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IDEA AND POLITICS OF WORLD ORDER

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Preliminary remarks

In recent months, statesmen from the Western world, including U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, repeatedly deplored the sudden and unexpected end of an era of international relations in which – they opined – a “rules-based order,” embodied by the United Nations Charter, had preserved global stability and peace among nations.¹ They described the events of February 2022 in Ukraine as a turning point (“Zeitenwende,” in the words of Chancellor Scholz),² supposedly signaling a new era of lawlessness between states where might makes right and the rule of force replaces the rule of law.³

Nothing could be further from truth, however. Through all the previous decades since the end of World War II, and in spite of the UN Charter’s general ban on the international use of force, have relations between states often been conducted in utter neglect of legal constraints. Powerful states, first and most frequently the self-declared winners of the Cold War, saw themselves in the position of being able and entitled to ignore the rule of law, and to “enforce” their “order” in whichever region of the globe. Thus, what is new – in the unfolding global constellation of 2022 – does not relate to the use of force as means of international politics as such, but to the fact that, for the first time after the end of the Cold War, force was used in reaction against a hegemonic claim of the West, in a constellation that involves a country within the expanded sphere of influence of NATO and the European Union.⁴ The misleading diagnosis of a paradigm change – or a “turning point” – is to be seen in the tradition of the policy of double standards practiced by the West in the previous decades.

Furthermore, any talk about a rules-based order is disingenuous as long as one does not address the exceptional privilege granted under the UN Charter to the

¹ Cf. Antony Blinken, news conference following NATO, G-7 and EU consultations in Brussels on 4 March 2022 (“Secretary of State Blinken Holds News Conference,” source: <https://www.c-span.org/video/?518391-1/>).

² Government Policy Statement of Chancellor Scholz at the German Parliament, Berlin, 27 February 2022 (“Abgabe einer Regierungserklärung durch den Bundeskanzler zur aktuellen Lage,” www.bundestag.de).

³ During the last few months, similar declarations and media commentaries triggered a wave of mass hysteria not seen in the Western world since the beginning of the First World War.

⁴ Cf. also, chapter I of the author’s report prepared for the 20th International Likhachev Conference (2022): *The Struggle for World Order: Reflections in Times of Global Realignment*, https://www.lihachev.ru/pic/site/files/lihcht/2022/dokladi_eng/Koehler.pdf.

organization's most powerful member states, the permanent members of the Security Council⁵ – a privilege most excessively used by the dominant power(s) in the post-Cold War period.

I

Against this background, any contemplation of world order must keep in mind the hiatus between *idea* and *reality*, i.e. between the stated principles of world order and the political (national) interests behind the invocation of those principles. Through all of recorded history, discourse on the order of the ages (*ordo saeculorum*) has tended in the direction of self-righteousness, often with Messianic undertones. Philosophy should analyze the underlying motives in a given constellation, with the aim to understand the context in which a proclamation of “world order” may have served – or may serve – the legitimation of a country's or leader's claim to rule. Those in power have always taken it as their prerogative to define the underlying *idea* of world order, namely the principles which should govern the concert of states (or the imperial realm). What we witness, in the course of history, is a perpetual cycle of *declarations* (of a “new world order”), inevitably followed by *disillusionment*. It is the dialectics between idea and reality that has characterized world order discourse since antiquity. The idea, solemnly proclaimed (and often “legitimized” by quasi-eschatological inferences), is almost always contradicted by the politics of world order, namely a global struggle for power that is determined by interests, not rules or principles.

History can thus be seen as a perpetual competition between major players to set the rules – the terms of global interaction – on the basis of their interests. The idea (of world order) is almost always subordinated to what in the modern era has been described as “realpolitik.” The examples abound.

Since ancient Roman times has a “new order of the ages” been invoked in periods of upheaval or (political) transition. Virgil's *Ecloga Quarta* (Fourth Eclogue of the *Bucolica*, ca. 42 BC) has created the *topos* – almost a template – for many such

⁵ For the implications in terms of international of law cf. the author's analysis, “The Dual Face of Sovereignty: Contradictions of Coercion in International Law,” in: *The Global Community – Yearbook of International Law and Jurisprudence 2019*, Part 6: *Recent Lines of Internationalist Thought*. New York: Oxford University Press 2020, pp. 875-885.

invocations, first and foremost by the nascent United States in the 18th century. The so-called “Messianic” Eclogue talks of the birth of a god-like boy, signaling the dawn of a golden age. In hymnic style – and in beautiful hexameter verse – Virgil proclaims the emergence of a great new order of the ages: *mágnus áb integró saeclórum náscitur órdo* [accents inserted by H.K.].⁶ Whatever the interpretation of these words may be – justification of Roman imperial rule under Augustus or prophetic announcement of the arrival of Christ the Savior, as was argued in the Middle Ages, when rulers sought divine sanction for their authority: With Virgil’s Fourth Eclogue, the topos and style were established that shaped powerful invocations of “world order” in later centuries. The *eschatological* flavor of some of the discourses testifies to that legacy.

