and Road Initiative

When proposing the BRI in 2013, China established green development as its core philosophy and fundamental principle. Adhering to the concept of addressing environmental issues through development, China has promoted green and low-carbon development in BRI partner countries by taking several measures, including cultivating green industries, developing clean energy, transferring green technologies, and jointly developing environmental protection standards.

Through international trade cooperation, China, through the BRI, has enabled partner countries to achieve deeper integration into global supply, industrial, and value chains. It also generates employment opportunities through international trade to support sustainable development objectives. Between 2013 and 2022, goods trade between China and BRI partner countries grew from $1.04 trillion to $2.07 trillion, achieving a 7.9% compound annual growth rate (CAGR), substantially higher than the 4.7% CAGR of China's overall foreign trade during the same period. Cumulative two-way investment surpassed $380 billion, including over $240 billion in China's outward direct investment. Overseas economic and trade cooperation zones built by Chinese companies in partner countries have generated 421,000 local jobs (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2020). According to World Bank projections in *Belt and Road Economics: Opportunities and Risks of Transport Corridors, by 2030*, BRI implementation could potentially lift 7.6 million people from extreme poverty and 32 million from moderate poverty and in-

crease global trade by 6.2% and Intra-BRI trade by 9.7%, thereby raising global income by 2.9%.

In advancing green industry development, China actively supports BRI partner countries in cultivating sustainable industries. For collaborative industrial projects, China rigorously complies with domestic and international green investment standards, establishes BRI principles, implements standardized environmental impact assessment mechanisms, and guides enterprises to fulfill environmental responsibilities to prevent cross-border pollution transfer actively. China has instituted green access criteria for the Green Smart Park of the China-SCO Local Economic and Trade Cooperation Demonstration Area (SCODA) and the China-Egypt TEDA Suez Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone (SETC-Zone). These efforts have yielded multiple flagship green and low-carbon demonstration projects that catalyze local green industrial transformation, including the Indonesia Tsingshan Industrial Park, the Vientiane Saysettha Low-carbon Demonstration Zone, and Sino-African agricultural technology demonstration centers.

In developing clean energy, China capitalizes on its technological and industrial strengths in new energy to drive the clean energy transition across BRI partner countries. As part of its commitment to facilitating low-carbon energy system transformation in these nations, China has completely ceased the development of new overseas coal-fired power projects. Building on this foundation, China has utilized the local resources of the BRI countries to construct the Zhanatas Wind Power Project in Kazakhstan, the Ivovik Wind Farm Project in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the Trung Son Solar Power Plant in Vietnam.

An aerial drone photo taken on July 3, 2025 shows a solar power station for agricultural use in the Yi-Hui-Miao Autonomous County of Weining, southwest China's Guizhou Province (Photo: Xinhua, 2025).

According to International Energy Agency projections, the annual average new installed capacity along the BRI region will exceed 80 GW by 2040, positioning it as one of the world's fastest-growing electricity markets.

China upholds an open-source and equitable model for technology and information collaboration in green technology cooperation, vigorously advancing the dissemination and implementation of digital and information technologies across BRI countries. These efforts have led to the establishment of platforms and institutions such as the BRI Environmental Big Data Platform, the Belt and Road Environmental Technology Exchange and Transfer Center, and the BRI Green Development Institute, providing specialized support for sharing environmental data, fostering green industrial partnerships, and facilitating sustainable finance initiatives.

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Impact on the Green Development of the Belt and Road Initiative

The increasing prevalence and stringency of international low-carbon trade rules present a double-edged sword for the Green Development of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Possible Opportunities and Positive Impacts

International low-carbon trade policies strengthen the constraints on climate governance for BRI countries. Under the Paris Agreement, climate governance largely relies on voluntary national commitments and lacks mandatory enforcement (Gürcan, 2021). Although the EU Green Deal and the establishment of climate clubs have unilateral characteristics, they have clarified the direction of climate policies in developed countries and transmitted pressure for low-carbon transformation to BRI countries through trade, thereby enhancing the binding force of climate governance.

Multinational corporations' green and low-carbon procurement strategies drive BRI countries' demand for green facilities and equipment. In the global division of labor, most BRI countries undertake high-carbon segments such as raw material supply, primary product processing, and assembly. To adapt to multinational corporations' green procurement and supply chain transformation requirements, the demand for new energy equipment, energy-saving and environmental protection devices, and green power facilities in these countries will increase significantly (Türe, 2022; Dai, 2025). This will accelerate green energy cooperation between China and BRI countries.

China has actively worked with participating countries to establish platforms for green cooperation, jointly advancing green infrastructure, green finance, and environmentally friendly investments (Illustration: China Daily, 2025).

The CBAM accelerates the construction of carbon pricing mechanisms in BRI countries. The EU CBAM requires the accounting of product carbon emissions, forcing other countries to accept or recognize the carbon prices of the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS). To meet the EU CBAM's compliance requirements and enhance their exports' competitiveness, BRI countries will accelerate the construction of their domestic carbon markets and improve their carbon emission cost accounting systems.

The green and low-carbon policies of Europe and the United States force BRI countries to strengthen cooperation on low-carbon rules. Policies such as the EU Green Deal and the U.S. Clean Competition Act (CCA) are essential for these regions to gain a say in green and low-carbon rules. This will compel BRI countries to strengthen institutional cooperation in carbon accounting and pricing to avoid being disadvantaged in future international trade (Kılkıs, 2022).

Possible Challenges and Negative Impacts

Compliance Pressure Restricts Trade Cooperation

The EU and U.S. have seized the initiative in creating carbon-related restrictions by establishing "carbon barriers" and forming an exclusive "carbon tariff coalition". This has significantly impacted trade for BRI countries, with the consequences specifically evident in the following dimensions:

Higher compliance costs and weakened competitiveness of enterprises: The low-carbon rules for international trade will bring additional carbon compliance costs to BRI countries, undermining the competitiveness of export products from enterprises in those countries. These rules will directly increase export costs for products from BRI economies in the short term. According to Zhang et al. (2025), the EU CBAM will substantially raise export costs for China's carbon-intensive industries, such as steel and aluminum, with projected export reductions of 18%-25% for steel and 15%-20% for aluminum by 2026. Long-term analysis reveals that developed economies such as the EU and the U.S. will leverage these low-carbon rules to maintain industrial competitive advantages, as their significantly lower carbon intensity compared to developing nations enables them to gain additional trade advantages through carbon-related trade barriers. Moreover, key components of the low-carbon rules, including Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) systems for carbon data, green electricity, and green certificate trading, are controlled by third-party institutions from the EU, the U.S., and Japan. Due to the late development of the low-carbon service sector in BRI countries, their relatively immature systems lack international recognition compared to Western counterparts. Consequently, enterprises are compelled to choose those international institutions for exports, escalating compliance cost burdens.

Extended compliance cycles and diminished trade efficiency: The low-carbon trade system requires enterprises to provide carbon emissions reports and supporting information. From the perspective of exporting companies, they must present massive amounts of information and data and submit them for review, which lengthens the compliance cycle of foreign trade. During the EU CBAM transition phase, for instance, traders must submit reports that cover

The Cirata Solar Floating Photovoltaic Power Plant, constructed by Power China, in Indonesia's West Java province (Fotoğraf: Global Times, 2024).

the following information: categorized total import volume for the quarter (with manufacturer identification), direct and indirect emissions per product category, and carbon emission costs already paid in the country of origin. To validate the reports, companies must present manufacturer details, equipment status, production capacity, domestic usage information, and geographic coordinates precise to six decimal places (Hu et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2022), significantly increasing compliance cycles and burdens. As calculated by Liu et al. (2022), the requirement for disclosing the cobalt and lithium carbon footprint under the new EU battery regulation extends the compliance cycle for the export of electric vehicle components from China to Europe to 14 months, reducing trade efficiency by 19%.

Carbon Verification Across Entire Industrial Chains Impacts Industrial Cooperation

The Green BRI has significantly enhanced industrial collaboration between China and participating nations, particularly in Hungary and Vietnam's successful absorption of transferred industries, including new energy vehicles and electronic information technologies. However, the evolving landscape of low-carbon rules for international trade has introduced uncertainties to these established BRI industrial partnerships.

Industrial investments from BRI countries may be diverted to regions with lower carbon pricing, such as the EU and the U.S. Current low-carbon rules for international trade, such as the EU CBAM, only specify products subject to carbon taxation without defining carbon accounting boundaries.

If based on "direct emissions" that cover only production processes directly controlled by manufacturers, companies could reduce direct emissions by purchasing semi-finished products or separating upstream and downstream operations. However, if adopting "embedded emissions" that include emissions from intermediate production, manufacturers would face identical carbon costs whether for assembling purchased semi-finished components or for carrying out production independently (Yang et al., 2022). In this case, companies would be incentivized to relocate all industrial chains to countries with carbon pricing advantages. China's carbon intensity exceeds that of the U.S. by over threefold, with its steel industry's emission factor about 1.5 times higher (Liu et al., 2022). Countries primarily exporting raw materials and carbon-intensive goods, such as Russia and Saudi Arabia, demonstrate even higher carbon intensities. Introducing the low-carbon rules for international trade will cause such countries to lose upstream customers or force them to transfer some industrial chains to countries with lower carbon prices, such as the EU and the U.S.

If Western economies establish a system of trade restriction rules comprising carbon trade barriers, they will likely propagate unilateral trade barriers under the guise of "net-zero" objectives.

Carbon verification may cause industrial carbon lock-ins in BRI countries. A diversity of international trade carbon barriers, including the new EU Battery Regulation and France's carbon labeling scheme, implemented through carbon footprint verification and labeling requirements, effectively function as trade barriers in product imports and project bidding, while protecting domestic low-carbon and zero-carbon technologies and products (European Commission, 2020). Currently, BRI countries lag behind Western counterparts in the standards and policies on carbon footprint verification and labeling, resulting in limited international recognition of their carbon footprint calculations and weakened positions in trade negotiations. If Western economies establish a system of trade restriction rules comprising carbon trade barriers, they will likely propagate unilateral trade barriers under the guise of "net-zero" objectives. As a result, the competitive advantages of BRI countries in terms of labor costs, raw materials, and energy resources could be negated by high carbon compliance costs. This would deter multinational corporations from industrial relocation and investment in BRI countries. Without access to carbon-efficient technologies and financing, BRI countries face the prospect of being locked into energy-intensive, high-emission industrial structures. Compounding these challenges, the lack of alignment and mutual recognition between China and the EU in carbon footprint verification standards means that Chinese companies transferring such industries as solar photovoltaics and wind power to BRI countries also face high compliance costs. This further constrains these countries' access to green and low-carbon technologies and financing, ultimately hindering their green and low-carbon industrial transformation.

Carbon Pricing Rules Impact Regional Carbon Market Cooperation

While complying with WTO regulations and existing free trade agreements, the EU CBAM retains provisions for companies to claim rebates or make additional payments according to verified product carbon intensity. The mechanism incorporates "price-based deduction" and "volume-based deduction" methods, though the final one to be applied has yet to be determined. Given the gap between BRI countries and the EU in carbon market development, adopting the CBAM, irrespective of which method is selected, will consolidate the EU's position in the carbon market and affect cooperation among BRI participants in the regional carbon market.

The "price-based deduction" mechanism will consolidate the EU's dominant role in establishing carbon market price benchmarks, as it requires companies to compensate based on price differences with the EU carbon market. Currently, the development of the carbon market in BRI countries is at a nascent stage. The International Carbon Action Partnership (ICAP)'s Emissions Trading Worldwide Status Report 2025 indicates that among developing BRI nations, only Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Türkiye, New Zealand, and Mexico have operational carbon trading markets; Brazil, Vietnam, and four others are in the process of establishing theirs; and Argentina, Thailand, Malaysia, and two additional countries are considering implementation (ICAP, 2025).

"If Western economies establish a system of trade restriction rules comprising carbon trade barriers, they will likely propagate unilateral trade barriers under the guise of "net-zero" objectives" (Photo: Generation Climate Europe, 2022).

Without functional carbon markets or effective carbon pricing mechanisms, BRI countries face no alternative but to adopt EU carbon prices as a reference. Trading volumes and price levels remain substantially below EU standards, even in those BRI nations with operational carbon markets (Kılkış, 2024). For instance, when China's national carbon market launched in 2021, its trading price hovered around RMB 50/ton, contrasting sharply with the contemporaneous EU price exceeding €50/ton (approximately 7.7 times higher) (Long et al., 2022). Given these significant price disparities, carbon tariffs calculated using the EU's pricing mechanism would constitute a substantial component of companies' primary emission costs, cementing the EU carbon market's "de facto" benchmark status in global carbon pricing.

The "volume-based deduction" method will tether other countries to the EU carbon market. Under this system, companies receive exemptions from carbon tariffs for emissions volumes already priced in their domestic markets, subject to EU

Table 1-6: Progress of Carbon Market Development in BRI Countries

Carbon Market	Progress		
	In force	Under development	Under consideration
China	•		
Indonesia	•		
Kazakhstan	•		
Mexico	•		
New Zealand	•		
Türkiye	•		
Chile		•	
Brazil		•	
Colombia		•	
Ukraine		•	
India		•	
Vietnam		•	
Dominica			•
Argentina			•
Thailand			•
Malaysia			•
The Philippines			•

Compiled from the ICAP's Emissions Trading Worldwide Status Report 2025
(Table: Wenbo & Quan, 2025).

recognition of carbon accounting data from their governments or third-party institutions. The condition for such recognition, as stipulated in Article 2 (5) of the European Commission's Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council Establishing a Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, requires "full linkage between the country of origin's emissions trading system and the EU ETS" (European Commission, 2020). This provision effectively mandates alignment with EU carbon pricing benchmarks, compelling participating nations to surrender their carbon pricing autonomy and submit to integration with the EU's carbon market regime. Through either the "price-based" or "volume-based" deduction methods, the EU can capitalize on its market influence and first-mover advantage to elevate its standards to global carbon trade norms. This process could occur without seeking cooperation with international institutions or countries outside the EU, exemplifying the "Brussels Effect" that cements the EU's dominance in the global carbon market. Among BRI countries, the carbon markets of China, Kazakhstan, and Mexico exhibit significant gaps compared to the EU ETS regarding industry coverage, trading liquidity, and market maturity. If compelled to adopt the EU CBAM's carbon price linkage model, these countries' carbon pricing mechanisms would struggle to fulfill their intended functions and face the risk of being marginalized.

Certification and Consumption Barriers Constrain New Energy Cooperation

The formation of the green procurement coalition by multinational corporations such as Apple, BMW, and Airbus to promote green and low-carbon procurement in the supply chain has driven growing demand among BRI enterprises to purchase and certify green electricity. BRI countries are blessed with abundant new energy resources. For example, South Asia enjoys approximately 2,500 hours of sunshine yearly (Halder et al., 2015), and underdeveloped BRI countries and regions, including Africa, hold 60% of the world's solar and vast renewable resources, including wind, geothermal, and hydroenergy (International Energy Agency, 2022). China has collaborated extensively with BRI partners on new energy projects. Examples include the 900 MW photovoltaic power plant developed by Zonergy in Pakistan and Chinese-aided initiatives in Nepal, including a solar-powered community bathroom and a rooftop photovoltaic power generation facility. However, through a series of low-carbon rules for international trade, the EU and the U.S. have assumed the authority to determine whether foreign green electricity, green certificates, and carbon sinks can be used to offset carbon tariffs. This undermines BRI countries' efforts to achieve carbon neutrality through new energy development. Specifically:

The EU and U.S. maintain a stranglehold on verifying green electricity and certificates, undermining the carbon asset valuation of clean energy projects. This Western dominance over global green certification creates barriers, as evidenced by RE100's "conditional acceptance" policy toward Chinese green electricity or certificates (Wang et al., 2023). Collaborative new energy projects between China and BRI partner countries equally face challenges in certification. Foreign trade companies are often compelled to accept Western certification standards to satisfy customers' requirements for green certification and reduce the complexity of certi-

fication and emission deduction. The financial burden is substantial, with many companies forced to allocate heavy budgets to purchase internationally recognized green certificates demanded by global customers such as BMW. Moreover, it is difficult to translate the emission reductions generated from new energy projects into tradable carbon assets and carbon emission deductions, creating a disincentive for BRI nations to pursue collaborative new energy developments.

Disclosure requirements increase the risk of sensitive data exposure and implementation barriers for new energy initiatives. In mechanisms like the EU CBAM, companies must submit project details to international third-party bodies, including geographic coordinates, photos, project scale, and implementation, to qualify self-developed and distributed new energy projects for emission cost reductions. This data sharing increases the risk of leaking scientific, technological, and geographical information with national security implications. BRI countries extend regulatory review periods to prevent the leakage of sensitive information and enhance security vetting for new energy developments. These measures create obstacles to the implementation of collaborative new energy projects.

The certification and consumption restrictions will divert financial resources from new energy development to other areas. The low-carbon rules' certification and consumption restrictions will create additional financial pressures on capital-scarce BRI countries, forcing them to channel significant funds allocated to new energy infrastructure toward purchasing foreign green electricity and carbon sink projects.

Conclusion

Policy Recommendations

International low-carbon trade rules impact the development of a Green BRI through multiple channels, including trade compliance pressures, industrial carbon lock-in, carbon pricing constraints, and new energy absorption controls. To mitigate the risks posed by evolving low-carbon rules for international trade, coordinated responses are needed in regulatory frameworks, market mechanisms, and infrastructure development, ultimately advancing a global governance system with "leadership-driven governance" for a Green BRI. Specifically:

A carbon accounting system for the BRI should be built. It is recommended that BRI countries jointly establish a carbon emissions accounting system to create a carbon accounting public good that aligns with their development levels and carbon neutrality processes. Specifically, **first, research should be conducted to develop recommended emission factor standards.** This involves analyzing the intensity values, types, industrial chain relationships, and relevant raw material data of major export product categories from BRI countries to formulate recommended carbon emission factor standards, while actively participating in the development of international standards for carbon emission monitoring technologies and accounting rules, and promoting the alignment and mutual recognition of carbon accounting and verification standards with international norms. **Second, efforts should be made to enhance the carbon accounting capabilities of supply chain enterprises by promoting green supply chain management** and leveraging the BRI International Green Development Coalition to establish carbon accounting

standards for dominant industries such as wind power and photovoltaics. BRI countries should collaborate to develop carbon accounting guidelines for carbon-intensive industries, including steel, metallurgy, and petrochemicals; incorporate embodied carbon intensity accounting; and establish a carbon footprint labeling system that achieves mutual recognition with ISO standards.

The low-carbon rules for trade among BRI countries should be built and refined. It is recommended that low-carbon rules be built for trade among BRI countries. This involves establishing a carbon tariff compensation mechanism. Specifically, BRI countries should take the initiative to add a "joint but differentiated carbon accountability" in the upgraded agreement on the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area (FTA), develop a carbon tariff compensation mechanism for Central Asian countries, and explore the possibility of achieving mutual recognition with countries such as Singapore and the UAE for green subsidy rules. It is recommended that BRI countries release a list of low-carbon products incorporating PV modules, new energy vehicles, and sewage treatment products; streamline related processes, such as the carbon emissions accounting and compliance review of low-carbon products; and implement the exemption or compensation of carbon tariffs.

A BRI carbon pricing system should be built. BRI countries should accelerate the formulation of an intergovernmental emission reduction cooperation framework agreement, establish a collaborative emission reduction management institution, and jointly advance the development of emission reduction project methodologies and the verification, registration, and transfer of emission reductions. Regional carbon markets should be developed in areas with mature conditions, such as between China and ASEAN nations and between China and Central Asian countries. Utilizing blockchain technology, BRI countries should create cross-border carbon accounting ledgers under the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank's framework to enable interoperability and sharing of carbon accounting methods and data, while establishing BRI carbon settlement centers in Hong Kong, Singapore, and other key cities to facilitate carbon market trading of carbon sink and new energy projects from BRI nations. Furthermore, BRI countries should promote the evaluation and mutual recognition of implicit carbon pricing by guiding industry associations and professional institutions to calculate compliance costs and assess operational impacts stemming from mandatory upgrades and retirement of high-energy, high-emission equipment, production activity restrictions, and other non-pricing policy instruments, ultimately fostering consensus on implicit carbon pricing among major economies and global organizations.

The mutual recognition of BRI carbon offset mechanisms should be promoted. It is recommended that BRI countries facilitate the inclusion of their collaborative new energy projects into the green electricity mutual recognition system while **supporting companies and international organizations in establishing green electricity certification service platforms**. They should encourage broader enterprise participation in RE100, the global initiative promoting green electricity consumption, and assist green certification service providers in collaborating with domestic and foreign institutions to develop the international I-REC green certification service platform. Additionally, they should create specialized information and data service platforms to handle BRI international green certificate registration, data storage, and authentication processes.

The BRI carbon information disclosure framework should be established. It is recommended that BRI countries jointly develop implementation and national guidelines for carbon information disclosure to standardize disclosure content, methods, and platforms, as well as establish management mechanisms against violations of mandatory disclosure requirements, thereby forming unified and standardized technical disclosure standards. BRI countries should create a Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) framework compatible with carbon market accounting systems and aligned with international standards, while promoting international harmonization and mutual recognition of assessment frameworks, standards, and implementation tools. Furthermore, they should develop a unified carbon information disclosure platform through regional carbon emission trading markets.

Carbon compliance accounting service providers should be fostered. BRI countries should support and develop globally competitive carbon accounting and consulting service industries. This involves establishing access regulations and standardization systems for carbon accounting services, third-party carbon asset management, low-carbon certification, and legal compliance services, while cultivating a comprehensive low-carbon service industry chain encompassing carbon data collection, verification, third-party testing institutions, and monitoring services. Additionally, qualified institutions and enterprises should be encouraged and guided to participate in international low-carbon certification systems and contribute to developing global standards and regulations for carbon accounting and trading.

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Water Scarcity and the Global Food Crisis in the Context of Climate Change

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ABSTRACT

Climate change has emerged as the most urgent and vitally important global challenge of the twenty-first century, profoundly impacting environmental systems, economic structures, and social stability. Among its most severe consequences are the closely interconnected water scarcity and food insecurity crises, which threaten to destabilize communities and profoundly exacerbate inequalities worldwide. This study examines the multidimensional relationship and complex nexus between climate change, water resources, and food security; it addresses the mechanisms through which climate change disrupts hydrological cycles, agricultural productivity, and global supply chains. Drawing on current empirical studies, policy frameworks, and an interdisciplinary perspective, the article discusses the increasing vulnerability of arid and semi-arid regions, developing countries, and small-scale farmers. Beyond biological and physical impacts, dimensions such as increased resource competition, population displacement, and political instability are also detailed. The article emphasizes the urgent need for integrated water resources management, the adoption of climate-smart agriculture (CSA), sustainable dietary changes, and robust policy frameworks that prioritize equity and climate justice. It concludes by proposing measures and tools to mitigate the effects of climate change.

Keywords: climate change, climate-smart agriculture, food security, sustainable development, water security.

Introduction

CLIMATE CHANGE PRESENTS ENORMOUS challenges with far-reaching consequences for ecosystems, national economies, and social life. The global community faces a paradox of unprecedented scale: while global agricultural production is at its peak, the number of people experiencing acute food insecurity continues to rise, and over two billion people live in countries experiencing high water stress (FAO, 2018; UNICEF, 2020). While continually increasing global temperatures, increasingly erratic rainfall patterns, and extreme weather events are among the most visible indicators, the less visible yet equally critical consequences lie in water scarcity and food insecurity.

The World Meteorological Organization (2021) reports that weather and climate-related disasters have increased fivefold over the past 50 years. This statistic reveals the devastating impact of climate change on fundamental human security areas. The unprecedented droughts that ravaged the Amazon rainforest and Europe's agricultural regions in 2022 are merely a precursor of the intertwined water and food crises fueled by the changing climate.

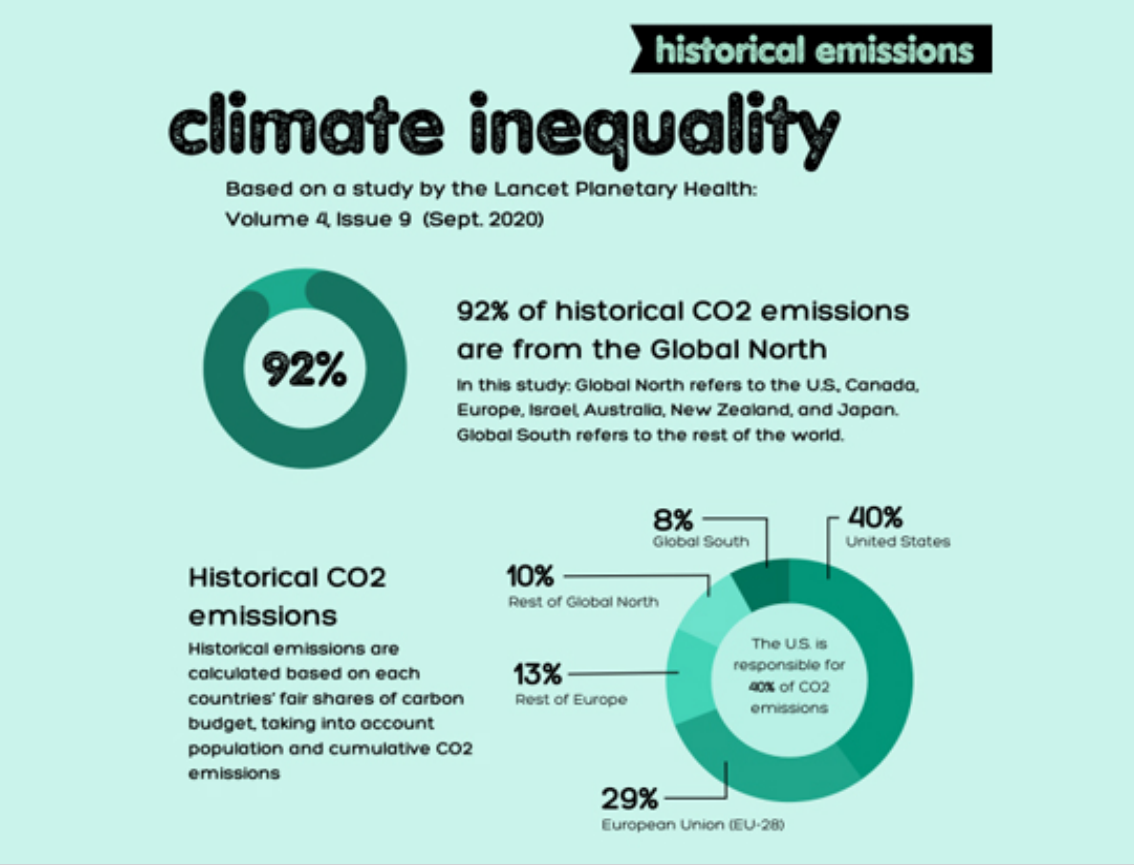
Water and food security are human well-being, economic stability, and global peace cornerstones. Climate change is a "threat multiplier," intensifying existing pressures such as population growth, land quality degradation, and natural resource waste. By exacerbating pre-existing vulnerabilities, climate change creates dangerous feedback loops.

Water and food security are human well-being, economic stability, and global peace cornerstones. Climate change is a "threat multiplier," intensifying existing pressures such as population growth, land quality degradation, and natural resource waste. By exacerbating pre-existing vulnerabilities, climate change creates dangerous feedback loops. The impacts of climate change on water and food systems, with their broad implications for poverty reduction, public health, global peace, and effects on human psychology, jeopardize the possibilities of achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG-02 (Zero Hunger) and SDG-06 (Clean Water and Sanitation) (IPCC, 2022; Wheeler & von Braun, 2013).

The Water-Food-Climate nexus is at the heart of this crisis: Agriculture accounts for roughly 70% of global freshwater consumption. Food production and supply chains contribute a significant portion (14%) of global greenhouse gas emissions. Climate change directly threatens agricultural productivity by disrupting the quantity and quality of water.

This study aims to examine the effects of hydrologic changes caused by climate change on agricultural systems and to analyze the resulting socioeconomic inequalities and geopolitical tensions. The central argument of the study is that climate change intensifies global water and food insecurity through a complex feedback loop comprising environmental degradation, disruptions in agricultural production processes, and socioeconomic instability, and that the burden of this crisis is unjustly distributed between the bloc of developed countries ("Global North"), who are the primary contributors to the crisis, and the most vulnerable developing countries (Global South). The article will first address changes in the hydrological cycle, then examine the impacts on agricultural productivity and food security, and finally assess the profound socioeconomic and geopolitical consequences of these physical impacts within the context of the Global "North-South divide."

Anthropogenic Global Warming, which has evolved into the present "Climate Crisis," dates



Studies show that the Global North is mainly responsible for today's climate crisis (Infographic: The Purpletide, 2023).

back to the First Industrial Revolution approximately 250 years ago. Rather than investigating the historical process that led to the current climate crisis, this study takes the current situation as a given outcome and analyzes the dynamics of the evolving climate-water-food triple crisis.

Climate Change: Fundamentally Altering the Hydrological Cycle

Climate change radically alters the planet's water cycle by increasing its energy, which threatens global water availability and quality.

