pólusok

POLARITIES

Vol. 7 No. SI (2026)

PÉCSI TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM
Bölcsészet- és Társadalomtudományi Kar
Politikatudományi és Nemzetközi
Tanulmányok Tanszék

UNIVERSITY OF PÉCS
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Department of Political Science
and International Studies

PÓLUSOK FOLYÓIRAT

HU ISSN 2732-1851
DOI 10.15170/PSK

A Pólusok folyóirat célja a politikatudomány, valamint a nemzetközi tanulmányok területén elért tudományos eredmények közlése, az érintett diszciplínákhoz köthető szakmai fórumok gazdagítása. A folyóirat évente két alkalommal (tél/tavasz–nyár/ősz) jelenik meg, online lapszámok formájában.

MTA besorolás (Gazdaság- és Jogtudományok Osztálya, 2023):
Politikatudományi Bizottság: **B**
Nemzetközi és Fejlődéstanulmányok Bizottság: **B**
Regionális Tudományok Bizottsága: **C**

Kiadó:
PTE BTK Politikatudományi és Nemzetközi Tanulmányok Tanszék
Cím: H-7622 Pécs, Ifjúság útja 6.
Elérhetőség: polusok@pte.hu

POLARITIES
Journal of Political and International Studies
HU ISSN 2732-1851
DOI 10.15170/PSK

The Polarities (Pólusok) journal aims to publish results obtained in the field of political science and international studies and to contribute to the professional forums of these disciplines. The journal is published twice a year (winter/spring and summer/autumn) in the form of online issues.

Qualification by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (2023):
HAS IX. Section of Economics and Law, Political Science Committee: **B**
HAS IX. Section of Economics and Law, International and Development Studies Committee: **B**

Publisher:
Department of Political Science and International Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Pécs
Address: H-7622 Pécs, Ifjúság útja 6.
Email: polusok@pte.hu

TARTALOMJEGYZÉK/CONTENT
TANULMÁNYOK ROVAT/RESEARCH ARTICLES

FROM UNIPOLARITY TO FRAGMENTATION: AN OVERVIEW OF GEOPOLITICAL DYNAMICS IN THE POST-COLD WAR PERIOD

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In July 2023, UN Secretary-General António Guterres (United Nations, 2023) painted a worrying picture of the current state of international relations when he said that "[t]his new era is already marked by the highest level of geopolitical tensions and major Power competition in decades. (…) Violations of international law are becoming more common. Deep and, in some cases, justified grievances about double standards and unmet commitments are undermining cooperation." These observations stand in sharp contrast to the mostly optimistic evaluations made by Western political commentators at the dawn of the 1990s, when the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union led to the emergence of a new world order. The unipolar era, defined by the unchallenged dominance of the United States in international politics (Layne, 1993), was marked by the extension of liberal hegemony. While the Political West incorporated most of Europe, with the notable exception of Russia (Sakwa, 2024), liberal internationalism, i.e., the system based on mutually accepted rules, multilateral institutions, and economic openness, was globalized (Ikenberry, 2018). By the mid-2010s, however, even the leading proponents of liberal institutionalism acknowledged that the hegemonic system of multilateral governance is in crisis (Ikenberry, 2015).

Doi: 10.15170/PSK.2026.SI.01.00
Published: June 07, 2026

Citation:
Lechner, Z. – Murányi, K. (2026 From Unipolarity to Fragmentation: An Overview of Geopolitical Dynamics in The Post-Cold War Period. *Polarities*, 7(SI), i–x.

Acknowledgements:
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Several interrelated factors can explain the failure of the post-bipolar order. The Bush administration's Global War on Terror, along with the US invasion of Iraq without UN Security Council authorisation, weakened the normative pillars of the rules-based international order already in the early 2000s. These actions exposed Washington's unwillingness to consider itself bound by the rules it expected others to follow (Vezirgiannidou, 2013), thereby revealing the growing divergence between declared norms and employed practices (Sakwa, 2024). In addition, the United States' efforts to promote democracy worldwide have provoked hostile reactions from authoritarian states, making intergovernmental cooperation on global issues more challenging (Haass, 2022). This coincided with the acceleration of the shift in the global distribution of economic growth following the 2008-2009 financial crisis. The "rise of the rest", i.e., the dynamic progress of non-Western countries such as China, India, and Brazil (Zakaria, 2008), has undermined the unipolarity of the US-centred international system and paved the way for an increasingly multipolar world economy (The World Bank, 2011).

The redistribution of economic power among an increasing number of actors has not resulted in the consolidation of multilateralism (Laïdi, 2014; Ikenberry, 2015). Instead, it led to the emergence of a complex post-hegemonic order, in which the United States can no longer dominate the institutions of global governance on its own, as it must accommodate the rise of emerging powers that do not bend to its command (Acharya, 2017). As the United States became increasingly unable to impose its preferences worldwide, its willingness to maintain the global order diminished (Tálas, 2021). Revisionist powers, however, are not yet able to provide a viable alternative. Hence, global governance has moved into a transitional phase of hegemonic change, characterised by instability and fragmentation (Laïdi, 2014). In this context, geopolitical rivalries stormed back into the centre of international politics, as emerging powers became more willing to directly challenge the declining hegemony of the United States (Mead, 2014).

China's rise represents the most significant challenge to US dominance, as the country's dynamically growing economic power has been complemented since 2009 by a global vision integrating the objectives of military build-up, expansion of economic influence, and construction of regional architectures (Doshi, 2021; Roland, 2021). While Beijing continued to utilise traditional Western-dominated international institutions to benefit from the existing order, from the mid-2010s onwards, it also showed a growing tendency to invest significant resources in building parallel institutional structures, security forums, and infrastructure projects (Huang, 2020). China has also made increasingly assertive efforts to extend its dominance over the South China Sea and oust the United States from the maritime area that it considers its own territorial waters, raising the prospect of direct great power confrontation (Allison, 2017). At the same time, by waging war against Georgia in 2008, then annexing Crimea and partially occupying Southeast Ukraine in 2014, Russia demonstrated its determination to use military force to reassert its control over the contested geopolitical field of the post-Soviet space (Toal, 2017). A further noteworthy aspect of the changing geopolitical landscape is the new opportunity it has provided for middle powers with traditionally close ties to the West to pursue strategic autonomy. Turkey, for instance, despite being a NATO member, has deepened its economic cooperation with Russia and China, while assertive diplomacy and the projection of military force beyond Turkish borders have become prominent elements of Ankara's foreign policy (Haugom, 2019).

Yet, contemporary geopolitics extends far beyond traditional great-power rivalry and military competition and is rather shaped by the interactions of multiple factors, such as economy, technology, environment, society and ideology. Widespread frustration over the growth of social differences, dissatisfaction with mainstream political parties, migration-related anxieties, social fragmentation caused by identity politics, and disillusionment with economic globalisation and free trade have led to the intensification of nationalist and anti-establishment sentiments both in the United States and the European Union (Acharya, 2017; Szalai, 2020). The subsequent populist upsurge manifested among others in the election of Donald Trump as US president, the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the EU, and the increasing influence of right-wing EU-sceptic parties in Central and Eastern Europe (Zakaria, 2016), making the Political West more divided and fragmented.

The 2020 coronavirus epidemic has amplified these negative trends. Although it could have been seized as an opportunity to rebuild global collaboration, the pandemic has served as a catalyst for increased geopolitical tensions and intensified competition between the United States and China. The Trump administration's withdrawal from institutions of multilateral governance accelerated the disintegration of the leading international role of the United States (Sheng, 2022). Meanwhile, China's ability to take advantage of the vacuum caused by Washington's retreat from multilateralism during the epidemic, and the strong performance of East Asian economies in the post-pandemic recovery, have further shifted the world beyond a US-centric world order towards a more pluralistic multiplex order (Acharya, 2021). In a broader sense, the temporary disruption of the economic, political, and social fabric of the world has given opportunities for authoritarian states to tighten control over their citizens and provided a fertile ground for nationalism and populism to flourish in both democratic and authoritarian countries (Huang, 2020).

The next major crisis that sent geopolitical shockwaves across the world was Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. In addition to causing immense suffering and destruction within Ukraine, the invasion has been a direct assault on the very foundations of the rules-based international order, as it disregarded its most crucial principle – the idea that international boundaries may not be changed with force (Brunk & Hakimi, 2022). The conflict vindicated the narrative of a definitive end to the "unipolar moment" and marked the return of contestation over spheres of influence in world politics (Ashford, 2023). Although it was unable to achieve a quick victory, Russia extended its military control to new territories in Ukraine, establishing a land corridor between the previously occupied areas of the Donbass and Crimea. Meanwhile, its economy proved resilient to Western sanctions, largely because several major countries – not only China, but also India, Turkey, and Brazil, among others – refused to sever their commercial ties with Moscow despite Washington's demands (Haass, 2022).

One of the most significant implications of the war in Ukraine has been the accelerating pace of the world's fragmentation into geopolitical blocs. Due to Russia's aggression, the Biden administration was revitalised, and the idea of a unitary West has been strengthened (Lo, 2023). The most visible consequence in this regard has been NATO's renaissance, manifested in stronger consensus, increased defence spending, and the integration of Finland and Sweden into the Alliance (Leoni & Tzinieris, 2024). At the same time, the alignment between Russia and China has become tighter, as indicated by the massive increase in their bilateral trade and the deepening of the interoperability of their armies. As a result, Moscow and Beijing's temporary marriage of convenience transformed into a durable strategic alliance based on a shared aversion to the US-centric world order and the mutual benefits of enhanced economic cooperation (Gabuev, 2024). The third, less unified geopolitical bloc consists of ambitious middle powers such as Brazil, India, Turkey, South Africa, and Indonesia. Instead of aligning themselves with the Euro-Atlantic alliance or the Moscow-Beijing axis, these "global swing states" are seeking to expand their strategic autonomy by taking advantage of the opportunities offered by an increasingly multipolar world (Hamilton & Stent, 2023).

The geopolitical shocks caused by the US-China rivalry and the war in Ukraine have also highlighted the risks of economic dependence on strategic competitors. This explains why a growing number of states and companies have adopted the practice of "friend-shoring", reorganising their supply chains to take into account not only commercial but also strategic considerations (Bosone & Stamato, 2024). Consequently, as geopolitical tension rises, the globalised world economy is gradually fragmenting into trading blocs, with partial decoupling in the areas of energy, technology, and finance, and increasingly fierce rivalry for economic dominance (Maihold, 2023). The revolutionary advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) is further intensifying competition among great powers – particularly between the US and China – while fuelling techno-nationalism, export restrictions, and the emergence of competing technological blocs, as states seek to bring AI-related supply chains, data flows, and critical digital infrastructure under their control (Weymouth, 2025). The successful application of AI tools can revolutionise warfare, enhance economic competitiveness, and accelerate political decision-making processes (Bremmer & Suleyman, 2023; Wang, 2025). Which states are best able to harness this potential will have a major impact on the global balance of power (Schmidt, 2023). At the same time, AI is expected to exacerbate existing inequalities, undermine public trust in state institutions, and increase the geopolitical influence of a few tech companies to an unprecedented degree (Zai & Chen, 2025; Park, 2025).

Donald Trump's return to power in 2025 has further heightened global geopolitical uncertainty, eroded the internal cohesion of the Euro-Atlantic Alliance, and accelerated the shift toward a post-American world order. Trump's remarks that the United States could annex Canada, Greenland, and the Panama Canal, as well as his demand that Ukraine must give up territories and remain outside the Western military alliance in exchange for a ceasefire, indicate that the United States, which previously tried, albeit imperfectly, to defend the rules-based order, is now openly seeking to undermine the long-standing principle of international law that prohibits the threat or the use of force to conquer land or resolve disputes (Hathaway & Shapiro, 2025). Although informal agreements among great powers to recognise each other's spheres of influence may be a mechanism for avoiding escalating tensions between them, it also foreshadows the emergence of an order, reminiscent of 19th-century geopolitics, in which great powers can oppress weaker states in their geographical vicinity without restraint (Taft, 2025).

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The objective of this special issue is to explore the multifaceted and complex dimensions of geopolitical dynamics by providing an interdisciplinary perspective of the contributing authors from different regional, theoretical, and disciplinary backgrounds. The volume aims to address contemporary geopolitical questions across a range of themes, including power competition, geoeconomics, technological rivalry, environmental challenges, security constraints, migration, urban studies, ideological narratives, and identity issues in popular culture. Hence, the articles published in this special issue demonstrate the diversity of geopolitical interpretations.

The first set of contributions demonstrates how global and regional fragmentation, rising tensions, and technological advancements can undermine traditional concepts of foreign and security policy and compel states to adapt to changing geopolitical circumstances. Pacini (2026) examines the relevance of neutrality, concluding that the proliferation of hybrid warfare challenges the feasibility of the concept in the classical sense and necessitates its reinterpretation. Urbanovics (2026) highlights the growing importance of digitalisation and cyber capacity-building in international relations, illustrating various strategic approaches to cybersecurity through the examples of key actors in cyber diplomacy. Siposné Kecskeméthy and Sipos (2026) analyse Japan's evolving geopolitical position in the Asia-Pacific region, demonstrating how growing geopolitical tensions have prompted Tokyo to redefine its security identity, pursue a more proactive foreign policy, and deepen its strategic ties with NATO. Csekity Szemesi and Györgyi (2026) examine how Japan and

Australia's political stances on the pursuit of nuclear energy solutions and military technologies have evolved within the context of the Indo-Pacific's turbulent geopolitics, comparing the divergent paths these two nations have taken on the issue.

A second group of articles highlights the diffusion of geopolitical agency beyond traditional state actors. Borja et al. (2026) examine the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy through the case of the Philippines under Rodrigo Duterte, arguing that citizens' low prioritisation of foreign policy and weak demand for political accountability enabled the government to pursue strategic hedging between China and the United States. Németh (2026) enriches the field of minority studies by incorporating an ethnic minority's perspective into foreign policy analysis. According to his conclusion, although North Macedonian Albanians remain committed to a Euro-Atlantic orientation, the prolongation of the European Union accession process may negatively influence their attitude. Tzoumaka (2026) presents an overview of global cities and their urban dynamics, explained through the case of Athens, tracing developments from the urban transformations associated with the 2004 Olympic Games to more recent trends such as urban attractiveness and touristification. Thomázy and Guevara Parra (2026) discuss recent trends in Venezuelan migration to Chile and Spain, focusing on migration policies, integration, and access to citizenship within the changing dynamics between the Global North and the Global South.

Finally, some of the articles in this special issue employ a critical geopolitical approach to interpret our rapidly changing world. Kara-Szabó (2026) explores the connections between climate policy and the Brazilian state's Amazon strategy, analysing Jair Bolsonaro's sovereigntist and climate change-denying policies within their historical context. Stempler (2026) reflects on decolonisation from a critical perspective by examining the Indonesian question at the UN Security Council in 1947, the first major armed confrontation between the Netherlands and the Republic of Indonesia following the latter's 1945 declaration of independence. Murányi et al. (2026) present the results of an analysis of the series *Rise of the Raven* from the perspective of popular geopolitics, examining how a large-scale historical television production contributes to the contemporary reproduction of the geopolitical imaginaries and national identity in the Hungarian context.

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ARTICLES

ON THE CONCEPT OF NEUTRALITY AND ITS CONTRADICTIONS: THE RELATIVE NEUTRALITY

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Doi: 10.15170/PSK.2026.SI.01.01
Received: December 15, 2025
Accepted: April 9, 2026
Published: April 24, 2026

Citation:
Pacini, Lorenzo Maria (2026). On the Concept of Neutrality and its Contradictions: The Relative Neutrality. *Polarities,* 7(SI), 2–16.

Acknowledgements:
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Abstract

This paper examines the evolving concept of military neutrality, highlighting its legal, political, and strategic dimensions. Traditionally codified under international law, neutrality requires abstention from armed conflict, impartiality, and the non-use of territory for belligerent operations. However, membership in military alliances such as NATO fundamentally contradicts these principles because of collective defense obligations and political commitments. The emergence of hybrid warfare, combining conventional, cyber, and unconventional tools, further complicates the application of neutrality by exposing states to ambiguous threats. The study introduces the concept of "relative neutrality," reflecting partial or domain-specific adherence, and offers a framework for analyzing neutrality in contemporary, complex conflict environments.