1,800 years after its poetic invocation, the idea of world order, as informed by Virgil, was introduced on the world stage by none other than the United States of America – and with the clear purpose to *legitimize* the new Republic, internally as well as externally. The Great Seal of the United States, created after the Declaration of Independence (1776), and reproduced on the reverse side of the one-dollar note, contains, on the reverse side, two (partly garbled or modified) phrases from Virgil, including the famous announcement of *novus ordo saeculorum*. We shall get back to this in more detail when we deal with contemporary examples of world order discourses, and with the contradiction between idea and reality. But first, we’ll have a cursory look at how the world order paradigm evolved over the past two centuries.

In the wake of the American Revolution, the air of a new beginning – a fundamental reorientation of the international order, also with divine blessing – transpired in the Holy Alliance Treaty between Austria, Prussia, and Russia, adopted in Paris on 26 September 1815, upon the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and the defeat of France. After the Congress of Vienna, the victorious rulers solemnly declared their “fixed resolution” that, from now on, they would “take for their sole guide” the principles of the Christian religion, namely “the precepts of Justice, Christian Charity, and Peace.” The principal architect of the treaty was Tsar Alexander I, arguably inspired by Baroness Barbara von Krüdener. In a style that resembles a preacher’s sermon, the rulers proclaimed, “that these truths should henceforth exercise over the

⁶ Publius Vergilius Maro, Eclogue 4, verse 5.

destinies of mankind all the influence which belongs to them,” and they invited all powers to embrace those truths and join them in their Alliance.⁷ However, this new order – presented as an entirely new beginning *exclusively* to be based on morality and divine rules – did not in any way end the power struggles those countries and leaders were involved in, and their insistence on the integrity of moral rules, with the emphasis on concordance of private and public morality, remained without consequence. In fact, the members of the Holy Alliance right away engaged in a policy of collective military interventions whenever they saw a threat to the conservative order they envisaged. As explained in a comprehensive analysis of the history of humanitarian intervention, “The right to interference, as it was incorporated in the Vienna settlement [i.e. of the Congress of Vienna / H.K.] was expressed chiefly through the policy of the Holy Alliance.”⁸ It is worthy of note that the Papal State never joined the Holy Alliance.

A century later, the *idea of a new order* was laid out again upon the end of World War I. In his Address to Congress of January 8, 1918, President Woodrow Wilson, possibly inspired by Immanuel Kant’s treatise “On Perpetual Peace” (*Zum ewigen Frieden*), solemnly proclaimed that “[t]he day of conquest and aggrandizement is gone by,” and that the world should be “made fit and safe to live in.” He laid out a program of “14 Points” that included guarantees of substantial international disarmament, an implicit recognition of the right of self-determination of peoples, and the idea of a “general association of nations” that should include covenants that afford “mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike.”⁹ Especially Points I and XIV were eventually reflected in the idealistic language of the Covenant of the League of Nations.¹⁰ Test cases of the integrity of Wilson’s proposals for a just new order would specifically have been his points IX (readjustment of Italian frontiers along clearly recognizable

⁷ Original French text: “Traité de la sainte Alliance entre les Empereurs de Russie et d’Autriche et le Roi de Prusse, signé à Paris le 14/26 septembre 1815,” in: Léonard Chodźko / Comte d’Angeberg (ed.), *Le Congrès de Vienne et les traités de 1815*. Paris: Amyot, 1863-1864, Vol. 4, pp. 1547-1549.

⁸ Fabian Klose, *In the Cause of Humanity: A History of Humanitarian Intervention in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge/New York etc.: Cambridge University Press, 2022, p. 33.

⁹ *President Wilson’s Message to Congress, January 8, 1918*; Records of the United States Senate; Record Group 46; Records of the United States Senate; National Archives.

