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WILL CHINA TAKE OVER THE WORLD IN THE MIDDLE OF THE 21ST CENTURY?

Will China Take Over the World in the Middle of the 21st Century?

The subject of this article is China and the analysis of its chances of gaining the status of the number one superpower in the world by the middle of the 21st century. I try to answer two fundamental questions here: Will China take over the world in the middle of the 21st century and will the United States and its allies allow this to happen? I try to answer these in both theoretical and utilitarian terms. I refer to several research theories, including the theory of equilibrium support and George Modelski's long cycle theory. Above all, I refer to the theory of the state's foreign policy, the theory of classical realism and the theory of hegemonic change. I use a comparative method and a critical discourse analysis, among others.

The main hypothesis of the article is the conclusion that the United States is slowly losing its position as a global hegemon in the international arena, which strengthens China's chances of achieving its strategic goal in international politics, which is to take over the world by the mid-21st century. However, this will not be an easy task. It will depend on many factors, including the internal situation in China and the policy of the United States and its allies towards Chinese aspirations, as well as Russia's position on this issue, which is already competing with China's growing influence in the world. China may also join forces with Russia and collectively deprive the United States of its hegemonic status. On the other hand, there is a tendency in political science to assume that Russia-China relations are a balancing alliance for the United States. However, this practice may verify the overall Russia-China relations in favour of the United States, thanks to which it will manage to maintain control over the world and defend its status as a hegemon in the international arena.

Keywords: China, United States, Russia, foreign policy, hegemon, control, competition, analysis, contemporary world, international relations.

INTRODUCTION

The answer to the question in the title is not an easy one for the reason that the United States (US) is still the most powerful state in the world. Its enormous economic, scientific, technical, and military potential significantly exceeds the potential of modern China. Besides, the US is a member of NATO and can count on the support of the majority of allies within the transatlantic system.¹ On the other hand, the mighty US has lost bloody wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, which is proof that nowadays the US no longer enjoys its dominance in the world in each aspect and is gradually losing its position as a global hegemon. Moreover, in the opinion of the author, it is rather impossible to return to *Pax Americana* with the US being the world leader (hegemon). Since the end of the Cold War, a new type of balance of power and the coexistence of several world centres, which are located near China, India, the Russian Federation and the European Union (EU), has been emerging.²

Over the years, researchers and politicians have been discussing the position and role of the US and China in current and future international relations. The debates are related to the building of a new, post-Cold War international order, which started at the turn of the 1990s, that is, since the end of the Cold War between the West and the East, which was won by the US.³ The discussions intensified after the People's Republic of China (PRC) stated that in 2049, which

¹ The war of the US against Iraq, which started in March 2003, was not supported by US allies such as Germany and France. By engaging militarily in the conflict in Iraq, Poland contributed to the split within NATO, and was exposed to criticism from its European partners. See: A.D. Rotfeld, *Przemiany w stosunkach transatlantycznych a bezpieczeństwo Polski*, in: A. Orzelska (ed.), *Stosunki transatlantyczne z perspektywy polskiej polityki zagranicznej*, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Collegium Civitas, Warszawa 2009; R. Zięba (ed.), *Bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe w XXI wieku*, Wydawnictwo Poltext, Warszawa 2018; J. Shapiro, D. Pardijs, *The Transatlantic Meaning of Donald Trump: A US – EU Power Audit*, ECFR-232, September, www.ecfr.eu (Accessed 5.09.2017).

² *China's Rise and Rethinking International Relations Theory*. Edited by Chengxin Pan and Emilian Kavalski, University of Bristol, Bristol 2022; A. Hurrell, *Hegemony, liberalism and global order: what space for would-be great powers?*, "International Affairs" 2006, no. 1, pp. 11–13; F. Zakaria, *The post-American World*, Norton, New York 2008, pp. 25–26; J.M. Fiszer, *The Rivalry Between the United States, China and Russia in the Process of Shaping a New International Order in the 21st Century*, "Studia Polityczne" 2020, vol. 49, no. 1, pp. 11–33.

³ More on this: J.M. Fiszer, *System euroatlantyczny przed i po zakończeniu zimnej wojny. Istota, cele i zadania oraz rola w budowie nowego ładu globalnego*, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Warszawa 2013; R. Kuźniar, *Europa w porządku międzynarodowym*, Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, Warszawa 2016; P. Buhler, *O potęgę w XXI wieku*. Wydawnictwo Akademickie DIALOG, Warszawa 2014; G. Friedman, *Następna dekada. Gdzie byliśmy i dokąd zmierzamy*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2012.

is the centenary of the PRC, the state will take over the world. It is hard to foresee if this will happen. Everything is possible in politics; however, China's domination will depend not only on the state itself but also on the way its rivals will act, particularly the US, which is trying its best not to lose the position of a hegemon it has held for over 30 years in the international arena.⁴

The US is aware of the threats China and Russia pose. This is evidenced by QUAD⁵ and its new alliance with the United Kingdom and Australia in the Pacific (AUKUS). AUKUS is expected to become a barrier to China's expansionism. Analysts claim that AUKUS is the most significant security arrangement between the US, the United Kingdom (UK), and Australia since World War II. Admittedly, the countries have been allies for ages, and AUKUS formalises and deepens their cooperation in the field of defence. The pact focuses on building military potential which is different from the 1946 UKUSA intelligence alliance of the US, the UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. "This is a historic opportunity for the three nations, with like-minded allies and partners, to protect shared values and promote security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region", it was stressed in the joint statement of the US, the UK, and Australia. The US President Joe Biden stated this is a "historic step", which allows "investing in our greatest source of strength – our alliances – and updating them to better meet the threats of today and tomorrow".⁶

The cooperation within AUKUS is meant to include artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and quantum technology. Digital technology is of great importance for cybersecurity, and thus for the security of a state and its citizens, whereas cybersecurity is a key element of the information and narrative war in a broad sense and a major element of a hybrid war which some countries, for example, the Russian Federation, have already been waging. President Joe Biden has recently said that if the US does nothing for the development of

⁴ P. Khanna, *Unsere Asiatische Zukunft*, Rowohlt Verlag, Berlin 2019, p. 131–137; T. Parsi, *Mit oder Trump: Viele Amerikaner sehen die USA nicht mehr in der Rolle des Weltpolitizisten. Europa muss die Zeichen der Zeit Ernst nehmen*, ipg-journal.de/ipg/autorinnen- und autoren/autor/trita-parsi/04.01.2022.