Keywords: *neutrality, law, geopolitics, relativity, military*

Introduction

The contemporary international order is marked by a profound tension between the legal architecture inherited from the post-1945 settlement and the operational realities of twenty-first-century conflict. Traditional warfare, conducted by identifiable state actors across demarcated territorial boundaries, provided the conceptual substrate upon which the classical law of neutrality was built. That substrate is rapidly eroding. The proliferation of hybrid warfare—combining conventional military instruments with cyberattacks, disinformation, economic coercion, and the strategic use of non-state proxies—has generated a new operational environment that the classical legal framework was never designed to regulate.

Against this backdrop, a central legal question emerges: can neutrality still function as a coherent legal status in the context of hybrid warfare? The present article argues that it cannot do so in its classical, absolute form. However, rather than concluding that neutrality has become legally irrelevant, this article proposes a productive reinterpretation: the concept of "relative neutrality."

The concept of relative neutrality captures a condition in which a state maintains neutrality selectively, within specific operational domains, while being unavoidably drawn into conflict dynamics in others. This domain-specific, non-absolute adherence to neutrality reflects both a legal reality and a systemic necessity for states navigating hybrid conflict environments. It is not merely a descriptive category but a prescriptive framework: relative neutrality allows states to articulate a principled position that acknowledges the structural transformation of conflict without abandoning the underlying normative function of neutrality as a mechanism of conflict containment.

Several important contributions to the literature have examined the evolution of neutrality in the post-Charter era (Cassese, 2005; Greenwood, 2002; Kelsen, 1954) and the legal challenges posed by cyberspace (Schmitt & Vihul, 2014, 2017; Schmitt, 2016). More recently, scholars have begun to address the implications of hybrid warfare for international law (Hoffman, 2009; Corn, 2018). However, no existing study has systematically integrated the classical doctrinal analysis of neutrality with the operational characteristics of hybrid warfare and the emerging legal challenges of the gray zone and attribution. This article fills that gap.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 describes the methodological approach. Section 3 constructs the theoretical framework, tracing the evolution of neutrality from its classical formulation through the transformation introduced by the United Nations Charter and into the contemporary doctrinal debate. Section 4 analyses the crisis of neutrality across three dimensions: military alliance obligations, hybrid warfare, and the gray zone. Section 5 identifies the three core legal problems that hybrid warfare poses for neutrality: territoriality, attribution, and the redefinition of assistance. Section 6 presents empirical case studies. Section 7 develops the concept of relative neutrality. Section 8 discusses the findings in relation to the research question, and Section 9 concludes.

Methodology

This article employs qualitative legal analysis, combining doctrinal analysis with a comparative approach. The primary objective of the doctrinal component is to reconstruct and critically assess the normative content of the law of neutrality as it has evolved from the seventeenth century to the present day. The comparative component systematically juxtaposes the classical legal framework with the operational and legal characteristics of hybrid warfare in order to identify structural incompatibilities and normative gaps.

The primary legal sources examined include the Hague Convention (V) of 1907 concerning the Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers and Persons in Case of War on Land; the United Nations Charter, in particular Articles 2(4), 2(5), and 51; the 1977 Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions; the Articles on State

Responsibility of the International Law Commission; and the Definition of Aggression adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in Resolution 3314 (XXIX) of 1974. These treaty and customary sources are read through the lens of systematic legal interpretation, with attention to their interaction and to the modifications introduced by the prohibition of the use of force.

Secondary sources include military manuals that articulate state practice on neutrality, the *Tallinn Manual on the International Law Applicable to Cyber Operations* (Schmitt & Vihul, 2017), and position papers by states on the applicability of international law to cyberspace. These are treated as evidence of *opinio juris* and as indicators of emerging customary norms.

The comparative element focuses on three state cases: Austria, Switzerland, and Finland. These cases were selected because they represent three distinct configurations of the relationship between formal neutrality status and actual participation in collective security and hybrid conflict dynamics. The analysis of each case draws on official state documents, treaty commitments, and documented participation in international security frameworks.

The analytical framework is built on a systemic reading of international law: individual rules are interpreted not in isolation but in light of their relationship with the broader normative system, including *jus ad bellum*, international humanitarian law, and the law of state responsibility. This approach follows the interpretive method codified in Articles 31 and 32 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties and applied by the International Court of Justice.

Theoretical Framework: The Evolution of Neutrality

Classical Neutrality: From Grotius to the Hague Conventions

The legal concept of neutrality has its intellectual origins in the early modern law of nations. Hugo Grotius, writing in the early seventeenth century, recognized the possibility of states remaining outside armed conflicts between others, though he did not formalize a comprehensive doctrine of neutral rights and duties. It was Emmerich de Vattel who, in his seminal work *Le Droit des Gens* (1758), provided the foundational definition: neutrality as the condition of a state that abstains from participation in a conflict while observing equidistance from the belligerent parties. For Vattel, this equidistance was not merely a political stance but also entailed specific legal obligations: the neutral state could not provide military assistance to either belligerent or was required to treat both impartially.

This conceptual foundation was progressively consolidated throughout the nineteenth century, culminating in the formal codification of the law of neutrality in the Hague Conventions of 1907. The Fifth Hague Convention (*Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers and Persons in Case of War on Land*) and the Thirteenth Hague

Convention (*Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers in Naval War*) established the core framework that continues to serve as the primary treaty basis for the law of neutrality. Under this framework, a neutral state is obligated to refrain from acts of hostility, from providing troops or military aid to a belligerent, and from making its territory available for military operations. At the same time, belligerent states are required to respect the inviolability of neutral territory.

Lauterpacht (1936) described neutrality as a "cornerstone" of classical international law, grounded in a system of sovereign state autonomy in which war was a legally legitimate means of resolving disputes. He also observed, with prescience, that the progressive institutionalization of international relations would inevitably call into question the possibility of absolute neutrality. The logic of the classical system rested on a set of assumptions—the identifiability of belligerent parties, the territorial delimitation of conflict, and the bilateral structure of war—that the twentieth century would progressively undermine.

The Transformation of Neutrality Under the United Nations Charter

The adoption of the United Nations Charter in 1945, and the emergence of the prohibition of the use of force codified in Article 2(4), fundamentally transformed the normative environment within which neutrality operates. Under classical international law, war was a legally available instrument of state policy, and neutrality served the function of containing conflict by excluding third states from the bilateral "duel" between belligerents. Once the use of force was prohibited—a development anticipated by the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 and consolidated by the Charter—the basic assumptions of the classical neutrality system were rendered problematic.

Two developments are particularly significant. First, Article 2(5) of the Charter imposes an obligation on member states to cooperate with United Nations enforcement actions, which may in certain circumstances conflict with the duties of neutrality. Second, the system of collective security established under Chapter VII of the Charter, including Security Council authorization of enforcement measures, creates a framework in which third states may be called upon to take sides in a manner inconsistent with classical neutrality. Cassese (2005) argued that the Charter replaced the classical logic of neutrality with a logic of international solidarity aimed at repressing aggression. Kelsen (1954) observed that collective security and neutrality represent fundamentally incompatible models of international order: the former requires alignment, whereas the latter requires abstention.

At the same time, the law of neutrality has not been formally abolished. As Lauterpacht had anticipated, states have not abandoned neutrality entirely, and the concept continues to appear in military manuals, state practice, and judicial decisions. The International Court of Justice, the International Law Commission, and the International Law Association have all made reference to the law of neutrality in recent decades, treating it as a surviving body of positive law. The persistence of neutrality within a transformed legal order raises the question of how it coexists with *jus ad bellum*—a question that becomes particularly acute when one party to a conflict is engaged in a war of aggression and the other exercises the right of self-defense under Article 51 of the Charter.

The interaction between neutrality and *jus ad bellum* has been analyzed by Von Heinegg (2007), who argued that the obligations of neutrality toward an aggressor state are not suspended merely because the victim exercises the right of self-defense. Third states are not required by general international law to actively assist the victim of aggression, although they are permitted to do so within the limits of necessity and proportionality. This intertwining of neutrality obligations and *jus ad bellum* assessments signals what Von Heinegg describes as a qualitative transformation of the classical rules, which increasingly incorporate the logic of responsibility for complicity.

Contemporary Doctrinal Debate

Contemporary scholarship reflects the tension between the formal persistence of neutrality and its substantive erosion. Greenwood (2002) observed that neutrality, while rooted in law, remains a political choice influenced by power dynamics and alliance structures, and that the distinction between legal neutrality and political non-alignment has become increasingly difficult to maintain. Fischer (2010) proposed the concept of "cooperative neutrality" to describe the practice of states such as Switzerland, which maintain formal neutrality while participating selectively in international cooperation for peace and development objectives.

The emergence of cyberspace as a domain of state activity has generated a new strand of doctrinal debate. Schmitt and Vihul (2017) argued that the principle of sovereignty applies in cyberspace and that belligerent states are therefore obligated to respect the cyber infrastructure of neutral states. The *Tallinn Manual 2.0 on the International Law Applicable to Cyber Operations* provides a comprehensive, if contested, analysis of the application of international law—including the law of neutrality—to cyber operations. Several states have endorsed the applicability of the law of neutrality to cyber operations in their national position papers, treating cyberspace as a domain to which the duties of non-assistance and prevention apply.

Dinstein (2022) proposed what he termed a "functional reinterpretation" of neutrality: rather than grounding the legal status in formal abstention, the concept should be understood in terms of the proportionality and transparency of state conduct. This reinterpretation preserves the underlying normative function of neutrality—conflict containment—while adapting its operational content to contemporary conflict environments. The concept of relative neutrality developed in this article builds on Dinstein's insight while providing a more systematic account of the domain-specific character of contemporary neutrality practice.

The Crisis of Classical Neutrality

Military Alliances and the Incompatibility with Permanent Neutrality

The most structurally significant challenge to classical neutrality arises from membership in military alliances. The clearest illustration is NATO. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty establishes that an armed attack against one or more member states is to be considered an attack against the entire Alliance, triggering a binding political-military commitment to take such action as each member considers necessary, including the use of armed forces. This commitment is not automatic in the strict legal sense—each member retains discretion as to what action to take—but it constitutes a binding political-military obligation that is structurally incompatible with permanent neutrality.

Goetschel (1999) identified the core elements of this incompatibility. First, the mutual defence clause creates an obligation to consider an attack on an ally as an attack on oneself, which is irreconcilable with the equidistance and abstention required by permanent neutrality. Second, alliance membership implies a defined political-military alignment, compromising the impartiality that neutrality presupposes. Third, alliances typically involve the use of national territory for military bases, transit, and joint operations—a practice directly prohibited by the duty of neutral states to prevent belligerents from using their territory for military purposes. Fourth, alliances involve long-term political commitments that go beyond military cooperation, constraining the decision-making autonomy of members. Fifth, the formal recognition of neutral status by the international community becomes problematic when a state is simultaneously bound by mutual defense obligations.

The result is a structural contradiction: a state cannot simultaneously maintain permanent neutrality and fulfil its obligations as a NATO member. This contradiction is not merely theoretical. States such as Finland and Sweden, which maintained various forms of neutral or neutral-like postures throughout the Cold War, formally abandoned those positions upon acceding to NATO (Finland in 2023, Sweden in 2024). Their accession represents an acknowledgment that the alliance framework and the neutrality framework are legally and politically incompatible.

Hybrid Warfare and Its Dimensions

The second major challenge to classical neutrality arises from the nature of hybrid warfare. Hoffman (2009) provided the foundational academic definition: hybrid warfare is characterized by the simultaneous use of conventional military instruments and a range of irregular, non-military means—including cyberattacks, disinformation operations, economic coercion, political influence campaigns, and the use of non-state proxies—within a single integrated strategic design. The defining feature of hybrid warfare is not merely the variety of instruments employed, but the deliberate convergence of these instruments with the objective of destabilizing the adversary without crossing the formal threshold of armed conflict as defined by international law.

This deliberate calibration of means below the threshold of armed conflict poses a fundamental challenge to the law of neutrality, which was designed to regulate states' conduct in the context of formal armed conflicts. When a state uses cyberattacks to paralyze an adversary's energy infrastructure, deploys disinformation campaigns to undermine citizens' trust in institutions, or applies targeted economic pressure to coerce a rival, these actions produce effects comparable to those of military aggression (Schmitt, 2014) without constituting an "armed attack" within the meaning of Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. The classical neutrality framework provides no clear guidance on how third states should respond to such operations, or what obligations of non-assistance apply.

The dimensions of contemporary hybrid warfare extend across five operational domains: land, sea, air, outer space, and the infosphere—a term encompassing cyberspace, the information environment, and the cognitive domain. Each domain has distinct legal characteristics, and the simultaneous operation across all five domains makes it impossible to apply domain-specific legal frameworks in isolation. A state's provision of satellite imagery to a belligerent, for instance, involves outer space and intelligence dimensions that do not fit neatly within the classical categories of "military aid" or "use of territory." Similarly, a state's hosting of a cloud-computing infrastructure used by a belligerent for military logistics implicates the law of neutrality in ways that the Hague Conventions could not have anticipated.

The Problem of the Gray Zone

The concept of the gray zone emerged from military strategic thought to describe the operational space between peace and open armed conflict in which hybrid warfare is predominantly conducted. The term connotes a zone of strategic ambiguity: neither clearly war nor clearly peace, neither clearly lawful nor clearly unlawful, and deliberately calibrated to remain below the thresholds that would trigger formal legal responses.

The gray zone is not synonymous with cyberspace or the information environment, although it encompasses both. It has a calculable dimension in physical geographical reality—it involves real states, real actors, and real effects—but it operates through the deliberate exploitation of legal and political ambiguity. It is simultaneously measurable and elusive: some of its operations can be documented and attributed, while others are specifically designed to remain deniable.

From a legal perspective, the gray zone represents a regulatory vacuum. The hybrid conflict operations conducted within it do not clearly meet the definitional criteria of "armed conflict" under international humanitarian law, "armed attack" under Article 51 of the Charter, or "aggression" under the 1974 Definition of Aggression. Classical neutrality was predicated on the existence of a recognizable armed conflict with identifiable belligerent parties. The gray zone dissolves these preconditions, leaving the law of neutrality without a clear trigger for its application.

Core Legal Problems Posed by Hybrid Warfare for Neutrality

The Territoriality Problem

The law of neutrality is built upon a territorial logic. The fundamental duty of a neutral state—to prevent its territory from being used by belligerents for military operations—presupposes that territory can be delimited, that sovereignty over it can be exercised, and that violations of it can be identified and attributed. These presuppositions hold in the context of classical interstate warfare but break down in the context of cyberspace and the information domain.

Cyberspace does not have a fixed geographical territory. Data flows across borders instantaneously and through multiple jurisdictions. A cyberattack originating from the infrastructure of a neutral state may be routed through the servers of several other states before reaching its target, and the legal characterization of each link in the chain raises distinct problems of territorial jurisdiction and state responsibility. The question of whether sovereignty constitutes an autonomous rule of general international law applicable to cyber intrusions—an issue on which state practice and doctrinal opinion remain divided—directly affects the content of the neutrality obligation in cyberspace (Schmitt & Vihul, 2017; Ossof, 2021).

States have begun to address this gap through national position papers on the application of international law to cyberspace. Several states have asserted that the law of neutrality applies to cyber operations, requiring belligerents to refrain from conducting cyberattacks against the cyber infrastructure of neutral states. However, the practical implementation of this principle faces fundamental difficulties: the attribution of cyberattacks is technically complex and politically contested, and the concept of "neutral cyber infrastructure" remains poorly defined.

The Attribution Problem

The second core legal problem is that of attribution. The law of neutrality assumes that the parties to a conflict can be identified, that their actions can be traced, and that responsibility can be allocated accordingly. Hybrid warfare deliberately subverts this assumption through the strategic deployment of what the literature describes as "plausible deniability."