¹⁰ *The Treaty of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany, signed at Versailles, June 28th 1919, Part I: The Covenant of the League of Nations*. London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1919. – The Wilsonian ductus relates to the Preamble in particular.

lines of nationality) and X (providing that the “peoples of Austria-Hungary [...] should be accorded the freest opportunity to autonomous development”). Without going into the details: in both cases, the reality check is clearly negative. In view of what followed – also, in the Middle East, Wilson’s declaration sounds hollow and disingenuous, and the noble idea of a “League of Nations” was discredited from the outset.

Again, after World War II, the victorious powers drafted a Charter that was meant to be the foundation of a world order of peace, justice, and human rights – a brave new world in which, in the Charter’s language, “armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest.”¹¹ However, the proclamation of the ideal – a total ban on the unilateral use of force – was flawed from the outset because the four “Sponsoring Governments” of the Charter were *effectively* exempted from the ban.¹² Again, at this juncture of history, the reality of politics – old-fashioned *raison d’état* – defeated the idea of a just world order.

Nearer to the present, about half a century later, after the end of the Cold War, in March 1991, the President of the United States declared with great fanfare the dawn of a New World Order¹³ the premature end of which is now being deplored by Western leaders – namely since February 2022. I shall deal here with this particular version of world order “invocation” in more detail because I consider it a paradigmatic case of “secular religion” in a wider historical context. The policies that are based on it have impacted the fate of today’s world in a most consequential way, have undermined the United Nations Organization, uprooted entire peoples, destroyed states, and created anarchy in vast regions.

All of the examples I mentioned are evidence of a kind of *systemic contradiction*, due to the primacy of power politics, between *proclamations* of world order and their political *implementation*, in whichever period of history or political constellation. More simply stated: honesty does not seem to be a defining feature of international realpolitik.

¹¹ Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations (1945).

¹² For details cf. the author’s analysis: *The Voting Procedure in the United Nations Security Council: Examining a Normative Contradiction and its Consequences on International Relations*. Studies in International Relations, Vol. XVII. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 1991.

¹³ For details, see Köchler, *Democracy and the New World Order*. Studies in International Relations, Vol. XIX. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 1993.

II

I shall now describe the *hiatus between idea and politics* in reference to how the “New World Order,” introduced as a concept in 1990 and reaffirmed in 1991, after the end of global bipolarity, was promoted and propagated at the worldwide level – and how the politics behind it triggered its early demise, unexpected by its propagators. This will also allow us to better understand the continuity of world order discourse – the prevalence of the topos – since antiquity.

After Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, President George H. W. Bush declared the emergence of a new world order as a major policy objective of the United States. In his *Address Before a Joint Session of Congress*, on 11 September 1990, the President invoked an “era in which the nations of the world, East and West, North and South, can prosper and live in harmony.”¹⁴ Claiming that he shared this vision with President Gorbachev in their earlier meeting in Helsinki,¹⁵ Bush outlined a kind of end-of-times vision, not unlike the pathos in the prophetic announcements of ancient Rome. Because of the topicality of the speech in the present context, I quote from it in more detail:

“A hundred generations have searched for this elusive path to peace, while a thousand wars raged across the span of human endeavor. Today the new world is struggling to be born, a world quite different from the one we’ve known. A world where the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle. (...) A world where the strong respect the rights of the weak.”¹⁶

Half a year later, on 6 March 1991, Bush declared victory in the Gulf war¹⁷ and hinted at the “very real prospect of a new world order,” claiming that the United Nations, from now on, would be able “to fulfill the historic vision of its founders.”¹⁸ However, unlike as promised by the President, the “principles of justice and fair play” were violated from the outset. The United Nations Security Council, at the initiative of the

¹⁴ *Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Persian Gulf Crisis and the Federal Budget Deficit*. 11 September 1990. George H. W. Bush Presidential Library & Museum. Public Papers, <https://bush41library.tamu.edu/archives/public-papers/2217>, last visited on 15 August 2022. – N.B.: The date applies to all web addresses indicated in the present text.

¹⁵ “Helsinki Summit” on 9 September 1990.

¹⁶ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁷ This was the second Gulf war (for the liberation of Kuwait), the first having been the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988), and the third the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003.

¹⁸ *Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the Cessation of the Persian Gulf Conflict*. March 06, 1991. Quoted according to: The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-before-joint-session-the-congress-the-cessation-the-persian-gulf-conflict>.