⁵ QUAD – Quadrilateral Security Dialogue – to nieformalny sojusz Indii, US, Australii i Japonii. More on this: B. Góralczyk, *Centrum jest dziś na Pacyfiku*, Rzeczpospolita-e-wydanie, rp.pl, 27.09.2021.

⁶ M. Kruczkowska, *Nowy sojusz na Pacyfiku*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 17.09.2021, p. 3; A. Rybińska, *Świat to džungla. Stany Zjednoczone i Wielka Brytania właśnie zadały Francji cios w plecy*, <https://wpolityce.pl/swiat/567184-swiat-to-dzungla-europa-szybko-rozczarowala-sie-bidenem> (Accessed 22.09.2021).

state-of-the-art technological solutions, it will cease to be a leader in innovation. In order to prevent this, Biden announced a \$250 billion state support plan for the development of key sectors of the economy. The US Senate voted for it unreservedly. If the US wants to continue to be a global superpower, it cannot lose an ongoing technological war with China. Today, the US and its ally, Europe, require well-educated and inventive scientists, engineers, and digital technology experts. It should be emphasised that there are four times more students studying science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) in China than in the US, and five times more than in the whole of Europe. In addition, there are roughly 360,000 Chinese students studying STEM in the US. Apart from modern engineering and technical staff, it is essential to have access to funds in the process of creating groundbreaking innovations, particularly when it comes to commercialising an innovation. Unluckily, China, with its \$6.5 trillion budget reserve funds, has a huge advantage over the indebted West. In 2019, the US debt exceeded \$23 trillion, and in April 2020, it amounted to \$25 trillion. The entire EU, the potential and actual US ally in a war over global control, is heavily indebted, too.⁷

What is more, the US is struggling with an inflation rate in 2021 of over 4%, which is the highest in ten years. China's GDP converted into PPP has been higher than US GDP PPP since 2016. The research of economists reveals that in 2025, China will be a world economic leader. Its share will amount to over 20%, the EU's approximately 15% (the EU without the UK – 13%), the US slightly less than 15%, and Russia roughly 3–4%.⁸

In theory, AUKUS could strengthen the influence of the West in an important region, from where the Chinese want to “displace” the Americans and become a regional power. It is impossible to predict if this will happen, especially since AUKUS has been criticised by France and Germany – these states have been deepening economic ties with China and recently this has led to the conclusion of an investment agreement between the EU and China. German and French politicians

⁷ M. Orłowski, *Globalny wyścig technologiczny – o co toczy się gra?* Kongres Obywatelski – thinkletter@kongresobywatelski.pl (30.09.2021); W. Gadomski, *Sygnaty ostrzegawcze: nadciąga kryzys*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 4.08.2021, p. 14; J. Bartosiak, *Co przyniesie nam rok 2022?*, “Strategy and Future” no. 12, 2021, pp. 1–4.

⁸ L. Smolaga, M. Smolaga, *Zmiana układu sił w stosunkach międzynarodowych: analiza potencjałów z perspektywy do lat 2025-2030*, „Sprawy Międzynarodowe” 2020, vol. 73, no. 3, pp. 75–77; R.J. Kruszyński, *USA-ChRL: konflikt konieczny?*, „Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego” 2020, vol. 12, no. 23, pp. 48–68.

criticising AUKUS, blame Joe Biden for following Trump's selfish policy towards China and debilitating NATO and the EU.⁹

Chinese economic and territorial expansion, particularly in the South China Sea, raises the concerns not only of the US, but also of Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam. China claims three-quarters of the sea, arguing with the Philippines and Vietnam over the strategically located Spratly Islands and the Paracel Islands, rich in fishery, crude oil, and gas. In the economic context, Chinese expansionism is expressed in acquiring foreign know-how, for example, by putting pressure on foreign enterprises. In 2018, this policy led to an open trade conflict (economic warfare) between China and the US which is still not over, despite the signing of the Phase 1 Agreement, or the Phase 1 Deal. It could affect the worldwide situation and not only aggravate a new cold war, where China replaces Russia, but also lead to a hot war involving actual fighting. The history of Europe and the world shows that when a state growing in strength begins to threaten the current superpower, their rivalry most often ends in a war. In order to prevent this and avoid a war from which no one side would gain, China and the US must carefully study their history of international relations.¹⁰

The article focuses on China, and the analysis of its opportunities to become the number one world superpower by the middle of the 21st century. The author attempts to answer the question which is posed in the title of the study: will China take over the world by the middle of the 21st century, and will the United States and other global powers let it happen? The author tries to answer this in theoretical and utilitarian terms. The author first and foremost refers to the state's foreign policy theory, classical realism, and the theory of long cycles, and uses the comparative method as well as a critical discourse. The theories and research methods allow the author to thoroughly analyse such an important issue in international relations.

The principal hypothesis of the study is the conclusion that the US is slowly losing its superpower position in the international arena, contributing to building up China's opportunities for achieving its strategic goal in international politics, which is to take over the

⁹ J.F. Copper, *Donald J. Trump and China*, Hamilton Books, Lanham 2019, pp. 156–157; W. Gadomski, *Sygnaly ostrzegawcze: nadciaga kryzys*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 4.08.2021, p. 14.