Through the use of proxies—irregular militias, hacktivist groups, private military contractors, or commercial entities operating at the direction of, or with the support of, a state—actors can conduct hostile operations without formally exposing themselves to the legal consequences that direct state action would entail (Corn, 2018).

The threshold of attribution under international law requires evidence that a non-state actor was acting under the effective control (*Nicaragua test*) or overall control (*Tadić test*) of a state. In practice, hybrid actors are specifically designed to operate in ways that make such attribution difficult or impossible to establish to the standard required by international law.

For the law of neutrality, the attribution problem generates double difficulty. First, it is often impossible to determine with certainty that an action has been carried out by a belligerent state rather than by a private actor, making it difficult to establish whether the neutral state has a duty to prevent or remedy the action. Second, when a neutral state's infrastructure is used for hybrid operations, the question of whether this constitutes a violation of the neutral state's duty of prevention depends on whether the state knew or should have known of the use—a standard that is genuinely difficult to apply when the relevant activities are concealed.

The Redefinition of Assistance

The third core legal problem concerns the concept of "assistance." The classical law of neutrality prohibited neutral states from providing "military aid" to belligerents—a concept that, in the Hague framework, referred primarily to the provision of troops, weapons, and military equipment, as well as the grant of territory for military operations. Contemporary conflict environments have generated forms of support that produce significant military effects without fitting neatly within the classical category of military aid.

A neutral state that provides cloud-computing infrastructure used by a belligerent for military command and control, supplies satellite imagery used for targeting purposes, or allows the transit of financial transactions that fund military operations may be providing assistance that has a decisive impact on the conduct of hostilities. Whether such support constitutes a violation of neutrality obligations depends on the interpretation of "military aid" in light of contemporary technological realities—an interpretive question that existing legal frameworks have not resolved.

The boundary between civilian and military assistance has become porous in a similar way for private actors. Technology companies, cloud service providers, and digital platforms may become functional participants in a conflict through the services they provide, without any deliberate decision to align with one party (Kleffner, 2019; Barkholdt & Winkelmann, 2019). This blurring of the civilian-military boundary has implications not only for international humanitarian law but also for the law of neutrality: a neutral state's failure to regulate the activities of private actors on its territory may itself constitute a breach of the duty of prevention.

Empirical Cases: Neutrality Under Pressure

Austria: Permanent Neutrality and European Security Integration

Austria provides one of the most instructive cases of the tension between formal permanent neutrality and the demands of contemporary security integration. Austria's permanent neutrality was established by the Austrian State Treaty of 1955 and the Federal Constitutional Law on Permanent Neutrality of the same year, enacted as a condition for the withdrawal of occupation forces following World War II. Austria committed itself to not joining any military alliance and to not permitting the establishment of foreign military bases on its territory.

Austria's accession to the European Union in 1995 created an immediate tension with its neutrality status. EU membership entails participation in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which involves collective security deliberations, joint military operations, and mutual defense commitments under Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union. Austria has participated in several EU-led military and civilian crisis-management operations, contributing personnel and resources to missions in the Western Balkans, Africa, and the Middle East.

Austria's position illustrates the phenomenon of relative neutrality in practice. Austria maintains its formal legal status of permanent neutrality and does not participate in NATO or in operations that it classifies as incompatible with its constitutional commitment. At the same time, it participates in EU security cooperation frameworks that involve degrees of political-military alignment. This selective participation reflects a domain-specific adaptation of the neutrality concept: Austria is neutral in relation to military alliance membership and direct participation in armed conflict, but not in relation to multilateral security cooperation and peace operations.

Switzerland: Neutrality and International Cooperation

Switzerland's permanent neutrality is among the oldest and most institutionalized in the international system, having been recognized by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Switzerland maintained its non-membership in military alliances throughout the Cold War and the post-Cold War era, including declining membership in NATO and, until 2002, in the United Nations itself.

Switzerland's accession to the United Nations in 2002 required a formal reconciliation of its neutrality obligations with the Charter's collective security framework. The Swiss government has maintained that UN membership is compatible with permanent neutrality, arguing that the obligations of collective security under the Charter do not require active military participation and that Switzerland can fulfil its Charter obligations through non-military means such as sanctions and humanitarian assistance.

In practice, Switzerland has participated in international security cooperation in ways that reflect a sophisticated management of relative neutrality. It has hosted international negotiations and mediation efforts, provided humanitarian aid to conflict-affected populations, and contributed to United Nations peace operations in non-combat roles. Switzerland has also cooperated with NATO through the Partnership for Peace framework, participating in information-sharing and capacity-building activities. These activities demonstrate that formal permanent neutrality does not preclude substantive engagement with international security frameworks, but rather requires a careful, domain-by-domain calibration of participation.

Finland: From Neutral-Like Behavior to NATO Membership

Finland's trajectory offers the most dramatic illustration of the instability of neutral-like status in the face of hybrid security challenges. Finland was never formally neutral in the strict legal sense: unlike Switzerland and Austria, Finland had no treaty-based permanent neutrality. Rather, it pursued what scholars have termed "Finlandization"—a strategy of cautious foreign-policy alignment with the Soviet Union during the Cold War that gave Finland substantial autonomy in exchange for deference to Soviet security interests. After the Cold War, Finland maintained a policy of military non-alignment while building increasingly close cooperative relationships with NATO and EU security structures.

The case illustrates the concept of relative neutrality with particular clarity. Finland participated in NATO's Cyber Defense Exercise *Locked Shields* in 2022, contributing its cyber capabilities and operational expertise to a collective-defense exercise explicitly oriented toward countering Russian cyber operations. This participation—while Finland was still formally outside NATO—constituted a form of alignment in the cyber domain that was incompatible with any strict conception of neutrality. Helsinki was sharing intelligence, technical capabilities, and strategic orientation with NATO partners before it formally acceded to the Alliance on April 4, 2023.

It is important to note that Finland was not in a condition of legal neutrality during this period; rather, it was in a condition of political non-alignment that it chose to manage as if it had some of the features of neutrality. Its accession to NATO represents not the abandonment of a legal status but the formalization of an alignment that was already substantively underway. The Finland case confirms that in the contemporary security environment, domain-specific partial alignment—relative neutrality—is an empirical reality that precedes and shapes formal legal status.

The Concept of "Relative Neutrality"

The analysis of the theoretical framework, the crisis of classical neutrality, and the empirical cases converges on the need for a conceptual innovation: the concept of relative neutrality.

The concept has four defining characteristics. First, it is domain-specific: a state may maintain full neutrality in the conventional military domain while participating in collective cyber-defence exercises, contributing to economic sanctions regimes, or hosting the logistics infrastructure of a belligerent. The classical binary between neutrality and belligerence is replaced by a domain-by-domain assessment. Second, it is non-absolute: no state operating in the contemporary international system can maintain absolute neutrality across all domains of state activity. The interdependence of digital infrastructure, the globalization of supply chains, and the extraterritorial effects of economic policy make total abstention empirically impossible. Third, it is functionally oriented: relative neutrality preserves the underlying function of the classical law of neutrality—conflict containment and the prevention of conflict escalation—by providing a principled framework within which states can articulate and justify their domain-specific conduct. Fourth, it is normatively grounded: relative neutrality is not a euphemism for politically convenient non-commitment, but a legally structured position that requires states to articulate the basis and limits of their domain-specific posture.

The concept connects to Dinstein's (2022) notion of a "functional reinterpretation" of neutrality, grounding the legal status not in total abstention but in the proportionality and transparency of state conduct. It also resonates with Fischer's (2010) "cooperative neutrality," although relative neutrality is more explicitly domain-specific and more directly responsive to the operational characteristics of hybrid warfare. Whereas cooperative neutrality describes states that engage in international cooperation for peace objectives while maintaining formal neutrality, relative neutrality describes states that engage in selective, domain-specific alignment as a structural response to the impossibility of absolute neutrality in hybrid conflict environments.

The introduction of relative neutrality as a legal concept serves three functions. Analytically, it provides a more accurate descriptive framework for the conduct of states that formally claim neutral status while participating in selective security cooperation. Normatively, it articulates a principled basis on which such participation can be justified and limited, preventing the concept of neutrality from collapsing into a rhetorical shell devoid of legal content. Practically, it provides state legal advisers and military planners with a framework for assessing the legality of specific forms of support or cooperation in the context of hybrid conflict.

Discussion

The analysis conducted in the preceding sections enables a direct response to the research question posed in the introduction: can neutrality still function as a coherent legal status in the context of hybrid warfare?

The answer is nuanced. Classical, absolute neutrality—understood as total abstention from participation in an armed conflict, equidistance from all belligerent parties, and the absence of any form of assistance—cannot function as a coherent legal status in the context of hybrid warfare. The structural characteristics of hybrid conflict—the deliberate calibration of operations below the threshold of armed conflict, the exploitation of the gray zone, the territoriality problem in cyberspace, the attribution challenge, and the redefined concept of assistance—make it empirically impossible for any state to maintain absolute neutrality across all operational domains. The empirical cases of Austria, Switzerland, and Finland confirm that even states with the strongest formal commitments to neutrality engage in forms of selective alignment that the classical framework cannot accommodate.

However, neutrality as a legal institution is not obsolete. The underlying function of the law of neutrality—conflict containment, the prevention of escalation, and the protection of third states from being drawn into conflicts against their will—remains relevant and valuable. The concept of relative neutrality preserves this function while adapting its operational content to contemporary realities. By articulating neutrality as domain-specific and non-absolute, relative neutrality provides a framework within which states can maintain a principled posture without pretending to an absolute abstention that is no longer attainable.

The concept of relative neutrality also has implications for the broader project of international law. It represents an instance of what might be called adaptive legal interpretation—the reinterpretation of existing legal concepts in light of changed factual circumstances, without formal treaty revision. This approach is consistent with the methods of international law as practised by courts and states, which regularly adapt established concepts to novel situations through interpretation rather than legislation. The functional reinterpretation of neutrality as relative neutrality follows the same interpretive logic that the International Court of Justice has applied in other areas of international law in which treaty texts written for earlier circumstances must be applied to new contexts.

Conclusion

This article argued that classical neutrality is structurally incompatible with hybrid warfare and that the concept must therefore be reinterpreted as domain-specific and functional: relative neutrality. This conclusion rests on three pillars.

First, the doctrinal analysis demonstrates that the classical framework of neutrality was designed for a context—interstate armed conflict with identifiable belligerents, territorial boundaries, and conventional military instruments—that hybrid warfare deliberately subverts. The three core legal problems identified in this article—territoriality, attribution, and the redefinition of assistance—are not marginal complications but structural challenges that render the classical framework inapplicable in its original form.

Second, the empirical cases confirm that domain-specific neutrality is already an empirical reality. Austria, Switzerland, and Finland have all developed practices of selective participation in security cooperation that reflect a de facto relative neutrality. The Finland case, in particular, illustrates that domain-specific alignment in the cyber and intelligence domains may precede and shape the abandonment of formal neutral-like status. This empirical reality calls for legal conceptualization, not merely political description.

Third, the concept of relative neutrality fulfils the core theoretical requirements of a legal concept: it has a clear definition, identifiable characteristics, a normative function, and a basis in existing legal doctrine. It does not require treaty revision or the creation of new international institutions, but can be operationalized through the adaptive interpretation of existing law.

The implications of this argument extend in two directions. Theoretically, the concept of relative neutrality contributes to the broader scholarly debate on the adaptation of international law to contemporary conflict environments. It demonstrates that legal concepts need not be discarded when they face new challenges, but may be functionally reinterpreted in ways that preserve their normative function while updating their operational content. Practically, the concept provides a framework for states, legal advisers, and international organizations engaged in managing the complex neutrality-related questions that hybrid conflict continuously generates.

Looking ahead, the most urgent need is normative harmonization. The application of the law of neutrality to cyberspace, the information domain, and the economic tools of hybrid warfare requires the development of more specific rules through international agreement, state practice, or authoritative interpretation. The concept of relative neutrality provides a principled framework within which such rules can be developed, but it does not substitute for the hard work of legal elaboration that the contemporary security environment demands.

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CYBER CAPACITY-BUILDING AS A GEOPOLITICAL TOOL: THE GLOBAL NORTH AND GLOBAL SOUTH RELATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY CYBER DIPLOMACY

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Doi: 10.15170/PSK.2026.SI.01.02
Received: November 15, 2025
Accepted: April 16, 2026
Published: April 26, 2026

Citation:
Urbanovics, Anna (2026). Cyber Capacity-Building as a Geopolitical Tool: The Global North and Global South Relations in Contemporary Cyber Diplomacy. *Polarities,* 7(SI), 17–35.

Acknowledgements:
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Abstract

Cyber diplomacy has become an important field, and one of the most efficient tools used by countries is cyber capacity building. This paper analyses these activities from the perspective of three key cyber diplomacy actors, the United Nations, the European Union, and the United States. As they follow different governance frameworks for cyber capacity building, the collaboration networks and regional focus of the projects they are involved in differ. This study uses a mixed methodology, combining descriptive statistics and network analysis. The analysis takes a data-oriented approach and data was gathered from the Cybil Portal. The results demonstrate that the United Nations has the most comprehensive network in terms of regional breakdown. The United States follows a great power logic, focusing on strategic regions. Meanwhile, the European Union is predominantly active in its neighborhood and plays an active role in promoting norms in these regions by its cyber capacity building engagements.

Keywords: *cyber diplomacy; cyber capacity-building; Cybil Portal; digital geopolitics; network analysis*

Introduction

Cybersecurity capacity-building has become a central instrument of international cooperation in cyberspace over the past two decades. It is defined as the "support and assistance aiming at empowering individuals, communities and governments to reduce risks stemming from access and use of information and communication technologies" (Homburger 2019). Policy actors have increasingly converged around the idea that capacity-building should enable states and societies to benefit from digitalization while mitigating the vulnerabilities associated with it. An EU Institute for Security Studies seminar report, for example, emphasized that cyber capacity-building should leave recipient countries better equipped to enjoy the economic and social benefits of cyberspace (European Commission, 2013). At the same time, cybersecurity capacity-building has become a rapidly expanding field of practice, involving governments, international organizations, development agencies, technical communities, private companies, and civil society actors.

Cyber capacity building as a concept lies within the broader aspects of capacity building, which emerged in public administration debates in the 1950s, and was later studied within development studies. In this sense, capacity building referred to supporting states and societies in developing institutions, skills, and organizational frameworks to sustain long-term development processes (United Nations, 2002). Within development studies, the concept has always been contested, criticized both for its conceptual vagueness and for the power relations embedded in donor–beneficiary frameworks (Connelly, 2007; Wilén, 2009). Cybersecurity capacity-building inherits many of these tensions. Early definitions considered it as assistance from developed to developing countries aimed at enabling safe access to and use of digital technologies.

At the same time, cybersecurity capacity-building cannot be reduced to a development tool only. As digital infrastructures have become integral to economic systems, public administration, political processes, and national security, cybersecurity has emerged as a cross-cutting policy domain that links development, security, justice, foreign policy, and governance. The UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) in 2015, and later the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG), explicitly connected capacity-building to international peace and security, calling on states to assist one another in improving the secure use of ICTs. In this context, cyber capacity-building has increasingly been framed as a form of international cooperation that contributes to cyber stability, confidence-building, and the diffusion of norms of responsible state behavior.

This paper aims to analyze cyber capacity building activities not as a technical assistant, but rather a geopolitical and a relational phenomenon within the emerging role of cyber diplomacy. This study does not measure the effectiveness of cyber capacity building instead; it focuses on the collaboration network of participating actors based on statistical data gathered from Cybil Portal database. The analysis points out the different approaches of main donor actors, namely the United Nations, the United States and the European Union. By mapping their networks, we gain insights on their institutional positions and different ways of international engagement – multilateral norm promotion, strategic security policy and regulatory external governance. Comparing their cyber capacity-building networks makes it possible to explore how different diplomatic logics are translated into concrete partnerships and projects.