United States and her allies, imposed punitive sanctions on the people of Iraq that – over a period of more than 10 years – led to the suffering or death of millions of innocent civilians. As early as 1991, the International Progress Organization declared before the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva that this policy was in outright violation of the Iraqi people’s most fundamental human rights.¹⁹ Thus, the “New World Order” was heralded by one of the most massive and systematic violations of human rights in history, under the auspices of a hijacked United Nations.

Intellectuals – indeed, false prophets as we now can say – had prepared the ground for the President’s Messianic posture in 1990/1991. First and foremost, it was Francis Fukuyama with his erroneous Hegelian vision of the “End of History,” claiming that no further improvement of political order would be possible after the Western system of “liberal democracy” had, so he argued, prevailed over communism.²⁰

In this period, after the end of the East-West conflict, the proclamation of a new world order perfectly reflected the foundational mindset of American exceptionalism as also became obvious in repeated statements of President Clinton, and in particular in Madeleine Albright’s self-righteous remarks at Ohio State University. When confronted with the death of Iraqi children due to the ongoing comprehensive sanctions, the U.S. Secretary of State, without hesitation, refused to admit any guilt and simply claimed: “what we are doing is serving the role of the indispensable nation ...”²¹

This kind of exceptionalism – that underlies so many of the U.S. pronouncements on world order²² – is rooted in the missionary self-perception of

¹⁹ United Nations – Economic and Social Council – COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS, Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, Forty-third session, 5-30 August 1991, Palais des Nations, Geneva: *Presentation by the delegate of the International Progress Organization, 13 August 1991*, U.N. Document E/CN.4/Sub.2/1991/SR.10, 20 August 1991.

²⁰ “The End of History?” in: *The National Interest*, Vol. 16 (Summer 1989), pp. 3-18. – See also, Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* [1992]. New York: Free Press, 2006.

²¹ *Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, and National Security Adviser Samuel R. Berger – Remarks at Town Hall Meeting, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, February 18, 1998*. As released by the Office of the Spokesman, February 20, 1998, US Department of State.

²² In an interview with FRANCE 24, Jeffrey Sachs branded U.S. exceptionalism as ultimately “self-destructive”: “US exceptionalism is ultimately self-destructive”, Jeffrey Sachs tells FRANCE 24.” *FRANCE 24 English*, 20 January 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCtdSfzpjil>.

the United States as the “shining city upon a hill,”²³ an attitude of self-righteousness and imperial arrogance that was already visible in the state’s founding years and has shaped U.S. foreign policy ever since.²⁴ It is most visibly expressed in the Latin phrases on the reverse side of the Great Seal of the United States²⁵ – and on the back of the one dollar bill. The two short text elements, in combination with the images, almost invite to draw an arc from the founding era of the Roman Empire to the nascent American state.

The phrases are borrowed from Virgil (*Publius Vergilius Maro*, 70-19 BC), considered by many as the most classical Roman poet, in the period of Emperor Augustus. Below the images of (God’s) Eye and Pyramid – in a somewhat garbled version, copied from Virgil’s *Bucolica*, the *Fourth Eclogue* –, are the words: *NOVUS ORDO SECLORUM* [The New Order of the Ages].²⁶ As I have already said, in the Middle Ages the phrase was often interpreted in the sense of a Messianic prophecy, announcing the coming of a New Age, namely the birth of Christ. On top of the pyramid is reproduced another Virgilian phrase: *ANNUIT COEPTIS* [He {God} favours our undertakings]. It is taken from the *Aeneid*, the epic poem where Virgil describes the voyage of Aeneas from Troy to Italy, which made him – together with the group of the “Aeneads” he had assembled for this undertaking – the ancestor of the Romans. However, the phrase on the seal is out of context. The original text (in hexameter verse) reads: “*Iúppiter ómnipoténs, audácibus ádnue [annue] cœptis.*” [Almighty God, do favour our undertakings / accents inserted by H.K.].²⁷ It is a prayer before battle where Ascanius, the son of Aeneas, implores Jupiter to grant victory to the Aeneads. The verb in Virgil’s original text is in **imperative** form (*annue*: expressing a wish) whereas the text on the Seal (and the dollar bill) is in the **indicative** form (*annuit*:

²³ Ronald Reagan, *Farewell Address to the Nation*. January 11, 1989. Quoted according to: Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum, <https://reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/farewell-address-nation>. – Reagan alluded to a phrase in the sermon of the Puritan pilgrim Jon Winthrop (1630): “For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us.” (Quoted according to: Robert C. Winthrop, *Life and Letters of John Winthrop, from His Embarkation for New England in 1630, with the Charter and Company of the Massachusetts Bay, to His Death in 1649*. Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1967, p. 19.)