¹⁰ G. Allison, *Skazani na wojnę? Czy Ameryka i Chiny unikną Pułapki Tukidydesa?*, Wydawnictwo: Pascal historia, Bielsko-Biała 2018; R.J. Kruszyński, *USA-ChRL: konflikt konieczny?*, „Przegląd Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego” 2020, vol. 12, no. 23, pp. 48–68.

world by the middle of the 21st century. However, this will depend on numerous factors, including the policy of the US and its allies towards China's huge aspirations and the stance of Russia, which can compete with growing China's influence in the world. On the other hand, there is a strong tendency in political science to assume that Russia and China form an alliance that balances the US. The practice may show that Russian-Chinese relations will not debilitate the US so that it would retain control and defend its status as a superpower in the international arena.

THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF CHINA'S INTERNATIONAL POLICY AND ITS ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

In the light of realism, there are many factors, both internal and external, that influence the way a state acts and whether or not it is effective in the international arena. The strongest states known as superpowers, including today's China, usually demonstrate higher effectiveness. China pursues an offensive policy to the greatest extent possible, contributes to the worldwide situation, plays a leading role in international processes, and predestines the emerging international systems (orders).¹¹

However, in the light of foreign policy theory, there are also many factors, both objective and subjective, or internal and external, that determine the position and the role of each state in the international arena. Internal objective factors include the relatively constant characteristics of a state as a subject of international law and international relations, such as its geographic and geopolitical location, demographics, economic, scientific and technical, and military potential as well as its political system. The set of a state's subjective internal conditions comprises the perception of the international environment by society, media, and politicians, concepts of foreign policy represented by various political forces as well as the effectiveness and engagement of its diplomatic service. Meanwhile, objective external conditions include the evolution of the international situation around a state, its international position as well as contractual relations with other states (treaties and alliances),

¹¹ T. Łoś-Nowak, *Polityka zagraniczna w przestrzeni teoretycznej*, in: T. Łoś-Nowak, *Polityka zagraniczna. Aktorzy, potencjały, strategie*, Wydawnictwo Poltext, Warszawa 2011, p. 17; E. Haliżak (ed.), *Badanie polityki zagranicznej państwa*, Wydawnictwo Rambler, Warszawa 2018.

and existing international law. The last set consists of subjective international conditions such as the way the international community perceives a state, the foreign policy concepts of other states addressed to or concerning a specific state, for example, the US or China, as well as the effectiveness and engagement of the diplomatic services of the other states with which those states have relations.¹²

With regard to the existing theories of long cycles, it is worth noting nowadays that they assume that only superpowers, that is, the US and China, can change the global order. Moreover, they assume that a state which is not a superpower (e.g., Russia, which is classified as a regional power by some researchers) pursues one of two strategies: joining or balancing. On the other hand, the maintaining equilibrium theory demonstrates that states can also choose a third strategy in a time of hegemonic change – maintaining the equilibrium. At this point, one should refer to the long cycle theory by George Modelski, which focuses on the four phases of the hegemonic cycle: domination, delegitimation, de-concentration, and hegemonic war. In the light of this theory, the US is currently in the phase of delegitimising its position and role as the number one superpower in the world, which may be an additional premise for China's fight for global power. Such considerations would not be complete without the power transition theory of Abramo Fimo Kenneth Organski and Jacek Kugler, which describes the moment of the outbreak of a hegemonic war, which is defined as power parity at the moment when both powers have a relatively equal level of power. The multiple hierarchies model developed by Douglas Lemke, which includes an innovative conceptualisation of the international system, departing from the traditional polarity theory, is noteworthy, too. This model assumes that the international system, instead of a one system equilibrium, consists rather of many equilibria, coinciding with the boundaries of subsystems. The dynamics of relations in the international system are therefore determined on two levels. The first is the subsystem level where a given regional power tries to maintain dominance over the rest of the states in a subsystem. The second level is the relationship between the regional powers that dominate in a given subsystem.

¹² T. Łoś-Nowak, *Polityka zagraniczna w przestrzeni teoretycznej...*, p. 17; E. Haliżak (ed.), *Badanie polityki zagranicznej państwa...*; pp. 13–14; R. Zięba (ed.), *Wstęp do teorii polityki zagranicznej państwa*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2005; J. Zając, *Role międzynarodowe państwa średniego – aspekty teoretyczne*, „Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe” 2013, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 11–14.

The situation in the international system is therefore a result of the relationship between the regional powers.¹³

The new, post-Cold War international system that is being shaped in Europe and the world is heterogeneous. There are various groups of countries in this system: democratic and undemocratic; modern, postmodern, and pre-modern; poor and rich; well organised and failing or failed; weak and strong, as well as small, medium, and large, regional powers and superpowers. The new democratic principles of the international order proclaimed after the end of the Cold War, that is, the rule of law, pluralism, sovereignty and the equality of states, and the free market, are, in fact, not contested by states, at least not officially (verbally). However, these principles and democratic values do not work perfectly in practice, and at present, they are repeatedly neglected by many of the participants in international relations. They are interpreted liberally and understood differently in the countries of the EU and the US, Russia, or China. This goes hand in hand with the rising tide of populism and nationalism. As a result, according to the Democracy Index, there are only 23 fully democratic countries in the world, 20 of which are in Europe. Hence, we are living in times of great and dynamic changes, and the boundaries between inside and outside are blurring. This involves systemic changes that affect the international situation. The pragmatic concept of systemic transformation, that is, regime change, is rejected by states that do not respect the rule of law and democracy, as exemplified by the way China and Russia act today. In turn, attempts to impose democracy from the outside, lead, by their nature, to counterproductive results. An example is US foreign policy after 1991. Moreover, such a way of promoting democracy is seen as a hidden form of a return to colonial methods. It is defined as the Americanisation, or Westernisation, of various regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Old and new powers often refer to the common values and interests of the international community. However, in the perception of Asian, African, and Latin American countries, these are attempts of the great powers to impose their selfish interests. The concept of a special role for the US is