The Precipitation Paradox: Severe Droughts and Floods

Climate change is making precipitation patterns more irregular and unpredictable. Increased evaporation and changing atmospheric circulation patterns lead to longer and more severe droughts in arid regions. In contrast, increased atmospheric moisture causes more intense downpours and floods when rain occurs. This paradox challenges water management infrastructure and disaster preparedness (IPCC, 2022).

In a warming atmosphere, the structure and functioning of the hydrological cycle are fundamentally changing. Due to global warming, the Earth has warmed by approximately 1.5°C compared to the pre-Industrial Revolution era, roughly 250 years ago, increasing the total amount of water vapor in the atmosphere. Currently, the total amount of atmospheric water vapor is calculated to be 12.8 trillion tons, based also on remote sensing measurements. The residence time of water evaporating from surface waters and soil into the atmosphere is approximately 9 to 10 days. After this period, the atmospheric water cycle is completed through precipitation.

The average global precipitation is calculated to be 15.3 million tons per second. The increase in atmospheric water vapor leads to an increase in total global precipitation. However, due to the highly complex nature of climate change, intense rainfall causes floods to occur in some places, while paradoxically, prolonged and severe droughts emerge in other regions.

Due to the highly complex nature of climate change, intense rainfall causes floods in some places, while prolonged and severe droughts emerge in other regions. For example, the IPCC (2022) has published a report indicating that since the 1950s, the frequency and intensity of heavy precipitation events have increased over most land areas. The same report also states that regions experiencing agricultural and ecological drought have increased more than regions observing increased rainfall.

The average global precipitation is calculated to be 15.3 million tons per second. The increase in atmospheric water vapor leads to an increase in total global precipitation. However, due to the highly complex nature of climate change, intense rainfall causes floods to occur in some places, while paradoxically, prolonged and severe droughts emerge in other regions. For example, the IPCC (2022) has published a report indicating that since the 1950s, the frequency and intensity of heavy precipitation events have increased over most land areas.

Water demand is showing a significant increasing trend, especially in developing countries and particularly in the Global South. Total water consumption, which was 4.30 trillion m^3 as of 2020, is projected to increase by 55% globally by 2050. The agricultural sector accounts for 70% of world water consumption, industry holds 20%, and drinking and household use accounts for 10% (UN World Water Development Report, 2021).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, prolonged droughts significantly reduce agricultural productivity and cause widespread water shortages. In South Asia, devastating floods linked to variability in the monsoon regime have led to water source contamination, infrastructure damage, and the displacement of millions. This variability makes water management extremely difficult, overloading infrastructure during floods and paralyzing agriculture during dry periods.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, prolonged droughts significantly reduce agricultural productivity and cause widespread water shortages (Photo: UN Women, 2023).

Shrinking Cryosphere (Glacial and Snow-Covered Areas)

The rapid melting of mountain glaciers due to global warming, while initially increasing flood risk, poses a long-term threat of permanent water scarcity by reducing the flow of major rivers like the Indus, Ganges, Yangtze, and Mekong (Immerzeel et al., 2020).

The cryosphere (the entire glacial and snow cover on Earth) is a critically important water source for approximately two billion people. Glaciers and snow cover in mountain ranges such as the Himalayas, Andes, and Alps are vital "water towers" for hundreds of millions of people. Mountain glaciers and seasonal snowpacks act as natural reservoirs, storing water in winter and releasing it during dry seasons, also replenishing groundwater reserves.

Climate change is rapidly breaking this systemic cycle. In Latin America, the rapid shrinkage of existing glacial areas in the Andes, which supply millions of tons of water to a vast geographical area, will inevitably lead to severe water stress across a broad region in the medium term. Due to substantial climate change impacts, Asia's Indus and Tarim basin systems have been identified as the most vulnerable water resources (Immerzeel et al., 2020). Glacier retreat threatens the perennial flow of major rivers, posing an existential threat to large populations' food production and water supply.

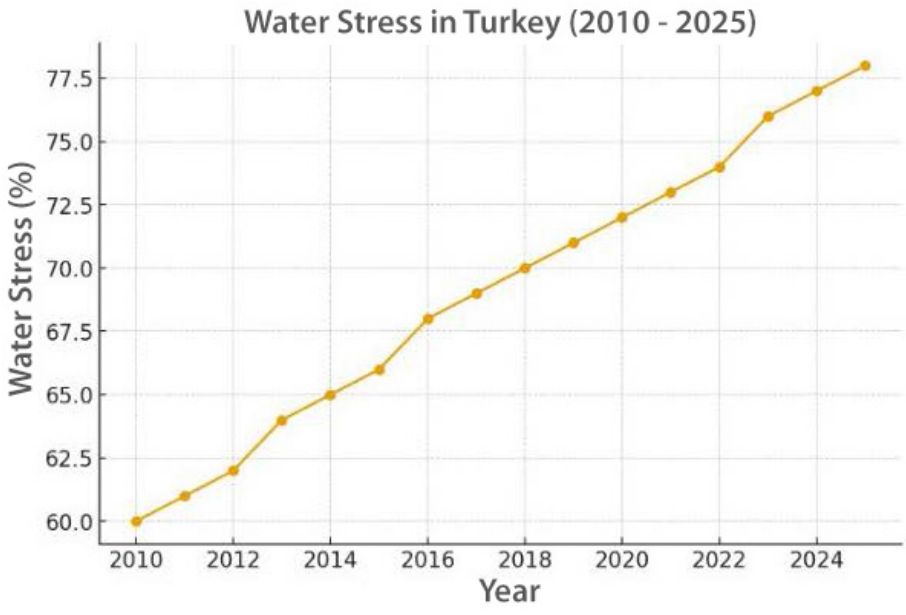
Depletion of the Invisible Resource: Groundwater

The over-extraction of groundwater for agricultural irrigation, drinking water, and industry is depleting aquifers in many parts of the world. Climate change deepens this crisis by reducing the recharge rates of these aquifers through decreased rainfall and increased evaporation.

Considering Türkiye as a specific example, the following graphs illustrate the deteriorating situation over time regarding the increasingly severe water stress. The graphs show changes in the rate of groundwater withdrawal (consumption) and per capita freshwater availability between 2010 and 2050 (Figure 1 and Figure 2).

While surface water crises are visible, an environmental disaster is unfolding out of sight in the subsurface layers. Groundwater, which acts as a buffer against drought and is essential primarily for agricultural irrigation, is decreasing and retreating to deeper layers, particularly in regions within the temperate climate zone, paralleling the decrease in snowfall. The irregularity of the precipitation regime due to climate change disrupts natural recharge from rainfall, further worsening the situation regarding groundwater reserves. Data from NASA's GRACE satellite mission reveal severe water loss in aquifers in critical agricultural regions such as California's Central Valley, North India, and the North China Plain (Famiglietti, 2014).

Figure 1. Per capita freshwater availability in Türkiye.



Graph showing the use of groundwater resources in Turkey (Graphic: FAO, 2025).

In the Middle East and North Africa, where rising temperatures overlap with declining rainfall, the per capita available water quantity is expected to decrease by over 50% by 2050 (FAO, 2020). The depletion of groundwater, particularly crucial for agriculture, creates a collapsing, unreliable foundation for global food security.

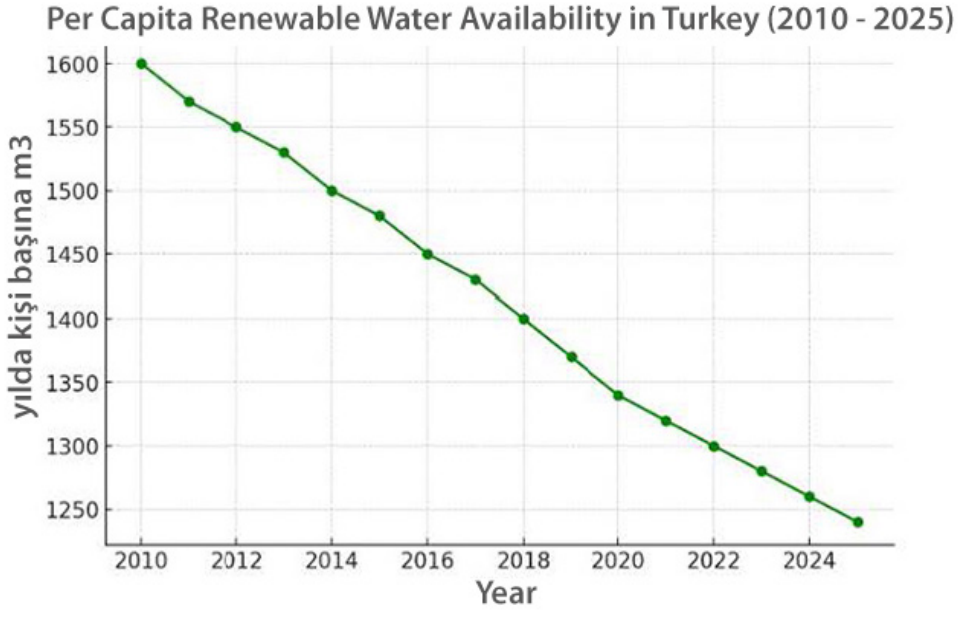
Pressures on Water Quality

The deterioration of water quality poses a significant threat to water scarcity. Rising sea surface temperatures reduce the amount of dissolved oxygen in water. The increased CO_2 dissolved in seawater, parallel to its increasing atmospheric concentration, also increases seawater acidity, causing severe damage, especially to coral reefs.

Additionally, the increase in sea surface temperature increases the frequency and intensity of algal blooms, devastatingly affecting drinking water sources and aquatic ecosystems. Sea-level rise causes saltwater intrusion (salinization) into freshwater aquifers in coastal areas, rendering these sources unsuitable for agriculture and human consumption (UNESCO, 2020). Requiring expensive treatment systems that consequently drive up drinking water costs.

Furthermore, transboundary disputes, such as the tensions between Egypt and Ethiopia over the Renaissance Dam in the Nile Basin, demonstrate how water scarcity can ignite geopolitical conflicts (Zeitoun & Mirumachi, 2008).

Figure 2. Groundwater withdrawal/usage rate.



Per capita freshwater consumption graph in Turkey (Graphic: FAO, 2025).

Impacts on Agricultural Productivity and Food Security

These radical changes in the hydrological cycle directly and indirectly disrupt agricultural productivity, which forms the backbone of the global food system.

Heat Stress and Declining Crop Yields

Extreme temperatures disrupt the development of the world's staple food crops (e.g., wheat, maize, rice), which are vulnerable to environmental changes. This reduces photosynthetic efficiency and leads to yield losses. Models predict significant declines in the yields of these staple crops with global temperature increase. Additionally, there is growing evidence that while high CO_2 concentrations in the atmosphere may accelerate crop growth, they dilute the concentration of essential nutrients like protein, zinc, and iron, increasing the risk of "hidden hunger" in field crops (Zhao et al., 2017).

Heat stress during critical flowering and grain filling periods is known to cause severe losses. Elevated CO_2 can have a fertilizing effect for some plants; however, heat and water stress often offset this advantage and can lead to reduced nutritional quality, such as lower protein and mineral content in staples (IPCC, 2019).

At this point, a critical observation must be included. Namely, with the irregularities occurring on a global scale in temperature and precipitation regimes becoming the "new normal," the possibility of sustaining current agricultural and livestock practices has vanished. It is imperative to design and implement new practices and land use models that are resilient to the effects of climate change. A proposal regarding this is included in the final section of this study.

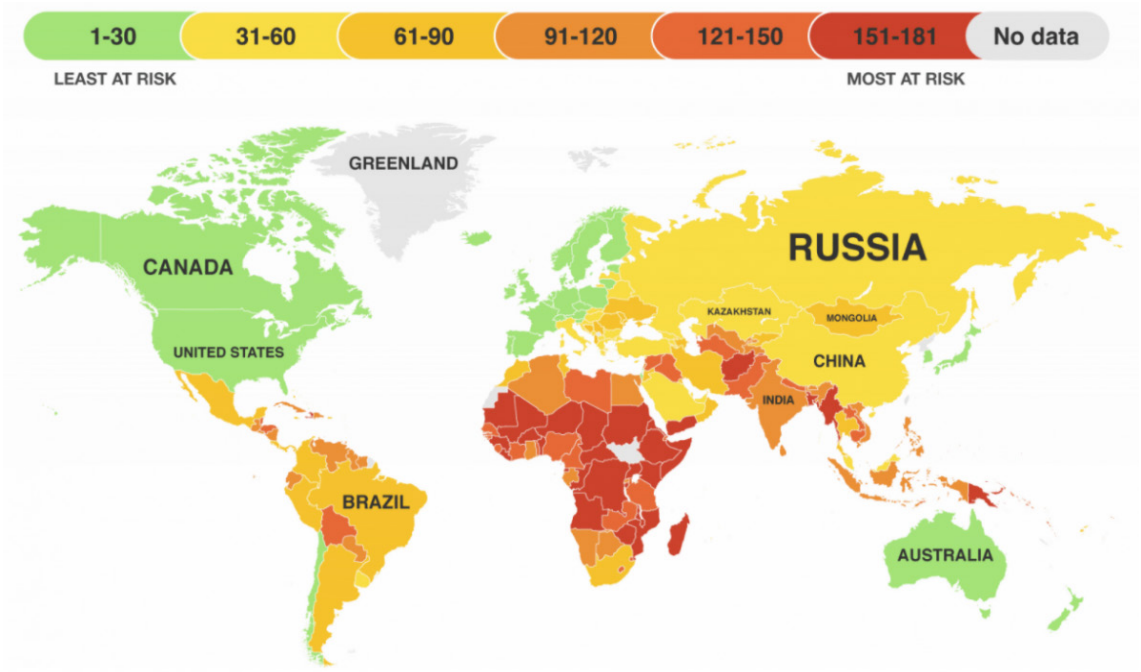
Increase in Invasive Species and Plant Diseases

Milder winters and generally warmer weather conditions increase the survival rate of agricultural pests and pathogens and expand their geographical range towards the poles. For example, invasive insect species like the fall armyworm have caused significant damage to maize production in Africa and Asia in recent years. Similarly, fungal and bacterial plant disease spread is accelerating (Deutsch et al., 2018).

Warmer winters allow more pests to survive, while warmer summers enable them to spread to new areas. The survival and proliferation of pests like locusts and armyworms during warmer winter months is increasing the destruction of crops in Africa and Asia. It is projected that insect-related yield losses for rice, maize, and wheat will increase by 10-25% with each degree Celsius rise in global mean surface temperature (Deutsch et al., 2018). This expanding threat forces farmers to increase pesticide use, raising economic and environmental costs and further disrupting food security and ecosystem health.

Impacts on Livestock and Fisheries Systems

The impacts are not limited to crop production. Heat stress negatively affects feed intake, milk yield, reproductive performance, and overall health in livestock. In the seas, ocean acidification threatens the existence of corals and shellfish, while rising sea surface temperatures alter the migration routes and distribution of fish



The countries most at risk from climate change. Based on data from the University of Notre-Dame's ND-Gain Index, the map ranks 181 countries on their vulnerability to climate change and how ready they are to adapt to a warming planet (Map: ILRI, 2022).

populations, disrupting traditional fishing activities (FAO, 2018)

Warming waters drive fish populations towards the poles, disrupting established fishing communities and creating new geopolitical tensions over fishing rights and maritime jurisdictions. Ultimately, these impacts threaten critical protein resources for billions of people (IPCC, 2022).

Vulnerability in the Food Supply Chain

Food crises are not only about production but also about distribution and access. Extreme weather events damage integral and critical infrastructures of the food supply chain (roads, bridges, ports). Droughts also disrupt river transport (as in the Mississippi River). These disruptions, resulting from damage to transportation infrastructure, also cause post-harvest losses and thus indirectly increase food prices.

Even when sufficient quantities are produced globally, disruptions in transportation infrastructure prevent or make it more costly for food to reach those who need it most. The 2007-2008 global food price crisis highlighted the vulnerability of global trade to climate-related shocks (Headey & Fan, 2008). Extreme heat can strain the capacity of cold chain storage and transportation systems, increasing food waste. This can lead to sudden and sharp increases in food prices, leading to inflation (IPCC, 2019). Climate change is estimated to push an additional 100 million people into poverty by 2030 through its impacts on agriculture and food access (World Bank, 2016).

Socioeconomic and Geopolitical Consequences: The Global North-South Divide and Opposition

Water and food systems are interconnected, forming a nexus under increasing pressure from climate change.

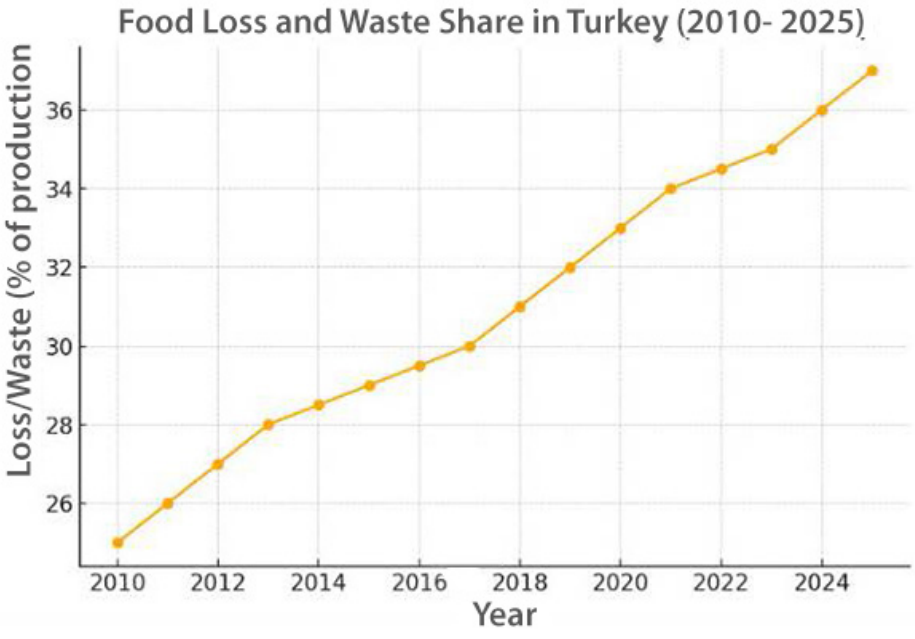
The physical impacts of climate change on water and food systems are exacerbating deep socioeconomic inequalities and creating new areas of geopolitical tension. Given the historical trajectory and existing contradictions have become antagonistic, these consequences exhibit a striking divergence between the Global North and the Global South.

A striking indicator of the unequal distribution of the Earth's resources relates to global food waste. Data in the UN Environment Program's "Food Waste Index Report 2024" states that 1.05 billion tons of food were wasted globally as of 2022. Reports that food wasted in the EU and the US alone would be enough to feed the African continent appear in the press, media, and academic publications. A graph containing data for Türkiye as an example is provided in Figure 3.

Historical Responsibility and Unjust Distribution of Impact

Global North countries (developed countries - Imperialist Bloc) are responsible for the vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions released into the atmosphere since the First Industrial Revolution.

Şekil 3. Food loss and waste during 2010 - 2025.



Food loss graph by year in Turkey (2010-2025) (FAO, 2025).

However, the most devastating effects of climate change are felt by Global South countries, which have the lowest carbon footprint, primarily in Africa, South Asia, and parts of South America. This situation constitutes a fundamental climate injustice. Developing countries are also far more disadvantaged than their Northern counterparts in capacity (financial resources, technology, institutional infrastructure) to adapt to climate shocks and mitigate their effects (Roberts & Parks, 2006).

Droughts, predominantly affecting the Global South, are reducing yields by diminishing irrigation resources and triggering food shortages. Conversely, it is important to note that uncontrolled irrigation (e.g., flood irrigation) and unsustainable groundwater use pressure aquifers pose a danger to long-term water security. This interconnectedness requires adopting an integrated approach addressing the water-energy-food-ecosystem (WEFE) nexus (HLPE, 2020).

Mass Displacement and Climate Migration

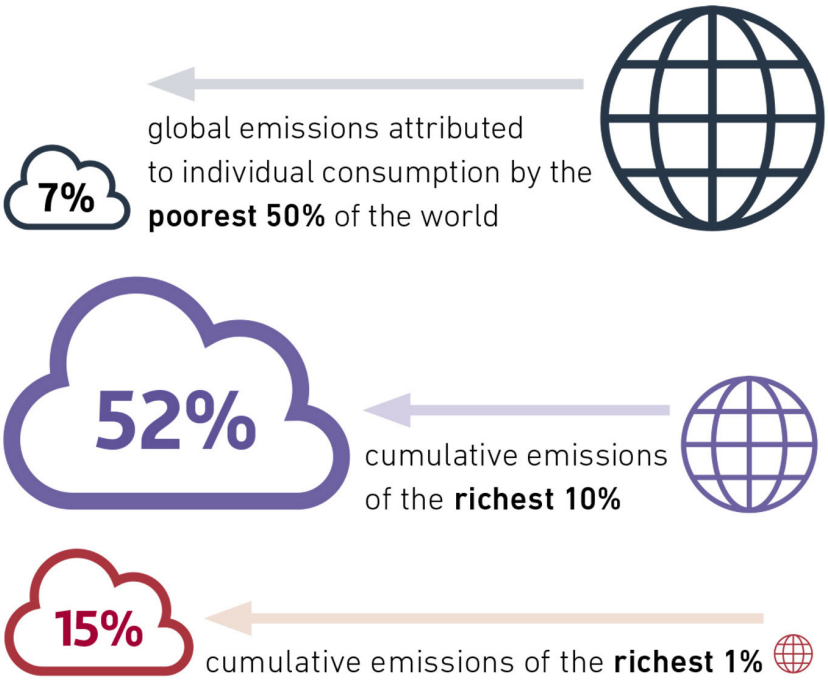
Water scarcity and agricultural collapse make rural livelihoods, especially the sustenance of small farms, impossible. This causes mass rural-urban migration, further straining already pressured urban infrastructure (water, housing, health services) and leading to the uncontrolled expansion of slums. In more extreme scenarios, cross-border "climate migration" is becoming an increasing source of geopolitical tension. For example, desertification in Sub-Saharan Africa and water stress in the Middle East are among the push factors triggering migration movements towards Europe (WBGU, 2007).

The impacts of the climate-water-food crisis are not borne equally. Vulnerability is shaped by poverty, gender, ethnicity, and access to resources. Small-scale farmers, pastoralists, fishing communities, and indigenous peoples, who contribute the least to global emissions, are disproportionately affected. In the rural Global South, women, who are often responsible for water supply and household food security, face increasing burdens as resources become scarcer. This inequality worsens existing social injustices. Malnutrition remains a persistent consequence of food insecurity, and climate change is exacerbating undernourishment and micronutrient deficiencies, particularly in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (WFP, 2023).

Increased Poverty and Risk of Internal Conflict

Sudden price spikes severely restrict food access for low-income households, deepening poverty. Such price shocks have been a significant trigger for social unrest and political instability in many countries in the past (e.g., the food riots of 2007-2008 and 2010-2011). Furthermore, competition over dwindling water and fertile land resources can fuel violent local-level conflicts, especially in fragile regions (Hsiang et al., 2013).

Scarcity of water and arable land fuels existing tensions and triggers conflict. Competition for increasingly scarce resources is intensifying among farmers and herders, between urban and rural areas, and among nations sharing transboundary water resources. The severe drought persisting in Mesopotamia since the 1990s, which has rendered the land unable to support its population, has been shown to have triggered the internal migration that evolved into civil war in Syria and the subsequent social unrest (Kelley et al., 2015).



"Developing countries demand a mechanism to share the costs of the climate crisis equitably. In contrast, developed countries are reluctant to recognize their responsibilities and make concrete financial commitments" (Infographic: Eurodad, n.d.).

Pressures stemming from climate and environmental change can undermine stability in already fragile states. The increase in grain prices, and consequently bread prices—a staple food for the peoples of North Africa and West Asia—probably during 2008-2009 was among the factors triggering the Arab Spring. From this perspective, the Arab Spring can be considered one of the indirect consequences of climate change.

When livelihoods disappear, people are forced to move. Climate-induced migration is already a reality, particularly in regions like the Sahel, South Asia, and Central America's "Dry Corridor." These movements will create humanitarian challenges and problems. Moreover, such mass migration movements can strain resources in destination areas, leading to new social tensions (Hallegatte et al., 2016).

Within the global food system, a climate change-induced shock occurring, for example, in a grain belt region can cause fluctuations in international markets, destabilizing distant regions. Such volatility hits the poorest hardest, as they spend much of their income on food.

The Global South's Debt Crisis and Climate Compensation

The economic costs of climate disasters are very high. As countries in the Global South struggle to make the necessary infrastructure investments to adapt to climate change and

mitigate the impact of disasters, their already high debt burdens often escalate. This creates a "climate-debt trap." In recent years, compensation for losses and damage caused by climate change has become one of the most bitter points of contention between the Global North and South in international negotiations (e.g., COP summits). Developing countries demand a mechanism to share the costs of the climate crisis equitably. In contrast, developed countries are reluctant to recognize their responsibilities and make concrete financial commitments (the Loss and Damage Fund established at COP27 is a concrete example of this struggle).

Concrete Solutions and Recommendations for the Triple Crisis of Climate, Water, and Food

Mitigating the devastating impacts of climate change on water and food systems is vital. To prevent the threats outlined in previous sections and build resilient systems, it is urgent to implement innovative technologies, integrated management strategies, and radical efficiency measures. This section discusses technical and management solutions critical to combating the triple crisis.

Preventing Physical Water Leaks: Combating Invisible Losses

Physical water leaks, especially in large cities and agricultural irrigation networks, create enormous pressure on resources. The average loss/leakage rate in drinking water networks worldwide reaches around 30%, and can exceed 50% in regions with high rates. This "invisible loss" also causes energy waste (energy spent on pumping and treating water), placing an additional burden on the system.

Detecting leaks in water pipes using acoustic leak detectors is often impossible, mainly due to ambient noise from round-the-clock vehicle traffic in crowded metropolises. Instead, methods and tools such as ground-penetrating radar, mise-à-la-masse (applied potential) methods, non-contact electrical sounding, total electrical sounding, the "long cable" technique, and remote sensing technologies (moisture mapping via drones) now allow for more precise and accurate identification of leak points. By integrating field-collected data with Geographic Information Systems (GIS), the widespread adoption of Smart Water Network Management Systems, functioning as decision-support systems, should be targeted. Regular, real-time monitoring of pipeline parameters (like flow and pressure in pipes and water levels in reservoirs) via SCADA integrated with GIS can prevent leaks by repairing and renewing old infrastructure.

In agriculture, transitioning to closed-system, pressurized irrigation (drip, sprinkler) systems can significantly increase water efficiency by eliminating evaporation and seepage losses from open channels.

Promoting Rainwater Harvesting: A New Resource in Urban and Rural Areas

In all settlements and huge cities, large quantities of rainwater from vast surface areas (roofs, roads, pavements) are released as surface runoff or partially directed into the sewer system. This indicates a major waste. However, collected rainwater can be used as "greywater" (for toilet flushing and garden irrigation) or, after simple treatment, for agricultural irrigation.

Making rainwater harvesting systems on building and greenhouse roofs mandatory is critical to alleviating urban water stress. Collected water can be stored in underground cisterns and reservoirs. This practice reduces flood risk while significantly meeting summer demand for mains water. In rural areas, practices like contour plowing, constructing trenches, and various micro-catchment applications on farmland can prevent surface runoff (which also causes erosion) and facilitate rainwater infiltration into the soil.

Atmospheric Water Generation

It would be appropriate to reiterate a piece of data from the introductory section of this article. While the world's annual water consumption is approximately 4.30 trillion tons (2020 data), the amount of water vapor in the atmosphere at any given moment is 12.80 trillion tons. Considering that globally 15.3 million tons of water evaporate into the atmosphere every second, it becomes evident that the atmosphere is a practically infinite source of freshwater.

Depending on low air temperatures, there is potential for harvesting water from the atmosphere in regions outside the polar areas, specifically in the perpetually warm equatorial region and low-lying areas of the temperate zone, especially during the hot summer season. It is also known that many private companies offer solutions in this field.

However, it is beneficial to note that technological innovations are still needed to make costs more attractive. With innovative and cost-effective technical solutions, atmospheric water generation will significantly alleviate water stress.

Dissociation of Carbon Dioxide within Flue Gas and the Atmosphere into Carbon and Oxygen Using Cold Plasma: An Advanced Technology Solution

"While the 'Net Zero Carbon Emissions' target, widely adopted today, is correct and necessary, it is insufficient on its own." To achieve this goal, it is simultaneously imperative to implement "Net Negative Carbon Emissions" methods and applications.

The concentration of CO_2 gas in the atmosphere must be reduced by all possible means to a safe level, for example, below 400 ppm as an arbitrary target. One technology that can be used for this purpose is"Cold Plasma."

Carbon Capture, Storage, and Utilization (CCSU) technologies are crucial for reducing emissions in "hard-to-abate" sectors like fossil fuel power plants and heavy industry. Cold plasma technology is an innovative and promising approach in this field.

Plasma, as known, is the fourth state of matter, an ionized gas. In a cold plasma environment, composed of electrons, ions, and neutral gas atoms or molecules, the electrons possess very high energy (i.e., high "electron temperature"). In contrast, the ions and neutral gas atoms are at room temperature ("cold"). Therefore, this type of plasma is called "cold."

