

Policy Insights

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Strategic Diplomacy: Statecraft and Imperialism in International Relations

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African perspectives
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Executive summary

The international system is going through a period of fundamental change, which has similarities with earlier periods in history. Such periods of change might usher into war and instability if it turned out to be impossible to arrive at a new international order. The current period of change is characterized by the collapse of a liberal international order, which was established under conditions of Western hegemony. The coming anarchy is the consequence of unforeseen structural changes wrought about by globalization and other developments associated with the global spread of the liberal order.

Today's most pressing security and policy challenges—great power conflict, economic interdependence, peacebuilding, climate change and other non-traditional threats such as pandemics—are all complex problems. Hyperconnectivity, power diffusion and radical technological transformation are significantly shrinking the policy space available to governments and other international agencies in what has been called the twenty-first century of complexity. Thus, the practice of statecraft requires accentuated strategic rationale: clear emphasis on big-picture and longer-term purposes and priorities. While effective strategy is essential for mobilizing power and winning strategic contests, effective diplomacy is necessary for garnering support for the strategy.

This article contributes to stepping up to this challenge in three innovative ways. First, it utilizes key insights from complex adaptive systems thinking to recast the conceptual underpinnings of power, strategy and statecraft. Second, the article advances a 'strategic diplomacy' diagnostic and policy framework to maximize policy space in dealing with complex systems problems in international affairs. Thirdly, Totalitarianism and imperialism in the current international system. finally, by applying the framework to three significant international policy challenges, the article demonstrates the utility and implications of the 'strategic diplomacy' framework for strategic policy in the twenty-first century.

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¹ Autor, David H./Dorn, David/Hanson, Gordon H. (2013): The Geography of Trade and Technology Shocks in the United States, *American Economic Review: Papers & Proceedings*, 103 (3), 220–225..

Introduction

International Relations are currently undergoing a structural change of a fundamental nature. The last time such a fundamental change happened was in the years between 1989 and 1992. Such periods of structural shift have occurred time and again in modern history.

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This was the case during the French Revolution (1789–1795), after the end of the Napoleonic Wars (1814–1820), as well as after 1848, when modern, parliamentary democracies began establishing themselves throughout most European states; between 1890 and 1910, when a relatively peaceful, euro-centric world began to regress into a state of anarchy and nationalism; from 1925 to 1939, when the post-war order began to collapse; in the period between 1945 and 1955, during which the new Western world and the conflict between the East and the West emerged; and, finally, the turning point between 1989 and 1992 that put an end to the East West conflict. All these phases have in common that hitherto prevalent political, economic, and cultural structures of international relations gave way to entirely new structures.

The frequent occurrence of such transforming processes in the past 225 years is not only unprecedented in human history but also indicates that such changes are part of the dynamic that governs modernity.^[1] What makes these periods of structural change so significant is that strategic decisions, taken by the most powerful leaders in reaction to those changes, have far-reaching implications. They often determine whether international relations are orderly and peaceful or, instead, are characterized by anarchy, instability and war to prevail. Consequently, both risks and benefits are extremely high during such phases.

The Nature of the Current Structural Changes in the International System:

A In order to describe the current international structural change, at first, the core elements of the last structural change (1989/1992) and the resulting strategic framework need to be outlined. With the end of the conflict between East and West and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a structural change took shape, which was characterized by two main elements:



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