¹³ More on this: R. Jackson, G. Sorensen, *Introduction to International Relations. Theories and Approaches*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2003; J.S. Ney, *Power in the global information age: From Realism to Globalization*, Routledge, London 2004; Ch. Layne, *This Time It's Real: The End of Unipolarity and the Pax Americana*, "International Studies Quarterly" 2012, vol. 56, no. 1, pp. 203–215; M. Prys, *Hegemony, Domination, Detachment: Differences in Regional Powerhood*, "International Studies Review" 2010, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 492–497.

rejected. The US leadership in the world is being challenged. Anti-Americanism fuelled by China and Russia has gained popularity and become a fairly new ideology, especially in some countries of Africa, Latin America, and Asia. It has become one of the premises of the renaissance of international terrorism, and religious Islamic terrorism in particular. In a situation when there are no institutional forms of security and multilateral structures, it leads to the phenomenon of the denationalisation of foreign policies, especially national security.¹⁴

Nowadays, a new phenomenon is taking place in the international system, which is the increasing number of weak, failing, and failed states. They are seen as one of the main contemporary threats, along with international terrorism. The cause of the majority of modern conflicts since 1991 has been an internal weakness, not external aggression. In 1992–2008, more than 70 major armed conflicts broke out worldwide, and in 2009–2021, dozens of others took place. Among these, such threats to world peace are the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Russo-Georgian war in Syria, and the war between Russia and Ukraine.¹⁵

Another phenomenon in contemporary international relations is a qualitatively new and positive, previously unknown, role played by supranational institutions. Undoubtedly, in the history of Europe and the world, the EU, which is an entity more integrated than the classic international organisation, but is not a state (superpower), has been playing an important role since 1993. In addition to intergovernmental organisations such as the United Nations, NATO, OSCE, and the Council of Europe, various supranational institutions, such as the EU, the Weimar Triangle, the Visegrad Group, and the Three Seas Initiative, are also becoming the main security instruments of the medium and small countries of Europe. As a rule, great powers attach importance to these institutions when they are useful instruments for implementing their policies. In other words, the great powers, led

¹⁴ F. Zakaria, *The post-America world*, Norton, New York 2008; A. Narlikar, R. Kumar, *From Pax Americana to Pax Mosaica? Bargaining Over a New Economic Order*, "The Political Quarterly" 2012, vol. 83, no. 2, pp. 384–394; J.M. Fiszer, *Terroryzm jako zagrożenie dla bezpieczeństwa euroatlantyckiego i nowego ładu międzynarodowego*, in: J.M. Fiszer, P. Olszewski (ed.), *System euroatlantycki w wielobiegunowym ładzie międzynarodowym*, ISP PAN, Dom Wydawniczy ELIPSA, Warszawa 2013, pp. 267–295; B. Bolechów, *Terroryzm w świecie po dwubiegunowym*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2002.

¹⁵ A. Grigas, *Russian Reimperialization: From Soft Power to Annexation*, in: *Beyond Crimea, The New Russian Empire*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 2016, pp. 113–127; A.D. Rotfeld, *Polityka suwerennej Polski w niestabilnym świecie*, "Sprawy Międzynarodowe" 2008, no. 4, p. 10; J.M. Fiszer, *Zadania i cele polityki zagranicznej Władimira Putina*, "Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna" 2016, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 167–201.

by the US and China, treat them instrumentally, but they do not want to be instruments for implementing the strategies of supra- and multinational (multilateral) institutions and organisations, which lead to new divisions and conflicts in the world.¹⁶

On the other hand, the years 2008–2021 have clearly shown that the role of the Atlantic Community in the international arena is also weakening, as the EU and NATO continue to drift and cannot reach a consensus on the forms and scope of further cooperation and methods of fighting for peace in the world. Europe and the US went their separate ways. Their mutual ties and cooperation are no longer as strong as they were during the Cold War years. This increases China's chances of taking over the world by the middle of the 21st century, especially since the decline of the American superpower which began with the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001.¹⁷

Today, the US has less and less influence on world events. Meanwhile, China is no longer hiding its long-term goals or plans on how to achieve them. China wants Taiwan, domination in Central Asia, and control over trade routes. The New Silk Road is supposed to serve this purpose as well, which, unlike the historic road connecting China with Europe and the Middle East, is, in fact, an idea, not a road. It is about the globalisation of China's economic and political role, mainly through investments and pushing Russia and the US away from Southeast Asia, post-Soviet Asia, Turkey, and Iran. The investments are allegedly beneficial for both sides, which is why, in some circles, the New Silk Road is called the "Chinese Marshall Plan".¹⁸ In practice, it is supposed to serve China's fight for world domination. As Professor Zbigniew Brzeziński emphasises, whoever controls Central Asia, controls Europe and Asia. The leaders of the PRC want the "Chinese

¹⁶ J.M. Fiszer, M. Czasak, *Trójkąt Weimarski i jego działalność na rzecz integracji Europy w latach 1991–2016*, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Warszawa 2019; T.G. Grosse, *Pokryzysowa Europa. Dylematy Unii Europejskiej*, Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, Warszawa 2018.

¹⁷ T. Parsi, *Mit oder Trump: Viele Amerikaner sehen die USA nicht mehr in der Rolle des Weltpolizisten. Europa muss die Zeichen der Zeit Ernst nehmen*, ipg-journal.de/ipg/autorinnen- und autoren/autor/trita-parsi/04.01.2022; L. Pastusiak, *Prezydent dobrych intencji. Polityka zagraniczna Baracka Obamy*, Wydawnictwo Akademia Finansów i Biznesu Vistula w Warszawie, Warszawa 2015.