CO_2 gas passed through cold plasma reactors is bombarded by high-energy electrons and positively charged atomic nuclei within the plasma, breaking it down into its components: carbon and oxygen (O_2). The obtained carbon can be used in numerous applications, such as a chemical raw material in industry, for synthetic fuel production, and advanced materials like graphene.

"It is necessary to reiterate and emphasize that traditional agricultural and livestock practices are no longer sustainable under the adverse environmental conditions caused by climate change"
(Photo: MIT CEEPR, 2019).

The energy required to create and sustain the cold plasma can ideally be supplied from renewable energy sources. This technology has the potential to revolutionize the transformation of industrial emissions.

Transitioning to Net Negative Carbon Emissions: Redefining Agriculture's Role

The "Net Zero" target involves balancing emitted carbon with captured carbon. However, it is possible to transform the agricultural sector into a "Net Negative Carbon Emissions" mechanism to reduce the accumulated and still accumulating carbon in the atmosphere.

Integrated crop-livestock systems are poised to play a key role here.

It is necessary to reiterate and emphasize that traditional agricultural and livestock practices are no longer sustainable under the adverse environmental conditions caused by climate change. Designing and implementing new land use models that are resilient to the effects of climate change is vital for ensuring food security.

Traditional monoculture cropping systems are extremely fragile in the face of climate shocks. In contrast, integrated practices that combine agriculture, livestock, forestry, and energy production into a single system will ensure the operation's economic resilience against climate shocks.

Conversely, most conventional agricultural and livestock operations are sources of positive carbon emissions. This trend can be reversed through climate-resilient integrated crop-livestock practices.

Adverse environmental conditions due to climate change now require some agricultural activities to be conducted in greenhouses. Greenhouses at the center of this closed-loop system allow for year-round cultivation of high-value products. Integrating rainwater collection systems on greenhouse roofs will add rural water management to the integrated crop-livestock practice.

A conceptual draft plan involves integrating various activities—crop farming, livestock, energy production (heat and electricity) from agricultural waste, greenhouse cultivation, and rainwater harvesting—within a single farm. These activities would operate complementarily under unified management.

Accordingly, necessary forage crops for animal husbandry can be cultivated in a portion of the open farmland adjacent to the livestock unit. This will eliminate the costs and logistical difficulties of sourcing forage from distant sources. For open farmland, transitioning to "Agroforestry—intercropping" (integrating suitable tree species in terms of root and canopy systems into croplands or grazing areas) would be the most appropriate choice.

Tree-crop intercropping improves the microclimate, reducing wind speed and soil erosion and increasing soil moisture and organic matter content. Practices involving fast-growing, multi-purpose tree rows will form the central axis of the integrated model. The "agroforestry" practice, conducted for hundreds of years in China and now widely implemented in third countries, will constitute the central axis of the integrated model.

This is because suitable tree species (e.g., Paulownia, native to China) form a symbiotic relationship with traditional field crops grown between them, significantly increasing yields. Furthermore, due to the expanded product range (nutrient-rich leaves, biochar from pruned branches, high-quality honey from flowers, and timber for furniture), a substantial increase in income from the land occurs.

In the context of combating climate change, through agroforestry practices, the integrated operation will function as a "carbon sink," enabling it to become a "net negative carbon emissions" area. Continuing with the Paulownia example; in Paulownia-Canola and Paulownia-Cotton "intercropping" pilot applications conducted in Bergama, İzmir (at sea level) in 2006-2007 using superior clones of Paulownia species, it was determined that an average of 40.0 tons of CO_2 per hectare per year were permanently removed from the atmosphere over the six to seven-year management period (until tree harvest - M. S. Ertan, personal communication, September, 2025).

This trial clearly demonstrated that integrated crop-livestock practices, with agroforestry as their central axis, possess a "net negative carbon emissions" function and can effectively mitigate the effects of climate change.

Adverse environmental conditions due to climate change now require some agricultural activities to be conducted in greenhouses. Greenhouses at the center of this closed-loop system allow for year-round cultivation of high-value products. Integrating rainwater collection systems on greenhouse roofs will add rural water management to the integrated crop-livestock practice.

Producing energy (heat and electricity) and bio-fuels, primarily diesel, from the organic waste generated by open-field farming, greenhouse, and livestock practices will constitute another significant gain and advantage. This will enable integrated farms to be as independent and self-sufficient as possible in energy and fuel supply, reducing reliance on external factors.

In the integrated practice, there will be no waste. The waste from one unit will serve as input for another. For example, flue gas from pyrolysis, gasification, or methanization (biogas) plants, rich in CO_2 and water vapor, can be directed to greenhouses to promote faster plant growth. At the same time, agricultural and livestock waste will be used as fuel in biomass (waste-to-energy) plants. In short, integrated practices should be planned and implemented with a "zero waste" characteristic.

The Paulownia - Canola Intercropping Experiment implemented in Pergamum-Izmir in 2006, aiming to produce biodiesel from canola oil. (Left to right) Salih Ertan, Prof. Xhu Zhaohua, İbrahim Yavaşça (owner of the farm).

A critically important observation is that in integrated systems, damage or economic losses in one component due to extreme climate events can be offset by the diversity of products and activities.. This provides resilience against climate shocks and allows the enterprise to survive without catastrophic collapse.

On the other hand, it is true that in almost all developing countries, the agricultural population is shrinking due to rural-urban migration. The significant increase in farmland income achieved through integrated practices will help bridge the rural-urban income gap while encouraging reverse migration. By facilitating capital transfer to rural areas, integrated practices will also play an important role in formulating rural development strategies.

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Another positive effect relates to biodiversity conservation. Meeting industrial timber needs from agroforestry areas instead of natural forests will greatly alleviate or completely eliminate the destructive production pressure on natural forests. It should also be noted here that the ongoing destruction of forest areas creates a multiplier effect on the impacts of climate change.

Including the essentials of the conceptual draft plan and considering Türkiye's specific conditions are beneficial as a closing note for this section.

Firstly, integrated practices can be implemented on large, contiguous, or closely located agricultural lands. From this perspective, especially in the Western Anatolia region, the number of contiguous farms suitable for integrated practices is very low due to the progressive fragmentation of agricultural land into smaller parcels through inheritance. How can we proceed under Türkiye's given conditions?

Türkiye has twenty-six river basins with differing soil and climate conditions. Considering integrated practices on a basin basis seems logical. Accordingly, each basin can be treated as an independent, integrated operation, considering its specificities. Agricultural and livestock operations within the basin boundaries could become partners of a central basin enterprise. Here, "administrative consolidation" is the key concept. Under the coordination of the Republic of Türkiye's Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, "administrative consolidation" structures for basins could be established. Harmonious collaboration and activities of different enterprises can certainly be achieved under central supervision and coordination.

To conclude this section, it is necessary to address the contentious issue of GMO crops. It will

"Releasing GMOs into the environment carries serious risks for biodiversity, ecosystem functioning through gene flow (genetic contamination) and hybridization with uncertain consequences, and ultimately for the interaction between nature and the socioeconomic structure" (Photo: Non-GMO Report, n.d.).

be helpful to continue with this topic.

GMO Crops: Opportunities and Risks

Drought, high temperatures, salinity, and increasing pest pressure reduce agricultural productivity. Genetic engineering offers the potential to create genetically modified organisms (GMOs) resistant to these abiotic and biotic stresses. However, the benefits brought by this technology also come with global risks applicable to all GMO products, such as "gene flow" (genetic contamination), the potential emergence of invasive species, effects on non-target organisms, and socioeconomic disruptions.

Nevertheless, the pressures of climate change on agriculture also make the development of new resilient varieties imperative (FAO, 2016). Compared to the limited speed of conventional breeding methods, genetic engineering offers a significant solution with products like drought-resistant wheat, salinity-tolerant barley, or insect-resistant cotton. However, releasing GMOs into the environment carries serious risks for biodiversity, ecosystem functioning through gene flow (genetic contamination) and hybridization with uncertain consequences, and ultimately for the interaction between nature and the socioeconomic structure (Ellstrand, 2003; Stewart et al., 2003). The risks associated with GMO products are outlined under the following headings.

"Gene Flow" and Potential Emergence of Invasive Species: Gene transfer from transgenic crops to wild relatives could enhance the competitiveness of these species and lead to invasive behavior. Particularly, the transfer of genes conferring herbicide tolerance to natural species could lead to the emergence of "superweeds" (Ellstrand, 2003; Simard et al., 2010). This situation could negatively affect both ecosystem balance and agricultural costs.

Erosion of Biodiversity: Gene flow between rare or endemic species and cultivated plants can disrupt the genetic integrity of these species and increase their risk of extinction (Ellstrand et al., 1999). Furthermore, the genetic diversity of cultivated plants may also decrease (Lu & Yang, 2009).

Effects on Non-Target Organisms: Insect-resistant crops (e.g., maize, cotton) carrying specific genes inserted into their genome can be toxic not only to target insects but also harm non-target insects (e.g., butterfly larvae, beneficial insects) (Losey et al., 1999). The pollen transport by wind to adjacent areas can cause this toxin to spread far beyond monoculture farmlands. This situation can affect the food chain and negatively impact natural ecosystem functions, such as pollination (Tsatsakis et al., 2017).

Agronomic and Socioeconomic Consequences: Gene flow risks organic farming certification, can lead to market losses for farmers, and may reinforce the seed monopoly of multinational corporations, reducing farmer autonomy (Altındişli, 2012). Additionally, uncertainties regarding GMOs' long-term health and environmental effects lead to a crisis of trust in society (Hilbeck et al., 2015).

Risk Mitigation Strategies: Site selection and geographical isolation: GMO cultivation should be kept away from areas where wild relatives are present (FAO & WHO, 2000).

Molecular biosecurity methods: Molecular biosecurity methods include genetic use restriction technologies (GURTs) and plastid transformation (Stewart et al., 2003).

Long-term monitoring: Conducting independent and long-term research programs to monitor the environmental effects of GMOs (National Academies of Sciences, 2016).

Labeling and transparency: Mandatory labeling protects consumers' right to choose (FAO, 2016).

Supporting alternative technologies: Promoting sustainable solutions such as agroecological methods, precision agriculture, and water management.

GMOs are an important tool for climate change adaptation; however, potential ecological and socioeconomic risks make using this technology without careful management problematic. The debate should move beyond the "GMO yes or no?" dilemma and focus on which products, which genes, under what conditions, and with what kind of control mechanism they should be used.

Conclusion

The water and food crisis caused by climate change is not merely an environmental problem but also a humanitarian, economic, and geopolitical existential threat. The burden of this crisis is unjustly placed on the shoulders of those histori-

cally least responsible. The triple crisis of climate change, water scarcity, and food insecurity can only be addressed through systemic and interconnected solutions.

To address this triple crisis, it is essential to: optimize existing resources by preventing physical water leaks and promoting rainwater harvesting; enhance production resilience and sustainability through integrated agro-ecological systems; and go beyond emission reduction by implementing advanced technologies like cold plasma and carbon-negative agricultural practices to achieve active carbon recovery. When combined with supportive policies, financing mechanisms, and public participation, these technical measures can help avert the worst effects of this converging crisis.

Enhancing Resilience in Water and Food Systems: Developing drought—and salinity-resistant crop varieties, widespread adoption of precision irrigation technologies (drip irrigation), establishment of water management and rainwater harvesting systems, and implementation of policies promoting efficient water use are critical.

Global Cooperation and Just Transition: As a requirement of its historical responsibility, the Global North is obligated to finance the Global South's efforts to adapt to climate change, transition to clean energy technologies, and engage in technology transfer. The practical and fair operation of the Loss and Damage Fund established at COP27 is vital.

Sustainable and Equitable Food Systems: Policies should encourage agro-ecological practices that reduce the environmental footprint of industrial agriculture, support local and short food supply chains, and reduce food waste.

Preventing and Managing Tension and Potential Conflicts: To prevent conflicts over water and land resources, transparent and participatory water governance models, transboundary cooperations (e.g., river basin management agreements), and early warning systems should be strengthened.

In conclusion, the climate change-induced water and food crisis deepens global inequalities. An effective response to this crisis cannot consist solely of technical solutions; it also requires the demonstration and implementation of political will, rethought globally based on justice, solidarity, and responsibility. Taking the legitimate demands of the Global South seriously and sharing resources fairly is the only way to prevent future conflicts and build a sustainable global society.

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Reordering the World: Regional Blocs and the Rise of Multipolar Global Governance

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ABSTRACT

The international governance system is undergoing a structural transformation, and this transformation is catalyzed by the rise of regional blocs and institutions that increasingly challenge the traditional dominance of Western-led institutions. This article analyzes the global transition from a unipolar liberal hegemonic order, dominated by Western-led institutions, especially after World War II, toward a multipolar global governance system characterized by the emergence of regional blocs and institutions. It argues that the growing inability of traditional inter-state institutions to address 21st-century challenges, such as climate change, economic inequality, and political multipolarity, which require a common understanding and cooperation, has led to the proliferation of alternative governance structures rooted in regionalism and South-South cooperation. It distinguishes between "regional blocs" as informal cooperative tendency of groupings formed around shared challenges or geographic proximity on the world stage, and "institutions" as formalized organizations with structured rules and long-term governance frameworks. By categorizing institutions, this paper evaluates how regional blocs and institutions are shaping a more inclusive and pluralistic governance architecture globally. Special attention is given to mechanisms associated with the rise of China and the Global South, as well as their implications for the future configuration of global governance. The study concludes that the international system is shifting from an inter-state conflict resolution framework to a global challenge-management paradigm, with multipolar governance at its core.

Keywords: China's rise, global institutions, Global South, multipolar governance, regional blocs, post-hegemonic order.

Introduction

THE ARCHITECTURE OF INTERNATIONAL governance is undergoing a profound transformation. The post-World War II global order, underpinned by institutions like the United Nations (UN), the Bretton Woods financial institutions (IMF, World Bank), and U.S.-led security alliances (NATO), was built on the assumption of U.S. primacy and the promotion of free trade and democracy (Ikenberry, 2018). While this order-maintained authority during the Cold War and early post-Cold War period, it has shown its limitations in addressing contemporary global challenges that we face today (Acharya, 2017; Ikenberry, 2018). Institutions designed for the mid-20th century now face questions about their relevance in a multipolar world characterized by transnational issues and the rise of the Global South (Acharya, 2017; Acharya et al., 2023).

Recent events, such as the African Union (AU)'s admission to the G20 in 2023, symbolize the push for more inclusive, multipolar governance (Acharya & Singh, 2023). The UN Security Council remains paralyzed by great-power vetoes, and the World Trade Organization (WTO)'s dispute settlement system is dysfunctional, reflecting divisions between developed and developing states (Araya, 2025). The IMF and World Bank also face legitimacy crises, with slow reforms failing to adequately represent emerging economies (Ikenberry, 2018; Acharya, 2017). As Acharya (2017) notes, the liberal order has long been exclusionary, and its claims of benign governance ring hollow in the developing world. This credibility crisis has fueled calls for alternative frameworks more suited to today's global challenges in a more inclusive way (Scholz, 2023).

Emerging regional blocs and new institutions are filling this void, with a focus on development, security, coordination, and inclusivity. It's crucial here to note that this research makes a distinction between regional blocs and institutions. Although it's difficult to clearly separate the effects and roles of both in global politics, for this article, the regional blocs will refer to an informal tendency among countries that face the same/similar challenges with the same/similar objectives to group and act in harmony together. The institutions, on the other hand, will cover and refer to the formal settings and systems in which these countries act with relatively equal voices on decision making and within legal status with long-term governance frameworks. Coalitions of the Global South have become more assertive, particularly in climate negotiations, trade, and UN votes, advocating for sovereign equality and development solidarity (Acharya, 2017). Additionally, new multilateral institutions like BRICS and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) challenge the dominance of Bretton Woods institutions by offering alternative development finance with fewer political conditions (Prates & Peruffo, 2016). These new actors show that global governance is shifting from a U.S.-led order to a more decentralized, networked multilateralism (Acharya et al., 2023).

In this context, this paper examines the transformation of global governance through emerging regional institutions. It categorizes institutions of global stage into three groups: (1) traditional institutions with declining influence (UNSC, NATO, WTO, G7, IMF/World Bank), (2) traditional institutions undergoing adaptation (G20, African Union, Arab League), and (3) new institutions reshaping governance (BRICS, SCO, AIIB, ASEAN, and others). By analyzing these developments, this paper explores how regional blocs are reshaping governance in ways that reflect a more diverse, multipolar international system.

The Traditional Global Governance System: Origins and Limits

The Architecture of the Post-WWII Order

In the aftermath of World War II, the victorious Allied powers led by the U.S. sought to construct a new international architecture to prevent future global conflicts and foster stability. This *post-1945 order* was built around a set of interlocking institutions and alliances that reflected the era's power distribution and liberal ideals (Ikenberry, 2018). Its core pillars included the establishment of the UN for global peace and security, the Bretton Woods institutions for economic and financial stability, a security alliance (NATO) to contain geopolitical threats, mechanisms of economic leadership like the G7 anchored by U.S. dollar primacy, and the European integration project as a regional embodiment of liberal order values.

Over time, these institutions provided a framework that underpinned decades of relative stability and growth. However, their institutional logic and representational structures, frozen mainly in the mid-20th century, have struggled to adapt to a dramatically changed world. As emerging powers and new challenges have arisen, the post-WWII architecture is increasingly seen as old-fashioned or inadequate for today's layered and polarized international system.

The UN, as the core agency, was created in 1945 as a universal organization for peace and security. At its heart lies the UN Security Council (UNSC), which was endowed with primary responsibility for maintaining international peace. The UNSC's structure reflected the geopolitical realities of 1945: five great powers, the U.S., Soviet Union (now Russia), China, Britain, and France, were given permanent seats with veto power, alongside a rotating set of non-permanent members. This arrangement, intended to guarantee that no significant action would occur without great-power consensus, entrenched the primacy of the "P5" in global security decisions. Yet the inherent inequality built into its design has become one of its greatest limitations. The Council's composition remains essentially unchanged since 1945, even as global power has diffused. Many critics argue the UNSC fails to represent many regions of the world today, noting that its permanent membership reflects a bygone era (Mahbubani, 2021).

"The post-WWII architecture is increasingly seen as old-fashioned or inadequate for today's layered and polarized international system". UN General Assembly Hall during an event in 2016
(Photo: UN Photo/Cia Pak, n.d.).

Major countries like India, Brazil, South Africa, and others have no permanent voice, while entire continents such as Africa and Latin America lack any P5 representation. Efforts to reform and expand the Council, to make it more representative of 21st-century realities, have repeatedly stalled, in part because any structural change requires the approval of the very P5 members whose privileged status would be diluted. The veto power is another key institutional logic now seen as anachronistic: while intended to prevent great-power war, the frequent use (or threat) of veto by P5 members has often crippled the UNSC's ability to act on pressing conflicts, for example, vetoes on Gaza or Ukraine resolutions (Ikenberry, 2018). This has led to perceptions that the UNSC is increasingly obsolete, unable to respond decisively to crises due to geopolitical deadlock and unrepresentative governance. Even UN leaders acknowledge the problem: Secretary-General António Guterres has argued that the Council's makeup is *"outdated"* and has urged adding permanent seats for underrepresented regions like Africa and Latin America (Mahbubani, 2021). In sum, while the UN remains a cornerstone of the global order, the dominance of a few post-WWII powers in the Security Council exemplifies how the traditional governance structure struggles to address the needs and voices of a far more multipolar world.

Decisions in the IMF and World Bank are driven by weighted voting shares based on economic size, yet those weights still largely mirror the power distribution of 1944, not 2025.

Alongside the UN, the Bretton Woods system formed the economic arm of the post-war order. In 1944, as World War II was ending, Allied nations met at Bretton Woods to design a new financial architecture. This yielded the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in 1945, tasked with ensuring monetary stability and post-war reconstruction/development, respectively. A complementary pillar was the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1947, which was later succeeded by the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995, to promote freer trade and avoid the protectionist disasters of the interwar period (Ikenberry, 2018). The Bretton Woods institutions were founded on liberal principles of open markets and cooperation but also reflected U.S. leadership: the U.S. dollar was established as the linchpin currency, and the IMF and World Bank's governance gave the largest voice to the U.S. and its Western allies. Decisions in the IMF and World Bank are driven by weighted voting shares based on economic size, yet those weights still largely mirror the power distribution of 1944, not 2025. The U.S. retains by far the largest share (over 15% in each institution), effectively giving it a veto over major decisions, which often require 85% approval. American and European influence was cemented through an informal agreement that an American heads the World Bank and a European head the IMF. This gentleman's agreement, once taken for granted, is now widely criticized by developing countries as an anachronism that undermines the legitimacy of these institutions (Mahbubani, 2021). Indeed, as emerging economies like China, India, and Brazil have grown to be major engines of global growth, they remain under-represented in Bretton Woods governance. For example, China, now the world's second-largest economy, still has a voting share in the IMF and World Bank well below its weight in the world economy, only about 6% in the World Bank as of 2021. By contrast, small European coun-

"In 1944, as World War II was ending, Allied nations met at Bretton Woods to design a new financial architecture" (Photo: britannica.com, n.d.).

tries often enjoy outsized influence. The distribution of quotas and votes has mainly remained the same. Reforms have been painfully slow: a modest IMF quota adjustment agreed in 2010, which slightly increased emerging market shares, took five years for the U.S. Congress to ratify, and further reforms have since stalled amid great-power disagreements (Acharya, 2017). It has undermined the credibility and effectiveness of the IMF/World Bank in the eyes of the Global South, and spurred countries like China and India to establish alternative institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the New Development Bank (NDB: the BRICS bank).

Likewise, on the commercial aspect, the WTO, which succeeded GATT as the guardian of global trade rules, has struggled to update its rules due to splits between advanced and developing economies. The once-ambitious Doha Round of trade negotiations collapsed, and the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism was crippled in recent years, reflecting deep disagreements over issues like subsidies and development rights.

As this article focuses both on institutions as formal settings and blocs as informal tendencies, it's also crucial to see the informal groupings and monetary arrangements that entrenched Western leadership back then. A prime example is the Group of Seven (G7), an informal bloc of advanced economies (the U.S., Canada, the UK, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan) that began meeting in the 1970s. The G7 emerged in 1975 as a response to the oil shocks and global recession, providing a forum for the world's richest democracies to coordinate economic policy.

Over the years, the G7 became a kind of *steering committee* for the liberal economic order, addressing issues from debt relief to financial crises and setting norms on development and trade. Crucially, the G7's influence has always rested on the economic might of its members; in the late 20th century, they collectively accounted for the majority of global GDP, and on their shared commitment to open markets and stable, dollar-centric finance. The U.S. dollar itself became the lynchpin of the post-war international monetary system (hence, now scholars use the term "dollar hegemony").

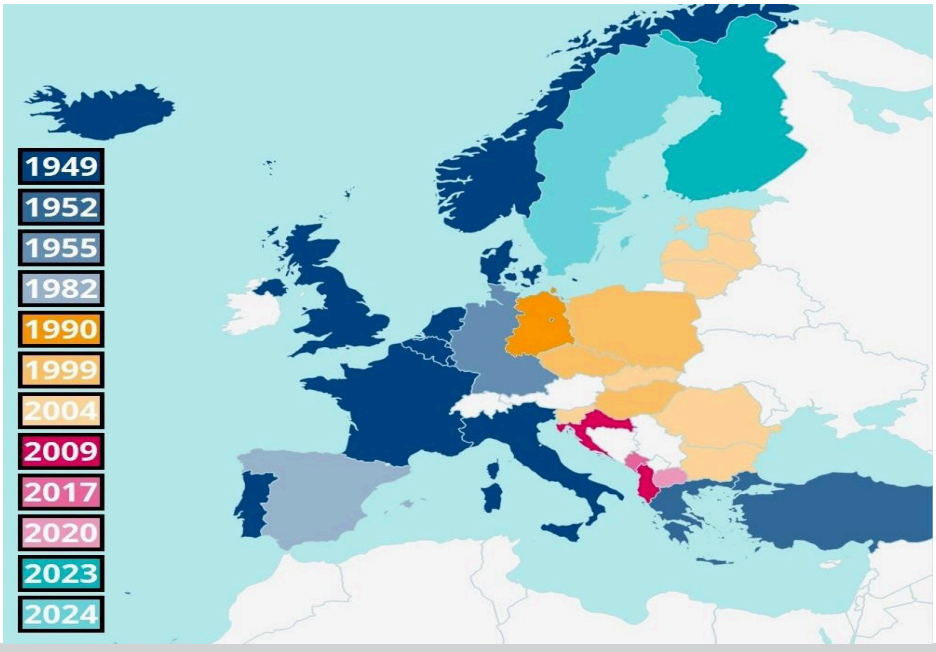
Dynamic emerging economies, China, India, Brazil, and others, are not part of the G7, meaning key decisions made by this club can lack legitimacy or buy-in from the rest of the world.

These arrangements worked when the G7 economies dominated the world and when most countries saw benefits in tying into a dollar-led system. Today, however, the limits of this exclusive economic leadership model are increasingly evident. The G7 now represents a much smaller share of the world economy, around 29% of global GDP by the mid-2020s, or ~44% if the EU is counted, down from the majority in decades past. Dynamic emerging economies, China, India, Brazil, and others, are not part of the G7, meaning key decisions made by this club can lack legitimacy or buy-in from the rest of the world. Analysts note that the G7's global influence has been chipped away by external dynamics, and many argue the G7 lacks relevance without China and other emerging powers. Indeed, the G7's priorities risk failure unless they garner support from beyond the club (Ikenberry, 2018). G7's unsuccessful outcomes and ineffectiveness can be seen more with each summit they have. In fact, the last summit in Canada in June 2025 could not declare a joint statement as expected due to the internal disagreements among members. Recognizing this, the G7 has at times invited leaders from outside, such as India or Brazil, to its summits, and since 1999, the broader Group of Twenty (G20), which includes emerging giants, has taken center stage in global economic crisis management.

While the UN aimed to provide collective security universally, Bretton Woods agencies aimed to support this financially, and informal groupings aimed to accommodate these principles, a parallel security structure was formed in 1949 explicitly for the Western bloc: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). NATO was conceived as a mutual defense pact to protect Western Europe against Soviet aggression, binding the U.S. and Canada to the defense of Western European nations. During the Cold War, NATO became the military backbone of the liberal order, containing the Soviet Union and preserving the security of the democracies in North America and Europe. After the Cold War, NATO did not dissolve but rather expanded, taking in former Eastern Bloc countries and assuming new roles (such as crisis management in the Balkans and a security presence in Afghanistan). This expansion solidified NATO's position as the predominant security alliance even in the post-Soviet era. However, the very success and Western-centric nature of NATO also expose its limits in the eyes of a diversified world. NATO's institutional logic is that of a selective club; it provides security for its members but excludes others, sometimes creating a dividing line in global security. Russia, for instance, has long viewed NATO's eastward expansion as a threat to its own security sphere,

a grievance that underlies tensions and conflicts in Europe (Yan, 2020). Other rising powers outside the trans-Atlantic realm (China, for example) have little connection to NATO and may see it as a relic of Western dominance. Even within the alliance, questions have been raised about its adaptability. Without the Soviet threat, critics have periodically questioned whether NATO is obsolete. This issue was dramatically highlighted in 2017 when a U.S. president publicly questioned the alliance's relevance (CBS News, 2017). While NATO proved its ongoing relevance by banding together in response to challenges like the Russia-Ukraine crisis, it remains true that NATO's scope is geographically and culturally bounded. It does not directly incorporate the security concerns of other regions (e.g., Asia, Africa) except through partnerships, nor does it address non-traditional threats well (such as pandemics or cyber warfare) without expanding its mandate. In effect, NATO exemplifies both the strength and the limitation of the traditional post-war system: it powerfully binds a like-minded set of nations with shared values, yet in doing so it also underscores the divide between those inside the Western security umbrella and those outside.

The Architecture of the Post-WWII Order consist mainly of UN at the core with its UNSC influence depending on its 5 permanent members with veto power, IMF and World Bank as the financial body to ensure the stability of US dollar and growth of major economies of 1944 and a WTO facilitating these principles on the commercial side while NATO was standing there as a hard power tool for and against certain actors, far from inclusivity. This system could respond to the problems back then and provide some growth with solutions. Yet, as the world is transforming, a 1944-based outdated system started feeling its inability to respond to contemporary challenges. That's where their functional decline appeared.



"After the Cold War, NATO did not dissolve but rather expanded, taking in former Eastern Bloc countries and assuming new roles" (Image: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, n.d.).

Functional Successes and Decline

By the post-Cold War era, the liberal order supported globalization, expanding world trade, and improving living standards. The last few decades have seen dramatic wealth creation and poverty reduction, with a sharp drop in interstate conflict, marking a historic success for the multilateral system.

Despite these successes, the liberal international order has faced growing legitimacy crises, particularly in the 21st century. The 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, without UN Security Council authorization, severely undermined the credibility of the UN and the global order. The Iraq War exposed flaws in international institutions and fueled global perceptions of double standards. The 2008 financial crisis further weakened the order, revealing the vulnerabilities of Western financial systems and diminishing faith in institutions like the IMF and World Bank. The collapse of the Doha Round and the WTO's dispute settlement paralysis exemplify the breakdown of multilateral trade. These crises, coupled with stalling global cooperation, have sparked a reevaluation of the effectiveness of the liberal order.