By situating cyber capacity-building at the intersection of development, security, and governance, and by analyzing it as a networked field of practice, the article seeks to contribute to cyber diplomacy scholarship in two ways. First, it provides an empirical mapping of cyber capacity-building as an emerging domain of international cooperation. Second, it advances a conceptual argument that cyber capacity-building should be understood as a modality of cyber diplomacy through which power is exercised, norms are diffused, and cyber order is constructed.

Despite a growing international literature on cyberdiplomacy, less attention has been paid to its role as a relational instrument through which geopolitical influence is exercised via structured collaboration networks. In particular, there is a lack of empirical, comparative analyses that connect theoretical insights on network power, norm diffusion, and geopolitical competition to observable patterns of cyber capacity-building partnerships. This article addresses this gap by conceptualizing cyber capacity-building as a form of competitive strategic alignment, through which donors seek to shape institutional environments, diffuse norms, and position themselves within global cyber governance networks.

The analysis is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How are cyber capacity-building networks structured across major donor actors (UN, US, EU)?

RQ2: What differences can be observed in their patterns of collaboration and regional engagement?

RQ3: To what extent do these patterns reflect distinct geopolitical strategies and forms of power in cyber diplomacy?

Building on the literature on network power and weaponized interdependence, the article expects that: multilateral actors (UN) will display more globally inclusive and decentralized networks; great powers (US) will exhibit selective, strategically concentrated engagement; regulatory actors (EU) will demonstrate regionally embedded and norm-driven network structures.

Cyberdiplomacy and cyber capacity building

The cyber domain has become one of the main domains of military operations in the last two decades, with its ever-growing number of cyber attacks (Urbanovics, 2023). In 2016, NATO recognized it as a domain of military operations and since then international actors have become active in the field. Building a comprehensive cyber policy requires "cybersecurity governance" referring to "a holistic and integrated vision of the security of networks, systems, services, and infra-structures in society. It includes the institutions, initiatives, policies, programs, and other mechanisms (formal and informal) that are part of an ecosystem of distributed capacities and responsibilities regarding cybersecurity" (Hurel, 2021). It is important to note that cyberdiplomacy has become a new field of power competition where state and non-state actors equally compete for norm setting, strategic positions and network dominance (Carver, 2025).

The literature on capacity building assistance for digital development increasingly recognizes that these programs are not merely technical or development policy tools, but can also have strategic foreign policy significance (Hathaway& Spidalieri, 2021). The strategic dimension of such assistance can be interpreted in a donor-recipient relationship where a state donor provides assistance for digital development abroad (Seidl, 2024). They separate "digital" and "cyber" capacity building, even though there is a growing need for their integration in policy practice and diplomacy.

Reflecting these diverse origins, literature offers no single definition of cybersecurity capacity-building. Instead, existing definitions can be grouped into several clusters.

1. Development oriented: framing cyber capacity-building as support to developing countries to increase access to, and benefits from cyberspace.
2. Risk reduction: defining capacity-building as empowering individuals, communities, and governments to achieve their developmental goals by reducing digital security risks.
3. Complex activity: cyber capacity building as an umbrella activity, ranging from human resources development to institutional reform that safeguards the secure and open use of cyberspace (Pawlak 2014; Müller 2015).
4. Governance oriented: emphasizes institution-building, resilience, and effective responses to cyber threats, positioning capacity-building within governance and regulatory frameworks (European Commission, 2018; Barbero & Berglund, 2021).

The main problem with these traditional conceptual frameworks is that they consider only interstate capacity building activities from a donor towards a recipient (beneficiary) country. However, it can occur between different types of actors and recipients, including non-state actors as well. They also obscure the multidirectional flows of resources, expertise, political capital, and legitimacy that characterize many cyber capacity-building partnerships.

Cyber capacity-building has become a key interface between Global North and Global South actors, where digital inequalities, development priorities, and geopolitical interests intersect. Most large-scale initiatives are still funded and coordinated by actors in the Global North, while a significant share of recipient countries is located in the Global South. Cyber capacity-building can enhance institutional development, workforce training, and cyber resilience in Global South contexts; yet it may also perpetuate hierarchical relationships, influence domestic policy agendas, and establish new kinds of digital reliance (Chang& Coppel, 2020). Cybersecurity frameworks provided by external entities may synchronize the legal systems, infrastructures, and institutional priorities of recipient states with the preferences of donors, thus connecting capacity-building to wider dynamics of influence, conditionality, and norm diffusion within the global digital landscape. Cybersecurity frameworks introduced through external assistance can align the legal systems, infrastructure and institutional priorities of beneficiary states with the preferences of donors. This links capacity building to the broader dynamics of influence, conditions and norms in the global digital order (Carver, 2025).

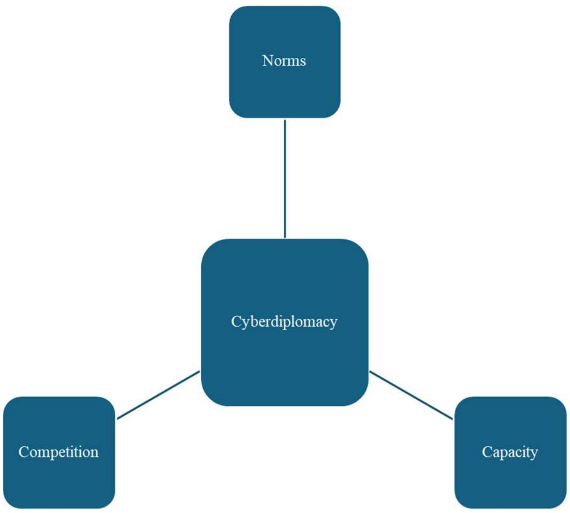
Cybersecurity capacity-building projects, however, are not only technical assistance projects anymore, as they have strengthened links to foreign policy, security cooperation, regulatory outreach, and international norm-making (Collett, 2021). They are used to support cybercrime cooperation, incident response capabilities, policy coordination mechanisms, workforce development, and the establishment of national and regional cybersecurity institutions. Cyber capacity-building has been integrated within the framework of cyber diplomacy.

Historically, the distinction arose because “digital capacity building” was linked to traditional development goals and often avoided security language, while “cyber capacity building” was mostly limited to technical cybersecurity issues and treated as separate from digital development (Pawlak & Barmpaliou, 2023). Parallel to this division, there are two main explanations for why donors provide capacity building support. One is that support serves development and normative goals: development progress, humanitarian values, and the UN's sustainable development goals. At the same time, this logic is complemented by the fact that donors can promote preferred cyber norms through programs and secure institutional access for themselves through bilateral channels and socialization. The other explanation comes from cybersecurity literature: according to this, "cyber capacity building" increases the resilience of recipient countries to cyber risks, reducing the negative spillover effects of "weak links" in the global network (Gjesvik, 2023).

However, the explanatory power of both explanations is limited. On the one hand, there is no universally accepted distinction between "digital" and "cyber" capacity building: the meaning of the terms is context- and time-dependent, and in practice they are becoming increasingly blurred (Pohle & Voelsen, 2022). Development-oriented explanations deal better with selectivity, but both approaches reveal little about how geopolitical competition and pressures surrounding digital sovereignty shape aid decisions. The concept of “weaponized interdependence” (Farrell & Newman, 2019) provides a useful lens to interpret cyber capacity-building as a form of network-based power. While originally developed to explain coercion through global economic networks, its core insight—that structurally central actors can leverage asymmetric interdependencies—can be extended to capacity-building relationships. In this context, capacity-building does not merely reduce vulnerabilities but can also embed recipient actors within donor-centered institutional, technical, and normative networks. This perspective allows us to interpret cyber capacity-building as a mechanism through which donors shape network structures and, potentially, create forms of dependency or alignment. Rather than direct coercion, influence is exercised through standard-setting, institutional design, and sustained engagement. This logic underpins the concept of competitive strategic alignment, whereby donors use capacity-building to position themselves within global cyber governance networks and align partner countries with their preferred norms and frameworks.

This framework also fits well with a broader interpretation of cyber diplomacy: cyber diplomacy is the diplomatic handling of cyber-related issues (negotiation, norm-setting, cooperation) with the aim of maintaining stability and promoting responsible behavior; it also supports capacity building in developing countries through knowledge sharing, training, and technology transfer, while keeping the balance between governance, rights, and security on the agenda (Radanliev, 2025).

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of cyberdiplomacy



Source: compiled by the author based on the literature (Radanliev, 2025).

Based on the literature cyberdiplomacy consists of the above three competing elements – namely norms including rules, standards, and their legitimacy; competition with great power dynamics centered around power and influence; and capacity including skills, infrastructure and institutions. Related to the norms, what we can see at an international level is that the United Nations OEWG dominated in norm setting, having a relatively rich network of collaborations (Shakeel et al., 2025). Regarding the cyberpolicy governance frameworks, there are two main approaches – one is state-centered followed by Russia and China, the other is a more network centric approach followed by the European Union and the United States. Due to this shared approach towards cyber policy, a certain norm coalition can be studied between the European Union and the United States (Anagnostakis, 2021). Radanliev (2025) also points out that the lack of guiding norms in developing states can be a source of escalation of the instability, therefore the strategic interests of developed countries are also to offer a norm framework for developing countries. This can lead to an even more intensive competition along with the competing norm frameworks. Capacity building, however, is an efficient tool for strategic alignment (Carver, 2025), and can be a pure governance question (Muller, 2015). As a network aspect what can be studied is that after all, central actors with more developed frameworks and capacities form their own competing collaboration networks to share same norms, while the developing countries form digital peripheries and are in a submissive position (Carver, 2025). This great power competition is reflected in the United States approach, acknowledging that capacity building activities are not always the most attractive tools, but they play a key importance in how policy translates into real world outcomes such as increasing the state's competitiveness against rivalry challenges (Ford, 2020). Studying cyberdiplomacy, the study of strategies is crucial as they are the manifestations of the states' political will and attitudes (Urbanovics, 2022; Thomázy, 2021).

Methodology

The research used a mixed-methods strategy, including descriptive statistics and network analysis. The research is based on the data of the Cybil Portal, an international database of cyber capacity-building projects. Cybil was initiated by the Global Forum on Cyber Expertise (GFCE) to improve coordination, transparency, and efficacy in global cyber capacity-building initiatives. During the data collection period in November 2025, the database had 1,026 entries, encompassing projects, resources, and events. The analysis predominantly utilizes the "Projects" dataset, which records specific cyber capacity-building initiatives. However, it is important to note that there is no single definition of what can be included in cyber capacity building projects, therefore the states and international organizations are free to upload a huge variety of their ongoing or finished projects.

The data was collected from the official platform of the Cybil Portal. Extracted variables included geographic focus, donor and implementing actors, and thematic areas. I used descriptive statistical methods to analyze the global and regional distribution of projects. Meanwhile, network analysis was employed to map donor-recipient relationships and implementation partnerships to capture relational dynamics. This process helped to identify key actors, collaborative patterns and regional clusters within the domain. The networks were visualized and analyzed using Gephi 0.10.1. Ego networks centered on donor actors were constructed in order to compare the positions and network structures of three key actors: the European Union, the United Nations and the United States.

To ensure analytical clarity, key concepts were operationalized as follows. "Cooperation intensity" is measured through edge weights, defined as the number of jointly implemented projects between actors. "Network centrality" is operationalized using weighted degree centrality, capturing the extent to which an actor is connected to others while accounting for the strength of these ties. Edge weights are measured by the number of joint projects, and were incorporated both into the layout algorithm and the calculation of network metrics. Weighted degree centrality was computed for all nodes and normalized by the maximum observed value to allow for clearer interpretation and comparison. The selection of weighted degree centrality is justified by the study's focus on collaboration intensity rather than brokerage or positional control. While alternative metrics such as betweenness centrality could capture intermediary roles, the present analysis prioritizes the identification of highly connected actors and dense cooperation patterns across networks.

Regarding the visualization of the networks, node size reflects the normalized weighted degree, indicating the relative connectedness of actors, while edge thickness relates to the strength of ties. Spatialization was produced using the ForceAtlas2 algorithm, with edge weights shaping attraction forces so that more intensive cooperation pulls nodes closer together. In addition to visual network interpretation, quantitative network indicators were used to support the analysis. Network density provides an indication of overall connectivity, while modularity helps identify the presence of subgroups or regional clustering.

Taken together, these methods make it possible to analyze cyber capacity-building not only as a set of technical interventions, but also as a structured field of geopolitical and diplomatic practice (Homburger, 2019). However, some limitations may arise as the Cybil Portal is based on voluntary reporting on data which introduces potential reporting bias. Furthermore, variation in how actors define and report "cyber capacity-building projects" may affect comparability across cases.

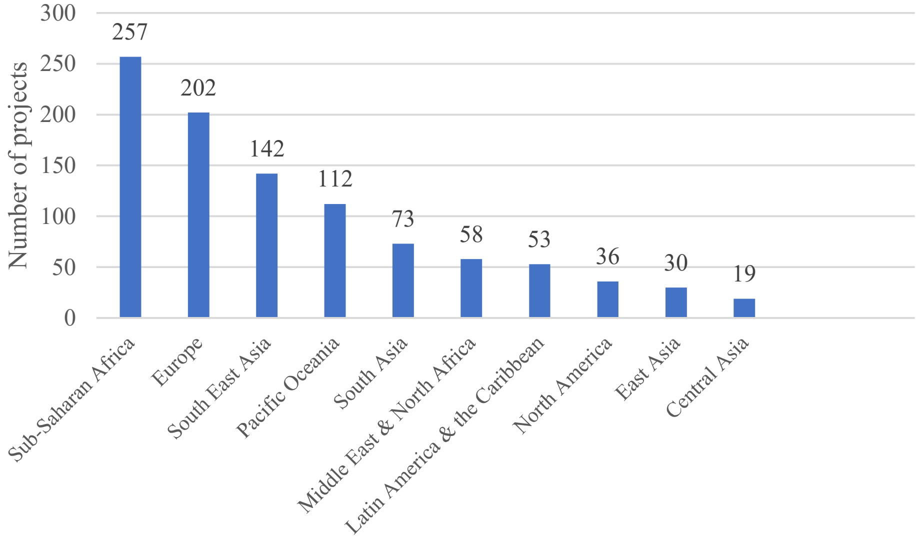
Cyber capacity building projects

This section presents the key findings on the patterns of cyber capacity building projects included in the Cybil Portal. First, general trends are presented, followed by a separate section highlighting the key characteristics of cyber capacity building projects coordinated by the EU, the United Nations and the United States.

General trends in cyber capacity building

First, the worldwide trends of cyber capacity building are presented.

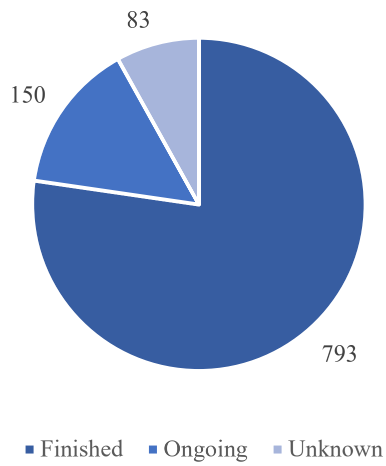
Figure 2: Regional breakdown by the number of cyber capacity building projects



Source: compiled by the author based on the data of the Cybil Portal.

Based on the number of CCB projects, we can study a regional breakdown led by a focus on Sub-Saharan Africa (257 projects), followed by Europe (202 projects) and Southeast Asia (142 projects). Altogether, the Cybil Portal dataset contains 1,026 projects, meaning that 25% focus on Sub-Saharan Africa and almost 20% deal with the European region. The fewest projects focus on Central Asia (19) and East Asia (30), which are separated from the Southeast Asian region in the dataset.

Figure 3: Number of projects by status



Source: compiled by the author based on the data of the Cybil Portal.

Of the CCB projects included in the dataset, 77% (793) have already been completed, 14.6% (150) are ongoing, and the status of 1% is unknown. However, studies show that the role of cyber capacity building has grown since the 2010s (Cyber Digital Europe, 2021). Nevertheless, studies indicate an increasing significance of cyber capacity building since the 2010s (Cyber Digital Europe, 2021).