¹⁸ More on this: E. Bryła, *Czy mamy szansę na chiński węzeł?*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 15.09.2017, p. 10; F. Godement, *Czego chcą Chiny?*, Wydawnictwo Akademickie DIALOG, Warszawa 2016, pp. 243–249; E. Haliżak, *Międzynarodowa strategia geoeconomiczna Chin – perspektywa neoliberalnego instytucjonalizmu i kulturowo-cywilizacyjnej tradycji*, „Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna” 2017, no. 2, pp. 72–101; Xu Jian, *Wspólnie budując Jedwabny Szlak XXI wieku promujemy i zacieśniamy przyjaźń*, in: J. Marszałek-Kawa (ed.), *Chiny i świat zewnętrzny*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2016, pp. 149–154.

Dream” to come true, hence, they strive to rebuild Great China and take over the world. As the author mentioned before, they want to achieve this by 1 October 2049, that is, the centenary of the PRC.¹⁹

Chinese international policy is supported by Vladimir Putin, who has been opposing American hegemony and American expansionism for long enough.²⁰ His main goal is to break the Euro-Atlantic system, rebuild a strong Russia and strengthen its position in the international arena as a superpower with adequate potential, especially economic and military. The goals and tasks set by Vladimir Putin for Russia’s foreign and military policy are dangerous for the US, Europe, and the entire world. They pose a serious threat to international peace and security and threaten the preservation of the hegemonic position of the US.²¹

OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS FOR CHINA WHICH IS SEEKING TO TAKE OVER THE WORLD BY THE MIDDLE OF THE 21ST CENTURY

For 30 years, we have been observing an exceptional situation in the world. The Americans have built a unipolar international system and have ruled the world. The US has had such a huge economic, institutional, monetary, and military advantage that no coalitions were formed to balance against this superpower. Neither Germany nor Yeltsin’s Russia, China, or Japan protested. In times of progressive globalisation, the US has supervised the conditions of the game, which was beneficial for small and medium-sized countries as they did not

¹⁹ *Chiny: będziemy wreszcie numerem 1. Rozmowa z prof. Bogdanem Góralczykiem*, „Gazeta Wyborcza” 20.01.2017, p. 16. More on this: B. Góralczyk, *Wielki renesans. Chińska transformacja i jej konsekwencje*, Wydawnictwo Akademickie DIALOG, Warszawa 2018; B. Góralczyk, *Nowy długi marsz – Chiny ery Xi Jinpinga*, Wydawnictwo Akademickie DIALOG, Warszawa 2021.

²⁰ C. Belton, *Putin’s People: How The KGB Took Back Russia and Then Takes on the West*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 2020, pp. 209–210; P. Buhler, *O potęgę w XXI wieku...*, p. 186.

²¹ J.M. Fiszer, *Zadania i cele polityki zagranicznej Władimira Putina*, „Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna” 2016, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 167–201; J. Koralewski, *Rozpad ZSRR a powstanie Federacji Rosyjskiej. Mocarstwowość utracona?*, in: S. Wojciechowski, M. Tomczak (ed.), *Mocarstwowość na przełomie XX i XXI wieku. Teorie – analizy – prognozy*, Wyższa Szkoła Nauk Humanistycznych i Dziennikarstwa w Poznaniu, Poznań 2010, pp. 129–145; pp. 1–10; M. Kokot, *Jak Kreml na nowo podbija Europę metodami KGB*, „Gazeta Wyborcza” 13.01.2017, p. 13; J.M. Fiszer, *Polityka RFN wobec Rosji – szanse i zagrożenia dla Europy i świata w XXI wieku*, „Rocznik Polsko-Niemiecki” 2017, no. 25, pp. 39–69; J.M. Fiszer, *Czy Rosja pod rządami Władimira Putina zagraża Europie i światu?*, „Biuletyn Analiz i Opinii” 2015, vol. 20, no. 03.

have to fight on their own for access to the raw materials market, sales, and the international supply chain.²²

As a result, in the economic sphere, the new international order was characterised by the development of the market system on all continents, but at the same time, the asymmetry between rich and poor countries deepened. In international economic relations after 1990, transnational companies and corporations as well as banks, mainly American ones, started to play an increasingly important role, and the role of nation-states, especially small and medium-sized ones, decreased. The world was distancing itself from building a relatively diversified and multipolar international order in favour of a unipolar system headed by the US, the presidents of which spoke more and more loudly about the necessary “American leadership in the world”. However, these selfish aspirations of the US towards a unipolar order met with increasing resistance. Many politicians accused the US of unilateralism and hegemony, disregarding the rules of democracy, partnerships in international relations, and multilateral international obligations.²³

They were right. As Robert Kagan writes:

The liberal world order was not really ‘based on rules’, as some say today, or at least not in the military and strategic affairs. When using force, the United States would stop at making declarations at the United Nations, and often would not even consult its military interventions with allies.²⁴

Nota bene, this policy was continued by former President Donald Trump, who cared, above all, that the US maintained its hegemony in the world. This is evidenced by, for example, his decisions to withdraw US troops from Syria and Afghanistan, which made it difficult to end the civil war in these countries peacefully and strengthened the

²² Ł. Ambroziak, *Skutki amerykańsko-chińskiej wojny handlowej dla międzynarodowych łańcuchów dostaw*, Polski Instytut Ekonomiczny, Warszawa 2020; K. Żukrowska, *Wojna handlowa USA-ChRL i jej konsekwencje*, „Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe”, no. 2, 2020; J. Bartosiak, *Kto będzie rządzić 5G będzie rządzić światem*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 30.06.2019, p. 17; J.E. Stiglitz, *Globalizacja*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2004.