Over the past two decades, a series of global shocks, from the war on terror to populist movements in the West, have further strained the liberal order. Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine crisis have highlighted the inadequacies of the existing system. The pandemic exposed gaps in global cooperation, and Russia's war has paralyzed the UN Security Council. The same is seen again when it comes to Gaza. One hand raised in the UNSC was enough to put aside the decision to send humanitarian aid to the region made by a strong majority both in the General Assembly and the UNSC. Some scholars argue that these kinds of events signal the end of unipolarity and the rise of competing blocs, while others contend that the liberal order must evolve to remain relevant (Layne, 1993). The future of global governance will depend on its ability to address the legitimacy deficits and power imbalances exposed in the contemporary era, as well as its capacity to adapt to the emerging multipolar world.

Structural Rigidities

The capacity to adapt emerging multipolar world, however, cannot be accomplished without reforming the bodies. Yet, when it comes to reforming, the structural rigidities pose a strong barrier. In other words, the post-war institutions anchoring global governance face structural inertia that impedes adaptation to 21st-century realities. A prime example is the UNSC, which has resisted reform for decades. Proposals to expand permanent membership or curb the veto have stalled due to competing national interests and the veto power of the P5 (Langmore & Thakur, 2024). There is no realistic prospect of fundamentally reforming UNSC permanent membership in the foreseeable future, even as its static composition erodes legitimacy and breeds resentment among emerging powers. The Council's credibility suffers from a representation deficit; it reflects the geopolitics of 1945, not today's diverse multipolar world, undermining its authority to speak *in the name of the whole international community*.

Similar rigidities plague the Bretton Woods institutions. IMF and World Bank quota structures remain skewed toward the Global North, lagging shifts in economic power. Incremental

quota adjustments since 2010 have barely dented the dominance of the U.S. and major European states (Wade & Vestergaard, 2024). For instance, by 2013, developing countries accounted for over half of world GDP but held only ~47% of World Bank voting power. This misalignment of voting shares leaves emerging economies underrepresented and undermines the legitimacy of these institutions. Analysts warn that without bold quota and governance reforms to reflect emerging economies' weight, the IMF risks losing legitimacy and becoming less effective in tackling global financial challenges. Yet reform is slow and politically fraught; any change that significantly reduces Western control (e.g., ending the U.S. veto at the IMF) remains politically unfeasible under current conditions (BU Global Development Policy Center, n.d.). The result is a stalemate, where governance structures no longer match reality, but power politics block meaningful change.

In the trade realm, the World Trade Organization (WTO) suffers from decision-making paralysis due to its consensus rule. The WTO's one-country-one-vote consensus system, meant to ensure inclusivity, has instead become *a recipe for gridlock*, as even a single holdout can stall progress (Yap, 2025). With 164 members at vastly different development levels, achieving unanimous agreement on new trade rules has proven nearly impossible. Indeed, since its founding in 1995, the WTO has failed to conclude a single new multilateral round of trade negotiations, and the Doha Round languished for years before its collapse. Contentious issues like agricultural subsidies, e-commerce rules, or special treatment for developing countries become impassable when any dissenting member wields a veto.

"One hand raised in the UNSC was enough to put aside the decision to send humanitarian aid to Gaza, which was made by a strong majority in both the General Assembly and the UNSC" (Photo: UN, n.d.).

Recent reform surveys find an overwhelming consensus that modernizing the WTO's consensus procedure is urgent to restore its efficacy. Yet here too, entrenched interests make change difficult: some members fear losing influence if majority voting or plurilateral agreements dilute the strict consensus norm. The WTO's stagnation exemplifies how rigid decision-making procedures hamper global governance in an era when agility is needed.

Wealthy industrialized states dominate leadership positions and bureaucracies in organizations like the UN, allowing them to shape the rules of the game to their advantage.

Underpinning these institutional challenges is a persistent North–South divide in agenda-setting and norm creation. Since the Cold War's end, developing nations have demanded a greater voice in defining global norms, from economic rules to human rights, yet the Global North still largely sets the global agenda, reflecting its outsized influence in international forums. Wealthy industrialized states dominate leadership positions and bureaucracies in organizations like the UN, allowing them to shape the rules of the game to their advantage (Harig & Jenne, 2022). Meanwhile, the Global South often finds its priorities sidelined or must accept norms it had little role in formulating. This imbalance has long bred frustration. As far back as the 1970s, coalitions of developing countries advanced the New International Economic Order and other initiatives, articulating new norms and alternatives to Western-dominated systems (Braveboy-Wagner, 2022). Many such efforts were stymied by resistance from developed nations, entrenching a sense of inequity. Today, issues like climate change, development financing, and digital governance reveal sharply divergent perspectives between North and South. Developing countries emphasize sovereignty, developmental rights, and fairness, whereas developed countries often prioritize liberal values and existing rules. This enduring split complicates norm-building: global negotiations from trade to climate become protracted battles of contested values and interests across the North–South divide. In effect, the lack of a shared vision between developed and developing blocs is itself a structural rigidity, a political fault line that impedes consensus on updating global governance.

Rise of Regional Institutions and Blocs: Reshaping Global Governance

With the status quo under mounting stress, the world faces a choice: either gradually adapt and reform the existing order, or see it give way to new arrangements. While the existing institutions and blocs are trying to agree on one of the options, new powers emerge with the potential to build pathways toward a more inclusive and resilient world order. This section will analyze how these powers are affecting the world governance system shift. To do so, a typology-based classification will be utilized, mainly grouping them into three categories with characteristic words of declining, evolving, and emerging. It should be noted here that the distinction between old and new is not dependent on the establishment date but rather depends on the dates of the active status of the relevant institution.

"The WTO's stagnation exemplifies how rigid decision-making procedures hamper global governance in an era when agility is needed (Photo: WTO website, n.d.).

Classification of Institutions and Blocs

Traditional Institutions/Blocs with Declining Influence (Declining)

Many post–World War II institutions now attract criticism for being outdated or insufficiently representative. As a typical example, the UNSC's 15-member structure (with five permanent veto-wielding members) reflects 1945 power balances, not today's world. Notably, two-thirds of UN members are from the Global South, yet the Council includes less than 8% of all states (ed. Patrick, S., 2023). African and other developing countries have even formed an informal "A3" caucus on the Council to press their priorities. U.S. leaders have likewise backed proposals to add two permanent African seats without veto rights to improve representation (Yade, 2024). But with veto rules unchanged, the Security Council still often stalls on pressing global issues from climate change to pandemics, fueling complaints that it has become an anachronism in urgent need of reform. Critics note that when the Council is deadlocked, many Global South states simply turn to other forums or coalitions to advance security agendas rather than wait for consensus (Global Policy Reform, n.d.).

Similarly, NATO, long a premier military alliance, faces questions about its strategic vitality. The 2025 Hague summit did yield a new defense declaration and commitments (e.g., spending 5% of GDP on defense by 2035), but many analysts saw it as more of a performative display than a true renewal (Kim, 2025). Beneath the summit optics, deep divisions remain: burden-sharing disputes, unclear priorities in Europe versus the Indo-Pacific, and skepticism about the U.S. commitment all persist.

In effect, NATO's track record on operations (Afghanistan withdrawal, deterring Russia) is hailed as success, but those actions may obscure unresolved questions about NATO's future relevance in a multi-power world.

The World Trade Organization likewise appears diminished. Multilateral negotiations have essentially stalled, so much so that, as one trade economist notes, the negotiation of multilateral agreements has stalled at the WTO, with members instead cutting deals in smaller group.

The World Trade Organization likewise appears diminished. Multilateral negotiations have essentially stalled, so much so that, as one trade economist notes, the negotiation of multilateral agreements has stalled at the WTO, with members instead cutting deals in smaller groups (Wolff, 2022). Indeed, regional and plurilateral pacts, like RCEP in Asia or new e-commerce agreements, have become the norm. Meanwhile, the WTO's dispute-resolution body is paralyzed: the U.S. has blocked all new appeals judges, meaning most panel rulings are now appealed into the void, leaving no enforceable outcome (Lester, 2022). In practice, this undermines confidence in the multilateral system and warns that the WTO risks further marginalization. Its consensus rules make it difficult to address novel global challenges such as climate, pandemics, digital economy at the world level without major reform.

The G7 (Group of Seven), an informal club of advanced democracies, similarly suffers from shrinking scope and reach. Its combined share of global output has fallen steeply: from around 65% in the early 2000s to roughly 43% today (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025). After expelling Russia in 2014 (and permanently in 2022), the G7 presents itself as a *like-minded* coalition of market democracies. U.S. strategists have even floated expanding it into a "D10" by adding Australia, India, and South Korea (Atlantic Council, 2021). Yet many scholars argue that the G7's lack of emerging economies and its shrinking share of global power limit its legitimacy (Dong, 2024). Its annual communiqueés on climate, security, etc., carry political weight, but critics say the G7 cannot substitute for broader forums like the G20 or the UN.

Finally, Bretton Woods financial institutions, the IMF, and the World Bank, also face growing scrutiny. Many experts from the Global South complain that these institutions impose one-size-fits-all policies and fail to respect different national pathways to development, nor guarantee fair access to global capital (Hamilton, 2024). They note that the IMF/Bank are often slow to respond to climate and development: in effect, sclerotic on the very issues like climate finance that most affect vulnerable economies. Recent reform initiatives, such as the G20's Bridgetown Initiative and related proposals, seek to redirect more lending and grants toward climate-vulnerable states, effectively treating the IMF/Bank as a multilateral "infrastructure" that needs upgrading (Bridgetown Initiative, n.d.). But underlying governance remains dominated by rich-country shareholders, so many question whether new

"Bretton Woods financial institutions, the IMF, and the World Bank, also face growing scrutiny" (Photo: IMF website, n.d.).

funds or minor mandate tweaks can bridge the trust and inequality gap. In short, analysts acknowledge that the IMF and World Bank still play crucial roles, but their dated rules and conditionalities have weakened their influence and legitimacy compared to past decades.

Traditional Institutions with Evolving Roles (Evolving)

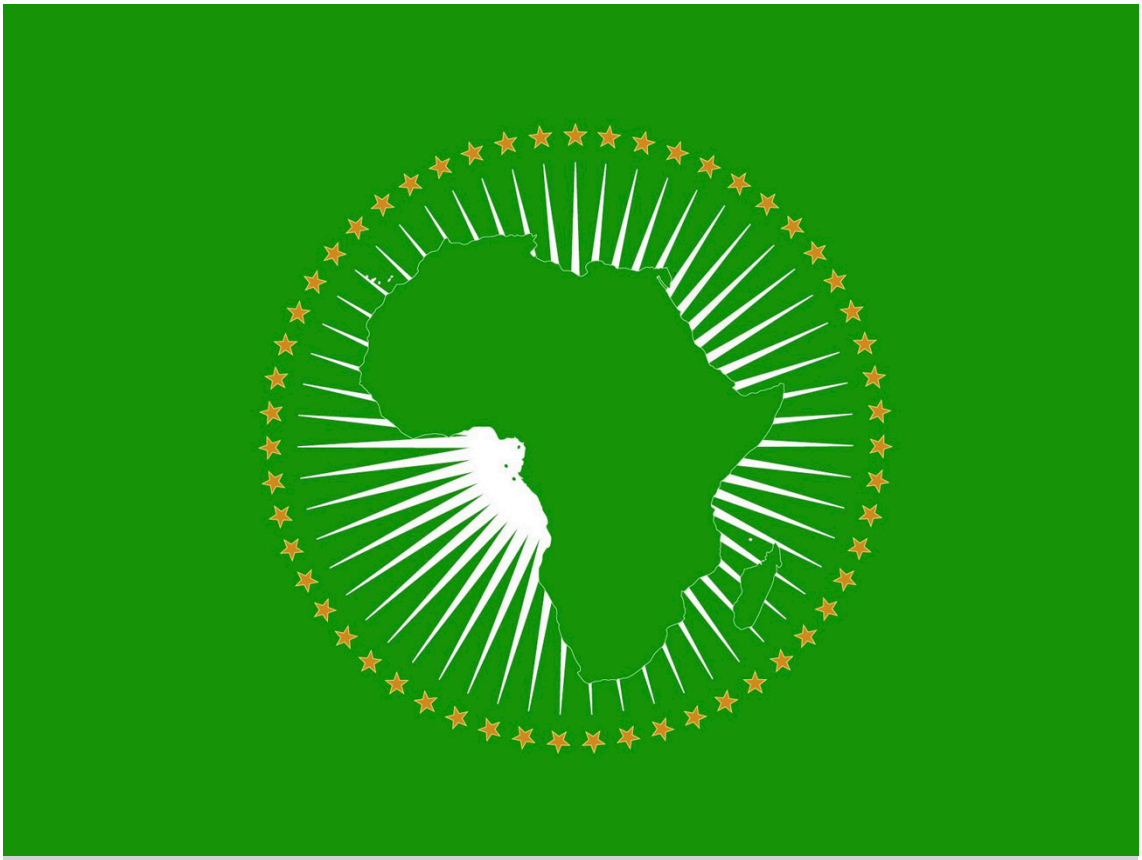
The fall of traditional institutions comes mainly from their inability or unwillingness to adapt and change to respond to current conditions. Yet, if a traditional institution can change and is willing to broaden its horizon in a more inclusive way, its role is not declining only because they have the label of being traditional. On the contrary, they provide a stronger role in the system. There lies the difference between G7 and G20. Established after the 1998-99 Asian financial crisis and elevated during the 2008-09 global meltdown, the G20 brings together the world's major rich and emerging economies (roughly two-thirds of the global population and about 80–85% of GDP) (Dstatis, n.d.; G20 India, n.d.). It proved its worth as a crisis manager in 2008–09, injecting liquidity, recapitalizing institutions, creating the Financial Stability Board, and stabilizing the economy, and at Pittsburgh 2009, leaders even declared it the "premier forum for our international economic cooperation" (Patrick, 2024).

With the new conjuncture, many expected its role to decline in parallel with the G7. Yet, the G20 could bring a new vision to the table thanks to its non-G7 members. Brazil, for instance, played a strong role in ensuring the G20 will maintain its inclusivity. The summit in 2024 was, therefore, both a symbolic and practical appearance to show the world that the G20 does not depend on the G7 and could draw its own line for its members' development. The voice of the Global South could be heard strongly this time, opening paths to direct collaborations between the South-South. In fact, with the involvement of AU officially in 2023, and practically in 2024, a move widely welcomed as giving Africa a stronger voice in global economic governance (Munyati, 2023), marked a significant milestone, turning the Global South into a Global Majority. The majority today is now aware of its own potential to make an impact, independent of the traditional limiting settings of those called major powers. South Africa's G20 presidency in 2024 underscored this recognition. Meanwhile, inside Africa, the AU has deepened integration. The flagship African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) has taken hold: by early 2025, some 48 countries had ratified the agreement, and the AfCFTA's "Guided Trade" pilot, designed to expedite tariff cuts, now involves 39 nations (Xinhua, 2025; African Union, 2024a). Observers say such steps are already giving Africa "stronger agency and voice in international arenas" (Mangeni et. al., 2024).

African leaders have also sought to reform global finance. For example, a February 2024 AU summit agreed to channel development finance through African-led institutions (like a new stabilization facility at the African Development Bank) and formally launched an "Africa Club", an alliance of Africa-owned multilateral banks (Afreximbank, AfDB, etc.), to coordinate funding and press for change (African Union, 2024b). Despite setbacks (coups in parts of the Sahel, political fractures), the AU is increasingly treated as a key interlocutor, even broaching the idea of a permanent African seat on the UN Security Council, reflecting its evolving, more proactive role.

Especially with the withdrawal of the U.S. from the region gradually, with the new government in Syria, with Türkiye playing more of a regional role, and with major actors like China playing a mediator role between regional powers, both the region and the Arab League may be reborn from its ashes. But as true for declining traditional institutions, its success will also depend on how well it fits with multipolar tendencies and inclusive principles.

Another old institution with the potential to shape itself in the future is the Arab League. Founded in 1945 as a loose confederation of Arab states, the Arab League has long struggled with internal divisions. Its charter makes consensus difficult: a majority decision binds only those members that accept it, and the League has no enforcement mechanism. Critics, therefore, call it a "glorified debating society" (Masters & Sergie, 2023). Yet the League still meets annually



"The AU is increasingly treated as a key interlocutor, even broaching the idea of a permanent African seat on the UN Security Council, reflecting its evolving, more proactive role" (Photo: AU website, n.d.).

and maintains a collective agenda on some issues. For decades, it has championed Palestinian statehood: for example, at a 2002 summit, it endorsed the Saudi-sponsored Arab Peace Initiative calling for a two-state solution, and it has reaffirmed that stance amid Gaza and broader Middle East crises. The League has also pursued economic integration (establishing the Greater Arab Free Trade Area, steps toward a customs union, etc.), though progress is slow. On security, the record is mixed: it backed the 2011 Libya intervention but failed to resolve the wars in Syria or Yemen. As the situation in the Middle East still maintains an unresolved crisis within itself, it's too early to state that the Arab League has as much potential as other institutions mentioned above. Yet, it does not mean to ignore its potential. Especially with the withdrawal of the U.S. from the region gradually, with the new government in Syria, with Türkiye playing more of a regional role, and with major actors like China playing a mediator role between regional powers, both the region and the Arab League may be reborn from its ashes. But as true for declining traditional institutions, its success will also depend on how well it fits with multipolar tendencies and inclusive principles.

New and Emerging Institutions (Emerging)

Of course, the most advantageous category within this conjuncture of global governance is the new institutions, which are already founded by those who were mainly oppressed in the traditional ones. Therefore, the core principles like multipolarity, co-existence, and cooperation are already written down in these institutions' charters. As one of the leading ones, BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), founded in 2009, has rapidly expanded (to include Egypt, UAE, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia in 2024) as an alternative platform for emerging economies. Its leaders explicitly aim to challenge existing unequal systems and give a louder voice to emerging economies. For example, the Western efforts to isolate Russia have failed, and BRICS showed that Russia still has many friends among developing countries, contrary to what traditional institutions attempt to make people believe. In practice, BRICS has built a web of South–South forums, including the NDB and Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) established in 2015 to "tinker" with the global economic order (Patrick, 2024). These institutions still remain modest in scope: the NDB's cumulative loans ($60+ billion over its first decade) are still small compared to the World Bank (e.g., ~$5 billion vs $72.8 billion in a recent year) (AIIB, 2025; John&George, 2024).

Similar to NDB, the AIIB is a China-initiated multilateral development bank that began in 2016 and has grown rapidly. It now has 110 member states, including many Western countries, and $100 billion authorized capital (AIIB, 2025). In its first decade, AIIB approved roughly $60 billion for over 300 projects across 38 countries, spanning infrastructure from African roads to Asian renewables, with a strong "green" orientation. Notably, AIIB's governance is multinational, and it often co-finances projects with the World Bank or Asian Development Bank (AIIB, 2025). Analysts attribuite AIIB's appeal to its nimbleness and to environmental/social safeguards comparable to those of established MDBs (AIIB, 2025). In 2024, the bank unveiled a strategy to double annual lending to ~$17 billion by 2030 (with over $50 billion in climate finance) (AIIB, 2025). This suggests the AIIB is carving out a legitimate role as a modern development financier: its focus on sustainable projects and partnership with existing MDBs makes it complementary to the Bretton Woods institutions, rather than a hostile rival. The World Bank often ties loan conditions to stringent economic reforms, focusing on neoliberal policies like market liberalization. In contrast, the AIIB emphasizes more flexible terms, with a focus on sustainable development with less conditionality and quicker implementation compared to World Bank loans.

The SCO provides a collective security platform for Eurasia that pointedly does not follow the Western alliance model. Instead of a formal defense pact like NATO, the SCO operates on principles of voluntary cooperation, mutual respect for sovereignty, and consensus.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), successor to the Shanghai Five, began its activities in 2001 as a Eurasian security forum led by China and Russia. Today, it has expanded significantly (adding India, Pakistan, Iran, etc.), and more are waiting on the list to join. It offers more pragmatic

"SCO offers more pragmatic solutions to long-term crises and an understanding of security independent of Western understanding". The SCO Summit held in Tianjin, China, on August 31, 2025 (Photo: Global Times, 2025).

solutions to long-term crises and an understanding of security independent of Western understanding, which will be detailed in the upcoming chapters of the article. The SCO provides a *collective security platform* for Eurasia that pointedly does not follow the Western alliance model. Instead of a formal defense pact like NATO, the SCO operates on principles of voluntary cooperation, mutual respect for sovereignty, and consensus. Its original mandate focused on combating the "*three evils*" (terrorism, separatism, extremism) and fostering stability across Central and South Asia. Over two decades, the SCO's membership has grown to cover over 80% of Eurasia's landmass and 40% of the world's population, *without* eliciting the kind of geostrategic backlash that NATO's eastward expansion did (Assaniyaz, 2024). Notably, as an SCO expansion, countries like India and Pakistan joined simultaneously in 2017, an inclusion made *not against anyone* but to broaden regional integration. This illustrates how the SCO pursues security through inclusivity rather than exclusive blocs. In practice, the organization has built up robust cooperation instruments: for example, its Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) headquartered in Tashkent facilitates intelligence sharing and joint operations against militant threats. By one account, in just the past year SCO members jointly dismantled 73 terrorist cells and prevented 69 terrorist attacks in member territories, tangible security outcomes that underscore the SCO's effectiveness (Assaniyaz, 2024). Regular "*Peace Mission*" exercises and border security operations are conducted under its auspices.

What is more unique for Asia, especially in terms of trade, is ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). ASEAN, established in 1967, is a mature regional bloc of 10 countries, often praised for its ASEAN Centrality, the idea that it should lead regional cooperation. ASEAN has deepened economic integration, launched the ASEAN Economic Community, and championed broader trade pacts (e.g. RCEP in 2020). It also anchors multilateral dialogue (hosting the ASEAN Regional Forum, East Asia Summit, etc.) and promotes inclusive norms (e.g. the Treaty of Amity). ASEAN's appeal lies in balancing big powers: it has long been the neutral broker for U.S.–China rivalry. In fact, as analysts note, Southeast Asian states insist on not taking sides in that rivalry and seek strategic autonomy (Mingjiang et. al., 2025). In practice, ASEAN convenes leaders to foster connectivity (e.g. digital economy, climate change) and shape Indo-Pacific discussions. However, its consensus-based decision-making produces mixed results on hard issues. For example, ASEAN made very little progress in addressing Myanmar's 2021 coup; leaders even agreed to ban Myanmar's generals from meetings until they honor the bloc's Five-Point Consensus. Overall, ASEAN remains influential as a convenor and norm-shaper. It also has a symbolic importance for most of the ASEAN members as it's something *from them* and *a part of* them.

As the Arabic version of ASEAN, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), established in 1981, groups six wealthy Arabian Gulf monarchies. After reconciling the 2017–2021 Qatar crisis, the bloc has reasserted unity. In mid-2025, the GCC explicitly endorsed moving "from the cooperation phase to the union phase", indicating plans for shared institutions (even a common currency) and tighter integration (GCC, 2025). Its ministers affirmed commitment to "strength and cohesion" and coordination "in all fields," including mutual defense. Economically, the GCC continues to harmonize (e.g., coordinating sovereign wealth funds and investment rules). Politically, it often speaks with one voice: recent GCC communiqueés strongly supported the Palestinians and condemned Israeli actions in Gaza. The GCC countries, with high wealth and small populations, have quietly pursued integration, joint military exercises, a Gulf common market, etc., and generally maintained a consistent external stance. Currently, the bloc is again moving toward a fuller Gulf union. If achieved, this deeper integration would mark a notable evolution; the GCC remains an older regional institution that is currently revitalizing its integration agenda and political influence.

The 2024 Bishkek summit with the theme "Empowering the Turkic World: Economic Integration, Sustainable Development, Digital Future, and Security" saw leaders pledge to deepen economic, digital, and security ties. They endorsed initiatives to enhance connectivity like a Middle Corridor trade route and a Digital Silk Way project and to harmonize customs and trade rules.

As the last institution with a more identity-based approach, the Organization of Turkic

"ASEAN's appeal lies in balancing big powers" (Photo: CGTN, 2025).

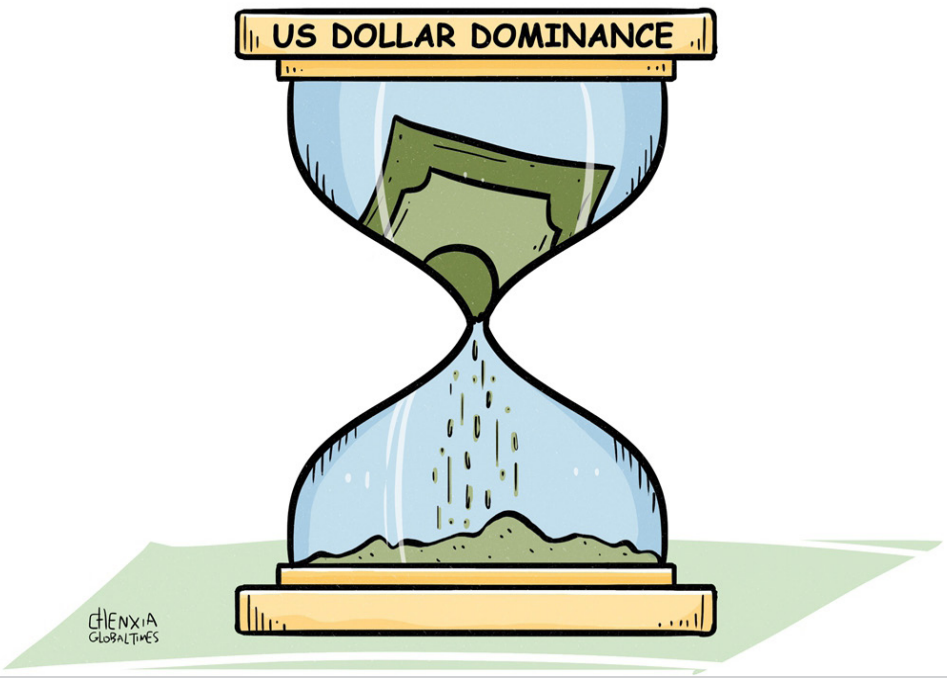
States (OTS) (successor to the Turkic Council) unites Turkic-speaking countries (members are Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan; and observers are Hungary, Turkmenistan, Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Economic Cooperation Organization). Its mission is cultural, economic, and political cooperation among "Turkic World" members. Recent summits have been highly ambitious. For example, the 2024 Bishkek summit with the theme *"Empowering the Turkic World: Economic Integration, Sustainable Development, Digital Future, and Security"* saw leaders pledge to deepen economic, digital, and security ties. They endorsed initiatives to enhance connectivity like a Middle Corridor trade route and a Digital Silk Way project and to harmonize customs and trade rules. The OTS also agreed on new measures on labor, education exchanges, and even a cross-border "Turkic Red Network" for humanitarian response. Institutionally, it has launched a Turkic Chamber of Commerce and a $500 million Turkic Investment Fund to boost intra-bloc projects (OTS, n.d.). While still small in global scope, the OTS is a rising sub-regional bloc: it leverages shared language and heritage to forge a niche in Eurasian diplomacy. Its 11th summit reaffirmed "a shared destiny" for its members and signaled intent to project influence together (e.g., a unified position on Gaza and Palestinian statehood).

In sum, the OTS exemplifies how a modest, identity-based grouping is carving new cooperative channels in international relations, shifting from a unipolar to a multipolar setting. This identity-based principle highlights the importance of *one for all, all for one* idea in the sense that if one chooses any blocs or institution types in the future, that member will have significant influence to inspire other members as well. The influence here, however, should be seen as a natural outcome of an identity-based grouping because identity-based paths naturally share the same or similar desires or concerns in common among members, which automatically increases the possibility of acting in a similar way and choosing the same options.

Regional Blocs and Institutions as Functional Coalitions

The contemporary Global South alliances appear to prioritize issue-based cooperation over rigid ideological blocs. For example, it can be said that India values BRICS as a vehicle to assert its strategic autonomy and preference for flexible, issue-based partnerships while still engaging with Western powers. In this multipolar context, developing states form coalitions that allow them to hedge risks and advance shared goals without taking sides in a new Cold War. Such groups focus on concrete projects, from infrastructure to climate financing, where members' interests overlap, rather than on grand ideological agendas. By pooling their bargaining power in forums like the UN or G20, these blocs promote more equitable global norms and champion multipolarity from the ground up. In that sense, rather than serving as a pole, these regional blocs serve as functional coalitions, especially on specific issues that require unity to overcome traditional settings.

BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) exemplifies this functional approach quite well thanks to its de-dollarization efforts. In 2015, it created the New Development Bank (NDB) and a Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA) to finance infrastructure and provide liquidity support independently of Western institutions. These BRICS institutions reflect South–South experimentation: each member contributed equally to the NDB, and the CRA pools reserves in proportion (China 41%, others less). In practice, the NDB finances development on the bloc's terms, and the CRA helps guard against balance-of-payments crises, both without IMF conditionality. More recently, BRICS countries have pursued de-dollarization: they are settling some trade in local currencies and even discussing a shared payment system, which will be detailed in the upcoming chapters. BRICS leaders seek financial channels less vulnerable to U.S. and European sanctions by increasing non-dollar transactions. This shift is driven by economic pragmatism, not ideology: avoiding excessive dollar exposure protects developing economies from external shocks (e.g., U.S. sanctions or Fed rate shocks). That is also why, for instance, G77+China is another accelerator from the Global South perspective. On the financial side, the 134-member G77+China platform has pressed for a comprehensive reform of the international financial architecture, demanding that institutions like the IMF and World Bank give developing countries more voice. In terms of technology and equity, its 2023 Havana summit denounced "digital monopolies" and other unfair practices that hurt developing countries, underscoring technology's role in development (Lopes, 2023). Leaders also called for more climate adaptation and loss-and-damage funds for vulnerable nations. Instead of enforcing a uniform ideology, the G77+China ad-



"BRICS countries have pursued de-dollarization: They are settling some trade in local currencies and even discussing a shared payment system" (Cartoon: Global Times, 2022).

vances concrete South–South goals. Member governments span divergent systems (from socialist Cuba to market-oriented Singapore) but unite on issues like debt relief, vaccine access, and technology transfer.

It is not only major powers that shape the blocs. Gulf states, for instance, have formed agile coalitions centered on their energy interests. The OPEC+group (including OPEC's Gulf core and Russia) is a loose, price-focused cartel formed in 2016 by a Saudi-Russia pact. Its sole mission is market stability: by jointly cutting output, members have at times supported global oil prices and safeguarded revenues. In fact, econometric studies find that without OPEC+ cuts during 2017-2020, oil prices would have been about 6% lower (Quint & Venditti, 2020). Scholars even call OPEC+ a unique model for global cooperation among resource exporters from the Global South. Importantly, this alliance spans very different regimes (monarchies, democracies, autocracies) and is strictly issue-specific: it binds members on oil policy but imposes no broader political commitments. The Gulf bloc has thus bolstered its bargaining power in world energy markets while retaining flexibility: for example, OPEC+ has resisted external pressure to flood the market, asserting Gulf producers' autonomy in global energy governance.

In sum, 21st-century South–South coalitions are pragmatic and flexible, pursuing development and reform goals. They advance shared interests (finance, trade, climate, health, tech) through collective institutions and consensus, injecting equity and multipolar perspectives into global governance. By avoiding ideological litmus tests and formal bloc commitments, these coalitions maximize member autonomy while gradually rebalancing world power.

China's Role and the Strategic Alternatives to the Old System

China has emerged as a primary architect of new global governance mechanisms, providing much of the *soft infrastructure* underpinning a multipolar order. Through a suite of major initiatives, often termed the four global initiatives, Beijing is offering conceptual and institutional alternatives to the Western-led system and frames it with principles of co-existence and holism. The most well-known one is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a transcontinental development strategy, launched in 2013 by Chinese leader Xi Jinping, financing infrastructure and connectivity projects across Asia, Africa, and beyond, creating physical, economic, cultural, and conceptual linkages outside Western frameworks. Over three-quarters of the world's countries have signed onto BRI cooperation, underscoring its broad reach. Which inspires as much as BRI is Global Development Initiative (GDI), announced by President Xi in 2021, the GDI aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals and focuses on poverty alleviation, health, food security, climate, and other development challenges of the Global South. China has backed this with a $10 billion fund and a UN Group of Friends, gaining support from *over* 100 countries and endorsement by the UN Secretary-General (Gross, 2025). However, as all these should be done in a secure environment, the Chinese government pays special attention to the Global Security Initiative (GSI), which was unveiled in 2022. The GSI is China's vision for a new global security order. It rejects military blocs and zero-sum alliances, instead advocating common, comprehensive, cooperative, and sustainable security grounded in respect for sovereignty, non-interference, and dialogue. In essence, the GSI serves as a manifesto for an alternative system of international relations to the US-led rules-based order, encapsulating China's core diplomatic principles (state sovereignty, territorial integrity, opposition to unilateral sanctions, and bloc confrontation). Beijing has credited the GSI's approach for recent diplomatic breakthroughs, for example, mediating the Saudi–Iran rapprochement in 2023, showcasing how Chinese facilitation can fill gaps left by traditional Western diplomacy.

Lastly, the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI), launched in 2023, emphasizes respect for cultural diversity and civilizational pluralism. It calls for dialogue among civilizations and rejects the notion of universal value imposition, aligning with China's critique of Western democracy and human-rights evangelism. In Chinese commentary, the GCI is described as *"offering Chinese wisdom"* to promote common human values while celebrating diversity (Yin, 2025). Dozens of countries have voiced support for the GCI, viewing it as a counterweight to Western cultural dominance (Global Times, 2025).

Together, these four initiatives form a comprehensive framework for China's vision of reformed global governance. They are frequently articulated as components of building a "community with a shared future for mankind," signaling a move away from the old order's norms. Beyond rhetoric, China is also *investing resources into these initiatives*: for instance, it reports 1,100+ projects under the GDI and extensive cultural exchange programs under the GCI (Yin, 2025). This multipronged approach, development, security, and cultural/normative leadership, bolsters China's role as an enabler of new global public goods and an agenda-setter in a multipolar world.

Another pillar of China's contribution to a

multipolar system is its central role in expanding inclusive coalitions and institutions that serve as alternatives to Western clubs. A prime example is the BRICS bloc and its associated institutions. Under China's prodding, BRICS has pursued a path of enlargement and institutional innovation. In 2023, BRICS invited six new members, *Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia,* and *Argentina*, dramatically increasing its economic weight and geographic representation (though Argentina's entry was later put on hold). The expanded BRICS now encompasses major oil producers and regional powers; a development Beijing and Moscow have hailed as amplifying the Global South voice in world affairs. Indeed, officials note that BRICS collectively has surpassed the G7 in share of global GDP and in population, bolstering claims to represent a "global majority" (Patrick & Hogan, 2025).

More concretely, China spearheaded the creation of the New Development Bank (NDB) by BRICS as a new source of development finance outside the Bretton Woods system. Headquartered in Shanghai, the NDB began operations in 2015 with equal capital contributions from the original five members, embodying a principle of *greater equality among shareholders* than the World Bank's weighted voting. The NDB and a BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement are meant to provide developing countries with alternative avenues for infrastructure funding and financial safety nets, without traditional Western conditionalities. By 2021, the NDB had approved over $30 billion for nearly 100 projects ranging from clean energy to transportation. It has also innovated in financing by lending in local currencies (e.g., issuing bonds in RMB, INR, ZAR, and RUB) to reduce dependence on the US dollar.

"The Global Civilization Initiative, launched in 2023, emphasizes respect for cultural diversity and civilizational pluralism" (Illustration: China Daily, 2025).

The impetus behind these efforts is a sense that Bretton Woods institutions have not adequately met developing nations' needs, a view echoed by the UN Secretary-General's remark that the current system was created by rich countries to benefit rich countries, leaving poorer regions underserved. Through BRICS and the NDB, China and its partners are forging South-South cooperation mechanisms intended to democratize development finance and diminish the hegemony of Western-led lenders. While skeptics note the NDB remains much smaller than the World Bank and has faced start-up challenges, its existence has already introduced friendly competition that pressures traditional institutions to be more responsive. Importantly, the NDB filled critical gaps during the COVID-19 crisis by quickly disbursing emergency loans, validating the original rationale for its creation.

In the security realm, China has led the development of parallel institutions that lie outside Western military alliances. Chief among these is the SCO, a regional security forum founded in 2001 by China, Russia, and Central Asian states, later expanded to include India, Pakistan, and now Iran.

In the security realm, China has led the development of parallel institutions that lie outside Western military alliances. Chief among these is the SCO, a regional security forum founded in 2001 by China, Russia, and Central Asian states, later expanded to include India, Pakistan, and now Iran. While the SCO is sometimes dubbed an Eastern NATO, its structure and ethos differ markedly: it has *no* mutual defense clause and instead relies on political cohesion and trust-building measures. This model aligns with China's Global Security Initiative vision of cooperative security with holistic perspectives, acknowledging that no security is possible in isolation. Overall, by providing an alternative venue for regional security governance, the SCO reduces reliance on U.S.-led security arrangements and gives Asian powers greater agency in solving their own security issues.

Finally, China has driven institutional diversification in global governance, creating or empowering new institutions to complement the traditional Western-led bodies. For instance, the establishment of the AIIB in 2015, with China as the largest shareholder, introduced a new multilateral lender focused on infrastructure in Asia. China launched the AIIB after frustration with slow reforms at the World Bank; notably, many U.S. allies joined the AIIB despite Washington's objections, signaling confidence in a more inclusive approach. The AIIB's governance gives developing Asian nations a stronger voice and its project processes are seen as more streamlined. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the AIIB was able to swiftly expand a crisis recovery fund to $20 billion and adopt quick and flexible disbursement procedures to help members, a responsiveness that drew praise (AIIB, n.d.). In parallel, China's promotion of the GSI can be seen as

"Through BRICS and the NDB, China and its partners are forging South-South cooperation mechanisms intended to democratize development finance and diminish the hegemony of Western-led lenders" (Cartoon: Global Times, 2024).

an attempt to offer a conceptual alternative to NATO's security paradigm. Beijing explicitly critiques U.S.-led alliances as a Cold War mentality contributing to instability, and through mechanisms like the SCO and forums under the GSI banner, it advocates a more multipolar security architecture with a more holistic vision. This institutional crossover is evident: the AIIB versus the World Bank, the NDB versus the IMF, the SCO (or GSI) versus NATO's logic, in each case, China and partners are broadening the options available to states. Rather than overturn the existing order overnight, this strategy adds *new platforms alongside old ones*, gradually diminishing the dominance of any single power bloc. In sum, China's role in the emerging multipolar system is multifaceted: it is supplying ideological vision, concrete development projects, financial capital, and security cooperation, all through new or revitalized institutions that challenge the monopoly of the West's post-1945 architecture. These efforts, largely framed in terms of true multilateralism and greater equity for the Global South, have already begun to reshape global norms and power alignments in the 2020s.

Performance-Based Analysis (Function-Specific Effectiveness)

Obviously, it is not just strategic principles that make new institutions new or emerging. Their practical success in real life would be the core element making them more suitable for today. In other words, beyond strategic vision, the effectiveness of these new institutions and frameworks can be assessed in specific functional areas, especially where they provide faster and more effective concrete solutions. A *performance-based analysis* may show that many of the emerging multipolar institutions are delivering outcomes that meet or exceed those of their traditional Western counterparts in key domains listed below:

Development Finance: New multilateral banks like the NDB and AIIB have demonstrated more equitable governance and faster response times compared to the IMF/World Bank system. The NDB, for example, operates on a one-country-one-vote *founding principle* (the BRICS each hold equal shares) and emphasizes greater equality among shareholders and borrower-friendly flexibility. This stands in contrast to the World Bank and IMF, where voting power is skewed toward G7 economies and loans often come with stringent policy conditions. In practice, the BRICS bank has been nimble: during the COVID-19 crisis, the NDB activated approximately $10 billion emergency facility and disbursed funds within weeks, whereas normal development bank procedures can take months. Chinese provinces received NDB emergency loans just 3–4 weeks after approval, thanks to expedited fast-track processes (Maasdorp, 2020). Similarly, the China-led AIIB quickly set up a Crisis Recovery Facility and scaled it up to $20 billion, enabling rapid support for dozens of countries with simplified procedures. Borrowers have noted that AIIB and NDB financing entails less bureaucracy and *more respect for local priorities*, addressing long-standing complaints about the traditional lenders (Humphrey & Chen, 2021). While the IMF and World Bank remain larger in absolute capacity, these new banks are *outperforming in procedural equity*: their governance gives developing nations a stronger voice, and they have pioneered innovations like local-currency lending and green bonds to tailor development finance to client needs. The result is quicker delivery of funds and development projects that are aligned with borrower countries' own strategies, thereby potentially increasing the effectiveness and ownership of development outcomes.

The SCO illustrates how a non-Western security platform can be effective on its own terms. Unlike NATO, the SCO does not bind members in a mutual defense pact, but it has excelled as a forum for collective security cooperation against shared threats. Its Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure has facilitated intelligence sharing and joint operations that yielded concrete results: SCO members together foiled dozens of terror plots and broke up extremist cells that endangered member states.

Security Cooperation: The SCO illustrates how a non-Western security platform can be effective on

its own terms. Unlike NATO, the SCO does not bind members in a mutual defense pact, but it has excelled as a forum for *collective security cooperation* against shared threats. Its Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure has facilitated intelligence sharing and joint operations that yielded concrete results: SCO members together foiled dozens of terror plots and broke up extremist cells that endangered member states (Eurasian Group, 2009). Such achievements speak to the SCO's value as a *pragmatic security provider* in Central Asia. The SCO also regularly convenes joint military exercises (e.g., the "Peace Mission" drills) and coordinates border security and counter-narcotics operations across its vast region (Anadolu Agency, 2024). These activities have built trust and interoperability among members, including historical rivals like India and Pakistan, in ways that would be impossible under exclusively Western alliances. Moreover, the SCO's consensual decision-making ensures *procedural equality*: each member, large or small, has an equal say in framing security initiatives, fostering a sense of shared ownership in regional stability. This inclusive approach has allowed the SCO to expand without provoking the hostile reactions that NATO's expansions have, thereby maintaining a cooperative atmosphere. In functional terms, the SCO has helped fill a security vacuum in Eurasia by tackling issues (like militancy and border management) that Western-centric institutions were less focused on. As a result, it provides an effective collective security complement to the global system, one that is rooted in regional cooperation rather than power projection. Its performance in quelling insurgent threats and managing conflicts (e.g., mediating between member states when tensions arise) underscores the viability of non-Western security models in a multipolar era.

International Finance: The emerging powers have also made significant strides in financial cooperation and de-dollarization, reducing reliance on Western-controlled payment systems. Within BRICS and beyond, there is a clear agenda to diminish the primacy of the US dollar in trade and investment, both to gain monetary autonomy and as a shield against unilateral sanctions. In practice, this agenda is advancing on multiple fronts. The BRICS New Development Bank has begun issuing loans in local currencies (about 20% of its portfolio is in Chinese Renminbi, for instance) to bypass dollar funding. Bilateral trade among these countries is increasingly conducted in national currencies, e.g. Russia and India trade oil for Rubles/Rupees, and China settles more purchases in Renminbi, thereby *chipping away at the dollar's dominance*. BRICS+ nations have been actively de-dollarizing their financial flows, as seen in a declining share of USD in their cross-border banking, debt, and reserve transactions over the past few years. For example, BRICS+ now control roughly *42% of global foreign exchange reserves*, and many members have pivoted those reserves toward gold and other currencies. They have also developed alternative payment networks to complement or eventually compete with SWIFT, the Western-controlled interbank messaging system. Russia's SPFS and China's CIPS have been linked to enable direct bank transfers outside SWIFT, and BRICS countries are exploring a joint payments platform and even central bank digital currencies (CBDC) for cross-border settlements. These efforts gained urgency after Western sanctions on Russia's financial sector, prompting not only Moscow and Beijing but also other BRICS partners to seek sanctions-proof transaction channels. While a new BRICS reserve currency remains a crucial proposal, the bloc's practical work, *increasing local-currency trade, launching digital payment pilots (like the m-CBDC "mBridge" project), and coordinating currency swap lines*, has begun to erode the dollar-centric system at the margins.

The development of cross-border payment systems within BRICS, alongside parallel initiatives like the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (for African integration), is creating a more multipolar financial infrastructure. These innovations mean that emerging economies can transact more freely on their own terms, reducing exposure to exchange-rate volatility and Western monetary tightening. In summary, although the dollar still reigns globally, the BRICS-led financial collaboration is *incrementally strengthening financial resilience* in the Global South, a performance marked by faster growth of non-dollar trade and the first real alternatives to a US-centric international financial system.

In the diplomatic arena, the shift to multipolarity is perhaps most evident in the rising prominence of the G20 relative to the G7. The G20, which brings together developed and developing powers, has effectively outperformed the G7 in terms of representational legitimacy and problem-solving capacity. While the G7 was once seen as the steering group for the world economy, it now represents a shrinking share of global output and population

Diplomacy and Global Governance: In the diplomatic arena, the shift to multipolarity is perhaps most evident in the rising prominence of the G20 relative to the G7. The G20, which brings together developed and developing powers, has effectively outperformed the G7 in terms of representational legitimacy and problem-solving capacity. While the G7 was once seen as the steering group for the world economy, it now represents a shrinking share of global output and population. It can be said that the G7 looks increasingly anachronistic in an era when countries like China, India, and Brazil are major economic engines. By contrast, the G20 includes all those emerging giants alongside the G7 members, giving it far greater representativeness. G20 countries account for roughly 85% of world GDP, 75% of global trade, and two-thirds of humanity, a scope that no exclusively Western forum can match. This inclusivity has translated into enhanced legitimacy: for example, on issues from financial stability to pandemic response, the G20's decisions carry weight because they reflect both North and South perspectives. Notably, during the 2008 global financial crisis, it was the G20 (not the G7) that coordinated the effective response, injecting liquidity and reforming financial rules with emerging economies at the table. The G20 has also eclipsed the G7 as the primary forum for discussing climate action, debt relief, and sustainable development, areas where developing nations' input is indispensable. In terms of diplomatic output, the G20 in recent years has brokered agreements on a global minimum tax, facilitated dialogue between great-power rivals, and, under Indonesia's and India's presidencies, produced joint communiqueés even amid geopolitical tensions, outcomes the G7 alone could not achieve. Furthermore, the African Union's admission as a permanent member of the G20 in 2023 has widened its representational breadth to 21 members (covering 55 additional countries), reinforcing the G20's claim to be the

"The G20, which brings together developed and developing powers, has effectively outperformed the G7 in terms of representational legitimacy and problem-solving capacity" (Photo: G20, 2024).

premier inclusive platform on global issues. All this underscores that a *more inclusive multilateralism* is replacing the old Western-centric diplomacy. Forums like the G20 (and BRICS, SCO, etc.) provide a voice to emerging powers and developing regions, improving the legitimacy and effectiveness of global governance by ensuring that decisions are not made by a narrow clique. Indeed, leaders from the Global South often note that the G20, despite its informal nature, appears a better-equipped forum than the G7 to navigate global challenges, precisely because it brings all key stakeholders to the table. The growing clout of such inclusive institutions is a performance indicator of the multipolar system: global decisions increasingly require consensus across East and West, North and South. In practical terms, initiatives like the G20's debt relief framework for poor nations or its coordination on vaccine distribution have filled gaps that the G7's limited membership could not address. Additionally, Keohane's concept of fragmented multilateralism explains BRICS and ASEAN's cooperation as decentralized, flexible networks (Morse & Keohane, 2014). These coalitions prioritize issue-based cooperation and functional interdependence, coordinating on specific domains (e.g., climate, trade) without formal hierarchical structures,

allowing diverse members to retain autonomy while advancing common goals. Similarly, non-state actors, including multinational corporations, NGOs, and international organizations, significantly influence the governance networks of BRICS, G20, and ASEAN. These actors shape policy agendas by advocating for issues like sustainable development, trade reforms, and climate action. Their expertise and advocacy amplify the voices of developing countries, fostering more inclusive and issue-focused cooperation within these multilateral frameworks.

The Future of Global Governance: From Hierarchy to Multipolar Networks

When we look at the broader picture, we see that in today's world, the focus of global governance has shifted from classic great-power rivalry to managing shared crises. Climate change, pandemic preparedness, digital technology, and financial stability now top the international agenda. As Arancha González notes, "today's defining global issues" include a rapid energy transition, preparing for the next pandemic, managing economic fragmentation, and designing governance for AI and other emerging challenges (CCG Update, 2024). This signals a move away from a singular, hierarchical order built for interstate conflict, toward networks of cooperation tailored to specific issues. In practice, states and other actors are collaborating in new ways even amid geopolitical tension. For example, after years of gridlock on climate, the UN's COP 28 (2023) agreed for the first time on language to transition away from fossil fuels and swiftly establish a loss-and-damage fund for vulnerable countries. Likewise, WHO member states in 2025 reached consensus on a draft Pandemic Agreement to strengthen global prevention and response; the UN chief hailed this as proof that multilateralism is alive and well and that nations can still work together on shared threats (WHO, 2025). In the digital realm, world leaders adopted a Global Digital Compact (2024) to close the digital divide and set human-rights-based AI standards, even calling for a global AI funding mechanism and an international scientific panel on AI akin to the IPCC. And on finance, groups like the G20 and IMF are reforming the global financial architecture: developing countries recently welcomed IMF updates that integrate climate and debt risks into lending frameworks, expanded use of Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) to support sustainability goals, and coordinated plans (MDB Roadmap) to make multilateral development banks more responsive to crises (IMF, n.d.).

These initiatives illustrate functional cooperation decoupled from power politics. Even as great-power rivalry and trade "decoupling" persist, states have repeatedly set aside their disputes to address transnational problems. Climate talks have drawn in both the U.S. and China despite their trade feud, and the pandemic treaty negotiations involved delegates from all regions working by consensus. In fact, recent analyses note that trade decoupling has simply produced multipolar clusters, deepening ties within blocs like the G7 and BRICS, rather than eliminating engagement. On global public goods such as health, environment, and digital infrastructure, countries increasingly cooperate through issue-based coalitions and frameworks. This pattern is a far cry from a single hegemon dictating policy; instead, it reflects a world where networked governance adapts flexibly to diverse challenges.

Underneath these trends lie enduring structural changes. Power in world affairs is dispersing, not coalescing under one authority. Many schol-

"Power in world affairs is dispersing, not coalescing under one authority
(Illustration: China Daily, 2024).

ars now describe an emerging "multiplex" or "poly-centric" order instead of a uniform hierarchy (Gaens et. al., 2023). In a multiplex world, there is no global hegemon. Instead, established and rising powers alike, from the U.S., EU, and China to India, Brazil, and regional blocs, operate through overlapping institutions and partnerships. Acharya's analogy of a multiplex cinema captures this: audiences may choose among different movies, but actors and narratives under one roof (Acharya, 2015). In practice, this means multiple coexisting centers of influence. For example, global economic and security leadership is shared across the G20, IMF, BRICS arrangements, regional associations (EU, ASEAN, African Union), and emerging minilateral formats (e.g. the Quad, Arctic Council, or digital alliances). Governance functions are also diffused: rule-making and implementation occur at global forums, regional bodies, and even private or civil-society platforms. Each issue may see different coalitions; the same country might be in one alliance on climate, another on cybersecurity, so authority is neither hierarchical nor static.

Regionalization is another key element of this networked governance. As global institutions face strains, regional and inter-regional clusters are taking on larger roles. In Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas alike, states are building institutions that address their specific needs while linking to the world system. In recent years, multilateral cooperation has become complex interregionalism, with entities like the EU forging tailored bilateral and minilateral ties as much as broad treaties. For example, the EU has deepened tech and security partnerships in Asia-Pacific and Africa (often in response to China's Belt & Road initiative), while African nations are advancing continental plans (like the African Continental Free Trade Area) and South–South cooperatives. In Asia, the notion of an Indo-Pacific super-region has emerged,

stitching together ASEAN, Pacific Island states, and East Asian powers into a strategic network. These interlinked clusters create a multi-layered order: global rules still exist, but their application and enforcement often run through regional forums, cross-border networks, and even public–private partnerships.

Overall, the evidence points toward a pluralistic, functionally differentiated network of governance rather than a revived single superstructure. Global leaders and experts increasingly accept that no country can unilaterally manage climate, health, or digital challenges. Instead, policy now flows through a tapestry of institutions: thematic bodies (like WHO and climate regimes), financial networks (IMF, MDBs, G20 processes), and regional organizations, all interwoven with civil society and the private sector. When WHO Director-General Tedros hailed the new pandemic treaty as proof that in our divided world, nations can still work together, he captured this spirit of shared purpose within diversity (European Council, 2021). In technical terms, order in the 21st century is being built on consent and cooperation across many nodes, rather than on command by any single power.

This emerging networked order has the potential to be more equitable and adaptive. By embedding voices from different regions and sectors, it can better represent varied needs and values. The new frameworks explicitly highlight inclusion and because this system is decentralized, it can respond more nimbly to change: if one approach fails, others can be tried in parallel. Of course, a multiplex order brings challenges, such as coordination and legitimacy, but by tolerating multiple norms and enabling tailored coalitions, it promises a global governance architecture that is more resilient than any single hierarchy could be. In sum, the future is likely a pluralistic network of networks, a true *multipolar* system, through which states and societies collectively tackle planetary challenges with both diversity and solidarity.

Conclusion

The global governance system is undergoing a profound shift away from the hierarchical, Western-dominated model established after World War II. Traditional institutions, especially those from the Bretton Woods system and Western security structures, are increasingly ill-equipped to address contemporary global challenges. Their failure to adapt to the complexities of a multipolar world has paved the way for regional blocs and institutions and flexible coalitions that are central to reshaping global governance. Institutions like BRICS, SCO, G20, and new development banks such as the AIIB and NDB offer viable alternatives that better reflect the needs of emerging powers and the Global South. These institutions are not merely replacing traditional power structures; they are creating new frameworks that promote inclusivity, equity, and diverse approaches to global issues such as climate change, pandemic preparedness, and development finance.

This article's findings contribute significantly to the literature by asserting that the future of global governance lies in multipolar networks rather than the unipolar, hierarchical systems of the past. While traditional institutions remain important, regional blocs and new institutions are increasingly taking center stage. This shift fundamentally alters the governance architecture to accommodate a more pluralistic and flexible approach. The evolving global system acknowledges that power is now distributed across various centers of influence, with regions such as Africa, Asia, and Latin

America no longer excluded from decision-making processes. This transition moves beyond the outdated Westphalian state model, offering a vision of governance that is more responsive to global challenges due to its diversity.

The theoretical implications are profound, challenging the long-standing assumption that Western liberalism is the ultimate framework for global governance. Instead of positioning the West as the sole arbiter of international norms, this article demonstrates how South-South cooperation and regionalism are creating alternative governance paradigms, thereby rebalancing the global order. These new approaches reflect a growing plurality of norms, where diverse governance models coexist, from state-centric systems like China's to regional integration efforts in the EU and AU. The article also highlights how new institutions, based on performance legitimacy, are gaining prominence, focusing on tangible results and diverse interests rather than structural hierarchy or historical precedence.

The policy implications are clear. First, there is an urgent need to reform existing institutions such as the UNSC, WTO, and IMF, which struggle to address the complexities of today's world. Reforms should focus on enhancing representation, improving decision-making efficiency, and incorporating emerging powers into leadership roles. For example, expanding the UNSC to include Global South countries would increase the legitimacy of the UN system. In fact, while avoiding giving up their veto power would be an expected and understandable reaction from P5 members, reforming the UNSC structure in a way that it will have at least 1 member with veto power from each continent can be seen as an agreeable solution. This may also accelerate the role of the regional blocs and allow regional bloc members to overcome their regional problems faster in order to have a common veto power. Another reform that will enhance the representativeness of the UNSC council can be that if organizations like the African Union, BRICS, SCO, etc. were given a veto power as a one-vote structure applied based on their internal decision. In this scenario, however, members who have both the veto power as their own at the UNSC and who also have influence and membership at these organizations should be excluded from the internal voting system of the organization to prevent dual voting. Similarly, reforming trade and financial institutions to better represent developing countries would enhance inclusiveness in global economic governance. Second, the success of coalitions like BRICS and the G77+China underscores the growing importance of South-South cooperation and inter-bloc diplomacy. These alliances are actively constructing new norms and institutions to serve the collective interests of the Global South, particularly in climate finance, de-dollarization, and global development. Policymakers should support these alliances, as they are crucial in building a more equitable and sustainable global order.

In conclusion, this article shifts the focus of global governance discussions from a static, hierarchical worldview to one that embraces the dynamic, issue-driven cooperation of a multipolar networked system. The findings suggest that regional institutions and coalitions are not merely supplementary but foundational to a new, pluralistic world order. The theoretical and policy implications highlight a future where governance is decentralized, diverse, and responsive to the needs of the global population. Future research on regional cooperation dynamics, the role of emerging powers, and institutional reform will be essential to understanding the trajectory of global governance in the 21st century.

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Research on the Islamic System and the Democratization of International Relations

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Research on the Islamic System and the Democratization of International Relations

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore the significance of the Islamic System to the democratization of international relations. In the current multipolar era, the Islamic world represents a potentially significant balancing force alongside China, the United States, Russia, and Europe. Through a comparative study with the Tributary System and the Treaty System, the article confirms the existence of the Islamic System as a model of international relations. In Chinese academic circles, the authors of this paper are among the first scholars to posit the actual existence of the Islamic System. This paper argues that the Islamic System is a model of international relations dominated by Islamic powers (historically, empires, and in the modern context, leading states), with Islam serving as the common ideology within the system. Historically, its external relations were characterized by territorial expansion in the early stage and primarily by trade and missionary activities in the later stage. The Islamic System demonstrated remarkable longevity. Since the late 19th century, efforts to revive the Islamic System have persisted, and its re-establishment holds great significance for the democratization of international relations.

Keywords: democratization, international relations, islamic system, treaty System, tributary system.