Table 1: Main categories by the number of CCB projects

Main Category	Total	Subcategories (with number of projects)
Emerging Technologies	5	
Cyber Security Policy and Strategy	434	Strategies (164)
		National Assessments (170)
		CBMs, Norms and Cyberdiplomacy (105)
Cyber Incident Management & Critical Information Protection	437	National Computer Security Incident Response (304)
		Critical Information Infrastructure Protection (119)
Cybercrime	227	Cybercrime Training and Prevention (70)
		Legal Frameworks / Cybercrime Law (66)
Cyber Security Culture & Skills	244	Cyber Security Awareness (131)
		Education, Training & Workforce Development (140)
Cyber Security Standards	82	

Source: compiled by the author based on the data of the Cybil Portal.

Table 1 shows the main categories of CCB projects, organized by topic and main goal. Globally, most projects focus on either cyber incident management and critical information protection (437), or the development of cybersecurity policies and strategies (434). These two categories are followed by enhancing cyber security culture and skills (244) and preparing recipient countries against cybercrime (227). Digging deeper into these main categories reveals the composition of the subcategories that define the projects' specific objectives and operational tasks. Within the dominant category of cyber incident management and critical information protection, we find the establishment of computer national security incident response teams (304) and the development of critical information protection services (119). Within the development of cyber security policies and strategies, the subcategories are strategies, national assessment frameworks, CBM norms, and cyber diplomacy.

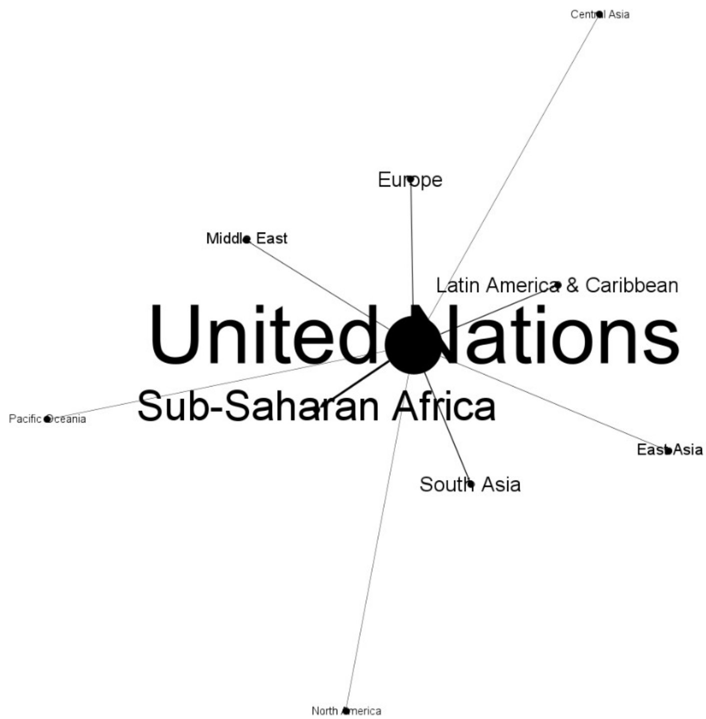
Global North actors-led cyber capacity building projects

Having carefully studied the general worldwide pattern of cyber capacity building, this section presents the actor-specific data. The three main actors involved in this comparison play crucial roles in cyber diplomacy. These are the United Nations, which introduced the report of the UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) in 2010, the United States, which is a cyber great power, and the European Union, which plays an active role in cyber diplomacy. Projects coordinated by these actors are primarily presented from a network-based perspective to highlight their main partners and recipients, and the status and main categories of these projects are also introduced.

Main regional focus points

Network analysis of cyber capacity-building initiatives linked to the United Nations (UN), the United States (US) and the European Union (EU) reveals that cyber capacity-building has become a key aspect of modern cyber diplomacy. Rather than being politically neutral forms of technical assistance, these initiatives are embedded in specific power, influence and governance constellations, reflecting broader foreign policy objectives and geopolitical logics.

Figure 4: Regional focus among United Nations-led CCB projects



Source: compiled by the author based on the data of the Cybil Portal.

Figure 4 shows the regional focal points of UN-led CCB projects. Based on this, the dominance of the Sub-Saharan African region can be seen, with 22 projects, followed by South Asia with eight projects and the Latin America and Caribbean region with seven projects. Of the 52 UN projects, 35 have been completed and 11 are ongoing. In terms of the main goals and instruments, there is a diverse picture, with an emphasis on developing cyber security strategies, primarily CBM norms and cyber diplomacy, as well as preparing recipients against cybercrime.

Studying the collaboration network graph, we can observe a very comprehensive and geographically inclusive structure covering all major regions of the world. This pattern aligns with conceptualizations of cyber diplomacy that emphasize multilateralism, norm entrepreneurship and capacity dissemination. The UN's broad geographical reach places it as a key factor in the cyber domain, promoting the dissemination of standards and best practices. This demonstrates the organization's institutional and normative power, as it influences the cybersecurity agenda by incorporating specific interpretations of cyber risk, responsibility, and governance into capacity-building initiatives, rather than using hard power.

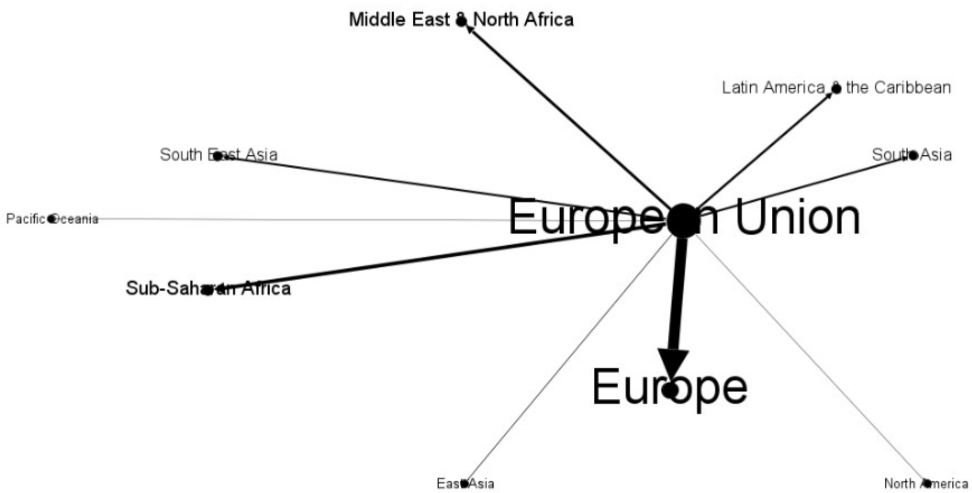
Figure 5: Regional focus among United States-led CCB projects

Source: compiled by the author based on the data of the Cybil Portal.

Figure 5 demonstrates the breakdown of United States-coordinated CCB projects. The regional breakdown shows a dominant focus on Europe (27 projects), followed by South Asia (26 projects) and Sub-Saharan Africa (14 projects). Of the 74 projects, 45 have been completed and 25 are ongoing. The main goals of the projects are cyber incident management and critical information protection (40%), and cyber security culture and skills development (36%).

Studying collaboration patterns, the great power logic is present in the US CCB activities and the selection of regions. The US is active in this field primarily in strategic regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, East Asia and the Middle East. This concentration of specific regions and a less active global engagement in others reflects a cyber diplomacy approach wherein capacity creation facilitates alliance preservation, strategic rivalry, and security collaboration. This resembles international literature as CCB projects are often used to stabilize strategic partner regions. This functions as a relational power including the enhancement of dependency networks, development of interoperability, and the integration of recipient governments into US-favored cybersecurity frameworks. The significance of geopolitically important regions suggests that US cyber capacity development is linked to overarching national security and foreign policy goals, reinforcing the notion that cyber diplomacy serves as a tool for exerting influence in both digital and geopolitical spheres.

Figure 6: Regional focus among European Union-led CCB projects



Source: compiled by the author based on the data of the Cybil Portal.

Figure 6 summarizes the regional focus of the CCB projects coordinated by the European Union. There is a clear emphasis on the European region (including the Eastern Partnership countries), with 45 projects. This is followed by Sub-Saharan

Africa (16 projects) and the Middle East (13 projects). 66 projects have been completed and five are ongoing. These projects mainly focus on cyber security policies and strategies (44), particularly the development of CBM norms and cyber diplomacy, followed by cyber incident management and critical information protection. Data reveals that the establishment of National Computer Security Incident Response Teams is the most prominent subcategory with 25 projects.

The EU network is characterized by a strong regional focus, with Europe as the dominant hub and significant connections to Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa. This regional concentration reflects the EU's characteristic mode of cyber diplomacy, which is based on regulatory, institutional and infrastructural forms of power. Within the EU and its neighborhood, cyber capacity-building serves several reasons: 1) consolidates governance frameworks, 2) harmonizes regulatory practices and 3) extends EU cybersecurity norms beyond its borders. In this sense, EU cyber capacity-building demonstrates how cyber diplomacy can operate as a governance technology, exerting influence through standard-setting, institutional design and long-term capacity integration rather than overt strategic alignment.

Table 2: Comparison of the characteristics of CCB projects led by the main actors involved in the analysis

Dimension	**United Nations (UN)**	**United States (US)**	**European Union (EU)**
Dominant cyber diplomacy logic	Multilateral, development-oriented cyber diplomacy	Strategic and security-oriented cyber diplomacy	Regulatory and governance-oriented cyber diplomacy
Geographic structure of network	Globally expansive and inclusive	Global reach with selective regional concentration	Regionally embedded and spatially concentrated
Primary regional focus	Sub-Saharan Africa; broad Global South coverage	Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, East Asia, Middle East	Europe (dominant); Sub-Saharan Africa; Middle East
Form of power exercised	Normative and institutional power	Relational and strategic power	Regulatory and infrastructural power
Function of capacity-building	Diffusion of global norms, standards, and best practices	Strengthening alliances, interoperability, and strategic presence	Harmonization of frameworks, institutional integration, regulatory diffusion

Cyber assistance as power mechanism	Embeds UN norms and multilateral governance models	Constructs dependency networks and strategic alignments	Extends EU governance models and regulatory ecosystems
Relationship to geopolitics	Indirect; mediated through multilateralism and development discourse	Direct; closely aligned with national security and geopolitical competition	Structural; exercised through governance, neighborhood policy, and external action
Overall interpretation	Cyber capacity-building as normative cyber diplomacy	Cyber capacity-building as strategic cyber diplomacy	Cyber capacity-building as governance-driven cyber diplomacy

Source: compiled by the author.

Table 2 summarizes the main characteristics of these CCB projects led by the three actors involved in the analysis. First, we found diverse diplomatic logic exercised by each actor. The United Nations has a central focus on multilateral cooperation and aims to provide a forum for the development of cyber diplomacy. Meanwhile, the United States has a strategic and more security-oriented approach to cyber diplomacy, and the European Union uses the CCB projects for its regulatory and norm promotion efforts. The geographic scope of the actors differs as well. While the United Nations has a globally inclusive and wide collaboration network and a broad Global South coverage, the other two actors rather focus on their partner regions which are under their influence. For the United States, Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, East Asia and the Middle East are all important partners as a great cyber power. Opposite to this, the European Union primarily focuses on European countries, and their very limited spheres of influence including Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East.

The rationale differs, too. While the United Nations uses CCB projects to diffuse global norms and develop best practices, the United States considers them instruments for strengthening alliances and enhancing its strategic presence. The European Union's approach is similar to that of the United Nations, as its primary goal is to harmonize frameworks and promote institutional integration. UN-led CCB projects have strong normative and institutional power, US projects have strategic significance for the country and EU-led projects have infrastructural power. UN-led cyber capacity building is indirectly associated with geopolitics, functioning mostly through multilateralism, development frameworks, and norm diffusion, which aligns with a type of normative cyber diplomacy. US Cyber capacity-building is directly embedded in national security and geopolitical competition, framing capacity-building as an instrument of strategic cyber diplomacy. The EU takes a structurally embedded approach, exercising cyber capacity-building through governance, regulatory power, and neighborhood policy, reflecting a model of governance-driven cyber diplomacy.

Conclusion

This article examined cyber capacity building as a practice of cyber diplomacy through a network analysis of projects coordinated by the United Nations, the United States, and the European Union. The results show that cyber capacity building is not a politically neutral form of technical assistance, but a structured, geopolitical, normative, and governance-oriented practice in which power can be exercised through institutional, relational, and infrastructural means.

Although all three actors use cyber capacity building as a foreign policy tool, they do so in significantly different ways. Results pointed out that UN-led initiatives function primarily on a multilateral basis and emphasize the dissemination of norms, which aligns with the normative cyber diplomacy model. US-led projects are closely embedded in strategic competition and alliance politics, reflecting a form of strategic cyber diplomacy. In contrast, EU-led initiatives focus on regulatory coordination, institutional integration, and neighborhood governance, which reflects governance-oriented cyber diplomacy. These findings carry significant implications for the comprehension and assessment of cyber capacity-building in international policy discussions. They propose that such projects be evaluated not only for their performance but also concerning the political and governance frameworks they incorporate.

Regarding the EU network, Europe can be seen as the primary hub, complemented by involvement in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa. This design embodies the EU's overarching external action framework, wherein internal integration, neighborhood stabilization, and development cooperation are included. In the cyber domain, capacity-building expands this concept into the digital realm, framing cybersecurity as an issue of governance rather than only of security. From the perspective of EU cyber diplomacy, these results support interpretations of the EU as a regulatory and normative power. Cyber capacity-building facilitates the dissemination of EU-endorsed standards, institutional frameworks, and policy structures, integrating cybersecurity into broader initiatives of digital transformation, rule of law, and institutional change. Results show that the EU cyber diplomacy focuses on the establishment of a regional cyber framework, where partner countries involved in CCB projects are harmonized from a governance and regulatory aspect, and external engagement through CCB also aims to reinforce the same governance model. This discovery aligns with research on EU external governance and regulatory authority, emphasizing the Union's ability to influence policy contexts via technical support, institutional collaborations, and conditional cooperation.

The significance of cyber capacity-building in Global South contexts prompts essential inquiries. Although these initiatives may facilitate institutional development, skills acquisition, and cyber resilience in the partner countries targeted by these projects, they raise questions related to power and influence of the donor country. Namely, to what extent do these projects press the recipient countries towards adopting the donor countries' norms, danger perceptions and governance framework. The integration of cybersecurity into donor-driven frameworks poses a risk of generating new kinds of digital reliance, as recipient nations conform their legal systems, infrastructures, and policy priorities to external agendas.

The comparative analysis highlighted that cyber capacity-building is a very essential tool to develop and follow one's cyberdiplomacy governance model. For the EU, it facilitates the externalization of regulatory and governance frameworks; for the United States, it strengthens strategic alignment and security alliances; and for the United Nations, it institutionalizes global standards and inclusive structures. In all three instances, cyber aid functions as a means of structuring cyberspace via networks of financing, standards, and institutional collaborations.

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Does Public Opinion Even Matter in Foreign Affairs?

Low Demand for Vertical Accountability and Foreign Policy in the Philippines under Duterte

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Doi: 10.15170/PSK.2026.SI.01.03
Received: December 14, 2025
Accepted: April 9, 2026
Published: April 24, 2026

Citation:
Borja, Anthony Lawrence; Blantucas, Jesi; Gonzales, Andre and Uyseco, Wayne Winter (2026). Does Public Opinion Even Matter in Foreign Affairs? Low Demand for Vertical Accountability and Foreign Policy in the Philippines under Duterte. *Polarities,* 7(SI), 36–60.