²³ J. Kukułka, *Wstęp do nauki o stosunkach międzynarodowych*, Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, Warszawa 2003, pp. 238–239; J. Stefanowicz, *Bezpieczeństwo w Europie lat dziewięćdziesiątych*, „Sprawy Międzynarodowe” 1991, no. 5, pp. 7–20; J.M. Fiszer, *System euroatlantycki przed i po zakończeniu zimnej wojny. Istota, cele i zadania oraz rola w budowie nowego ładu globalnego*, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Dom Wydawniczy ELIPSA, Warszawa 2013.

²⁴ R. Kagan, *Koniec Pax Americana?* “The Wall Street Journal”, „Gazeta Wyborcza” 17.11.2018, p. 4; *ibidem*, *Powrót historii – koniec marzeń*, Dom Wydawniczy REBIS, Poznań 2009.

influence of Russia and China there. Besides, it made “space for terrorist groups to plan operations against US citizens, America, and its allies”.²⁵

On the other hand, Trump emphasised that he was not sure if it would still be so, and if the US would be able to control the international order. He provoked Germany and said that if this order collapsed, it would be unclear whether the ships with their cars would reach the US or China, and whether they would be supplied with oil from the Persian Gulf because the US Navy’s cruisers and destroyers ensured the safety of its transport. He often repeated: “If you want this world, you follow the US will and reform the system so that China will not continue to grow at a pace that leads to its supremacy.”²⁶

At the beginning of the 21st century, the US fell into internal and external debt. The enormous debt owed to China, estimated at over \$1.3 trillion, has become particularly dangerous. Moreover, American democracy began to fail, and the presidential system of power was becoming less and less effective, both in domestic and foreign politics. On the other hand, Europe led by the EU, which was unable to deal with the financial and economic crisis and its consequences in many EU member states, the immigration crisis, Islamic terrorism, and other problems, was also becoming weaker and weaker. At the same time, there is no doubt that only a strong EU can be a global partner of the US, which supports and develops the material and spiritual strength of the Atlantic Community. A weak Europe, and thus a weak Atlantic Community, will not be a co-creator of a new, increasingly clearly emerging multipolar global order.²⁷

Nowadays, most researchers and experts assume that in the next 25–30 years a new multipolar global system will be created, in which the emerging powers, led by China, India, and Russia, will play a key role alongside the US. It is assumed that the Euro-Atlantic system with the US, the EU, and NATO at the head of it, will remain the guarantor of international security. It is emphasised that the US will remain a global political, military, and economic power, but its

²⁵ R. Stefanicki, *Trump zabiera armię z Afganistanu*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 24–26.12.2018, p. 8. See: E. Eppler, *TRUMP – und was tun wir? Der Antipolitiker und die Würde des Politischen*, Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachf. GmbH, Bonn 2018; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/10/16/trumps-indifferent-new-fighting-syria-theres-lat-sand-there-that-they-can-play-wit/>, 16.10.2019.

²⁶ J. Bartosiak, *Kto będzie rządzić 5G będzie rządzić światem...*, p. 16.

²⁷ T.G. Ash, *Free World: America, Europe and the Surprising Future of the West*, Random House, New York 2010; A. Kukliński, K. Pawłowski (ed.), *The Atlantic Community. The Titanic of the XXI Century?*, Wyższa Szkoła Biznesu – National Louis University, Nowy Sącz 2010.

hegemonic position will gradually weaken.²⁸ French political scientist and diplomat, Pierre Buhler in his fascinating book²⁹ criticises the condition of the contemporary US and writes pessimistically about its further role in the international arena.³⁰ He writes that:

Rightly or wrongly, due to external and internal indebtedness, America is perceived as weak (...). Despite the debt limit set and systematically increased by Congress, the forecasts for the coming years are not optimistic: it is estimated that in 2016 the US debt will reach a staggering 20 trillion, and in 2023 – 25 trillion. These are official US government estimates, but other sources paint a black picture: according to some sources US debt will amount to \$50 trillion (140% of GDP) by 2030.³¹

Admittedly, America, which maintains an expensive network of bases abroad, has become incapable of bearing its debt since the beginning of the 21st century and has been forced to rely on overseas financing of its debt – nearly half of the US's public debt belongs to foreign creditors, mainly to China (\$1.3 trillion) and Japan (\$1.1 trillion).³²

Over the years, the economic, political, and civilisational leadership of the US in the world has been undermined and criticised. Theories about the decline of this power are developed and its domestic and foreign policies, both inside and outside the US, are criticised. The superpower is not expected to be a hegemon, but a global driver, and this assumes the further development of China and India, as well as some regional powers.³³ However, the former President of the US, Donald Trump, and President Vladimir Putin, who is striving to restore Russia's superpower status and rebuild the bipolar or multipolar international order, did not want to let it happen. Putin accuses the US of trying to adapt the

²⁸ P.D. Williams, *Security Studies. An Introduction*, Routledge, Londyn & Nowy Jork 2012; S. Koziej, *Między piekłem a rajem. Szare bezpieczeństwo na progu XXI wieku*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2006; J.W. Müller, *Wo Europa endet? Ungarn, Brüssel und das Schicksal der liberalen Demokratie*, Suhrkamp, Berlin 2013; J.M. Fiszer, *Nowy, pojaltński ład globalny: bipolarny czy multipolarny?*, „Biuletyn Analiz i Opinii”, ISP PAN, no. 01(22), Warszawa 2016, pp. 1–6.

²⁹ P. Buhler, *O potędze w XXI wieku*, Wydawnictwo Akademickie DIALOG, Warszawa 2014.

³⁰ P.D. Williams, *Security Studies. An Introduction*, Routledge, Londyn & Nowy Jork 2012, pp. 34–36; J.W. Müller, *Wo Europa endet? Ungarn, Brüssel und das Schicksal der liberalen Demokratie*, Suhrkamp, Berlin 2013, pp. 134–136.

³¹ W. Pomykała, *Wyścig gigantów: stan i wizja współzawodnictwa ChRL i USA*, Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, Warszawa 2021; P. Buhler, *O potędze w XXI wieku...*, p. 262.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 263.