Introduction

THE RAPID RISE OF CHINA HAS SPARKED growing interest within the field of international relations (IR) in the tributary system of East Asian history, also known as the Chinese world order (Zhang & Barry, 2012: 4). Regarding the vast regions of Asia, Africa, and Europe (especially West Asia, North Africa, South Asia, Central Asia, and southeastern Europe) deeply influenced by Islamic culture, a question remains: whether a distinct model of international relations, different from those rooted in Confucian and Christian cultures, existed in these regions remains a subject of academic debate. This article argues that such a previously under-recognized model does exist and can be termed the Islamic System. This paper holds that the Islamic System is a model of international relations dominated by Islamic powers (states); in this regard, it is more similar to the Tributary System and significantly different from the Treaty System, because the characteristics of the Treaty System are institutionalized arrangements and a balance of power among multiple major powers. Nineteenth-century international peace and stability derived mainly from systemic changes, reflected in major institutionalized arrangements and practices that diverged from the 18th-century norm (Schroeder, 1986: 2). The Islamic System takes Islam as the common ideology within the system. Historically, its communication with the outside world was primarily based on territorial expansion in the early stages and later shifted to trade and missionary activities.

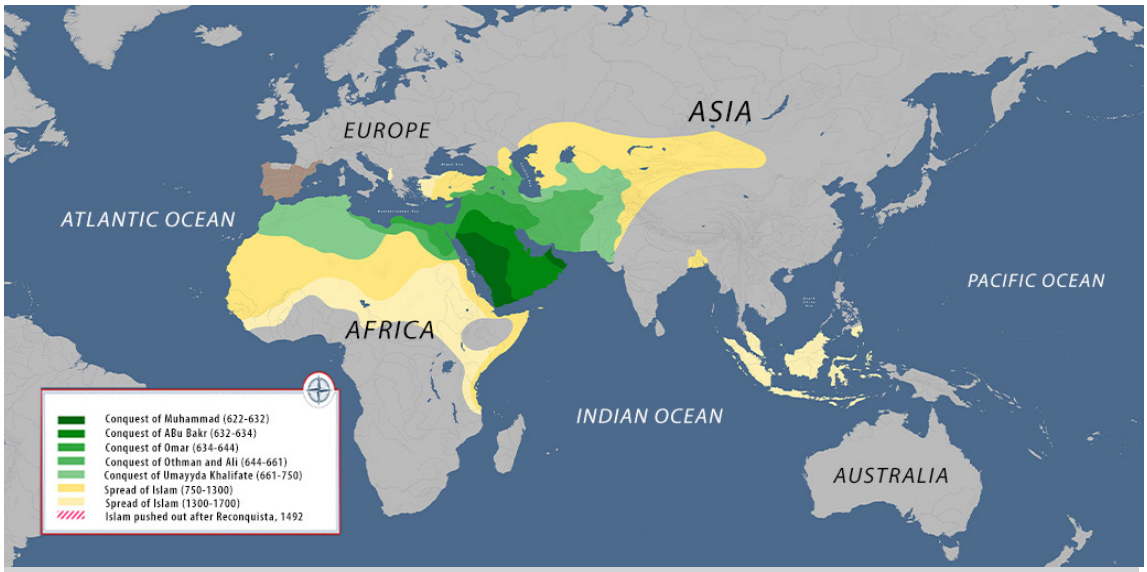
The Islamic System existed stably for a long time. This resonates with William Callahan's viewpoint. It can be posited as an Asian civilization with radically different features from an equally essentialized West (Perdue, 2015: 1002).

The fact remains that the West acknowledges the existence of the Tributary System but often rejects the Islamic System.

The actual existence of the Islamic System is attributable to its possession of the basic elements constituting an international relations model, including: 1) The existence of a dominant power, such as the Arab Empire and the Ottoman Empire. 2) Countries within the system sharing the same or similar cultural backgrounds. 3) Continuous and historically inherited methods of external communication, akin to John K. Fairbank's evaluation of the Tributary System's mode: "The Chinese empire consistently sought by coercion or appeasement to subjugate or make friends of its non-Chinese neighbors within and without the Empire" (Taylor, 1969: 838). 4) A high degree of stability over a significant period; 300 years might be a suitable time frame, as only through sufficient duration can a model's characteristics and underlying patterns be clearly identified. Take the Tributary System as an example. Within it, the status of members was not equal, yet it lasted for more than 2,000 years. Historical records indicate that the Tributary System, as a means of conducting foreign relations, originated in the Western Han dynasty [202 BCE–8 CE] (Chen, 2019: 173). China, as the most powerful and advanced country in the region, played a decisive role in maintaining regional peace and trade, providing public goods to the system, and governing it. In tributary trade, China pursued the principle of "giving more and getting less," which greatly benefited other members. Simultaneously, China also acted as a balancer of the system (Acharya & Buzan, 2010: 36).

However, the fact remains that the West acknowledges the existence of the Tributary system but rejects the Islamic system. Multiple factors lead the West to pursue this double standard. First of all, the historical roots of the single political-religious community created by Muhammad have endured to this day, inevitably leading to fierce conflict between Muslims and Christians for more than a decade (Pagden, 2018: 136). Under this historical sway, Western academic circles widely maintain that the revival of long-slumbering Islamic civilization poses a profound threat to the West. In his book The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality? J. L. Esposito (1999: 2-3) pointed out that academic analysts and political commentators across Israel and the United States consistently sound alarms about the grave global threat that Islamic fundamentalism poses to the West.

Among the scholars who hold this view, Samuel Huntington is a particularly representative figure. In his book The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order (2010: 188), he emphasized that, as long as Islam is still Islam (it certainly is) and the West is still the West (there are many doubts about this), the fundamental conflict between these two great civilizations and lifestyles will continue to determine their relationship in the future, even as it has been for the past 1400 years. In his paper The Root of Muslim Rage, Bernard Lewis (1990: 48) pointed out that, like other religions, Islam has experienced times when it has



"The Islamic System existed stably for a long time". Spread of Islam (Map: OER Project, n.d.).

inspired hatred and violence among some of its followers: "Unfortunately, a portion—though by no means all or even most—of the Muslim world is currently undergoing such a phase, and much, though again not all, of this hatred is directed toward us". The hostility of the Islamic world towards the West is mainly due to the West's historical advantage in bilateral relations since the 18th century. In his book The Middle East: 2000 Years of History from the Rise of Christianity to the Present Day, Bernard Lewis (2000: 18) stuck to his point of view. He thought that many people, including Islamic conservatives and radicals, seek to continue and expand this reversal. In their view, the influence of Western civilization represents the greatest disaster in the Middle East's history, surpassing even the devastating Mongol invasions of the 13th century. However, the efforts to reform in the Islamic world have failed. None of these attempts worked, though, and the humiliation borne out by that reversal process gave way to the perceived hatred on the part of Middle Easterners towards the West (Keles, 2004, p. 249). Many Western scholars hold similar views and will not elaborate on them.

Conversely, Islamic scholars stand in diametrical opposition to the Western perspective. They hold that Islam embodies a great civilization, and its historical grandeur entitles the Islamic world to a prominent position within the global order. Tariq Ramadan, a towering Islamic scholar of our time, in his book The Life Story of Prophet Muhammad and Its Practical Significance (2014: 268), firmly believes that Islam is the last chance for humanity to follow the right path. In this regard, Seyyed Hossein Nasr (2008: 202) explained this in his book Islam. He believed that the significance of Islam to today's humanity lies in its spiritual and intellectual orientation, inner prayer and meditation methods, and the possibility of following a spiritual path to God.

Compared with the situation in the Western world, the inner and intellectual aspects of Islam have not been attenuated or marginalized. Yusuf al-Qaradawi criticized the West in his Moderate Thinking; he stated that our concerns regarding this culture, much like those of sincere Western critics, stem from the fact that its benefits extend to all people. Yet, its potential harms pose risks to the entire world. (Zhou, 2009: 29) Edward Said insisted in his book Orientalism (1999: 147) that, if temporary society continues to advance, Europe will experience renewal through its engagement with Asia.

Islamic System in the Mode of International Relations

Models of international relations, such as the Tributary System and the Treaty System, are typically characterized by the presence of a leading country, a shared cultural background, consistent methods of interstate interaction, and long-term structural stability. It is worth noting that among these factors, the dominant country is particularly crucial. This aligns with Charles P. Kindleberger's viewpoint: Hegemonic stability theory explains international regimes as the creation of a single great power in the world system. Determining whether the Islamic System qualifies as a distinct model of international relations necessitates rigorous historical and structural analysis rather than speculative assertions (Hong, 2013).

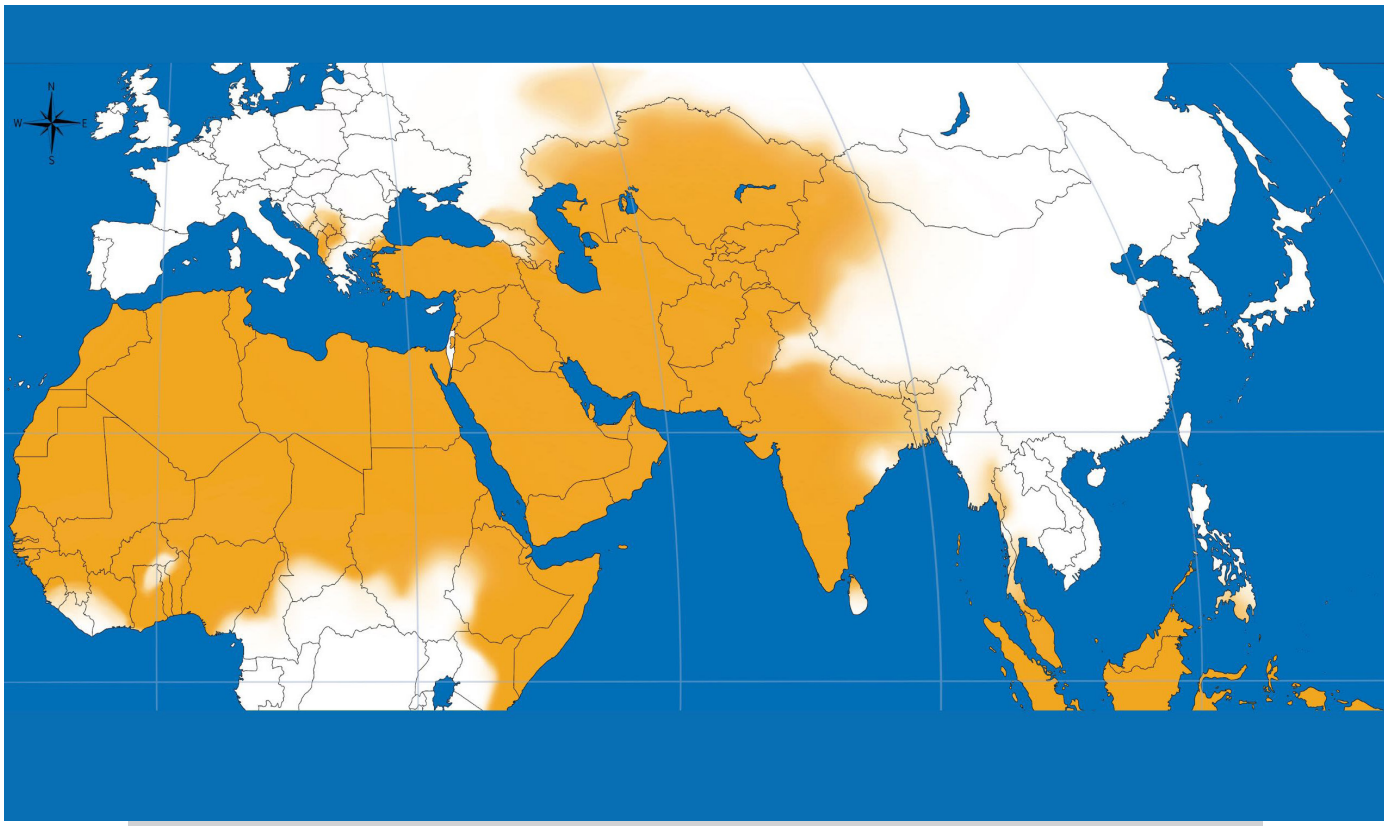
Leading Powers in the Islamic International Relations Model

Historically, the configuration of international politics has been shaped predominantly by major powers. States such as Cambodia, Djibouti, Bahrain, and San Marino have had limited agency in shaping global political norms (Daddow, 2013: 131). In contrast, the Tributary System was led by Imperial China. At the same time, the Treaty System emerged from the influence of Western powers, including Britain, France, Germany, Russia, the United States, and Japan.

Similarly, within the Islamic context, great powers such as the Arab Empire (7th–13th centuries) and the Ottoman Empire (1299–1923) played pivotal roles. Both empires were strategically situated at the crossroads of Eastern and Western civilizations, exerting significant influence on trans-regional political and cultural exchanges. On one hand, these major empires (the Arab and Ottoman Empires) created their own unique civilizations. On the other hand, their existence ensured the coexistence and mutual exchange of multiple cultures, connecting numerous cultural centers to form larger cultural regions (Wang, 2006: 73). Neglecting the systemic features of Islamic international relations—as vividly manifested through these empires—fundamentally undermines a comprehensive analytical framework grounded in historical materialism.

Similar Cultural Background

Every model of international relations is inherently linked to a specific cultural background. For example, the Tributary System is deeply rooted in Chinese or Confucian culture, whereas the Treaty System emerges from Western Christian traditions, commercial principles, and the rule of law. This shared cultural foundation enables countries within these systems



"The existence of Islamic empires ensured the coexistence and mutual exchange of multiple cultures, connecting numerous cultural centers to form larger cultural regions". Islamic World Today (Map: Oxford University, n.d.).

to foster mutual understanding and adhere to established communication norms. Likewise, the Islamic System has a clearly defined cultural background centered on Islamic principles. Even though the Turks conquered Arab lands and established the Ottoman Empire, the core cultural framework of the system remained distinctly Islamic.

Continuity in Interstate Communication

A continuous and historically inherited mechanism of international communication is essential for recognizing any enduring model of international relations. For example, although the Tributary System underwent evolution over thousands of years, its core remained consistent: the primary means of communication was Tribute Trade. Under the Treaty System, relationships between countries are formalized through treaties. Since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, these treaties have served as crucial instruments of communication among Western nations and between the West and other global regions. Today, international law and treaties still form a foundational element of international relations.

The Islamic System also embodied distinct and continuous methods of external communication—one prominent aspect involved military expansion. The Qur'an contains passages urging believers to defend their faith, with the concept of Jihad constituting a significant part of Islamic doctrine. Consequently, extensive external expansion is observed both before and after the consolidation of the Arab and Ottoman Empires, resulting in the establishment of vast empires that spanned Asia, Africa, and Europe. During the Umayyad dynasty, "Arabs had now become the masters of a huge tranche of the civilized world, from Portugal to the Pamirs and from Aden to Azerbaijan" (Mackintosh-Smith, 2019: 232). However, military expansion should not be overemphasized to the exclusion of other factors, as Muhammad is revered as a prophet who laid the foundations for a peaceful social order, though the early expansion of the Islamic state was often military in nature.

The second method was peaceful, conducted primarily through commercial trade, cultural exchange, and missionary activities. Taking West Africa as an example, "the spread of Islam in West Africa is inseparable from the activities of caravans," and "Muslim businessmen had ideological exchanges with residents through commodity exchange." Subsequently, Muslim business people often intermarried with local elite and prominent families. Many tribal chiefs converted to Islam due to these marital and kinship ties, thereby influencing tribal members. In this context, after the 9th century, Islam spread very rapidly in the inland areas of West Africa (Ren & Jin, 2006: 348–349).

Long-Term Stability of the International Relations Model

For a model of international relations to be recognized, it requires not only elements such as great powers and communication methods, but also long-term stability. This stability is essential because the creation and effectiveness of a model emerge through a cumulative process. For instance, the Tributary System evolved over more than 2,000 years, while since the Westphalian system was established in 1648, the West has dominated the order of the modern world (Mei Zhaorong, 2020: 11).

In the case of the Islamic System, its two most prominent powers—the Arab Empire and the Ottoman Empire—collectively engaged in state-building and system leadership for well over 600 years. Throughout the transition from the Arab Empire to the Ottoman Empire, the cultural foundations and primary means of communication within the system remained relatively stable, demonstrating a longevity that arguably surpasses that of the Western Treaty System to date. The spread of Islam in West Africa, closely related to commercial activities, illustrates this continuity. From the 8th century to the 13th century, Muslim political influence gradually grew stronger, leading to the establishment of the Islamic Mali Empire on the foundations of the Kingdom of Ghana (Jin, 1990: 404-405).

It is, therefore, inconsistent to acknowledge a unique communication mode in the West while negating the existence of the Islamic System. In the contemporary context, Muslim-majority countries are dispersed across Asia, Africa, and

Europe, with significant Muslim communities in the Americas. These countries hold essential roles on the global stage, often situated in critical strategic regions such as the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Central Asia. Although they have not unified as a single bloc in the international arena, their collective interests often bind them on various issues, creating an impression of unity (Lahoud & Johns, 2005: 39). For example, on April 5, 2024, the United Nations Human Rights Council voted to adopt a draft resolution calling on all countries to implement an arms embargo against Israel. Pakistan proposed this draft resolution on behalf of 55 of the 56 United Nations members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

Characteristics and Evolution of the Islamic System

To identify a distinct model of international relations in world history, it is necessary not only to analyze its constituent elements but also to identify its defining characteristics that differentiate it from established models.

Characteristics of the Islamic System

First, the Islamic System was deeply embedded in Islamic religious and civilizational values. Like the Tributary System and the Treaty System, it possessed distinct structural characteristics. The Tributary System, as the name implies, was centered on the Central Plains Dynasty in China, where neighboring states acknowledged China's suzerainty and sent regular tribute missions. Its principles of interaction emphasized hierarchical relationships and a hub-and-spoke network, governed by the logic of "giving more and receiving less"; that is, the value of gifts bestowed by the Chinese emperor was greater than the value of tribute received (Fairbank, 2010: 69).

In contrast, the Treaty System is based on the concept of sovereign states and pursues the principle of "sovereign equality." Before the collapse of the colonialist system, this principle was primarily pursued among Western states themselves but was not consistently applied in their interactions with other regions. The system is defined by its focus on the nation-state framework rather than a dynastic-state system. International interactions are formalized and regulated through treaties, and participating countries are obligated to adhere to these agreements. Failure to comply with treaty obligations can result in penalties. For example, in 1923, due to Germany's refusal to pay the reparations stipulated in the Treaty of Versailles, France and Belgium sent troops to occupy the Ruhr region (Gaillard, 2000: 534).

Islam is a religion deeply engaged with worldly affairs and political life. Fundamentally, Islam is not only a religion but also a social system and way of life, which inevitably influences all aspects of the Islamic System. During the Abbasid dynasty, numerous independent or semi-independent dynasties arose. In managing their mutual relations, these entities often relied on the legitimizing umbrella of Islam. For instance, the Persians, who played a crucial role in the Abbasids' rise to power, leveraged the authority of the Caliph to enhance their own influence before ultimately asserting their autonomy. Similarly, the Turkic slave-soldiers (ghilman) used by the Caliphs eventually became power brokers in their own right (Peng, 2002: 57–58).

Foreign expansion, cultural exchanges, and even commercial trade were imbued with religious significance. Thus, it can be stated that the Islamic System was founded on Islam and was characterized by religious expansion, which could occur through peaceful propagation of the faith or through other means.

Second, the Islamic System often resembled an internal imperial order more than a system of fully independent states. Both the Arab Empire and the Ottoman Empire were established through military expansion, resulting in a heterogeneous socio-political composition across their vast territories. Due to varying levels of development and the widespread use of decentralized feudal or provincial structures, neither empire achieved complete, centralized political unification. For instance, after the 9th century, the Arab Empire witnessed the rise of multiple semi-autonomous dynasties, including the Tahirids, Saffarids, Tulunids, Samanids, and Fatimids. "As we shall see, some of those Arabs at the edges gained in strength, forming the nuclei of their own new systems" (Tim Mackintosh-Smith, 2019: 307). The Ottoman Empire was no exception, with weak connections between its nominally subordinate provinces. On the surface, the Ottoman Empire was centralized, but in practice, it was a decentralized entity. The empire lacked both close internal economic unity and national unity. In essence, it was a mixture of different countries and ethnic groups united by conquerors through force (Peng, 2002: 162).

In contrast, both the Tributary and Treaty Systems primarily governed the relationships between distinct sovereign polities, even if those relationships were highly asymmetric. For example, the Tributary System structured China's relations with Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Siam, and Ryukyu. At the same time, the Treaty System defined interactions among major powers, such as Britain, France, Russia, and Germany, as well as with smaller states like Belgium and Luxembourg.

During the Arab Empire, the commanders of the garrisons in various places often served as the first governors of the Caliphate government. They were both local military and administrative leaders, as well as imams of Islam, responsible for organizing religious worship and delivering the Friday sermon.

Therefore, compared to the Tributary System and the Treaty System, the Islamic System functioned more like a hierarchical, intra-imperial order, where external relations were often direct extensions of internal political dynamics. Although the imperial political structure was formally a centralized authoritarian system, due to extremely uneven social development, the central government, led by the Caliph, often exercised lax control over various regions, especially remote provinces, which fostered strong centrifugal forces within local governments (Xu, 1993: 94).

Third, political legitimacy within the empires was fundamentally rooted in a system of theocracy. Islam is not only a faith but also a social and political system, as well as a way of life with universal guiding significance (Stavrianos, 2005: 222). Whether the Caliph of the Arab Empire or the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, these rulers combined political authority with religious leadership, positioning themselves as agents or defenders of God's law (Allah). They reinforced

"In 1529 and again in 1683, Ottoman forces reached the gates of Vienna, instilling widespread fear across Europe. However, the zenith of the empire also marked the onset of its long-term decline". A scene from the siege of 1683 (Photo: Warhistorynetwork, 2002).

their control over the populace and local political entities through both secular and religious means. The same principle applied to provincial governance. During the Arab Empire, the commanders of the garrisons in various places often served as the first governors of the Caliphate government. They were both local military and administrative leaders, as well as imams of Islam, responsible for organizing religious worship and delivering the Friday sermon (Peng, 2002: 57-58). By contrast, Europe, beginning with the Renaissance and Reformation, gradually separated religious authority from state power. Subsequently, Christianity gradually ceded secular power to the nation-state, focusing instead on the spiritual realm, so that the state under the Treaty System was no longer legitimized by the "divine right of kings" but rather by "popular sovereignty." In East Asia, although Buddhism, Daoism, and Shintoism, among others, had a profound influence on culture, they never gained control over state power, even during the heyday of Buddhist influence.

The Historical Evolution of the Islamic System

Following its consolidation, the Ottoman Empire launched large-scale expansion campaigns in three geographic directions—Southeastern Europe, Western Asia, and North Africa. In 1529 and again in 1683, Ottoman forces reached the gates of Vienna, instilling widespread fear across Europe. However, the zenith of the empire also marked the onset of its long-term decline. Most historians have portrayed the post-Suleimanic Ottoman world as one of decline, with their evidence principally military. It is frequently argued that the Ottoman navy never fully regained its power or prestige following the defeat at Lepanto in 1571, and that the Ottoman army never reestablished its former strength and ferocity after the prolonged conflicts against the Habsburg and Safavid empires, which concluded the sixteenth century and resulted in the stalemated Peace of Zsitvatorok in 1606 (Goffman, 2002: 192).

The failure of the second Ottoman siege of Vienna in 1683 signaled a decisive reversal of its strategic fortunes in Europe. As recorded in a diary from the besieged city, defenders had reason "to expect to complete a more glorious and vast conquest at this time, to promote the 'great cause of God', enhance the prestige of the Austrian royal family and soothe many Christians groaning under the tyranny of pagans," seeing this as merely the beginning where "Christianity may conquer and unify the world, Islam itself may decline, and countless barbarians will soon rejoin the real 'church of God'" (Wheatcroft, 2010: 318).

The Treaty of Karlowitz represented a final and decisive turning point in the military balance between the Ottoman Empire and Europe. It was the first agreement signed between the Ottoman Empire and a coalition of Western powers, marking the first formal acknowledgement of an Ottoman defeat (Turnbull, 2003: 91). The Ottoman Empire transitioned from a period of territorial expansion to one characterized by significant territorial losses.

In the wake of Suleiman the Magnificent's era, Western European society underwent a remarkable transformation through the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution. In stark contrast, the Ottoman Empire experienced relative stagnation in both social and economic development. One region was rapidly evolving and advancing, while the other remained largely static, resulting in an ever-widening gap between them. This divergence led to a Treaty System that increasingly challenged the Ottoman Empire and disrupted its regional order. The Treaty of Karlowitz (1699) marked a turning point, as it was the first significant instance where the Ottoman Empire ceded territory to a coalition of European powers.

By the 19th century, European colonial ambitions extended aggressively into India, Africa, and the Middle East. Territories historically under Islamic influence fell under European domination, culminating in the partition of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire following World War I (Esposito, 1999: 552). As a traditional empire, the demise of the Ottoman Empire also marked the effective end of the historical Islamic System.

The first stage involved the direct clash between the Islamic System and the expanding Treaty System. The Treaty of Karlowitz represented a final and decisive turning point in the military balance between the Ottoman Empire and Europe. It was the first agreement signed between the Ottoman Empire and a coalition of Western powers, marking the first formal acknowledgement of an Ottoman defeat (Turnbull, 2003: 91). The Ottoman Empire transitioned from a period of territorial expansion to one characterized by significant territorial losses. As the strength and ambitions of Western powers grew, the Empire entered a period of sustained retreat and national humiliation. The French invasion of Egypt under Napoleon in 1798 marked the beginning of a

"The Treaty of Karlowitz (1699) marked a turning point, as it was the first significant instance where the Ottoman Empire ceded territory to a coalition of European powers" (Photo: Wikimedia Commons, n.d.).

new era of direct foreign military interventions. The territorial and economic pressure from Europe further exacerbated deep-seated internal contradictions within the Ottoman Empire, resulting in severe governance issues and a social crisis.

From the outset of the collision with the Treaty System, the Islamic System demonstrated weaknesses, presaging the increasingly difficult situation it would face. The Ottoman Empire, like other early modern empires such as the Holy Roman Empire and Spain, struggled to keep pace with the latest military technology and organizational reforms; when their opponents modernized, they fell behind (Boot, 2011: 71). After the 19th century, with the intensifying invasion of foreign powers and the rising tide of independence movements in the Balkans, Arabia, and North Africa, the rule of the Ottoman Empire became increasingly precarious. Struggles in Greece, Serbia, and Egypt significantly shook the foundations of the empire. By the end of the 19th century, the rise of Arab nationalism presented the Ottoman Empire with even greater internal challenges. Consequently, by the early 20th century, the Ottoman Empire was in an irreversible decline.

The second stage (18th-19th century) focused on struggles for self-preservation and reform within the Islamic System. In an effort to save the declining Empire, a series of reforms were undertaken over more than 120 years, from 1792 when Selim III initiated the Nizam-i Jedid (New Order) reforms, until 1914, just before it entered into World War I (Wang, 2023: 49). The promoters of reform included Sultans Selim III, Mahmud II, Abdulmejid I (architect of the Tanzimat), and Abdul Aziz; they initiated a movement aimed at preserving the empire from collapse and ensuring its survival. However, similar to the Self-Strengthening Movement in late Qing China, these measures ultimately failed to fundamentally reverse the empire's fortunes. On the eve of World War I, the Young Turks government allied the Empire with the Central Powers in an attempt to resist aggression from Britain, France, Italy, and Russia. This decision proved fatal. As a result, the Ottoman Empire was dismantled, and the Islamic System that had lasted for more than a millennium effectively came to an end.

However, throughout modern and contemporary history, relevant states, nations, and political movements have never entirely abandoned efforts to revive or reimagine a unified Islamic political order. Guided by various ideologies, they have attempted to reproduce the glory of the Islamic System in different ways. Over the past two centuries, "revitalizing the Islamic community to effectively meet the challenges of the modern world and the international system ruled by the West has always been an important theme in Muslim thought and writings" (Haddad, Voll, & Esposito, 1991: 4).

Revival of the Islamic System and Democratization of International Relations since the 19th Century

During the 19th century, European powers increasingly coveted Ottoman territories, accelerating their aggression. Simultaneously, independence movements within the empire gained momentum, plunging the "Sick Man of Europe" into a profound crisis of internal rebellion and foreign invasion. In an attempt to save the crumbling empire, Pan-Turkism, which first emerged among Turkic peoples in Russia, found receptive ground among Ottoman elites. Almost concurrently, Arab nationalism began to rise in Greater Syria to establish a unified Arab state. This movement experienced three peaks in the 20th century: after World War I, after World War II, and during the Nasserist era, all sharing the common goal of Arab national rejuvenation. After the 1960s, following the setbacks of secular Arab nationalism and inter-Arab strife, Pan-Islamism and Islamist movements gained prominence, hoping to rebuild international and regional order under the banner of Islam. After the Cold War, Turkey actively revived the ideologies of Pan-Turkism and Neo-Ottomanism. Under the influence of Neo-Ottomanist thought, the establishment of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (Turkic Council) in 2009 provided Turkey with an international organization to exert influence in Eurasia. Through this organization, Turkey has pursued practical cooperation with Central Asian countries in various fields, including the economy, trade, transportation, customs, and others, steadily expanding its influence (Yang, 2021: II).

