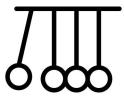


TURKEY'S UNHEARD VOICES

The Economic-Political Interaction of Power Balances in the International Arena

POLITICS

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Introduction

The global political stage has been shaped throughout history as a reflection of the power struggle among states. The main dynamic of this struggle is formed by the intertwined interaction of economic interests and political strategies. With the end of the Cold War and the questioning of the unipolar world order, this interaction has become more complex and multidimensional. Today's trade wars, struggles for influence over energy corridors, and demands for reform directed at global financial institutions cannot be explained without understanding the economic-political foundations of power balances. To analyze this complex network of relations, it is necessary to return to the fundamental elements and historical turning points that guide the functioning of the international system.

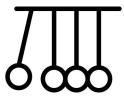
Historical Background

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the international system was largely built upon colonial empires and their economic networks. Western powers that had completed the Industrial Revolution used their military and political power to gain access to raw material sources and new markets. During this period, power was largely measured by territorial expansion and overseas colonies. These expansionist policies, as an extension of the mercantilist understanding, increased the wealth of the metropolitan countries while depleting the resources of the colonies and making them dependent on the industrialized core.

However, the Bretton Woods system established after the Second World War — with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) — placed economic power at the center of a new international order. The acceptance of the U.S. dollar as the global reserve currency formed the financial foundation of American hegemony. This system aimed to rebuild war-weary Europe (the Marshall Plan) and stabilize international trade, but at the same time, it largely shaped the rules of the world economy in line with U.S. interests.

During the Cold War, the balance of power was shaped between ideological blocs. NATO and the Warsaw Pact were not only military alliances but also networks of mutual economic interdependence. The Soviet Union, through COMECON, integrated the countries within its sphere of influence around a planned economy model, creating a unique division of labor by supplying raw materials to its Eastern European allies and importing manufactured goods from them. The Western bloc, on the other hand, promoted free trade and market economy, encouraging tariff reductions under the framework of GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) to open the way for global trade.

The oil crises of the 1970s demonstrated to the whole world how decisive energy resources could be for geopolitical power. The rise of the Organization of Petroleum



Exporting Countries (OPEC) proved that political pressure could be applied against Western powers using economic tools. The oil embargo imposed after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War led to a deep economic crisis in the Western world known as “stagflation” (stagnation amid inflation) and bitterly reminded that power no longer derived solely from developed industries but also from the control of critical resources. This situation constituted a historical example of how even militarily weak countries could create a leverage effect in the global balance of power if they held a strategic resource.

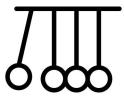
Post–Cold War

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the international system entered a unipolar era accompanied by claims of “the end of history.” This period, which Fukuyama interpreted as the ultimate victory of liberal democracy, presented globalization as an inevitable and universal process. Neoliberal economic policies — including the principles of reducing state intervention, privatization, free market, and trade liberalization — were imposed on the rest of the world through the Washington Consensus.

In this period, economic power became more decisive than military power; the sphere of influence of multinational corporations overshadowed that of many nation-states. The spread of global supply chains caused production to shift to regions with cheap labor, while the integration of financial markets placed capital movements at the center of international politics. However, this situation did not last permanently. The income inequalities caused by globalization, the collapse of local economies, and cultural homogenization gradually laid the groundwork for a strong reaction against this process.

The 2008 Global Financial Crisis revealed the fragility of the existing system and undermined confidence in the U.S.-centered financial order. The mortgage crisis that began in the U.S. struck economies around the world like dominoes, revealing the risks of financial integration and the inadequacy of global regulatory institutions. Taking advantage of this gap, new powers — particularly China — began to build alternative institutions. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) were products of China’s effort to create an alternative to the Bretton Woods institutions and expand its economic sphere of influence.

The ports, railways, and energy lines financed and built under the BRI were not only infrastructure projects but also strategic investments securing China’s trade routes and deepening its economic-political ties with participant countries. During the same period, Russia, thanks to the revenues from energy exports, began to pursue a more aggressive foreign policy to regain the influence it had lost on the international stage. Its efforts to use natural gas as a strategic weapon against Europe and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 clearly demonstrated how Russia used its military power and economic resources as complementary tools.