³³ L.W. Zacher, *Przyszłość w świetle prognoz światowych u progu XXI wieku*, in: „Polska 2000 Plus” 2000, no. 1; F. Fukuyama, *Budowanie państwa. Władza i ład międzynarodowy w XXI wieku*, Wydawnictwo REBIS, Poznań 2005; J. Wallerstein, *Koniec świata jaki znamy*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2004; Z. Brzeziński, *Wybór – dominacja czy przywództwo*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 2004.

international system and the global order to its interests, disregarding other players on the world stage, especially Russia.³⁴

Former President Donald Trump did not achieve his goal in the international arena. Instead, he caused animosity among the allies of the US and divisions in American society. Francis Fukuyama writes:

The greatest threat to America's global importance is (...) its internal situation: the United States is so divided that it is difficult to reach agreement on any matter. And it is of great importance for foreign policy. (...) The biggest problem is that Americans today live in two parallel worlds. We have many Republican supporters who believe victory was stolen from Trump. These people make up roughly 30% of all voters. It is a disastrous situation when such a large proportion of the population questions the peaceful transfer of power and thus the basis of democracy. This has not happened since the Civil War. And it bodes ill for the future. If that doesn't change, America will grow weaker and weaker. Our democracy has not yet been saved.³⁵

The US is anxious and fearful of the growing strength of China, which in 1990 was not in the top ten countries in terms of GDP, yet in 2011 it was the second. What has happened in China since the late 1970s is the greatest economic phenomenon in history. Over this period, 550 million people moved from the countryside to the cities. The Chinese built roughly as much urban space for them as there is in the whole of Europe. Currently, the Chinese build residential areas as big as the Italian capital simply within a few weeks. Today, China's foreign exchange reserves are estimated to be over \$6 trillion and it is the biggest creditor of the US. Forecasts show that in 2025–2030, China will surpass the US and become the undisputed leader of the global economy. China is already the largest trading power in terms of exports and imports, which means it exerts great influence on the world economy. Thus, China influences the politics of states not only in the region but also in Europe and Africa.³⁶

³⁴ E. Eppler, *TRUMP – und was tun wir? Der Antipolitiker und die Würde des Politischen*, Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachf. GmbH, Bonn 2018; K. Demirjan. M. Birbaum, *Russia's Putin blames U.S. for destabilizing world order*, "The Washington Post", 24.11.2015, pp. 3–4; J.M. Fiszer, *System euroatlantycki w multipolarnym łańdziej międzynarodowym: szanse i zagrożenia*, w: J.M. Fiszer, P. Olszewski, B. Piskorska, A. Podraza (red.), *Współpraca transatlantycka. Aspekty polityczne, ekonomiczne i społeczne*, ISP PAN, Warszawa 2014, pp. 33–52; J.M. Fiszer, *Zadania i cele polityki zagranicznej Władimira Putina*, w: „Myśl Ekonomiczna i Polityczna” 2016, no. 1(52), pp. 167–201.

³⁵ F. Fukuyama, *Jeszcze Ameryka nie upadła*, "Newsweek", 6–12.09.2021, pp. 11–14.

³⁶ Ł. Wójcik, *Efekt pieluchy. Do następnej wojny może pchnąć nie poczucie siły, tylko słabości – swojej i potencjalnego rywala. Chiny zbliżają się do tego momentu*, „Polityka”, 1.01.–11.01.2022, pp. 66–68; P. Cieśliński. T. Ulanowski, *Chiny się kurczą*, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 4.02.2022, pp. 18–19.

After 40 years of experimentation and reform, China is a global power, not just a regional or local entity. It is forecast to be militarily on a par with the US by 2050. Finally, in the emerging new geopolitical configuration of the world, China will play a leading role by the middle of the 21st century, both in politics and the economy. The state may become a potential alternative to the US, that is, turn out to be the number one superpower in the world, and even – along with the states in East Asia – be an alternative for the entire West.³⁷

Bogdan Góralczyk, an outstanding sinologist, and political scientist writes in a book devoted to the Chinese Renaissance that:

(...) China is a constant mystery, and also a trap for us. Contrary to its name – *Zhongguo*, meaning ‘the middle kingdom’ – it is not an ordinary state at all. On the other hand, it is a great old civilisation that has survived till today and always had its order and rules. Indeed, China believes it was once in the centre of the world and civilisation. Over the last decades, China has been fighting so effectively for a return to this role. China wants to be what it used to be for centuries: a great civilization emanating into the world and exerting a profound influence on it.³⁸

In the future, the US may become a junior partner of China, just as Europe was previously a junior partner of America. Thus, the rest of the world, including Europe, will eventually be on the periphery of a new global order. In each of these scenarios, Europe will be relegated to a secondary role in international relations. Therefore, the global triad (the US, China, the EU) as the foundation of a new global order, which was forecast at the beginning of the first decade of the 21st century, is slowly becoming obsolete. The vision of creating the so-called Chimerica, or a bipolar order led by the US and China is becoming more and more uncertain.³⁹

In view of the above, many experts argue that the 21st century will ultimately belong to the Asian countries. Today, they are slowly returning to the centre of the international arena, where they were

³⁷ G. Nycz, *Mocarstwa nuklearne rywalizujące z USA i polityki odstraszenia w XXI wieku*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2020; B. Góralczyk, *Wielki Renesans. Chińska transformacja i jej konsekwencje*, Wydawnictwo Akademickie DIALOG, Warszawa 2018; Z.W. Puślecki, *Unia Europejska – Chiny. Nowe zjawiska w stosunkach handlowo-ekonomicznych*, Wydawnictwo Poznańskie sp. z o.o., Poznań 2018; P. Buhler, *O potęgę w XXI wieku*, Wydawnictwo Akademickie DIALOG, Warszawa 2014.