Efforts to Revive the Islamic System since the 19th Century

First, the Ottoman Empire and efforts to preserve the Islamic System. Pan-Turkism emerged in the 1880s, originating among Turkic intellectuals in Crimea and other regions within the Russian Empire, and was subsequently adopted by some scholars and officials within the Ottoman Empire. Subsequently, the ruling Committee of Union and Progress (Young Turks) actively promoted Pan-Turkism and strongly supported various Pan-Turkist activities. During World War I, the Young Turks government joined the Central Powers, hoping, with German assistance, to resist threats from Russia and Britain; the realization of Pan-Turkist ambitions became one of their goals. After Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) came to power, he pragmatically renounced all foreign imperial ambitions and the ideologies of Ottomanism and Pan-Islamism, deliberately confining Turkish national aspirations to the borders stipulated in the Treaty of Lausanne (Huang, 2002: 187). To consolidate the newly established secular nation-state, Kemal implemented policies restricting the activities of Pan-Turkists. In 1926, he suppressed them on charges of subverting the Republic, which severely impacted the Pan-Turkist movement and ushered in a period of decline. Concurrently, Kemal enforced a strict principle of secularization (laïcité) and carried out a series of radical reforms in the Republic of Turkey (Huang, 2002: 195).

"Independence movements within the Ottoman empire gained momentum, plunging the 'Sick Man of Europe' into a profound crisis of internal rebellion and foreign invasion". Members of the Native Bedouin Camel Cavalry in the Arab Revolt against the Ottoman Empire during 1st World War (Photo: History Collection, 2017).

Secondly, the rise of Arab nationalism and the reconstruction of the Islamic System came to the fore. After the 16th century, most Arab regions fell under Ottoman rule, but Arab intellectuals and leaders never completely abandoned the dream of establishing a unified nation-state. The Arab nationalism that emerged in the late 19th century contained a distinct ideal of Arab unity. The outbreak of World War I made Arab nationalists see an opportunity to establish a unified Arab state. Sharif Hussein of Mecca entered into the McMahon–Hussein Correspondence (1915-1916) with Britain, which promised support for Arab independence after the war. However, the secret Sykes–Picot Agreement (1916) between Britain and France, which partitioned the Ottoman Arab territories, and the Balfour Declaration (1917), which supported a "national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine, rendered the establishment of a unified Arab state impossible. Arabs reacted with profound bitterness upon discovering Britain's duplicity (Barr, 2018: 3).

After World War II, Arab countries were divided into two camps: "radical" and "conservative," based on their foreign policy orientations and political systems. To counter the Arab nationalism represented by radical states (e.g., Egypt under Nasser, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq; He Zhilong, 2009: 234),

Following World War II, the Arab nationalist movement experienced a resurgence, and calls for Arab unity grew louder. Against this backdrop, in 1944, seven Arab countries signed the Alexandria Protocol in Egypt. In March 1945, the Charter of the League of Arab States came into effect, marking the establishment of the Arab League. This event represented a significant step toward reconstructing a regional system led by Arab nations, echoing aspects of the historical Islamic System. However, it is worth noting that this was an attempt by Arab states to revive an Arab-led regional order, safeguarding Arab interests in the post-war international system, based primarily on Arab nationalism and intergovernmental cooperation, rather than on an explicitly Islamic governance model. Later, with the rise of Nasserism in Egypt and Ba'athist Pan-Arab nationalism in Iraq and Syria, efforts to rebuild a unified Arab entity were practiced across the Middle East. These movements achieved significant successes in resisting imperialist influence and confronting Zionism, including Egypt's successful nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956. From 1961 to 1971, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and South Yemen gained independence from British rule in succession. However, due to intensifying inter-Arab rivalries (e.g., between republican and monarchical camps) and the devastating defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the project of rebuilding a unified Arab order under the banner of secular nationalism entered a deep trough after the 1970s. With the perceived failure of the secular nationalist state model in delivering both domestic prosperity and foreign policy success, sub-state and supra-state identities, particularly political Islam, began to revive and seek influence (Tibi, 2002: 136). Taking Egypt as an example, by the late 1980s, there were approximately 13,000 officially registered non-governmental organizations providing social services, including

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, for example, plays a crucial role in enabling Islamic countries to adopt common positions on global issues and protect their shared interests. Extraordinary Arab and Islamic Summit 11 November 2024, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Photo: OIC, 2024).

those for women and children, social assistance, culture, education, academia, and charity. More than one-third of these were effectively under the influence or control of the Muslim Brotherhood (Ha, 2019: 1704).

Third, Pan-Islamism and the reconstruction of the Islamic System. After World War II, Arab countries were divided into two camps: "radical" and "conservative," based on their foreign policy orientations and political systems. To counter the Arab nationalism represented by radical states (e.g., Egypt under Nasser, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq; He Zhilong, 2009: 234), conservative monarchies led by Saudi Arabia and Jordan began actively promoting Pan-Islamism. Pan-Islamism advocates that all Muslim countries and peoples unite, ultimately aiming to establish a unified "Islamic Ummah" or Caliphate implementing Sharia Law. Saudi Arabia, in particular, aspired to become the leader of Islamic countries and the spiritual homeland for Muslims worldwide, leveraging not only its vast oil wealth but also its custody of Islam's two holiest cities, Mecca and Medina. Mamdouh Sabishi (2015: 155) stated that "Mecca, located in western Saudi Arabia, is the center of the Islamic world". With Saudi sponsorship, the Muslim World League (MWL) was founded in 1962, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC, now the Organization of Islamic Cooperation) in 1970. The establishment of these organizations represented a significant institutional manifestation of unity within the Islamic world. Together, they play a key role in enabling Islamic countries to articulate shared positions on global issues and safeguard their interests.

Furthermore, they constitute an essential component of the post-World War II trend toward world multipolarization, playing a role in challenging the existing Western-dominated international political and economic order and positioning the Islamic world as a distinct pole. The Islamic world's ability to be considered one pole in a multipolar pattern stems mainly from its broadly shared stance on issues like Palestine, which often manifests as an anti-Western hegemonic tendency, fostering a sense of collective identity. Some geopolitical theorists, such as Russia's Alexander Dugin, have proposed a multipolar world order comprising several major civilizations, including a unified Islamic world as one of the seven proposed poles alongside the West, China, Russia, India, Africa, and Latin America (Li, 2023).

The militant interpretation of "Jihad," somewhat marginal after the classical period, was significantly revived during the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan (1979-1989), where it received encouragement and support from the United States and its allies, contributing to the resurgence of a transnational, militant Pan-Islamism (Noorani, 2002: 12).

Fourth, the rise of Islamic Revivalism and the reconstruction of the Islamic System. As a concept within Islam, revival (Tajdid) is not a new concept; it is an inherent tradition in Islamic history, reflecting the belief that the Muslim community must periodically return to the sources of the faith for renewal. In the Islamic philosophy of history, human history is often seen as a process of constantly reviving ideal traditions (Wang, 2015: 53). After the 1970s, triggered by the trauma of the 1967 Arab defeat, the failure of the 1973 war to achieve complete political objectives, and mounting domestic problems in many Muslim countries (e.g., wealth inequality, corruption, unemployment), widespread disillusionment with secular nationalist regimes grew. Many placed their hopes in a return to the Qur'an and the early Islamic model, aspiring to establish a more just and egalitarian society, thus forming the social foundation for the Islamic revival movement. The actions taken in pursuit of this goal can also be seen, in a broad sense, as efforts to reconstruct a modern Islamic system. Contemporary Islamist movements can be categorized into three main types: The first consists of state-led Islamization policies, represented by Iran after the 1979 Revolution and Sudan under al-Bashir. The second comprises opposition movements operating within predominantly Muslim countries, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria. These groups, although not holding state power, exert significant social and political influence, often through anti-government activism and the provision of social services. The third category is transnational extremist/jihadist movements represented by Al-Qaeda and its affiliates, who advocate violent "Jihad" to achieve goals such as expelling Western influence from the Muslim world, "purifying" Islam, and re-establishing a global Caliphate. The militant interpretation of "Jihad," somewhat marginal after the classical period, was significantly revived during the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan (1979-1989), where

it received encouragement and support from the United States and its allies, contributing to the resurgence of a transnational, militant Pan-Islamism (Noorani, 2002: 12). Despite their significant ideological and methodological differences, these diverse movements have, in their respective ways, propelled the development of the contemporary Islamic revival and the process of the Islamic world reasserting itself as a collective actor on the global stage.

Fifth, the rise of Pan-Turkism and Neo-Ottomanism in the new situation. The end of the Cold War and the independence of five predominantly Turkic Central Asian republics provided a golden opportunity for the resurgence of Pan-Turkist ideas. The nationalist Pan-Turkist sentiments suppressed during the Kemalist era were unleashed, and Turkey was encouraged to develop relations with these new states actively. Initially, the ambition behind promoting Turkic integration was grandiose, envisioning a vast Turkic world "from the Adriatic Sea to the Great Wall of China." However, the limitations of Turkey's own power and the realities of great power politics (e.g., Russian influence) soon tempered this ideal into more pragmatic cooperation focusing on economics, culture, and political dialogue. In 2002, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), with its roots in political Islam, came to power. The Erdogan government, facing repeated setbacks in its bid for EU membership, began a strategic "pivot to the East" and implemented what some termed a "New Oriental Policy." Neo-Ottomanism, to a certain extent, represented not merely a nostalgic return to the Ottoman past but also a significant ideological shift away from the rigid secularism of Kemalism, altering Turkey's trajectory for achieving major power status.

"As a concept within Islam, revival (Tajdid) is not a new concept; it is an inherent tradition in Islamic history, reflecting the belief that the Muslim community must periodically return to the sources of the faith for renewal" (Photo: Politics & Society Institute, 2025).

The AKP government aimed to rebuild Turkey's influence in the Middle East and restore a level of regional leadership reminiscent of the Ottoman era by deepening its engagement in Middle Eastern affairs. After the Cold War, Pan-Turkism evolved into a foreign policy tool for Turkey to build a shared Turkic cultural identity. At the same time, Neo-Ottomanism emerged as a geopolitical concept, leveraging Ottoman historical and cultural ties to shape regional dynamics in former Ottoman territories. Although distinct, these two ideologies jointly served Turkey's post-Cold War strategic goal of becoming the geopolitical core of a "Turkic-Islamic-Eurasian" sphere, an ambition articulated by former Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in his book Strategic Depth. Turkey's unique geographical position, straddling Europe, the Caucasus, and the Middle East—all areas of significant strategic importance—provides the foundational rationale for this ambition (Babalı, 2013).

Whether Pan-Turkism, Arab nationalism, Pan-Islamism, Islamist revivalism, or Neo-Ottomanism, all can be regarded as diverse efforts to rebuild or re-imagine a cohesive Islamic or Muslim-led international system. In a sense, these contemporary revival movements are a specific response to the unique international environment of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, which must be understood within the context of global conflicts and challenges. Simultaneously, it should be noted that they are also part of the periodic historical revival inherent to Muslim societies over the centuries; the contemporary Islamic resurgence cannot be isolated from the historical heritage of Islam (Haddad, Voll, & Esposito, 1991: 23). Although Islamic countries and movements have never abandoned these efforts, historically, since the 19th century, most large-scale projects for political unification have failed, hindered by multiple internal and external factors.

The Internal Logic of the Revival of the Islamic System and the Democratization of International Relations

Although modern efforts to restore a unified Islamic System have largely ended in failure, and no institutional system dominated by a single Islamic power has been re-established, this does not imply that the Islamic world lacks influence on the process of international relations. In fact, the Islamic world, comprising 57 OIC member states and entities such as Kosovo and Western Sahara, exerts significant influence on the contemporary international balance. Because the 'end of the Cold War shows that profound structural changes have taken place in the international system' (Daugherty & Pfaltzgraff, 2002: 135), this has provided political space for the Islamic world to expand its collective influence. More specifically, the democratization of international relations primarily refers to achieving a greater balance in the power dynamics among prominent global actors through the rise of regional powers or groups of states, without necessarily subverting the entire existing order, thereby ensuring that the interests of a broader range of countries are better reflected in global governance. The influence of the Islamic world on this democratization process is mainly exercised through the following channels:

Exerting influence in international organizations such as the United Nations or using international organizations composed of Islamic countries to exert influence on major international issues. Take the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) as an example. In October 1973, following the outbreak of the fourth Arab-Israeli War (Yom Kippur War), OAPEC decided to progressively reduce oil production by 5% per month and impose an embargo on countries perceived as supporting Israel, notably the Unit-

ed States and the Netherlands. It also unilaterally raised the posted price of crude oil by 70%. The deployment of the "oil weapon" by OAPEC directly contributed to the 1973-1975 economic crisis in Western countries, exerting a profound impact on the global economy and the international political structure. Since then, the Western world has begun to reevaluate the power of the Arab/Islamic world, while the Arab oil-producing states, having significantly benefited from the increased oil revenues, have recognized the strategic potency of oil. Subsequently, these states have frequently employed oil as a strategic tool to protect their interests or enhance their international standing. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is another important platform for the Islamic world to safeguard the interests of its member countries and promote a more multipolar international order through collective diplomacy. The OIC possesses significant religious, historical, and cultural advantages in addressing issues related to the Muslim world and can play a unique role in conflict prevention and mediation (Fu, 2025). On May 18, 2018, after a special meeting in Istanbul, the OIC reiterated its refusal to accept the United States' recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, condemning the relocation of the U.S. Embassy as a 'provocative and hostile move against Muslim peoples.' On June 1, 2019, and again in several meetings throughout 2025, the OIC issued statements condemning U.S. policy on Jerusalem and Israeli military actions, discussing substantive countermeasures. These collective diplomatic efforts further isolated the United States and Israel in international forums and enhanced the perceived role of the Islamic world as a cohesive actor.

"The deployment of the 'oil weapon' by OAPEC directly contributed to the 1973-1975 economic crisis in Western countries, exerting a profound impact on the global economy and the international political structure" (Photo: Qatar News Agency, 2024).

Islamic powers such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran have become players in a multipolar world by virtue of their geographical location, resources, and cultural influence. Taking Turkey as an example, it serves as a crucial land and maritime transportation hub connecting Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Since the early 21st century, Turkey has striven to re-establish its status as a regional power and plays a significant role in the politics of Europe, the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Its strategic geography forms a crucial foundation for its engagement in great-power politics. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia increasingly assumes an essential role in the international community, leveraging its status as the world's largest oil exporter (giving it influence over global oil prices) and its religious authority as the custodian of Mecca and Medina, which positions it as a de facto "Leader of the Islamic world." In 2025, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman publicly called for Islamic unity against Israeli actions, mobilizing 21 countries to jointly condemn Israel, highlighting Saudi Arabia's considerable religious appeal. These factors make Saudi Arabia a significant shaper and potential balancing force in the evolving international pattern.

Using the Palestinian issue as a unifying cause to foster solidarity within the Islamic world. The Palestinian cause remains the core of the Middle East conflict and the most potent mobilizing issue across the Islamic world. Since the escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in October 2023, the Islamic world has demonstrated a degree of unity often absent in recent decades. On November 11, 2023, at Saudi Arabia's initiative, a joint extraordinary summit of the Arab League and the OIC was held in Riyadh. Saudi Arabia and other Muslim leaders called for an immediate end to military operations in Gaza, rejecting Israel's justification of its actions as 'self-defense.' Some Chinese observers viewed this development as a "historic moment when the Arab-Islamic world is moving toward unity" (Global Times, 2023). On September 18, 2025, Turkish President Erdogan, meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, demanded that Israel immediately halt its military operations to end the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, stressing that the "Islamic world holds a unified position in opposing Israel." This indicates a concerted effort within the Islamic world to overcome its traditionally fragmented stance on Palestine. By forging strategic consensus, implementing policy coordination, and offering tangible support, it is projecting a more unified voice to the international community, thereby amplifying the collective influence of the Islamic world.

Obstacles to the Revival of the Islamic System

The efforts to revive a cohesive Islamic system of international cooperation have encountered numerous internal and external obstacles. These structural and geopolitical barriers have significantly hindered the emergence of a unified Islamic political order in the contemporary world.

Geopolitical Constraints and Western Dominance

One of the most significant external challenges is the hegemonic structure of the international system, particularly as shaped by the leadership of the United States and its Western allies. For years, the United States, as the predominant superpower, derived significant benefits from and sought to maintain the existing global economic

"The West has provided steadfast support for Israel in its conflicts with Arab neighbors". On 19 March 2025, at least 25 Palestinians were killed and dozens more wounded in the Sabra neighbourhood south of Gaza City as a result of Israeli bombardment (Photo: China Daily, 2025).

and political structure (Engdahl, 2009: 2). The West, led by the United States, has been reluctant to share leadership of world affairs substantively with other actors. In fact, since the 1990s, U.S. policy elites have pursued "globalization" in a manner that often reinforced American primacy in the 21st-century global system. This trend has continued in various forms (Gowan, 2003: 1). The emergence of a powerful, cohesive Islamic System would challenge Western political, economic, and strategic interests in a region of vital importance.

On one hand, the West has provided steadfast support for Israel in its conflicts with Arab neighbors. The Arab-Israeli conflict has sparked several major wars (1948-1949, 1956, 1967, 1969-1970, 1973, 1982) and endless low-intensity military conflicts (Buzan & Waever, 2009: 181). On the other hand, Western powers have often pursued policies that exacerbated divisions among Muslim nations, fostering internal strife that compelled them to rely on Western security guarantees or mediation, thereby preventing a unified challenge to Western dominance. This state of affairs has generally served the broad interests of Western powers. Consequently, while maintaining a strategic alliance with Israel, Western countries have often adopted a differentiated policy towards Arab-Islamic nations, supporting pro-Western governments while isolating or pressuring those opposed to Western policies. This has artificially deepened contradictions both between Arabs and Israelis and within the Arab-Islamic community itself.

This posture of the United States and its allies has, in turn, generated significant conflict with large segments of the Islamic world. When conventional political and diplomatic means fail to address their grievances, some extremist factions resort to violent confrontation. It is widely understood that one key facet of international conflict in the post-Cold War era has been the struggle between militant Islamist movements, originating primarily in the Middle East, and the U.S.-led international security architecture.

In summary, U.S. and Western opposition to the rise of any independent, powerful Islamic bloc is not only a primary external obstacle to Islamic political revival. Still, it is also cited as a significant driver of the global terrorist activities witnessed in recent decades. As a result of these external pressures and internal divisions, the Islamic world has often been unable to effectively articulate its collective aspirations on the global stage or emerge as a coherent and decisive political force (Lahoud & Johns, 2005: 36).

Absence of a Regional Hegemonic and Internal Fragmentation

The lack of an uncontested regional leader and the existence of deep-seated internal contradictions hinder the establishment of a cohesive Islamic System. Although several significant regional powers exist within the Arab-Islamic world—including Egypt, Türkiye, Iran, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia—none currently possesses the capacity or acceptance to lead such a system for various reasons.

First, a leading power must exert dominant influence within the region, with other states being willing, whether voluntarily or by coercion, to accept its leadership. Second, a leading power must be able to provide "public goods" such as security guarantees, economic markets, and diplomatic backing, allowing smaller states within the system to "free-ride," while simultaneously bearing the corresponding costs and responsibilities of leadership. The U.S.-led world order historically relied on a degree of hegemonic provision of global public goods like security and an open trading system (Amitav Acharya, 2016: 5). However, none of the major Islamic powers fully possesses all these attributes, creating a critical vacuum for the formation of a new Islamic System. Within the Arab world, Egypt has historically been the natural leader and remains a core actor in the Arab-Israeli conflict, exerting significant cultural influence in the Gulf region (Buzan & Waever, 2009: 181). Egypt also holds a central place in the history of modern Islamism as the birthplace, in 1928, of the Muslim Brotherhood, the prototype of contemporary Islamist movements (Kaplan, 2021: 1). However, due to constant foreign intervention and intra-regional rivalries, the Arab-Islamic world is plagued by internal conflicts that consume vast resources and energy. States often seek to balance regional competitors by aligning with external powers, making a unified foreign policy impossible. Furthermore, historical schisms—such as ethnic (e.g., Arab-Persian), sectarian (Sunni-Shi'a), territorial disputes, and competition over resources—constrain cooperation at a deeper level, preventing the Arab-Islamic world from becoming a highly cohesive bloc. Third, there is a lack of a decisive historical opportunity. The emergence of a new international order requires not only a dominant state with sufficient power but also a conducive historical juncture. While the end of the bipolar Cold War order appeared

to create an opening for a new international political and economic framework, it did not fundamentally overthrow the existing Western-centric system. The West maintains a comprehensive advantage in financial, military, and institutional power, making it impossible for any single Islamic country, or even a loose coalition, to challenge it effectively. Consequently, the post-Cold War era did not provide a genuinely permissive environment for the revival of a political Islamic System, and its successful reconstruction remains a long-term prospect. One important reason is that the West, which still dominates the international order, views the global religious revival, particularly in its political Islamic form, with deep apprehension (Liu, 2014: 20).

Problems in the Study of the Islamic System and the Significance of Democratization of International Relations

The Tributary System and the Treaty System are two major, well-recognized models of international relations, located at the eastern and western ends of the Eurasian continent, respectively. The Tributary System has its origins in the Western Zhou Dynasty (Ru Ying, 2009: 51), while the Treaty System is conventionally dated from the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. A crucial question arises concerning the south-central region of Eurasia, specifically the vast area influenced by Islamic civilization since the 7th century: Does a distinct model of international relations exist, one that differs from both the Tributary and Treaty Systems? Henry Kissinger believes that "in most areas between Europe and China, the Islamic view of world order is dominant" (Kissinger, 2015: XII). Professor Liu Debin, Director of the Institute of International Relations at Jilin University, also affirms the existence of the Islamic System. He pointed out that in the medieval period, the Muslim world constituted a theocratic state system, composed of all Muslim polities that professed Islam (Liu, 2003: 24). Tian Wenlin holds a similar view, describing the historical Islamic world as an imperial system characterized by multi-ethnic coexistence (Tian, 2019: 89). In fact, the conquests carried out by Muslim armies in the 7th and 8th centuries established an overarching cultural and political framework across the lands they conquered (Fernandez-Armesto, 2000: 214).

Factors Hindering the Study of the Islamic System

The very existence of the Islamic System has long been a subject of debate. For an extended period, it has been intentionally or unintentionally overlooked by mainstream IR scholars, a phenomenon stemming from several reasons:

First of all, the dominant position of the Western world in international architecture. Since the Age of Exploration, Western civilization has gained structural advantages over other civilizations. The dissolution of the Soviet Union on December 26, 1991, created a unipolar moment where the United States stood as the sole superpower, a force unmatched by any other country (Krauthammer, 2010: 4). Therefore, despite the trend toward multipolarization in world politics after the Cold War, the United States remains the most powerful pole and has continuously worked to consolidate its leading position within this evolving order. A recurring theme in international politics is for great powers to seek to maximize their share of global power (Mearsheimer, 2008: 157).

This implies that the United States will not voluntarily relinquish global leadership without a fundamental shift in the power balance and will simultaneously act to suppress potential challengers, whether the rise of China or the resurgence of a unified Islamic power. In reality, "with the rise of China and the increasing importance of the Middle East, transatlantic relations will no longer be the main axis of American foreign relations" (Jacques, 2010: 272). To contain potential challengers in the Middle East, the United States deeply intervened in the region after the Cold War, employing a strategy of "divide and rule" that exacerbated tensions among Middle Eastern states. This included exploiting Sunni-Shi'a sectarian divisions, fueling the Arab-Israeli conflict, and intensifying rivalries within the Arab camp. Consequently, the Middle East has become a region of persistent instability and conflict. Middle Eastern states mired in internal friction find it difficult to coalesce into a threat to U.S. interests. A potential U.S.-Israeli military strike against Iran in 2025 could be seen as an attempt to eliminate the last major regional challenger to American primacy in the Middle East. The political failure of the Middle Eastern powers most likely to lead a revival of the Islamic System would marginalize efforts in this direction by removing its primary potential actors.

Secondly, the deep-seated fear of Islam in Western society. Regarding the historical relationship between Islam and Christianity, Samuel Huntington (2009) commented that the 20th-century conflict between liberal democracy and Marxism-Leninism was "only a fleeting and superficial historical phenomenon compared to the continuing and deeply conflictual relation between Islam and Christianity." While periods

"A potential U.S.-Israeli military strike against Iran in 2025 could be seen as an attempt to eliminate the last major regional challenger to American primacy in the Middle East". Photo taken on June 15, 2025, shows an oil storage facility that caught fire after being attacked by Israel near the Iranian capital Tehran (Photo: China Daily, 2025).

of peaceful coexistence have occurred, "more often the relation has been one of intense rivalry and of a variety of hot wars" (Huntington, 2009: 186). The historical memory underpinning Western anxiety can be traced back to the Battle of Poitiers/Tours in 732 AD.

"Western-centrism" is an extension of "Euro-centrism," placing the West at the center of world history and the international system. The narrative structures of disciplines like International Relations and History are particularly colored by this perspective.

The notion, popularized by Edward Gibbon, that had Charles Martel's Franks lost, "the Koran would now be taught in the schools of Oxford," has profoundly shaped the Western perception of Islam as an existential threat. In the Western imagination, Islam is inherently expansionist; as H.G. Wells wrote, "Muhammad … became the founder of fighting faith" (Hebert George Wells, 2001: 649). Robert the Monk, chronicling the First Crusade, recorded Pope Urban II's speech at Clermont, portraying Muslims as "a race utterly alienated from God" who had "invaded the land of those Christians and depopulated them by pillage and fire" (Housley, 1999). In the context of globalization, the confrontation between extremist groups in the Middle East and the United States evokes this deep-seated historical memory in the Western psyche, leading some to subconsciously view this struggle as a continuation of the medieval wars between the Arab/Ottoman Empires and Christendom. Therefore, the West remains deeply apprehensive about any significant resurgence of a politically unified Islamic world.

Finally, the dominance of the United States in global social science research and knowledge production. In the 21st century, American social science boasts over 1,500 world-class research centers, covering almost all disciplines. The research output of U.S. institutions accounts for a dominant share of published work in Western social sciences (Yang, 2014: 58). Institutions like the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) have a wide global influence. For a long time, Western discourses and narratives, based on Western concepts, experiences, theories, and logic, have been widely disseminated as universal knowledge and often used to explain, describe, and even predict the non-Western world, resulting in numerous misunderstandings (Sun, 2023). "Western-centrism" is an extension of "Euro-centrism," placing the West at the center of world history and the international system. The narrative structures of disciplines like International Relations and History are particularly colored by this perspective. Taking IR as an example, it emerged as an independent discipline in the West after World War I. Its foundational theoretical paradigms—Realism, Liberalism, Marxism, and Constructivism—and their core concerns (e.g., anarchy, power, national interest) are largely derived from Western historical experience. The Islamic System, as an object of study and a potential non-Western theoretical framework, is inherently part of "Third World" politics. This theoretical subject matter, by its nature, stands in contrast to traditional Western IR theory (and political development theory) and necessarily constitutes a non-Western or even anti-Western theoretical perspective (Hoshino, 1999: 10).

Islamic System and the Significance of Democratization of International Relations

Times have changed, and super-empires like those of the Arabs and Ottomans are no longer feasible in the modern world. Emphasizing the importance of the Islamic System aims to provide a new paradigm and analytical framework for understanding international politics. The reality of contemporary international politics has undergone a fundamental shift away from formerly dominant structures, requiring the conceptual expansion of the international system itself under new conditions—transforming from a state-centric, great-power-dominated system toward a polycentric or even global-centric system. However, the problem lies in the lack of a theoretical system fully capable of conceptualizing and guiding this transformation (Hoshino, 1999: 1).

First, emphasizing the importance of the Islamic System helps to understand the trend of multipolarity in the world more comprehensively. Since the 1970s, with the relative rise and fall of national power, the trend toward multipolarity began to emerge, and the end of the Cold War's bipolar structure provided a significant impetus. Many scholars argue that the perceived overextension of U.S. power, coupled with the rising economic and military capabilities of other major actors, has inevitably altered the global distribution of power (Kegley, 2010: 93). Not only have established powers like China, Russia, the EU, and Japan articulated their visions for a multipolar world, but also regional powers such as India, Brazil, Australia, South Africa, and Egypt aspire to play larger roles on the international stage. Today, there are nearly 60 Muslim-majority countries, which constitute a significant force in international relations due to their strategic locations and vast resources. However, because the West often monopolizes discourse in international affairs, and internal challenges within Islamic countries limit their diplomatic effectiveness, the distinct perspective of the Islamic world on global multipolarity is often muted. Without the active and coherent participation of the Islamic world, any representation of global multipolarity would be incomplete and questionable.

Second, it helps to understand the foreign policies of Islamic countries. In fact, as early as the 14th century, the renowned scholar Ibn Khaldun developed concepts in his Muqaddimah (Introduction to History) that can be interpreted as an early formulation of an "Islamic world system." The Muqaddimah not only describes the rise of a distinct Islamic world order between 1000-1500 but is also considered a pioneering work of civilizational analysis. In it, Ibn Khaldun brilliantly assesses the uniqueness of Islamic history and proposes a new science of society and civilization (Ilm al-Umran). His arguments essentially refute the view of an absolute East-West dichotomy, which often casts Islam as a perennial enemy of Western civilization or an unassimilable outsider (Katzenstein, 2012: 181). Historical tradition and strategic culture are inseparable; the influence of historical-cultural legacy can unconsciously shape ideas and behaviors. It is impossible for any country's foreign policy to completely escape the inertia of its traditions. A nation's glorious history often inspires subsequent generations to seek to recapture past greatness. In this light, ideologies as diverse as Arab nationalism, Pan-Turkism, Pan-Islamism, Neo-Ottomanism, and even Islamist fundamentalism can be seen, in part, as different manifestations of this desire to restore a position of dignity and influence in the world, ultimately converging toward a similar goal of civilizational revival.