²⁴ Cf., *inter alia*, Jeffrey D. Sachs, *A New Foreign Policy: Beyond American Exceptionalism*. New York / Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2018.

²⁵ Designed and approved by the Continental Congress in 1782, following a resolution adopted in connection with the Declaration of Independence on 4 July 1776.

²⁶ In the original text (Eclogue 4), the vocal “u” in “saeculorum” is omitted for purposes of the meter (dactylic hexameter): “saeclorum” (seclorum). However, as prose text, the phrase should correctly read: *novus ordo saeculorum*.

²⁷ *Aeneis, Liber IX*, verse 625.

stating a fact). Thus, the modified phrase – converting the imperative form of the verb to the indicative form – arrogantly asserts that God has endorsed the undertakings of the nascent American Republic.

In a commentary for all those who might not have been as well versed in the Classics as the person who chose – and partly manipulated – the quotes, Charles Thomson, who was charged with designing the seal, explained, referring to the text underneath the pyramid: “the words (...) signify the beginning of the new American Æra.” The text above the pyramid, he stated, suggests divine providence “in favour of the American cause.”²⁸ Thus, the topos of salvation and self-aggrandizement, conveyed through imagery and allusions to classical antiquity on the Great Seal of the United States, has continued to shape the self-understanding of the republic regarding her role among the community of nations.

The (however arbitrary) link to a world order discourse aimed at glorifying, and justifying, the Roman Empire’s claim to power has been at the roots of the spirit of exceptionalism that informed many declarations and proclamations of the leaders of the United States until the present day. The pathos in the invocation of Virgil’s prophetic text by America’s Founding Fathers was visible also in Thomas Paine’s remarks of January 1776: “The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind. (...) It is not the concern of a day, or an age; posterity are involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected, even to the end of time, by the proceedings now.”²⁹

In the 20th century, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in his *Armistice Day Address* of 11 November 1940, explicitly referred to the Virgilian motto, putting the creation of the United States as dawn of a “New Order of the Ages,” similar in magnitude to the emergence of the Roman Empire: “There came into being the first

²⁸ Quoted according to: *Pamphlets on U.S. History*, 1954, p. 65. – The full text of Thomson’s explanation leaves no doubt about the attitude of exceptionalism, or Messianic mission, that informed the mindset of the Founding Fathers of the United States: “The pyramid signifies Strength and Duration: the Eye over it & the Motto allude to the many signal interpositions of providence in favour of the American cause. The date underneath is that of the Declaration of Independence and the words under it signify the beginning of the new American Aera, which commences from that date.” (*Loc. cit.*)

²⁹ Quoted according to: Thomas Paine: *Common Sense and Revolutionary Pamphleteering. The Library of American Lives and Times*. New York: Power Plus Books, 2002, p. 60.

far-flung government in all the world whose cardinal principle was democracy – the United States of America.”³⁰

All these proclamations of an *ideal* world order, embodied and to be guaranteed by the United States, the “indispensable nation,” culminated – in the 20th century – in the earlier mentioned speeches of George Bush senior, upon the end of the Cold War.

III

In the complex, and increasingly multipolar, context brought about by globalization – a process fostered and welcomed by the self-declared hegemon in the years after 1990 –, the confrontation with reality was unavoidable and predictable. In a series of excessive uses of force – in violation of the very rules agreed upon within the UN system of collective security – the United States set out to enforce its vision of world order, and to make it permanent. In the name of this order, the President solemnly *preached* the rules of “justice and fair play”³¹ – just to *breach* those rules right away, obviously not being aware of the “law of unintended consequences.”

The instances of these “imperial transgressions” are numerous. We can here only give a few examples:³²

- o In the confrontation with Iraq since 1990, the United States – in the course of the Gulf War of 1991 – not only overstepped the respective Security Council mandate,³³ but, as we said earlier, also initiated comprehensive sanctions on the entire people of Iraq, and used its veto power to prevent the lifting of these punitive coercive measures for more than a decade (until 2003).
- o The invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 – in outright violation of international law – led to the disintegration of the country and the destabilization of a geopolitically sensitive region. The emergence of ISIS

³⁰ Quoted according to: “Franklin D. Roosevelt, Address on Armistice Day, Arlington National Cemetery, November 11, 1940.” *The American Presidency Project*, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-armistice-day-arlington-national-cemetery-0>.