Acknowledgements:
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Abstract

Concepts like populist foreign policy and populist securitization have emerged as means to analyze the rise of strongmen appealing to the "People" in foreign affairs. They provide insights into the supply side of rhetoric and policies that treat the international arena as an extension of domestic struggles against perceived elites—both local and global; struggles conducted through anti-establishment tendencies, skepticism towards liberal international norms, and dramatic appeals to the "People". Without dismissing the value of such conceptual-theoretical advances, a supply side analysis appears insufficient in the face of such global political shifts. However, with the "People" being dragged into the picture by their supposed representatives, a demand side analysis appears necessary. In the context of populist foreign policy rhetoric, how can we make sense of their audience? Do they even matter, or are they mere props in a leader's performance? Specifically, we need to ask, what is the relationship between a foreign policy process and demands for vertical accountability? Such a question takes the matter beyond populist leadership and into the realm of democratization itself. By pursuing it through a secondary data analysis of foreign policy landmarks and public opinion surveys during the administration of Rodrigo Duterte, we will provide an integration of demand and supply side perspectives and explore the possibility of foreign policy being based on or enabled by the powerlessness of ordinary citizens. Its implications on the trajectory of democratization within and across countries will then be opened for future analyses.

Keywords: *Accountability, Duterte, Foreign Policy, Hedging, Political Psychology, Philippines*

Introduction

Vertical accountability is intrinsic to democratic politics. Without it, an electoral system is no more than a game between elected oligarchs. For international relations, vertical accountability ensures that foreign policies remain within the ambit of popular control. If such an alignment between foreign policy and vertical accountability is realized, then democracies can both muster sufficient political will to meet the logistical requirements of war at home and on the battlefield, while adopting more prudent foreign policies (Stam & Reiter, 2010). Simply put, vertical accountability ensures that a democracy will neither enter risky affairs nor simply lie down when confronted with foreign threats.

But what if there is low demand for vertical accountability among ordinary citizens? How can one frame the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy under such conditions? With neither strong institutions for vertical accountability nor a demand for it from the general public, foreign policy remains exclusive to a few populating diplomatic circles and occupying concerned legislative offices. Political elites can end up enjoying a free hand in foreign affairs if there is a deficit in vertical accountability.

These obvious implications notwithstanding, further analysis is necessary to ground such a possibility in the context of (de)democratization, foreign policy shifts, and the rise of what has been termed as populist foreign policy and securitization (cf., Chryssogelos, 2018; Wajner & Giurlando, 2024). Thus, we turn to the case of the Philippines as a defective democracy (cf. Teehankee & Calimbahin, 2020) sandwiched between big powers in Southeast Asia (cf. Baviera, 2014; Baviera & Arugay, 2021; de Castro, 2016, 2017), and subjected to populist foreign policy rhetoric (Arugay & Magcamit, 2024). We ask, *what is the relationship between a foreign policy process and demands for vertical accountability?*

Through a secondary data analysis of foreign policy landmarks and public opinion surveys during the administration of Rodrigo Duterte, we will explore the possibility of foreign policy being enabled more by the leader-centric tendency of ordinary citizens than their concern for foreign affairs. We argue that the chronic lack of priority for foreign affairs among ordinary citizens is related to a leader-centric reliance on public matters. Moreover, we open the possibility that low demand for vertical accountability can give the government a relatively free hand in foreign policy making (i.e., the costs of hedging and policy shifts on political support are lowered).

Why the Philippines? We seek to contribute to the growing literature on the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy in the Philippines by looking at the matter from the level of political values (i.e. stable and motivational principles and ideals towards an object) (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004; Rohan, 2000). Such an endeavor supplements existing analyses of political attitudes (i.e. evaluations of foreign matters and other countries), the generation and subsequent reception of foreign policy narratives, and the formation of a Filipino identity in relation to foreign affairs (Kurdli & Gonzales, 2025; Montiel, et al., 2019; Montiel & Dela Paz, 2020; Montiel, et al., 2014). We will do so by examining what ordinary citizens expect from their leaders (their values on vertical accountability as citizen-leader relations), their values and attitudes towards international relations, and whether they find foreign affairs as a priority issue in relation to other public matters. By mapping these tendencies out, we hope to provide insights on whether ordinary citizens think about foreign affairs when facing the ballot as their only effective form of holding leaders accountable (cf. Borja et al., 2025).

To elaborate on these points, this paper will be organized accordingly with the succeeding section providing a brief review of the literature on public opinion's relationship with foreign policy, prefaced upon the literature on vertical accountability. Moreover, the next section also provides a general overview of contemporary Filipino foreign policy, gravitating around the struggle to realize the constitutional guarantees for an independent foreign policy. After these we will look at public opinion surveys, first on the prioritization of foreign affairs, and second on shared values and attitudes towards international relations and foreign affairs. We will then turn to the issue of vertical accountability itself by looking at shared values on leader-citizen relations. A general map locating both tendencies and key foreign policy landmarks will be provided as a way of grounding survey results on foreign policy movements.

Vertical Accountability and Foreign Policy: A Review of Literature

For Ashworth (2012), vertical accountability is a system of rewards and punishments that can keep policymakers tied to the will and welfare of their constituents. In other words, it is an alignment between the interests and behavior of policymakers and their constituents (cf. Hellwig and Samuels 2008). Now, if we tie vertical accountability with the Schumpeterian understanding of democracy as a circulation of political elites through competitive elections, then it can be construed as a question of citizen-leader relations.

However, despite this ideal schema, the circulation of elites can turn into a coagulation of power in the hands of a few if conditions become disempowering for the ordinary citizen (Borja 2015, 2017). Vertical accountability can collapse under the weight of power asymmetry. Consequently, such a vicious cycle can end in a democratic crisis driven by the disempowerment of the ruled and a lack of obligations and accountability among rulers (cf. Borja, et al., 2025). In relation to foreign affairs, the matter hinges upon whether international relations is a priority issue for ordinary citizen-voters. Assuming that elections are relatively fair and regular, it becomes a question of whether citizen-voters take foreign affairs as consideration whenever they participate in the elections. The next section fleshes this out from a psycho-political perspective (e.g., are ordinary-citizens even knowledgeable enough to have sound opinions on foreign affairs), but for now, we note that the dynamics between domestic politics and international relations can take on multiple forms and facilitated by a number of factors outside diplomatic procedures.

Putnam's (1988) Two-Level game model sums up the general dynamic between these two areas by showing that through difference spaces of negotiation between domestic groups and the government, advocacies, problems, and policy/political changes carried out domestically can be translated to the formulation of a foreign policy. In a later work, Noone (2019) presented three tracks for foreign policy analysis through the following frameworks: (1) Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF)[1] that looks at how strong beliefs that are translated into policy by allied groups involved in pushing for such advocacies (cf., Cairney, 2012); (2) Multiple Streams Framework (MSF)[2] that three intertwined streams focusing on the framing, formation, and public acceptance of foreign policies; (cf., Kingdon, 2014); Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET)[3] that explains continuous periods of policy stasis as well as periods of intense, rapid policy change (cf., True, Jones, and Baumgartner, 2007).

Juxtaposed with such models, scholars have noted several factors that facilitate the relationship between international and domestic politics, the most basic of which are the dis/incentives faced by political decision makers. This refers to the institutions, structure, characteristics, and current conditions that shape behavior in the international arena and relations with other states. Along with this, foreign policy is also something constructed through a host of constitutive (construct identities and interests of actors), regulative (constrain the acceptable range of behavior), and prescriptive (prescribing what "ought" to be done) norms which are shared and institutionalized within and outside a state (Clarke, 2005; Johnston, 1995; Katzenstein, 1998; Finnemore & Sikkinik, 1998).

Now, with the recent wave of populist leaders taking high offices, we note the impacts of such a twist on foreign policy discourse, especially in terms of projecting "what is" and "what should be" in the world of nation-states. Populism renders foreign policy as a matter of anti-establishment tendencies, skepticism towards liberal international norms, and dramatic appeals to the "People" vs. "elites" embodying foreign interests (Cadier, 2024). Populists also securitize foreign affairs by constructing certain issues as existential threats to the "People" in order to legitimize extraordinary actions beyond normal politics (cf., Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). Such practices enable populist governments to personalize foreign policy processes, weaken bureaucratic mediation, and employ nationalist or anti-globalist rhetoric that aligns foreign policy with the popular will (Chryssogelos, 2018; Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017).

In the Philippines, public opinion, institutional constraints, and interest group pressures can be weighed in when crafting international strategies. For example, while the public perceives the Philippines as "weak" against China, it has the capacity to check its stronger counterpart by gaining support from its allies (Baviera, 2014). Regarding populism, Arugay and Magcamit (2024) illustrate how Rodrigo Duterte deployed populist rhetoric to redefine traditional foreign relations—casting the liberal West or domestic elites as threats to national sovereignty and "the people."

Through this fusion of populism and securitization, foreign policy becomes a stage for dramatizing the defense of the nation against both external and internal adversaries.

Ultimately, populism in foreign policy brings forth the "People" as an actor on the world stage. But, does it contribute to the capacity of these "People" to hold their leaders accountable? Assuming that this "People" is no mere rhetorical mechanism but an actual, albeit amorphous set of actors – the ordinary citizen as a diverse mass – then the question becomes a political, psychological, and sociological one (cf. Borja, 2023a). The next section elaborates on this matter.

The Question of Domestic Support for Foreign Policy

Domestic support for foreign policy is ultimately a question of political costs and benefits. It is a matter of whether foreign policy – may it be militant and aggressive, or benevolent and cooperative, or even isolationist – can lead to the (dis)empowerment of those in power. In the context of electoral democracies, it becomes a matter of whether a foreign policy issue is a priority for voters.

Despite the brevity of the aforementioned portrayal, the chain between domestic support and foreign policy is a long one. Baum and Potter (2008), and Kaarbo (2015) have provided surveys of the literature with their works emphasizing the crucial role of domestic political processes in shaping foreign policy. On one hand, Baum and Potter (2008) have proposed a theoretical synthesis that assumes the relative autonomy of mass media in foreign affairs before placing it in a triangular relationship with the public and decision-makers. They argue further that the foreign policy process is better analyzed in terms of market relations with information serving as its currency; something that these different actors hold different measures of before acting in accordance with what they know. On the other hand, Kaarbo (2015) argues that internal political factors—leadership psychology, bureaucratic competition, coalition dynamics, and institutional context—are essential for explaining why states behave differently under similar structural pressures. Together, their reviews show that foreign policy analysis must account for the domestic environments of decision-making, communication, and political contestation that shape state behavior.

We will not provide an extensive review of the literature on this matter. Rather, we will tease out the supposed importance of public opinion on foreign policy from a psycho-political perspective (cf., Aldrich et al., 2006; Kertzer & Tingley, 2018) through the following points. First of which are the notions of audience costs and accountability environments affecting the nature and trajectory of foreign policy processes (cf., Narang & Staniland, 2018; Slantchev, 2006; Tomz, 2007). These demonstrate how domestic accountability mechanisms shape leaders' foreign policy behavior through the logic of audience costs. Slantchev (2006) argues that audience costs stem not merely from public intolerance of inconsistency but from how political opposition and media coverage expose leaders who back down in crises, making them vulnerable to domestic punishment. Tomz (2007) shows that citizens across partisan lines do indeed penalize leaders who make threats and subsequently fail to follow through, confirming that audience costs are a real and measurable feature of democratic accountability.

Overall, the notion of audience costs allows us to measure whether ordinary citizens can reward or punish policy makers who deviate from what they perceive as the "right" foreign policy direction. The problem, however, is that despite a need to reward or punish, it is another question as to whether the electorate can do so. Hence, focusing on Narang and Staniland's (2018) theoretical contribution on this matter, we note that accountability environments:

> …create incentives for politicians to devote political effort and resources to foreign policy issues…leads politicians to pay careful attention to strategy, supports credible threats to adversaries, and disciplines individual ambitions in line with the electorate's incentives. In many other cases, however, it creates strong incentives to pay little attention to foreign policy and to delegate power to bureaucracies and militaries while allowing strategies that evade accountability even for unambiguous failures (p. 411).

Such an environment is built on both the salience of a foreign policy issue (psycho-political dimension) and the institutional clarity of government responsibility (formal institutional and informal political dynamics). From variations in these two dimensions, different types of environments can be derived as a means to understand the overall alignment of an electorate's foreign policy tendencies with those of the elected.

What we note for this paper is that a psycho-political approach to the issue of foreign policy raises the question of cognitive factors affecting the salience of a foreign policy issue; factors beyond knowledge of foreign affairs. Though it should still be considered in analyzing the transformation of opinion into support for foreign policy (cf., Todorov & Mandisodza, 2004), differences in knowledge is no longer deemed as a decisive factor (cf., Kertzer & Zeitzoff, 2017). For one, Kertzer (2022) shows through quantitative analysis that the supposed gap between mass and elite is an overstatement. While differences in levels of political knowledge and exposure to international affairs exist between elites and the public, they share similar underlying value orientations and respond in comparable ways to perceived threats, partisanship, or moral framing. If this is the case, then what matters more in shaping political support?

More fundamental cognitive factors enter the picture, especially values as a person's set of stable and trans-situational ideals; that is, what a person wants to happen to a specific object that in turn can determine their motivations. Kertzer et al. (2014) and Rathbun et al. (2016) have shown that moral and personal values help determine an individual's attitude towards foreign policies. For Kertzer et al. (2014) citizens' foreign policy preferences are structured by underlying moral values such as care, fairness, loyalty, and authority. They find that liberals and conservatives differ in both their strategic and ideological stances towards foreign interventions. Building on this approach, Rathbun et al. (2016) apply value-based and psychological modeling using cross-national survey data to demonstrate that specific personal values are more related to a specific policy stance than another. Specifically, they illustrate that on one hand, conservation values emphasizing a need for security while upholding the primacy of tradition and conformity is a strong determinant for militant internationalism as a stance that emphasizes force in foreign affairs. On the other hand, the contrary is true for those with more universalistic personal values that promote the welfare of all. This tendency was more strongly tied to a more cooperative internationalist stance that stresses concern for others and a need for collective efforts.

This analytical thrust extends to the personality itself, and Gravelle et al.'s (2020) study is an example of how certain personality types can be aligned with specific foreign policy stances. Through a large-scale quantitative study of Western cases, they have illustrated that foreign policy attitudes can be traced to certain personality types (i.e., Big Five Personality Types), with the likes of openness being positively related to upholding global justice and cooperative internationalism and extraversion being positively related to militant internationalism. We leave it to the reader to visit their empirical contributions on the matter.

For the current paper, we note that these studies, among others (cf., Flanagan, 2016; Rathbun, 2020; Stoll, et al., 2023; Thierbach-McLean, 2019), emphasize the possible impacts of (mis)alignments between the values held by the general public and those underpinning foreign policies. Their key causal mechanism is that of values affecting attitudes, or in this case, moral or personal values affecting foreign policy attitudes.

The problem is that the impact of foreign policy attitudes on the policy process is itself mediated by a myriad of factors ranging from lobbying to elections. In other words, cognitive and behavioral tendencies towards domestic politics must be accounted for; that is, instead of simply trying to trace the roots of foreign policy attitudes on personal (non-political) values and tendencies, analysis must also look at the impact of political values. The literature on foreign policy ideology (cf., Haesebrouck & Mello, 2020), especially nationalism (cf., Mayda & Rodrik, 2005; Weiss, 2019) and populism (cf., Isernia et al., 2025; Jenne, 2021; Onderčo, 2020) are contribution to this analytical thrust.

In relation to contemporary democratic politics, these studies are found wanting. For one, to focus on nationalism is to focus on something more general (nationalism as something shared by those with democratic and authoritarian tendencies alike). On the other hand, to focus on populism is to remain within the limits of its conceptualization, specifically its anti-elite component. This dimension could not measure values on vertical accountability and leader-citizen relations (Borja, 2022). Thus, to redirect analyses squarely on the issue of democratic values, we return to the issue of accountability environments and extend Narang and Staniland's (2018) analysis to the political psyche of ordinary citizens. Specifically, we must grapple with something more intimate to democratic politics, that is, political values on vertical accountability and leader-citizen relations. Elaborations will be made on this matter in the next section regarding this study's conceptual and theoretical frameworks. For now, we turn briefly to the case of the Philippines and its ongoing struggle for an independent foreign policy.

