

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY RICHARD FALK

09.09.2023

G-7 and BRICS Visions of the Future: Coercive Unipolarity or Cooperative Multipolarity



First G6 summit at the Chateau de Rambouillet in November 1975 – Public Domain

When the Cold War ended in 1991, the West, and particularly the United States, found itself at a fork in the road. One road led to peace, justice, cooperation, nuclear disarmament, a revitalized UN, inclusiveness, pluralism, human rights, multilateralism, fair trade, regulated markets, food security, energy transition, sustainability, and humane governance. The other road led to militarism, intervention, warmongering, nuclearism, conflict, sanctions, regime-changing interventions, multiple trends toward inequality, predatory neoliberal globalization, hegemony, geopolitical primacy. Unfortunately, the

victorious side in the Cold War immediately chose the familiar more traveled road of hegemonic geopolitics, foregoing historic opportunities to pursue nuclear disarmament and humane forms of global governance, including a veto-free UN. The longer term harms of these serious lapses in geopolitical judgment are being currently experienced by way of the unresolved Ukraine Crisis and the negligently handled response to global warning.

The American president, George W. Bush a decade later after the Soviet implosion, summarized the ideological justification of this choice in self-assured language: “The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom—and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise... We will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent.” [Cover letter to official document, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 2002] Such a statement was made some months after the 9/11 terror attacks on World Trade Center and Pentagon, reaffirming the choice of the geopolitical continuity by declaring a ‘war on terror’ rather than seizing the opportunity for a momentous experiment in transnational cooperative anti-terror law enforcement.

The Ukraine War presented yet another opportunity to choose the less familiar road of compromise and diplomacy rather than the costly and problematic pursuit of victory, the opportunity costs for climate and reforms at home of further increased investments in hegemony and prolonged warfare, and yet again there was no hesitation about embracing an uncompromising militarism. What doubts arose involved an increased questioning of whether the financial burdens of this geopolitically tinged war making, that is, defeating Russia, warning China, and cynically inflicting the heavy incidental costs of such a strategy on the Ukrainian people who have not only been victimized by the Russian attack but by the hyper-nationalism of their own government including the acceptance of political guidance from Washington, despite its geopolitical priorities clashing with Ukrainian wellbeing.

This prevailing pattern of geopolitics is difficult to deny, and vividly illustrated by comparing the long and complicated outcome documents of the recent summits of G-7 leaders in May at Hiroshima and declaration of BRICS leaders at Johannesburg in August. The G-7 document has three notable features: a featured unconditional commitment to help Ukraine achieve a battlefield victory over Russia, a downplaying of the relevance of the UN and the failure to do more than pay lip service to the peace agenda embedded in the UN Charter, nuclear disarmament, and international law, bolstered by ‘feel good’

platitudes about the doing more to achieve the UN SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) by 2030. The G-7 countries having opposed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), affirming their continued reliance on deterrence, non-proliferation, and implicitly on U.S. ‘full-spectrum dominance,’ misleadingly softened by cynically affirming an intention to embrace nuclear disarmament ‘ultimately,’ which in elite security circles of the West is correctly interpreted as ‘never.’ After the Cold War ended in the early 1990s, the global situation was as calm as it could ever hope to be, with geopolitical rivalry removed from the scene, and yet not a single move was made by Washington even to test the waters by proposing high profile moves to achieve nuclear disarmament and build up UN peacekeeping capabilities.

In contrast to the G-7, the BRICS Johannesburg Declaration looks toward a world of peaceful competition and global cooperation, treats the Ukraine War as presenting a challenge that should be the occasion for diplomatic peacemaking rather than militarist war making. The most pronounced theme of the BRICS document is the resolve to become less dependent on the hegemonic global security and trade/finance/investment arrangements more harshly imposed on the Global South after the Soviet collapse, to resist the new imperialism of unipolarity and act in solidarity with various post-independence conflictual situations that has awakened the world to the reality that the struggle against ‘colonialism’ in Africa, Latin America, and Asia is far from over.

The recent tensions arising from the July coup in Niger manifest the entrapment of African states in the toxic reality of ‘colonialism after colonialism.’ This reality reflects the contradictions, corruption, and incompetence of the decolonized state that had been deliberately prevented from developing national economic, educational, and governance capabilities while under direct colonial control until 1960, and since then exploited by regimes of informal control. When left to fend for themselves these states, especially the former French colonies in West Africa, found that they could not do better by way of domestic governance than to accept a new humiliating phase of French tutelage slightly disguised by the façade of collaborating civilian elites.