³¹ Re., *inter alia*, President Bush’s speech on 6 March 1991, *loc. cit.*

³² For a comprehensive dataset of U.S. military interventions cf. the most recent publication: Siditha Kushi and Monica Duffy Toft, “Introducing the Military Intervention Project: A New Dataset on US Military Interventions, 1766-2019,” in: *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 2022. August 2022, doi:10.1177/00220027221117546.

³³ For details, cf. Köchler (ed.), *The Iraq Crisis and the United Nations: Power Politics vs. the International Rule of Law. Memoranda and declarations of the International Progress Organization (1990 – 2003)*. Studies in International Relations, Vol. XXVIII. Vienna: International Progress Organization, 2004.

and the migration crisis of 2015 were direct consequences of this unilateral action.

- o In the European theatre, the NATO war of aggression, under U.S. leadership, against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999 totally undermined public confidence in the international rule of law under the auspices of the new order enforced by the United States.
- o In 2011, again overstepping a Security Council mandate³⁴ (that was flawed from the outset),³⁵ the United States, upon orders of Nobel Peace Laureate President Barack Hussein Obama II, together with France and the United Kingdom destroyed political order in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, making it a “failed state” – with dramatic consequences not only for the people of Libya, but for the entire Europe.
- o Also, in the wake of the so-called “Arab Spring” (2011), the United States interfered in the civil war in Syria and further fuelled and prolonged the conflict, eventually imposing harsh sanctions on the civilian population, in violation of fundamental human rights.
- o Following the events of September 11, 2001, the United States used massive military force in Afghanistan and established a puppet régime that quickly disintegrated after the withdrawal of troops in 2021. In the course of almost 20 years, serious war crimes and crimes against humanity were committed by U.S. and allied troops (the investigation of which by the International Criminal Court President Trump tried to prevent).

The systematic and excessive use of force that accompanied the U.S. project of a “new world order of peace and justice” – at the beginning of a prematurely declared “American century” – triggered counter-reactions in a multitude of ways on the part of those that were targeted by this self-righteous, “Messianic” power. Chalmers Johnson early on diagnosed a so-called “blowback effect.”³⁶ It resulted in an increasing number of peoples and states beginning to reconsider their loyalties and (strategic) alliances – in an awakening of formerly oppressed nations in a new post-colonial constellation. The late Zbigniew Brzezinski may have sensed this global “realignment” when, in a text that appeared shortly before his death, he shared his premonition of things to come: “In today’s postcolonial world, a new historical narrative is emerging. A profound resentment against the West and its colonial

³⁴ Resolution 1973 (2011), adopted on 17 March 2011.

³⁵ The then-Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, characterized the resolution, sponsored and supported by Western states, as “defective and flawed” insofar as it “allows everything” and resembles “a medieval call for crusades.” (Quoted according to REUTERS: “Putin: Libya coalition has no right to kill Gaddafi,” by Gleb Bryanski, 26 April 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-libya-idUSTRE73P4L920110426>.)

³⁶ *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000.

legacy in Muslim countries and beyond is being used to justify their sense of deprivation and denial of self-dignity.”³⁷

In the wake of the Ukraine crisis of 2022, more and more countries appear determined to reevaluate and redefine their strategic outlook, and assert their national interests independently of the erstwhile hegemon.³⁸ The politics of world order have exposed, indeed unwittingly unveiled, the hollow nature of the underlying idea. From the outset, as almost always in history, the proclaimed “New World Order” actually served as a *pretext* to justify an imperial claim to global power – and to camouflage the *real* motives.

Reality has returned with a vengeance. The promised “golden age” barely lasted for two decades. Though one must honestly admit that it is always difficult to distinguish wishful thinking from sound prognosis, one can fairly say that the false prophets have been discredited by now. A new – alternative – power constellation gradually appears to emerge along the lines of multipolarity.³⁹ The creation, and possible expansion, of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), but, also (at regional level), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), is a hint in this direction.⁴⁰

In a recent speech, the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, said that a “model of total domination by the so-called golden billion,” namely the G7 under U.S. leadership, is unfair and not sustainable. He spoke of the “illusion of exceptionalism,” which is “essentially racist and neo-colonial,” predicting a “new era and a new stage in world history” on the basis of a community of “genuinely sovereign states,” as alternative to the existing unipolar world order.⁴¹ In a similar

³⁷ “Toward a Global Realignment,” in: *The American Interest*, Vol. 11, No. 6 (July/August 2016), pp. 1-3.