These developments indicated that power was gradually shifting from West to East. However, this was not merely a geographical shift, but rather a sign of a new and more unstable geopolitical equation in which power was increasingly distributed through a multi-centered (multipolar) network of competing institutions and alliances.

Contemporary Competition

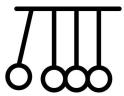
Another critical front of the global power struggle is shaped around energy transition and green technologies. As the geopolitical importance of fossil fuels decreases, control over critical minerals and renewable energy technologies — the foundation of the energy transition — has created a new area of competition. The extraction and processing of minerals such as lithium, cobalt, nickel, and graphite, which are vital for battery technologies, are largely dominated by China.

This gives China a strategic advantage not only in the electric vehicle market but also in the energy storage systems and grid stability that will form the backbone of the future energy infrastructure. Western powers are trying to break this dependency by creating alternative supply chains through initiatives like the “Minerals Security Partnership.” However, the environmental cost of mining, the time required to build processing facilities, and the geographical concentration of geological resources make these efforts complex and turn them into a long-term strategic race.

Moreover, countries that build the infrastructure necessary for green hydrogen production and export early are expected to gain geopolitical importance as the “green energy sheikhs” of the future.

Artificial intelligence and autonomous systems have entered the power balance equation as a new variable with their potential to change the nature of warfare. AI-supported cyberattacks, targeted propaganda (including deepfakes), and autonomous weapon systems have expanded the toolbox of hybrid warfare. Achieving technological leadership in this field means not only military superiority but also the authority to set international norms and ethical standards.

China's efforts to export its “social credit system” and mass surveillance technologies demonstrate that artificial intelligence carries geopolitical value not only as a weapon of war but also as a model of social control. Parallel to this, cyberspace has become a continuous and borderless battlefield among states. Cyberattacks targeting critical infrastructures (energy grids, financial systems, healthcare facilities) allow one state to inflict serious damage on another without declaring war. This state of “constant, low-intensity conflict” challenges the traditional framework of international law and requires a redefinition of the concept of deterrence.



Finally, the bloc of developing countries traditionally referred to as the “Global South” is no longer a passive object in the competition between the West and the East, but has risen to the position of a subject that pursues its own interests more aggressively. These countries may benefit from China’s BRI projects while also needing the West’s security umbrella — or vice versa. Not being fully engaged with any pole, the pursuit of strategic autonomy, and cooperation with different parties on different issues (“issue-based alignment”) form the new foreign policy doctrine of this bloc.

This situation reduces the effectiveness of traditional multilateral institutions such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, while making coordination in urgent global issues such as climate change, pandemic management, and space law even more difficult. As a result, the new multipolarity appears not as a stable balance, but as a dynamic, unpredictable, and constantly negotiated state of instability — one that opens new opportunities for states while also creating unprecedented strategic uncertainties and systemic risks.

Conclusion

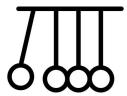
The dynamic structure of the global system forces states to redefine their traditional instruments of power. Military superiority and economic size alone are no longer sufficient; new parameters such as digital diplomacy, data sovereignty, artificial intelligence capacity, and cybersecurity have become central to the power equation.

In this context, the legitimacy crisis of international institutions and the gaps in global governance are driving states toward more flexible and multi-layered alliance formations. On the other hand, borderless issues such as climate change, energy security, and migration waves not only make international cooperation inevitable but also sharpen competition.

Control over green technologies and sustainable energy resources forms new geopolitical fault lines. In this process, countries that aspire to become regional powers are engaged in intense struggles to strengthen their positions in global supply chains and increase their technological independence.

In conclusion, surviving within the complex balances of the 21st century is directly related not only to the military or economic capacities of states but also to their ability to adapt to changing conditions, build strategic partnerships, and produce solutions to global crises. In this multidimensional struggle, smart power strategies supported by elements of soft power will play a decisive role in the international arena.

Resources



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