BRICS are still at the early stages of establishing their own identity, an intricate undertaking given its own internal contradictions. For instance, India, Brazil, and South Africa do not want to burn most of their bridges to the West but do seek to create counterweights to the hegemonic aspects of unipolarity. Also, it is unclear whether the addition of six countries to BRICS membership will overall broaden its base and help increase its anti-hegemonic leverage or have the opposite effect—diluting a principal

reason for the formation of BRICS by admitting to membership countries that seem presently unwilling to challenge hegemony or geopolitical primacy.

As of mid-2023 the difference in tone and substance between the two collective perspectives has significance. The G-7 after a recital of peace and development platitudes shifts immediately to specifying its operational commitment to militarism, which is reinforced throughout the document by references to ‘Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine.’ The opening words of the Hiroshima final statement are indicative: “We, the Leaders of the Group of Seven (G7), met in Hiroshima for our annual Summit on May 19-21, 2023, more united than ever in our determination to meet the global challenges of this moment and set the course for a better future. Our work is rooted in respect for the Charter of the United Nations (UN) and international partnership.” From the overall document, it is clear that ‘our determination’ in the quoted sentence is symbolically and substantively linked to securing victory in Ukraine however long it takes, an interpretation confirmed by the document’s focus on outlining concrete steps in relation to winning in Ukraine with no sign of openness to diplomacy or political compromise.

This dubious course of action is confirmed as follows: “We are taking concrete steps to “support Ukraine for as long as it takes in the face of Russia’s illegal war of aggression.” A listing of such concrete steps is in marked contrast to the vague generalities when it comes peace and justice issues. In contrast, the BRICS give close attention to the worsening situation of Palestine, worries about migration, the urgency of an equitable approach to climate change, issue on which the G-7 address by silence or regressive postures.

How can we make sense of these G-7 choices that seem so obviously to imperil the human future by raising nuclear dangers to crisis levels and by diverting attention and resources from global public goods such as climate change, poverty mitigation, food and nutritional security, self-determination, peaceful resolution of conflict, enhanced UN capabilities, receptivity to multilateralism? Why do the political leaders of the West consistently turn their backs on the human interest as a time of planetary emergency?

A first line of response is to grasp that although the historical circumstances are fraught with unprecedented risk, geopolitical primacy has long been part of the way the world is organized. Even in the shadow of World War II, the UN exempted the most dangerously powerful countries from its own Charter framework by the veto as well as by giving the victors impunity for their international crimes while prosecuting punishing surviving leaders of the losers. With respect to nuclear weapons, instead of eliminating them the

solution found was to combine non-proliferation restraints on additions to the nuclear oligopoly as accentuated by unrestrained discretion in secretly developing roles for this weaponry in the war plans of the nuclear powers, not even mitigated by No First Declarations. In effect, the global security system was designed in 1945 to keep international law and the UN at the margins. What it was not designed to be was a *unipolar* structure that only emerged after the Berlin Wall fell. It is this structure that is currently under increasing challenge from Russia and China, themselves not prepared to bring geopolitical governance to an end. Multipolar challenges are also being directed at hegemonic and dysfunctional post-Cold War structures of the U.S. led NATO West. Unipolarity is also increasingly challenged by the Global South acting jointly and separately from the two geopolitical challengers. As the Global West drifts ever closer to declaring Cold War II, the Global South is inclining toward Bandung II.

Among the important manifestations of this new more hopeful global atmosphere are the following: widespread support by governments representing a majority of the world's peoples for diplomatic accommodations in Ukraine and Iran and overall opposition to coercive diplomacy by way of sanctions; the launch by BRICS of a direct challenge to neoliberal globalization through the 'dedollarization' of international trade and financial arrangements for less developed countries; the operations of the New Development Bank (NDB) in promoting economic progress in less developed countries without the debilitating conditionalities of the support imposed by the World Bank and IMF; challenging NATO nuclearism by wide support among countries in the Global South for Treaty of Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW); support for Palestine's right of self-determination and African coups directed at the colonialist features of post-colonial statehood.

The global outlook is becoming aware of and hostile toward U.S. hegemony, but showing a greater interest in a governance framework that displays deference to the UN Charter and international law. These developments, despite contradictions and elements of incoherence, create a potential for a more benign geopolitics, less militarist, more committed to peaceful resolution of disputes, more concerned with equity in the world economy, and dedicated to cooperative solution of common global problems. If such trends continue, the historical transformation underway will gain momentum, weakening its *hegemonic* and *unipolar* characteristics and the early phase of a transition to a more benign, regulated, and multipolar version of *geopolitics*. Overall, glimmers of hope in a darkening sky.

Richard Falk is Albert G. Milbank Professor Emeritus of International Law at Princeton University, Chair of Global law, Queen Mary University London, and Research Associate, Orfalea Center of Global Studies, UCSB.

CounterPunch 08.09.2023