³⁸ Cf. Ivan Timofeev, “‘Russian Rebellion’: Local and Global Consequences.” *Valdai Discussion Club*, 15 June 2022, <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/russian-rebellion-local-and-global-consequences/>.

³⁹ For a more detailed analysis cf., Köchler, “Peace in a multipolar world,” in: *Current Concerns*, N. 17/18, 25v July 2017, pp. 11-15. – On the role of Russia, in that regard, cf. Dmitri Trenin, Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), “Russia has made a decisive break with the West and is ready to help shape a new world order.” *RT*, 4 July 2022, <https://www.rt.com/55832-rus-pivoting-toward-nonwest/>.

⁴⁰ Among the possible candidates for membership in an expanded BRICS are Indonesia, Egypt, Turkey Mexico, Saudi Arabia.

⁴¹ Quoted according to the transcript of the speech released by: *ASI Forum “Strong Ideas for a New Time,”* Moscow, July 20, 2022, <https://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69039>. – Cf. also President Putin’s speech at the *Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF)* on 17 June 2022: St Petersburg International Economic Forum Plenary session, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68669>.

vein, though from different political and ideological premises, Tony Blair, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, made the sober admission: “We are coming to the end of Western political and economic dominance. The world is going to be at least bi-polar and possibly multi-polar.”⁴²

Unlike the pompous declarations of 1990 and 1991, these assessments of a change in world order do not mean the proclamation of a new era in any Messianic sense. They are rather based on a sober calculation and evaluation of the consequences of a strategy of power politics that far too long was able to travel in idealistic disguise. There is one important caveat, however. As long as the United States will be in a position to exploit regional and geostrategic rivalries between powers that could become cornerstones of a new multipolar architecture (e.g. China, India) – i.e. as long as major global players may fall victim to a politics of *divide et impera* [divide and rule], any prognosis will be fraught with uncertainties, and the Western-dominated system may prove to be more resilient than many expected.

It will thus be decisive that emerging powers – particularly, but not exclusively, within the BRICS framework – overcome their (regional) rivalries and continue to act in unison at the global level, also, and especially so, in terms of new arrangements for financial and commercial transactions. Simultaneous membership in BRICS and the Quad-alliance,⁴³ for instance, may be incompatible in that regard. The risks of old-fashioned realpolitik, brilliantly described by Henry Kissinger in his analysis of the 19th century “concert of powers,”⁴⁴ must not be underestimated also in the 21st century.

Conclusion

As history has amply demonstrated, *false*, self-serving and exclusivist ideas of world order, proclaimed by the “hegemon of the moment” – often in the course of or after major geopolitical conflict – are not sustainable. If peace is to prevail (or to be restored), great power exceptionalism, or unilateralism, must be replaced by a blueprint for a system of relations among a multitude of sovereign states that

⁴² Tony Blair, “After Ukraine, What Lessons Now for Western Leadership?” *Ditchley Foundation Annual Lecture LVIII*, 16 July 2022, <https://institute.global/tony-blair/tony-blairs-speech-after-ukraine-what-lessons-now-western-leadership>.

⁴³ Australia, India, Japan, United States.

⁴⁴ *Diplomacy*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994.

accounts for the interests of *all*, on the basis of *mutuality*. This will be the only reasonable “win-win approach” envisageable under conditions of today’s global world.

An exceptionalist politics of world order – that so often, since antiquity, allowed leaders to instrumentalize the idea of justice and fairness between nations as a tool of domination – must be identified as what it is: namely, a threat to global peace and stability. What the international community needs – and the peoples of the world deserve – is not a fake “new” order, serving the interests of a privileged few, but an enlightened, just system of rules similar to that which Immanuel Kant described as foundation of “perpetual peace”⁴⁵ between sovereign states.

⁴⁵ *Zum ewigen Frieden* [1795]. Ed. Otfried Höffe. Berlin: Akademie, 1995. – For an English translation, see Ted Humphrey (ed.), *Perpetual Peace and other essays on Politics, History and Morals*. Indianapolis / Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983.