Struggle for Independent Foreign Policy: The Case of the Philippines

Vertical accountability and foreign policy in the Philippines must be understood in the context of an ongoing struggle to determine and realize an independent foreign policy. This is crucial since the Philippines is thoroughly unlike Western Europe and the United States. It is neither an ex-colonial and imperial power or self-proclaimed global police. Instead, its role in the Third World movement during the Cold War notwithstanding, the Philippines was and remains sandwiched between greater powers, a condition that renders an independent foreign policy a difficult struggle if not a far-off reality. To elaborate, we note the following points as a way of establishing the general context of this case study.

First, the struggle for an independent foreign policy is based on a thin constitutional base. Article II, Section 2, of the Philippine Constitution predicates that the Philippines must pursue an independent foreign policy, renounce war as an instrument of national policy, and adopt generally accepted principles of international law in pursuit of peace, equality, and justice.[4] Despite this, the notion of an independent foreign policy only became a "household term" in the domestic setting during Duterte's administration, when the former president favored improving relations with China over the U.S., a long-time ally of the Philippines (Quilop, 2024).

Second is the unending question of alliances—especially in terms of hard/military power. This raises the issue of hedging as a strategy that prohibits siding with any power through contradictory measures that ensure return-maximization while setting up contingencies (Kuik, 2016). More concretely, hedging involves limited and indirect forms of aligning against a principal threat (*balancing*) and siding with the principal threat (*bandwagoning*) (Walt, 1985). In general, all Southeast Asian states except the Philippines currently employ hedging strategies (Lai and Kuik, 2019). The problematique in rhetoric and narrative then becomes a matter of determining who these threats are, and justifying either balancing or bandwagoning, or even both in a certain pattern, ala' the curious shifts and turns of Orwell's 1984.

Lastly, in the context of a long-standing relationship with the US, the struggle for an independent foreign policy is a sticky matter to say the least. For one, as Kurdli and Gonzales (2025) have argued, Philippine foreign policy remains structurally constrained by long-standing neo-colonial norms and identities that reinforce dependence on the US. These shape a narrow strategic outlook that obstructs the realization of a genuinely independent foreign policy (i.e., beyond dependence on US power and support). An example of such a constraint is Manila's reluctance to criticize Israel's actions in Gaza; a diplomatic constraint that is aligned with a strategic preference for US alignment (Seralbo, 2024). Moreover, the Philippines potentially faces many opportunity costs in aligning or balancing with the US, rather than pursuing a hedging strategy as was pursued during the first half of the Duterte administration by jettisoning strategic autonomy, inflaming a great-power rivalry, and foregoing beneficial economic relations (Gonzales and Kurdli, 2025).

Focusing on responses to the growing power of China, Tamalayan (2019) illustrates that the Duterte regime's own struggle for an independent foreign policy[5] aims to end US dependence by balancing relations with China. Such a move was used as a leverage for major infrastructure and investment projects in the country (i.e., Duterte's "Build, Build, Build" program) while being tied to nationalist sentiments and rhetoric that frames alignment with the US as an affront to Philippine sovereignty (Wu and Velasco, 2024). The consequence was a disruption of a long-standing US-Philippines relationship (de Castro, 2016, 2017). So how did ordinary Filipino citizens respond to Duterte's foreign policy? The succeeding section looks at recent literature on the matter.

Public Opinions on Foreign Policy in the Philippines

As far as our review is concerned, scholarship on public opinion towards foreign policy in the Philippines gravitates around two major themes, namely, that of ambivalence and identity building. Regarding the former, Fang and Li (2022) have illustrated that nationalism among Filipinos is associated with strategic ambivalence—a desire to protect national sovereignty while maintaining pragmatic flexibility in external relations, especially in economic relations. Through a quantitative analysis of survey data, they show that nationalist sentiments are not an obstacle for the government's hedging strategy between the US and China.

Specifically, their findings show that nationalist tendencies do not necessarily translate into anti-China sentiment or unconditional pro-U.S. alignment. Rather, nationalist individuals tend to favor close security ties with the United States to protect sovereignty, while simultaneously endorsing strong economic relations with China to secure development gains. This dual orientation reflects a form of pragmatic nationalism, where maintaining autonomy and maximizing national benefit outweigh ideological loyalty to either power. Overall, nationalism exerts a nonlinear and conditional influence on public attitudes: moderate nationalists are most likely to support hedging, while those with extremely high nationalist sentiment are more inclined toward balancing or confrontation. Their findings suggest that nationalist tendencies among ordinary Filipinos can function as both a protective (primacy of independence) and adaptive (legitimizing hedging as a mode of both survival and benefitting from more powerful countries).

Regarding identity building, recent works have analyzed the congruence of narratives between Duterte's populist rhetoric and those found in social media (Montiel et al., 2017) and in media (Montiel & Dela Paz, 2020). These works show how the space for legitimation is built on the relationships between narratives, collective identities, and movements in foreign policies and rhetoric. What we can derive from their works is that policy legitimation at the level of rhetoric and public discourse is both dynamic and imperfect. For one, Duterte's rhetoric was not in lockstep with that of his social media followers when it comes to the details of an alliance with China; the latter even shifted focus on the benefits of a Trump presidency despite Duterte's pronouncements on a beneficial relationship with China (Montiel et al., 2017).

What must be noted is that these works gravitate around nationalism as a key political value. Though their insights on the matter are invaluable and aligned with the longstanding literature on nationalism and foreign policy, they fall short in providing more insights into the relationship between accountability and foreign policy. In response to Fang and Li (2022), we raise the possibility that the space for legitimizing hedging might not be due solely to a complicated sense of nationalism. Rather, it might be more basic as simply leaving foreign policy to leaders—a lack of need to hold leaders accountable on such grounds.

For the works on narrative congruence, we can deem them as measurements of values in action (i.e. as narratives constituted by expressions in mass and social media). However, their analyses did not flesh out the values behind such narratives. As far as their definition of narrative congruence is concerned, they might not even be concerned with values at all, settling instead with attitudes/evaluations expressed as storylines. Unless their subjects are merely gossiping online for the sake of gossiping itself (bereft of any goal or political motivation) – an assumption that is thoroughly unrealistic – then an analysis of political values remains necessary. To this end, we will elaborate on this study's conceptual and theoretical frameworks before presenting data on accountability and foreign policy attitudes in the Philippines during the Duterte administration.

Public Opinion and Foreign Policy in the Philippines under Duterte

To reiterate, we ask, *what is the relationship between a foreign policy process and demands for vertical accountability?* Assuming that the Philippines is a defective democracy characterized by the concentration of power at the hands of fewer and fewer elites tied with mass disempowerment and leader-centric tendencies (cf., Arugay & Magcamit, 2024; Borja, 2015, 2017, 2023b; Borja et al., 2025; Teehankee, & Calimbahin, 2020), vertical accountability between the government and ordinary citizens is more a problem than an established system – a remote ideal than a reality.

It is in this context that we must understand the relationship between public opinion and foreign policy. If ordinary citizens could not easily hold the government accountable for domestic matters (may it be systematic incapacity or an unwillingness to), what more for something as remote as foreign affairs. Thus, we argue that the chronic lack of priority for foreign affairs among ordinary citizens is related to a leader-centric reliance on public matters. Moreover, we open the possibility that low demand for vertical accountability can give the government a relatively free hand in foreign policy making (i.e., the costs of hedging and policy shifts on political support are lowered). Overall, we will illustrate that the accountability environment for Filipino foreign policy making can be characterized as low cost and leader-centric.

What is an accountability environment from a psycho-political perspective? We define it as values regarding leadership and leader-citizen relations that can motivate political behavior (e.g., voting preferences) through attitudes (i.e., evaluations and assessments) towards specific political objects. Through this, we can construe high-cost accountability environments as something based on a shared need to hold leaders accountable in relation to specific policy issues. Contrary to this, a low-cost accountability environment is based on a lack of need to hold leaders accountable in relation to specific policy issues.

In addition, focusing on attitudes towards specific objects, if there is a relationship between the concerned values and attitudes, then the direction of the latter (may it be positive or negative) determines how ordinary citizens will hold leaders accountable. For example, if a citizen wants to hold a leader accountable on the issue of unemployment, and if his understanding of unemployment is based on a negative attitude towards labor policies, then it is probable that such a citizen would demand the government to correct itself and provide labor generating policies in the future. All this makes sense, if and only if there is a connection between values on vertical accountability and attitudes towards a specific issue.

Table 1 below grounds this schema on the issue of foreign relations between the Philippines, China, and the US. We use two sets of values to measure demand for vertical accountability. On one hand are leader-centric values referring to a willingness to suspend accountability in favor of a paternal and/or morally upright leader. On the other are values regarding leader-citizen relations referring to how citizens would want their relationship with leaders to be like. Regarding attitudes, the indicators below point to the perceived extent and nature of US and Chinese influence in Asia and in the Philippines.

Table 1: Conceptual Framework

LEADER-CENTRIC VALUES – values regarding the primacy of leadership based on moral and/or paternal standards.
Indicators:

- **Paternalistic Political Leadership** – willingness to give absolute power to a paternal figure.
- **Moralistic Political Leadership** – willingness to give absolute power on moralistic grounds.

Paternalistic Political Leadership
Q: Government leaders are like the head of a family; we should all follow their decisions.
Moralistic Political Leadership
Q: If we have political leaders who are morally upright, we can let them decide everything.
VALUES ON LEADER-CITIZEN RELATIONS – values regarding the ideal relationship between government leaders and ordinary citizens.
Indicators:

- **Trustee vs. Delegative Representation** – willingness to either give autonomy to government leaders in determining and realizing the public good or the contrary.
- **Decisiveness vs. Accountability** – willingness to sacrifice political accountability for decisiveness or vice versa.
- **Electoral vs. Meritocratic** – preference on the source of legitimate political power.

Trustee vs. Delegative Representation
Q1: Government leaders do what they think is best for the people *Or* Government leaders implement what voters want.
Q2: The government is like parent, it should decide what is good for us *Or* Government is our employee, the people should tell government what needs to be done.
Decisiveness vs. Accountability
Q: It is more important to have a government that can get things done, even if we have no influence over what it does. *Or* It is more important for citizens to be able to hold government accountable, even if that means it makes decisions more.
Electoral vs. Meritocratic Legitimacy
Q: Political leaders are chosen on the basis on their virtue and capability even without election. *Or* Political leaders are chosen by the people through open and competitive elections.
ATTITUDES ON CHINA AND THE US – an assessment of the extent and nature of China and the US's influence in the region and in one's country.
Indicators:

- **Nature of impact on the region** – determining whether their impact on the region is beneficial or not.
- **Degree of influence** – determining the extent of their influence on domestic affairs.
- **Nature of influence** – determining whether their influence on domestic affairs is beneficial or not.

Nature of impact on the region
Q: Does China do more good or harm to the region?

Q: Does the United States do more good or harm to the region?
Degree of influence
Q: How much influence does China have on our country?
Q: How much influence does the United States have on our country?
Nature of influence
Q: General speaking, the influence China has on our country is?
Q: General speaking, the influence the United States has on our country is?

We conducted basic correlation tests between values on vertical accountability and on the aforementioned attitudes. We will try to confirm the following hypotheses through a secondary data analysis of survey data from the 4th, 5th, and 6th waves of the *Asia Barometer Survey* (ABS)[6] and public opinion polls from *Pulse Asia*:[7]

Hypothesis 1: There is chronically low demand for vertical accountability among a majority of Filipinos.
Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between values for vertical accountability and attitudes towards the US.
Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between values for vertical accountability and attitudes towards China.

Leader-centrism and Low Demand for Vertical Accountability

Most Filipinos lack motivation to hold leaders accountable while being willing to give more power to those they deem as worthy. Moreover, despite their attachment to elections as the primary source of political legitimacy, most share an ideal of trustee representation wherein the elected are given more autonomy in determining and realizing the public good.

Table 2 below shows that through 4th to 6th Waves of the ABS, most Filipino values toward political leadership and leader-citizen relations show a gradual but noticeable shift toward merit-oriented and trustee representation. On paternalistic leadership, agreement remains high across all waves, but support softens over time. Regarding moralistic leadership, Filipinos consistently express strong expectations that leaders should behave with moral virtue, with agreement rising from about 61% in Wave 4 to over 68% in Wave 6, indicating increasing moral demands placed on political elites.

Between trustee and delegative representation, most Filipinos prefer the former. During the 4th Wave, 62.83% agreed that leaders should do what they think is best for the people rather than follow voter preferences, and this sentiment was shared by more during the 5th Wave. Similarly, between decisiveness and accountability, most Filipinos lean slightly toward decisive government action even at the expense of citizen influence. Finally, regarding the source of political legitimacy, support for leaders chosen based on virtue or capability "even without election" rises sharply from 33.75% in Wave 4 to 47.92% in Wave 6, suggesting growing openness to non-electoral or technocratic forms of legitimacy.

Table 2: Values on Vertical Accountability (Percentage)

	WAVE 4	WAVE 5	WAVE 6
Paternalistic Political Leadership			
Strongly agree	14	**20.92**	**14.17**
Agree	30.58	**34.58**	**39.58**
Disagree	**38.08**	23.75	35.25
Strongly disagree	**16.83**	20.33	10.83
Moralistic Political Leadership			
Strongly agree	**22.5**	**33.33**	**25.33**
Agree	**38.92**	**35.5**	**42.92**
Disagree	25.83	18.92	22.33
Strongly disagree	12.42	11.67	9.08
Trustee vs. Delegative Representation 1			
Government leaders implement what voters want.	35.67	25.58	
Government leaders do what they think is best for the people	**62.83**	**72.67**	
Trustee vs. Delegative Representation 2			
Government is our employee; the people should tell government what needs to be done.	44.75		
The government is like parent, it should decide what is good for us	**54.25**		
Decisiveness vs. Accountability			
It is more important for citizens to be able to hold government accountable, even if that means it makes decisions more.		41.67	
It is more important to have a government that can get things done, even if we have no influence over what it does.		**56.25**	
Electoral vs. Meritocratic Legitimacy			
Political leaders are chosen by the people through open and competitive elections.	**65.58**	50.33	
Political leaders are chosen on the basis of their virtue and capability even without elections.	33.75	47.92	

Overall, these tendencies can help create an environment that lacks a demand for accountability; that a leader, once he gains power, can achieve a free hand on policy and governance. Considering mass disempowerment and inaction outside elections (Borja, 2015, 2017, 2023; Borja et al., 2025), there is a heavy cap placed on the public expressions of discontent and demands for accountability. The next section explores attitudes towards the US and China before examining how such attitudes play out in a low-cost accountability environment.

Foreign Affairs as a Non-priority

Do Filipinos care about being caught between two great powers? If so, to what extent, and how do they expect their leaders to act? While this study cannot fully answer these questions, examining Filipino perceptions of China and the US provides some insight. Specifically, it helps determine whether attitudes toward foreign powers are shaped by core political values and whether Filipinos even consider foreign affairs a priority. Moreover, we will try to see whether Filipinos are even interested in foreign affairs to begin with.

Table 3 below shows a stable pattern wherein most Filipinos continue to perceive the US as a largely benevolent, influential actor in the region, while attitudes toward China fluctuate but increasingly tilt toward caution or mild negativity even as recognition of China's growing influence rises. From the 4th to 6th Waves of the ABS, attitudes towards China's impact and influence in the Philippines and in the region moved from a level of ambivalence to a clear recognition of its rising power. Moreover, the 5th Wave shows the probable impacts of Duterte's shift to China. Specifically, more Filipinos see its domestic influence as more positive. Nonetheless, this experienced a slight decrease during the 6th Wave even if most still share a positive attitude toward China. This was tied to a modest increase in negative sentiments suggesting a persistent uncertainty or growing skepticism over its supposed beneficial impact on the region and on the Philippines.

In contrast, perceptions of the United States remain consistently favorable and stable across the same period. Large majorities through the 4th to 6th Waves view the US as bringing more good than harm to the region, with combined positive assessments typically hovering around 80–88%. Ratings of U.S. influence also remain high. Moreover, attitudes towards US influence stays overwhelmingly positive. Overall, while attitudes toward China trend toward caution, attitudes towards the United States remain strongly positive and stable.