³⁸ B. Góralczyk, *Wielki Renesans. Chińska transformacja i jej konsekwencje...*, p. 13.

³⁹ J. Klikowska-Ciesielska, M. Marczuk-Karbowiak, *Stany Zjednoczone – Chiny. W stronę dwubiegunowości?*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2017; R. Kuźniar, *Europa w porządku międzynarodowym*, PISM, Warszawa 2016, pp. 208–209; D. Murray, *Przedziwna śmierć Europy. Imigracja, tożsamość, islam*, Zysk i S-ka Wydawnictwo s.j., Poznań 2017.

before Western domination.⁴⁰ Today, the reviving Asian powers, led by China, India, and Russia, are increasingly demanding a redefinition of security and transposition of the liberal-democratic world order, that is, they are in favour of a new multipolar global order. Additionally, the dynamic development of the situation in the Asian region is, at present, accompanied by a strong imperial ideology and Russia's strategic political interest, as well as the tightening linkages between Beijing and Moscow. Vladimir Putin, on the one hand, recognises the advantages of diversifying China's relations and policy in Asia, and, on the other hand, believes that the road to a more secure and influential Russia leads through Beijing, and knows that no improvement in relations with other Asian countries would be able to compensate for a deterioration in relations with China.⁴¹ Therefore, he is trying to make China Russia's best friend in the Asia-Pacific region. This, in turn, may result in a multifaceted Russian-Chinese alliance aimed against the US's power over the world. The Russian policy of destabilising the West and deepening divergences within the transatlantic community of the North Atlantic Alliance and the EU is also intended to serve this purpose.

CONCLUSION

In his fascinating book, Professor Zbigniew Brzeziński considers the geopolitical consequences if the US loses its leading role in the world, and wonders who would become a geopolitical victim of this weakening, and what its implications would be for the challenges the world is facing in the 21st century:

(...) the role of the United States on our globe will be essential for many years. Considering changes in the world power distribution and escalating global conflicts, it is essential that the United States neither takes the position of a garrison state with ignorant mentality nor falls into self-righteous cultural hedonism. In this case, the geopolitical prospects of a changing world, with the centre shifting from West to East, will look ever more threatening. The world needs a United States that would be economically viable, have attractive social solutions, manage its power responsibly, have a clear and

⁴⁰ P. Khanna, *The Future is Asian*, Simon & Schuster, Nowy Jork 2019; A. Acharya, *The End of American World Order*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2018; M. Falkowski, J. Lang, *Zakładnicy Moskwy. Klienci Pekinu: bezpieczeństwo w Azji Centralnej w dobie malejącej roli Zachodu*, Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, no. 51, Warszawa 2014, pp. 25–27.

⁴¹ J. Bielecki, P. Rożyński, *Ameryka to król kłamstw*. Wywiad z Liu Guangyuan, ambasadorem Chin w Warszawie w 70. rocznicę powstania ChRL, „Rzeczpospolita”, 1.10.2019, pp. A23.

well-thought-out strategy, and be respected in the international arena, as well as involved in global contacts with the new East with full awareness of historical conditions.⁴²

The escalating rivalry between the US, China, and Russia raises questions. What will the future of the world order ultimately look like? Will the world be divided into two US-China camps, or will the world return to the model known from 19th-century Europe, called the Concert of Powers? The author does not cross out the three-pole option: US-PRC-Russia or US-EU-PRC. It is difficult to answer these questions today as the world is unpredictable and changing at a crazy pace. One thing is certain: currently, there are no premises of a return to the unipolar system with the unquestionable dominance of the US. This is a new challenge for NATO, which, together with the EU and the US, will have to continue to ensure security for Europe and the world. There is no alternative to the Euro-Atlantic system under the leadership of the US. American political scientist, Francis Fukuyama, in an interview in September 2021, said that:

The United States still has an economic, military, and cultural advantage. In the upcoming years, the US will maintain the status of a superpower (...) Biden has clearly shown that alliances are important to him and depend on a common belief in democracy. (...) Europe and the US have a common role to play in containing the growth of Chinese power. China is a greater challenge than the Soviet Union. We should consider the worst-case scenario and assume that this country will grow in strength.⁴³

If this is the case, and the role of the US in the world continues to diminish, China will seek to become a hegemon by both peaceful means and force. It will follow the path of offensive realism and attempt to dominate Asia in the way the US has dominated the West. China will do so because:

[...] regional domination is the best guarantee of survival in conditions of international anarchy. Moreover, China is embroiled in a series of territorial disputes, and its growing power will make it easier for it to settle these disputes in its favor. (...) Powerful China, like the United States, will have vital interests around the world, which will induce it to develop the ability to project power over long distances. The new superpower will pay special attention not only to the Persian Gulf region but also to the countries of the West. China's well-understood interest will dictate that it creates problems

⁴² Z. Brzeziński, *Strategiczna wizja. Ameryka a kryzys globalnej potęgi*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2013, pp. 6–7.

⁴³ F. Fukuyama, *Jeszcze Ameryka nie upadła...*, pp. 11–12.

for the security of the USA in its neighborhood, to make it difficult for them to operate freely on other continents – especially in Asia.⁴⁴

China may also join forces with Russia and collectively deprive the US of its hegemonic status. Therefore, the US should not wage a war on two fronts with Russia and China. In the opinion of the author, the US should rather seek rapprochement with Russia and, at the same time, cooperate with the EU and China in order to build a new multipolar and peaceful international order.

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⁴⁴ J.J. Mearsheimer, *Tragizm polityki mocarstw...*, p. 438. See: J. Marszałek-Kawa, T. Dmochowski (ed.), *Rozważania o kierunkach współczesnej polityki Chin*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2018; J.M. Fiszler (ed.), *Unia Europejska – Chiny w XXI wieku*, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, Warszawa 2018.

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