Third, it helps to understand the Islamic revival movement and the enduring appeal of Pan-Islamism. Since the 1960s, the Islamic revival has gained momentum. One important reason is the profound nostalgia among many Muslims for the heyday of the Islamic System and a deep sense of humiliation stemming from repeated defeats, particularly in the Arab-Israeli wars. Since the Third Middle East War (1967), the appeal of secular Arab nationalism and Pan-Arabism declined sharply, "resulting in the space left by them being filled by several unstable ideological mixtures, including national loyalty, regional patriotism and Islamic particularism" (Kramer, 1996: 3). Widespread Muslim dissatisfaction with military and political failures provided a fertile ground for the long-simmering trend of Islamic revival to gain a much broader audience. The tide of religious revival spread not only in the defeated nations but also had a significant impact on the publics across the Islamic world and even among the elites of some countries (Jin, 2008: 23–24). Even the phenomenon of terrorism in the Middle East can be viewed, from a particular analytical perspective, as an extreme and destructive method employed by some groups in the pursuit of their vision for restoring Islamic power and challenging a Western-dominated international order—a twisted manifestation of the desire for a place in a "democratized" international system.

Conclusion

"Driven by the belief that its expansion will achieve unity and bring peace to all mankind," Kissinger (2015: 120) observes, "Islam is both a religion, a multi-ethnic superpower and a new world order". This "new world order" mentioned by Kissinger aligns closely with the concept of the Islamic System analyzed in this paper. Although the transformation of the international pattern following the Cold War has not yet fundamentally shaken the dominant position of the U.S.-led West, the ongoing development and dynamism within the Islamic world present an alternative pathway for its potential revitalization as a significant pole. Demographically, Islam has been the fastest-growing major world religion in recent decades. According to Pew Research Center data, the global Muslim population increased by approximately 350 million between 2010 and 2020, making it the second-largest religion globally (Pew Research Center, 2015). If current demographic trends continue, by 2050, the number of Muslims is projected to equal the number of Christians worldwide nearly (Cooperman et al., 2015). Ultimately, international competition hinges significantly on human capital; population is the primary agent of social progress, the vehicle for civilizational development and inheritance, the cornerstone of ethnic survival, and a core element of national power. The rapid growth of the Muslim population globally will lay a formidable demographic foundation for the potential future rise of the Islamic world as a more influential collective actor. This significant demographic shift has already sparked considerable anxiety in some Western societies. On December 7, 2015, then-Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump called for "a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States" (Diamond, 2015). The "Islamophobia" exemplified by such statements demonstrates that civilizational distrust, combined with the other factors discussed, forms a significant obstacle to the revival of the Islamic System. The Islamic world must overcome numerous internal and external challenges if it aspires to become one of the stable poles in a future multipolar world.

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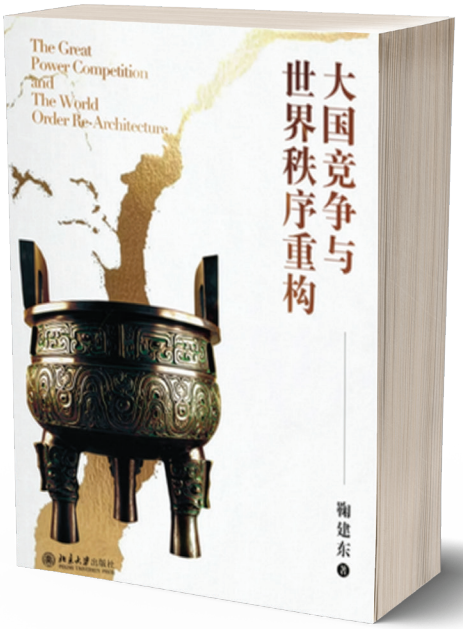
The Future of China-U.S. Relations

Ju, J. D. (2024). The Great Power Competition and the World Order Re-Architecture, Peking University Press, October 2024. ISBN: 978-7-301-35327-1.



ASSOC. PROF. YANG CHEN*

IN RECENT YEARS, A BUZZWORD HAS emerged in Chinese academic circles: "the great transformation unseen in a century." "Century" can refer to 100 years, 200 years, or even 500 years. A 100-year timeframe signifies China's century of humiliation and national shame. A 500-year timeframe refers to the fact that since 1500, the West has been dominating the world order, with Britain and the United States taking the lead in shaping this order, especially over the past 200 years. Now, with the overall rise of China and other non-Western countries, the Western-dominated world order is no longer compatible with the current international political and economic landscape. The old order has collapsed, while a new one has yet to be established.

The China-U.S. trade war broke out in 2018. To safeguard its own interests, the US has sought to contain China's development and prevent China's growth from challenging its global leadership. Essentially, this is a struggle over the world order.

This also indicates that China and the US have entered a phase of great power competition. The outcome of this competition will have a profound impact on the world's future development. Why do great powers compete? How do they compete? What defines victory or defeat? Can the great powers coexist? Professor Ju Jiandong from Peking University provides systematic answers to these questions and offers many profound insights in his book *The Great Power Competition and the World Order Re-Architecture*.

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What is Great Power Competition?

The so-called great power competition refers to the rivalry between the dominant power (also referred to as the established power) in the world and the emerging power (also referred to as the rising power). Since 1500, great power competitions have occurred many times, such as the competition between Spain and Portugal, between Britain and the Netherlands, between Britain and France, between Britain and Germany, the hegemonic rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, the disputes between the United States and Japan, and the ongoing China-U.S. trade disputes. The competition primarily focuses on and unfolds across six key fields: manufacturing, total economic output, science and technology, finance, military strength, and global governance.

Looking back at the five great power competitions over the past century-between Britain and Germany, Britain and the United States, the United States and the Soviet Union, the United States and Japan, and the United States and China—we find that, except for the Soviet Union in the U.S.-Soviet hegemonic rivalry, all catching-up powers have at one point surpassed the dominant power in manufacturing and reached 60% of the dominant power's total economic output.

Among these fields, manufacturing represents a country's industrial capacity, and it is generally the first area where a catching-up power achieves a breakthrough. Total economic output reflects a country's economic strength, while science and technology stand for its innovation capability. Finance represents a country's ability to raise funds, especially in the international market, and military affairs denote a country's military strength. A country's soft power in the global order includes its cultural and ideological influence, the power to formulate global and regional rules, its status and influence in international organizations, its voice and influence in world public opinion and politics, and its influence over other countries (including colonies, allies, and countries with close ties). All these elements are collectively referred to as a country's position in the global governance system.

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Taking the four great power competitions that unfolded in the 20th century as examples—namely, the UK-Germany competition before World War I, the UK-U.S. competition from the post-American Civil War era to before World War II, the U.S.-Soviet competition before the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the U.S.-Japan competition around the signing of the Plaza Accord—only the US succeeded in challenging the UK's dominant position in the world.

What was the reason behind this? It was because the US surpassed the dominant power (the UK) in all the aforementioned six fields that the world order changed. Take the UK-U.S. competition as a case in point: 1) The US overtook the UK in steel production in 1886. 2) It surpassed the UK in total economic output around the 1880s. 3) It pulled ahead in science and technology around the time of the Second Industrial Revolution. 4) It overtook the UK in military strength around World War II. 5) With the establishment of the Bretton Woods System in 1944, the US also surpassed the UK in the financial field. 6) Additionally, after World War II, the US overtook the UK in global governance.

Thus, the US achieved overtaking in all six fields, completing the rise of a catching-up power over an established power. If a catching-up power only surpasses the dominant power in some or even most fields, the dominant power can still rely on its advantages in the remaining fields to defeat the former. For instance, Germany, the Soviet Union, Japan, and even China today have only achieved overtaking in a few fields, and therefore have not successfully reshaped the world order.

The Five Phases of China-U.S. Relations

The level of conflict or cooperation between two countries mainly depends on three factors. The first is the relative strength between the two countries. The second is their degree of political and cultural identity. The third is the third-party effect, which refers to the impact of third parties on the bilateral relationship.

"In terms of global governance, China wielded significant influence in the Third World, making it a force that could not be ignored on the world stage". Mao Zedong with youth from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, 1959 (Photo: Hou Bol/China Daily, 2017).

Based on the analytical framework comprising the six core fields of great power competition and the three factors mentioned above, the China-U.S. relationship, from the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 to its future direction, can be divided into five phases.

After the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States in 1979, their political relations were normalized. During this phase, China-U.S. relations were cooperative and sound, mainly for the following three reasons: 1) In terms of economic strength, China was a small power while the United States was a great power. There was a massive gap between their economic strength-China's GDP in 1980 was only 6% of that of the United States.

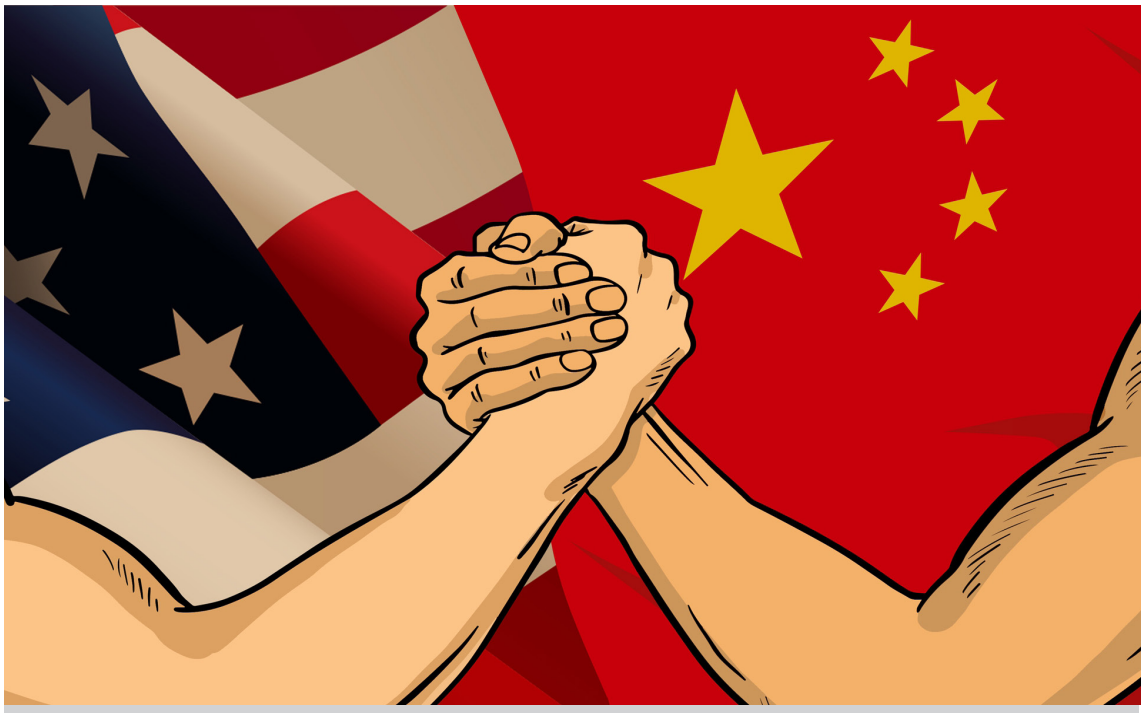
Phase 1 (1949-1978): The "Confrontation Phase". There are three reasons for this phase: 1) From the perspective of political and cultural identity, China and the United States were politically opposed, which made their relationship tend toward conflict. 2) In terms of relative strength, China could not compete with the United States in four fields: manufacturing, total economic output, science and technology, and finance. However, China's military strength was powerfully demonstrated in the Korean War and the Vietnam War. In terms of global governance, China wielded significant influence in the Third World, making it a force that could not be ignored on the world stage. 3) Regarding the third-party effect, China-U.S. relations were actually part of the U.S.-Soviet-China triangular relationship. When the Korean War broke out in 1950 and China chose to align with the Soviet camp, China and the United States were in a conflictual relationship. After China distanced itself from the Soviet camp and Nixon visited China in 1972, relations between China and the United States began to normalize.

Phase 2 (1979-2015): The "Small Power v.s. Great Power Phase". After the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States in 1979, their political relations were normalized. During this phase, China-U.S. relations were cooperative and sound, mainly for the following three reasons: 1) In terms of economic strength, China was a small power while the United States was a great power. There was a massive gap between their economic strength—China's GDP in 1980 was only 6% of that of the United States. 2) China and the United States were at different development stages. China had low labor costs and a shortage of capital and technology, while the United States had high labor costs, advanced technology, and abundant capital. As a result, their industrial structures were highly complementary. 3) During this phase, other major powers and regional conflicts in the world also diverted the United States' attention—this is the so-called third-party effect. Examples include the Soviet Union in the 1980s, Japan in the 1990s, and the global anti-terrorism campaign led by the United States after the "9/11" terrorist attacks. However, China-U.S. relations also encountered setbacks from time to time during this phase. For instance, the United States bombed the Chinese Embassy in Yugoslavia in 1999, and the China-U.S. Aircraft Collision Incident occurred on April 1, 2001.

China-U.S. relations are currently in the third phase, namely "Great Power Competition Phase I" (2016-2035). In 2010, China's manufacturing output surpassed that of the United States. In 2016, China's GDP exceeded 60% of America's, making it the world's second-largest economy. After 2016, China met the prerequisite conditions for great power competition, and since then, China and the United States have entered the phase of great power competition. During this phase, China's main task is to catch up with the United States in terms of total economic output. Assuming the US nominal GDP grows at a rate of 2% and China maintains an average annual growth rate of 5%, China is expected to catch up with the United States around 2035.

If China's GDP catches up with that of the United States by 2035, China-U.S. relations will enter the fourth phase, namely "Great Power Competition Phase II" (2036-2060). The central theme of the fourth phase will still be great power competition. In the early stages of this phase, China is expected to surpass the United States in manufacturing and total economic output, but will still lag in four key areas: science and technology, finance, military affairs, and global governance. Therefore, China's main task in this phase is to launch an all-around catch-up effort in these four fields. According to estimates, it will take about another 30 years—around 2060—for China to overtake the United States in these four fields.

If China successfully overtakes the United States in all six fields of great power competition, its GDP will eventually reach approximately 1.5 to 2 times that of the United States. **At that point, starting**



"After 2016, China met the prerequisite conditions for great power competition, and since then, China and the United States have entered the phase of great power competition" (Photo: Global Times, 2020).

from 2061, China-U.S. relations will enter the fifth phase, namely the "Competitive Coexistence Phase" (2061 onwards). This is because, according to optimistic forecasts of global economic rankings by total output at the time, the world's top four economies are expected to be China, India, the United States, and the European Union. Their respective shares of the global economy will be 29%, 18%, 16%, and 16% respectively. Even so, China's share of the global economy at its peak will be less than 30%, which is still a significant gap compared to the 50% share once held by Britain and the United States in their heydays.

Additionally, even if China becomes the world's largest economy by total output in 2060, the combined economic output of any two of the other three major economies (India, the United States, and the European Union) will exceed that of China. Therefore, the world order in 2060 is unlikely to see a hegemonic power similar to Britain or the United States in the past. A more probable scenario is a world order where the top economies compete with each other, cooperate, and coexist through a balance of competition and cooperation.

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Contradictions in the Current World Order and China's Response

From now until 2060, China and the United States will be in a phase of great power competition. On one hand, China's economic growth will enable it to gradually overtake the United States in total economic output, science and technology, finance, and military affairs—this will objectively and inevitably drive changes in the global governance system. On the other hand, the United States will leverage its remaining advantageous position in five fields—total economic output, science and technology, finance, military affairs, and global governance—to contain China's development and maintain its status as the dominant power.

Such intense power competition is expected to last for 40 years. In other words, it will not be surprising to see conflicts or even intense confrontations in China-U.S. relations over the next 40 years. This is because an analysis of the evolution of the global structure of trade, production, and consumption networks reveals the following: In 2000, the global value chain consisted of a Europe-centered network with Germany at its core and an Asia-Pacific-centered network with the United States at its core, where the United States was the dominant country in the global value chain.

By 2019, global trade, production, and consumption had formed a tripartite pattern among Europe, Asia, and North America, with Europe centered on Germany, Asia centered on China, and the United States reduced to the core of the North American network. The formation of the tripartite pattern mainly stems from two aspects: the market and production. From a market perspective, between 1960 and 2020, the Asian region had the relatively lowest market share, with the global economy dominated by the North American and European markets. However, after 2000—especially following the 2008 financial crisis—Asia's share of global GDP rose rapidly. Since 2011, it has surpassed North America and Europe to become the world's largest market, thus forming a three-major-market pattern consisting of Asia, America, and Europe. From the production perspective, each of the three markets can basically achieve self-sufficiency in production factors. In the North American region, the US and Canada provide technology and capital, while Mexico can supply low-cost labor. In Asia, countries such as China, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore, among others, can offer technology and capital, while Southeast Asian countries can provide low-cost labor. In the EU, developed countries such as Germany and France can also provide technology and capital, while Eastern Europe has an abundant supply of low-cost labor. Therefore, from the perspective of production factors, all three regions have formed relatively independent internal networks for supplying production factors.

The so-called fundamental contradiction of the world order refers to the conflict between the tripartite global value chain structure and the U.S.-dominated global governance system. Given that competition among major powers will be the norm in the future, two key questions arise: Will military conflicts erupt between major powers, and how can such conflicts be effectively prevented? From China's perspective, three elements are necessary for China and the United States to avoid large-scale military conflicts and achieve a basically peaceful transition of the international order. These elements are: China's achievement of strong economic growth, the RMB becoming a global currency, and the maintenance of symmetric military strength between China and the United States in China's surrounding regions.

In this sense, what China needs to do is focus wholeheartedly on development. Time is on China's side, and China should maintain sufficient strategic resolve and strategic patience. Specifically, China's strategy over the next decade should adhere to the principle of "not seeking hegemony, stabilizing markets, and pursuing shared benefits". "Not seeking hegemony" has two core meanings. First, it means not attempting to replace the United States' global hegemony, as this is unfeasible, unbeneficial, and undesirable. Second, it means not engaging in "G2 governance" (joint governance of the world with the United States). The essence of the so-called "China-U.S. joint governance" is to maintain the U.S.-dominated world order, with China merely acting as a supplement to U.S. strength and helping the U.S. manage the world—this could ultimately lead to China being contained by the United States. "Stabilizing markets" refers to establishing an "Asian" order, stabilizing technology markets and capital markets, and building a China-led regional economic order in the "Asian" market, which covers a population of 2 billion to 2.5 billion. "Pursuing shared benefits" focuses on the creation and sharing of ideas, knowledge, science, and technology. Its essence is to share long-term and stable growth with people from all countries around the world.

HIROSHI SUGIMOTO*

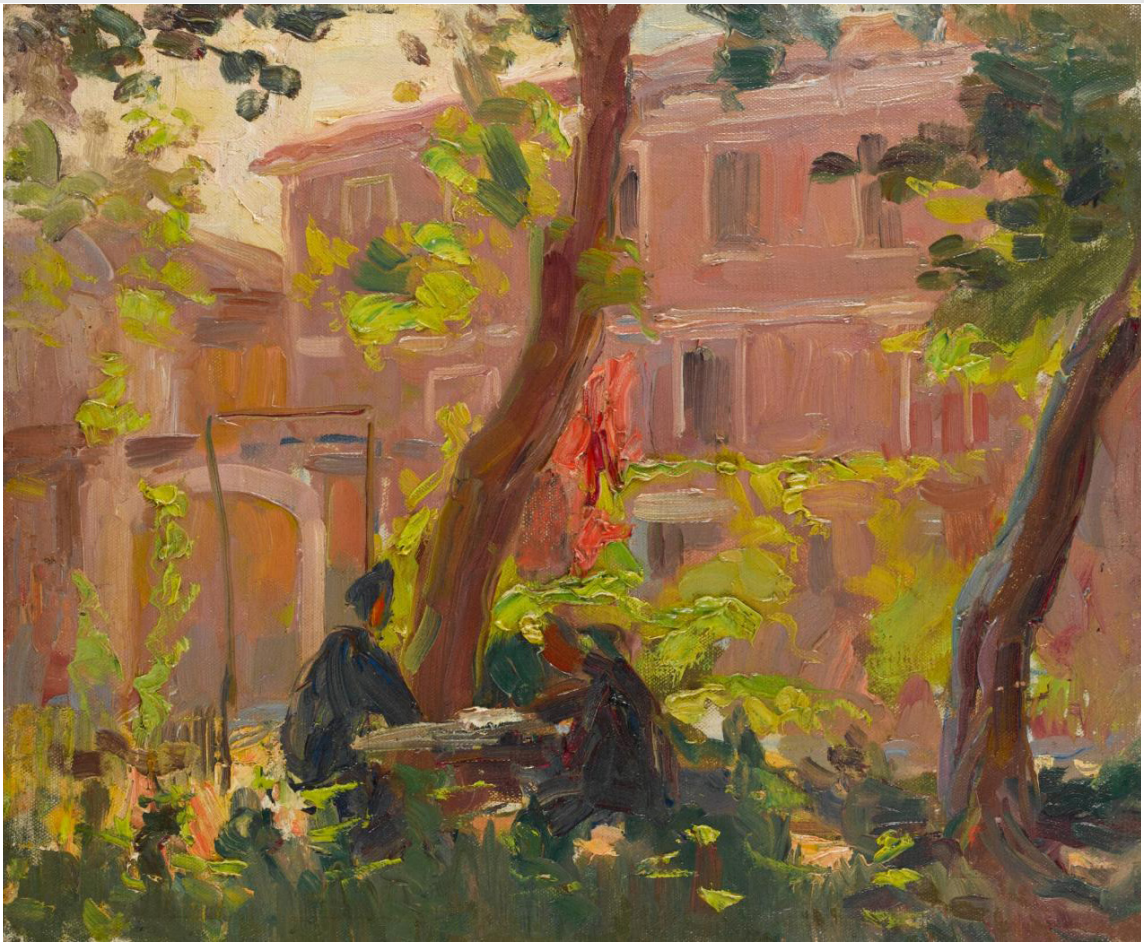
Cro-Magnon, 1994.

**Hiroshi Sugimoto, a Japanese photographer who has made significant contributions to contemporary photography, draws attention with his extraordinary conceptual and philosophical themes in his works. The artist uses his camera to give a sense of vitality and authenticity, and provokes viewers to question more extensively how nature is actually represented and perceived in museums and photography. "Cro-Magnon" is a still life of a taxidermy and plastic model diorama from the American Museum of Natural History in New York, depicting the prehistoric human species known as Cro-Magnon, and is part of Sugimoto's "Dioramas" series.*

Source: Fotosfer. (2023). Photography Culture Magazine, No. 3. Turkish Photography Foundation.

How to cite: [Photograph by Hiroshi Sugimoto]. (2025). Cro-Magnon, 1994. *BRIQ Belt & Road Initiative Quarterly, 7*(1), 122.

NAZMİ ZİYA GÜRAN*



Backgammon Players.

**Nazmi Ziya (1881-1937) was the son of Ziya Bey, a descendant of Molla Gürânî, the fifteenth-century scholar known for being Sultan Mehmed II's tutor. Ziya, who took his first painting lessons from Hoca Ali Rıza, was one of the young Turkish artists who went to Europe to study art in the early 1900s. With the outbreak of the First World War, he returned home and became known as the '1914 Generation'. As one of the 'Turkish Impressionists', he stood out with his masterful play with colours and sensitivity to light.*

Source: Gökkaya, E. K. (2013). Türk Resminde Öncü Bir İsim: Nazmi Ziya Güran Dönemi, Hayatı, Sanatı, Karabük Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi, 3(1), p. 65.

How to cite: [Painting by Nazmi Ziya Güran]. (2025). Backgammon Players. *BRIQ Belt & Road Initiative Quarterly, 7*(1), 123.

SEMİH BALCIOĞLU*
(1928 - 2006)

The work was drawn by Balcıoğlu for the first issue of Ünlem Magazine.

**One of the leading names in the caricature world in Turkey, Semih Balcıoğlu was born in Istanbul in 1928 He is known as one of the most productive cartoonists with his masterful lines and delicate sense of humour, Balcıoğlu was also the first artist in Turkey to draw three-dimensional cartoons, and today his works are exhibited in caricature and press museums in many countries around the world.*

Source: Eskisehir Art Magazine. (2000). Eskisehir Art Association. Issue: 152.

How to cite: [Cartoon by Semih Balcıoğlu]. (2025). *BRIQ Belt & Road Initiative Quarterly, 7*(1), 124.

POEM

CAHİT SITKI TARANCI*

**Born on 4 October 1910 in the Camiikebir neighborhood of Diyarbakır, he passed away on 13 October 1956 in Austria. He began his education at Galatasaray High School before enrolling at the Faculty of Political Sciences at Ankara University (Mülkiye Mektebi). He later studied at the Ankara Higher School of Commerce. He continued his career as a civil servant, working at Sümerbank, the Anadolu Agency, the Office of Agricultural Products, and the Ministry of Labor. In 1939, he moved to Paris to work as a Turkish broadcaster at Radio Paris but returned to Turkey when World War II broke out. In 1946, he won first prize in a poetry competition with his poem Otuz Beş Yaş (Age of Thirty-Five) and gained great fame. His poems explore the inner world of human beings, death, loneliness, and the meaning of life, and he uses syllabic meter skillfully. His poetry books include Ömrümde Sükût (Silence in My Life, 1933), Otuz Beş Yaş (1946), and Düşten Güzel (1952), as well as the posthumously published Sonrası (1957) and Bütün Şiirleri (1983). He also wrote various short stories, which were published under the title Gün Eksilmesin Penceremden (2006), to mark the 50th anniversary of Tarancı's death. Most of the poet's translations of French literature, as well as his correspondence with family, friends, and acquaintances, were published under the titles Ziya'ya Mektuplar (1957) and Evime ve Nihal'e Mektuplar (1989).*

How to cite: [Poem by Cahit Sıtkı Tarancı]. (2025). I want a country. *BRIQ Belt & Road Initiative Quarterly,* 7(1), 125-126.

I want a country**

I want a country

Let the sky blue, the bough green, the cornfield yellow

Let it be land of birds and flowers

I want a country

Let there be no pain in the head, no yearning in the heart

Let there be an end to brother's quarrels.

I want a country

Let there be no rich and poor, no you and me

On winter days let everyone have house and home.

I want a country

Let living be like loving from the heart

If there must be complaint, let it be of death.

**Translated by Bernard Lewis

Silay, K (Ed.), (1996). An Anthology of Turkish Literature. Indiana University, Turkish Studies and Turkish Ministry of Culture Joint Series, 15.

POEM

PABLO NERUDA*

**The great Chilean poet Pablo Neruda was born on July 12, 1904, to a railroad worker father and a teacher mother. Neruda, who lost his mother at a very young age, began writing for local newspapers like La Mañana at the age of 13. He first used the name Pablo Neruda in 1920 in the literary magazine Selva Austral. His first book, Crepusculario, was published in 1923. His best-known poem appears in his widely translated works, Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Desperation (Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada). While pursuing his literary career, he studied French and pedagogy at the University of Chile in Santiago. He served as the government's foreign ambassador from 1927 to 1935. The Spanish Civil War and the death of García Lorca profoundly affected him, leading him to join the Republican movement, first in Spain and then in France. Spain in My Heart is significant because it was published on the front lines during the Spanish Civil War. Known throughout his life for his strong political stance, Neruda opposed fascism in his country and in Spain. In 1970, he was nominated for the presidency of Chile, but he later supported Salvador Allende, who was elected president. He received the Peace Prize in honor of Nâzım Hikmet. At a congress, he praised Nâzım Hikmet, saying, "We can't even be poets compared to him." Although his death from prostate cancer was announced on September 24, 1973, the fact that it occurred so soon after the fascist 1973 Chilean coup has been consistently questioned. Although a mass funeral procession was forbidden by the junta that took power after the coup, thousands of people, defying curfews, attended the funeral.*

How to cite: [Poem by Pablo Neruda]. (2025). The Song of the Wheat. *BRIQ Belt & Road Initiative Quarterly,* 7(1), 127-128.

The Song of the Wheat**

My people and I are numberless
There is a radiant power in my voice which benefits
The growing tall in the darkness
And the overcoming of the silence

The dead, the valiant, shade and ice
All remain in the seed anew
And the people, buried in the earth
Remain in the seed somewhere

How the wheat sends out its young shoots
And if it rises above the soil
With its good, golden ears
It bores through the silence like an auger
We are the people and are born again in death.

**Translated from Turkish to English by Bill Welsh.

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The Climate-Water-Food Crisis

Caused by the North, the Solution Comes from the South

"Global South countries are advancing towards building a common future for humanity, increasing their cooperation for a 'green industry', and resisting imperialist impositions. Indeed, the situation can be summarized as 'the Global North brings destruction; the Global South brings solutions."

Editor-in-Chief
FİKRET AKFIRAT