Table 3: Attitudes on US and China (Percentage)

	WAVE 4	WAVE 5	WAVE 6
Nature of impact on the region (China)			
Much more good than harm	7.83	14.33	9.42
Somewhat more good than harm	**32.25**	**34.42**	28.25
Somewhat more harm than good	**38.08**	**28.5**	**36.5**
Much more harm than good	19	18.5	**22.67**
Degree of influence (China)			
A great deal of influence	**32.83**	**46.33**	**54**
Some influence	**46.83**	**40.92**	**31.58**
Not much influence	12.75	6.08	7.92
No influence at all	6.08	3.67	4.17
Nature of influence (China)			

Very positive	**5.33**	**8.25**	**10**
Positive	**25.17**	**28.08**	**24.5**
Somewhat positive	**32**	**34.42**	**25.5**
Somewhat negative	20.33	11.25	16.67
Negative	11.33	12.75	15.67
Very negative	4.42	2.5	5.08
Nature of impact on the region (US)			
Much more good than harm	**43.17**	**36.67**	**41.58**
Somewhat more good than harm	**46.08**	**47.83**	**46.17**
Somewhat more harm than good	6.67	9.25	7.25
Much more harm than good	1.58	2.75	1.83
Degree of influence (US)			
A great deal of influence	**71.33**	**48.25**	**55.17**
Some influence	**22.58**	**42.25**	**37.75**
Not much influence	4.08	5.08	4.42
No influence at all	1.25	1.75	0.92
Nature of influence (US)			
Very positive	**28.33**	**16.25**	**22.42**
Positive	**41.42**	**40.5**	**42.83**
Somewhat positive	**22.83**	**31.42**	**26.42**
Somewhat negative	3.75	3.83	3.92
Negative	2.33	4.33	2.25
Very negative	0.58	0.92	

Are these attitudes related to how Filipinos understand accountability—their ideals towards leaders and leader-citizen relations? If they are, then we can conclude that a person's sense of vertical accountability is tied to how they understand foreign affairs (i.e., for this case, their assessment of the relationships between the Philippines and these two great powers). If not, then it is plausible that the foreign policy process is situated in a low-cost accountability environment wherein an ordinary citizen could not tie a need for accountability to a specific relationship with a foreign power.

Table 4: Correlation (spearman's rho) between values on vertical accountability and attitudes towards China and the US

	WAVE 4	WAVE 5	WAVE 6
	Paternalistic Political Leadership		
Nature of impact on the region (US)	0.03	0.038	0.086**
Nature of impact on the region (China)	0.064*	0.049	0.068*
Degree of influence (China)	-0.011	0.012	0.029
Nature of influence (China)	0.085**	0.049	0.132***
Degree of influence (US)	-0.01	0.056	0.113***

Nature of influence (US))	-0.021	0.042	0.059*
	Moralistic Political Leadership		
Nature of impact on the region (US)	0.073*	0.071*	0.023
Nature of impact on the region (China)	0.022	0.011	-0.035
Degree of influence (China)	0.008	0.015	0.087**
Nature of influence (China)	0.06*	0.009	0.096**
Degree of influence (US)	0.071*	0.041	-0.015
Nature of influence (US))	0.076**	0.048	-0.027
	Trustee vs. Delegative Representation 1		
Nature of impact on the region (US)	-0.051	0.003	
Nature of impact on the region (China)	-0.027	0.047	
Degree of influence (China)	-0.046	-0.01	
Nature of influence (China)	-0.033	-0.004	
Degree of influence (US)	-0.076**	-0.011	
Nature of influence (US))	-0.045	-0.013	
	Trustee vs. Delegative Representation 2	**Decisiveness vs. Accountability**	
Nature of impact on the region (US)	0.012	-0.027	
Nature of impact on the region (China)	-0.011	-0.02	
Degree of influence (China)	-0.008	-0.008	
Nature of influence (China)	-0.074*	-0.053	
Degree of influence (US)	-0.024	0.015	
Nature of influence (US))	-0.021	0.026	
	Electoral vs. Meritocratic		
Nature of impact on the region (US)	-0.016	-0.04	
Nature of impact on the region (China)	-0.053	-0.002	
Degree of influence (China)	-0.001	-0.006	
Nature of influence (China)	-0.053	-0.061*	
Degree of influence (US)	0.029	0.027	
Nature of influence (US))	-0.002	-0.003	

Note:
* $p < 0.05$ level
** $p < 0.01$ level
*** $p < 0.001$

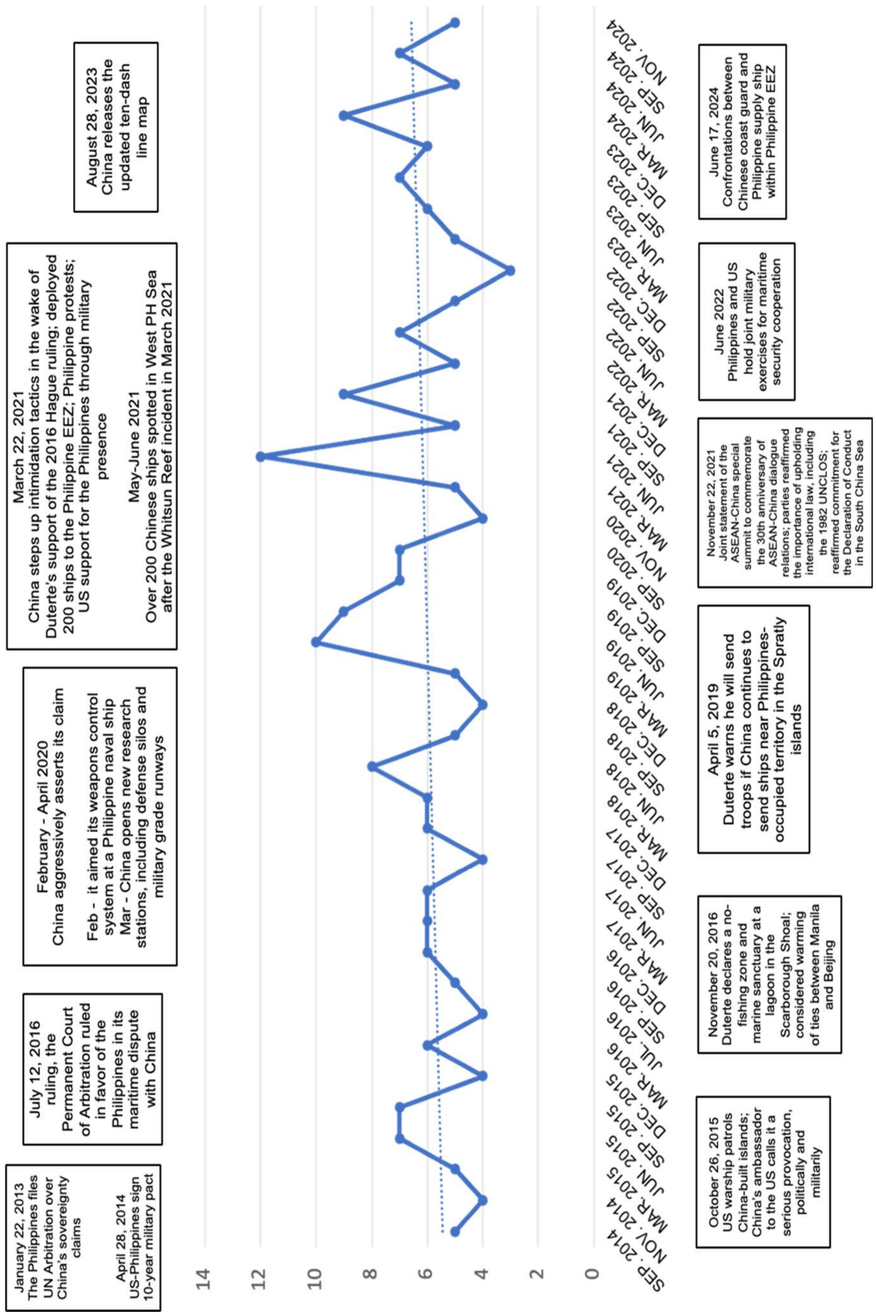
Table 4 above shows that only attitudes towards the nature of China's influence in the Philippines and the degree of American influence are weakly related to a preference for paternalistic political leadership. The rest have no significant relationship with the other values on vertical accountability or have significant but negligible relationships. This proves that such crucial political values have no bearing on attitudes towards the US and China; that there is a chasm between the issue of vertical accountability (may it be a demand for it or not) and foreign policy in the political psyche of the Filipino electorate.

At this point, we are still working on the assumption that Filipinos care about foreign affairs to begin with. Though we have no extensive measurements of this tendency, as data from Figure 1 below shows that foreign policy might not be a priority for many Filipinos. *Pulse Asia* surveys show that from 2014 to 2024, the issue of territorial integrity remains as a non-priority for most Filipinos with data showing a fluctuating upward trend. This pattern exists despite the various twists and turns during the Duterte administration and the growing aggression and presence of China in the West Philippine Sea.

Why is this so? We can entertain the following possibilities, first of which is the dynamic between media exposure, Chinese aggression, and the remoteness of the West Philippine Sea issue. Even if the media facilitates the exposure of the general public to China's aggression, it is probable that citizens have deemed the matter as something out of their control and/or far from everyday life. Simply put, China's aggression is probably normalized or distant enough to be assumed then ignored. Second, juxtaposed with Fang and Li's (2022) findings, it is also probable that ordinary Filipinos are more concerned with the economic dimensions of Philippines-China relations since such is more proximate to priority issues (e.g., employment, inflation, etc.) than territorial disputes.

Overall, though we could not offer anything definite at this point, data above suggests two things. On one hand, foreign policy holds no bearing in matters of vertical accountability. In more practical terms, it is probable that an ordinary Filipino citizen does not think of trade, territorial integrity, and foreign powers when facing the ballot; that is, when they are engaging in one of the few effective ways for them to hold leaders accountable. On the other hand, values on vertical accountability do not shape one's attitudes towards the US and China. Ordinary Filipinos are probably too reliant on leaders to establish a link between issues on foreign affairs (e.g., territorial disputes with China) and a need to hold them accountable. But then again, given the limits of the data, such a tendency could not be established definitely.

Figure 1: Percentage of Filipinos who consider "Defending territorial integrity" as a top three national priority (Pulse Asia Surveys) and key events on Filipino foreign policy and security



Concluding Remarks: At the Mercy of Leaders and the Question of Hedging

Foreign policy is generally a low national priority for most Filipinos. Leader centrism embodied in trustee representation attitudes and the prioritization of decisiveness over accountability, suggest a low demand for accountability in the foreign policy space. In particular, because hedging means refraining from siding with any great power, its associated policy rhetoric often sends mixed signals to the public. Unlike more overt alternatives, hedging evades easy categorizations of allies and enemies. This might be contrary to public attitudes that may clamor for aligning against perceived enemies or for maintaining dependency on "benevolent" superpowers. As such, a necessary precondition of hedging is sufficient breathing space to choose potentially unpopular strategic options. What might contribute to such a breathing space is a low demand for accountability in foreign policy for the simple reason that it can provide leaders with a free hand on such matters.

We cannot address the issue of hedging conclusively given the limits of the data analyzed above. And unfortunately, there are no direct measurements for it at this point—something we leave for future studies. Nonetheless, we can open up certain possible explanations and areas for inquiry on this matter.

First, it is probable that ordinary citizens probably hold a more flexible understanding of how the government should navigate between these two powers. The findings of Fang and Li (2022) attests to this and we add that such a tendency can provide room for justifying hedging to the electorate. However, assuming that considerations of domestic economic matters often outweigh foreign policy concerns (in public discourse, mass media, and even formal education), further research can examine whether hedging in the Philippines is better framed for ordinary citizens in terms of the benefits that can be derived from it rather than as a way to address adverse security issues (i.e., leaders can add something to their domestic prestige by engaging in "benefit extractive" foreign policies with little to no regard as to whom such benefits can be derived from). The prevailing trend indicates a political culture where international matters never gain political prominence unless linked to urgent economic or material issues. This can help explain why even nationalistic citizens may end support stronger economic ties with powers like China.

Second, future studies can consider how to recontextualize foreign policy in order to align it with daily priorities, and whether innovative public engagement methods, such as education, media representation, or participatory processes, can bridge the gap between citizens and the foreign policy agenda. Similar research has the opportunity to enhance our understanding of democratic accountability and public concerns about global issues typically influenced by executive discretion. Therefore, further research of this nature is essential to develop the link between vertical accountability and foreign policy.

Third, and beyond the issue of hedging, future inquiries must further dissect the Filipino political psyche when confronted by foreign policy issues. What are the factors affecting a citizen's level of interest on foreign security issues? How proximate do they see their everyday lives with international affairs? Examining public discourse on foreign affairs, as well as our own attempt to indirectly measure the relationship between political values and foreign policy attitudes will not suffice moving forward. The former assumes too much about a citizen's attachment to foreign affairs (e.g., whether it is a factor that affects their voting preferences) while the latter raises the need for more direct measurements.

Lastly, if there is a low-cost accountability environment from the electorate, then are there any other sources of accountability within the government (e.g., the relationship between military and security forces with the legislature, etc.)? Can the government further democratize the foreign policy process? Given the current conflict in Iran that involves bypassing the power of the US congress to check and balance the Presidency of Donald Trump, the issue of accountability and its supposed impact on foreign affairs stands now as thoroughly urgent.

Endnotes

[1] An example of this analysis can be used to understand when and how US foreign policy targeted the creation of the State of Israel (Noone, 2019). The highly contested discussion was centered on pro-Zion, anti-Zion, and pro-Arab causes in US Congressional hearings. Such result, while part of the policy process, extends to actual implementation of US foreign policy on Israel.

[2] The three streams are as follows: (1) the problem stream focuses on identifying and defining issues based on what actors perceive situations that require policy intervention, (2) the policy stream targets acceptability, feasibility, and integration, (3) the political stream tackles public opinion surrounding an issue and where policymakers create actual policy. Noone (2019) cited the case of Greek efforts to block recognition of FYR Macedonia where Greek Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis targeted Greek public sentiments to justify policy solutions to said problem and political streams.

[3] Noone (2019) cited the case of India-Pakistan rivalry, having been engaged in periodic conflicts that stemmed from differing foreign policy goals of each administration.

[4] Apart from this, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) has been guided by the Three Pillars of Philippine Foreign policy, established during the Ramos administration under the Republic Act 7157, Philippine Foreign Service Act of 1991. RA 7157 mandated the DFA to implement Philippine foreign policy under three pillars: (1) Preservation and enhancement of national security; (2) Promotion and attainment of economic security; and (3) Protection of the rights and promotion of the welfare and interest of Filipinos overseas.

[5] Prior to the Duterte administration, the term "independent foreign policy" was also repeatedly stressed by the Aquino III administration, particularly during the height of the South China Sea dispute, when the Philippines initiated and brought the case to an arbitral tribunal in 2012. In a forum with the private sector, the Former Foreign Affairs Secretary Albert Del Rosario iterated the administration's stance for an "independent, principled and based on the rule of law." In an

interview with Quilop (2024), Del Rosario states that the foreign policy entails that, "we refuse to be bullied by China, and we refuse to be subservient to the Americans."

[6] The Asian Barometer Survey (ABS) conducted its 4th, 5th and 6th waves in the Philippines over a roughly one-decade span, using consistent methodology to track public opinion nationwide. In the 4th wave, fieldwork in the Philippines was carried out in July 2014. In the 5th wave, interviews took place in December 2018. By the 6th wave, the Philippine survey was conducted on October 2021. A nationally representative sample of 1,200 were recruited through a multistage probability sample of adults.

[7] Data was drawn from the *Ulat ng Bayan* reports accessible through (https://pulseasia.ph/data-bank/ulat-ng-bayan/).

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JAPAN IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION AND ITS STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH NATO

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Doi: 10.15170/PSK.2026.SI.01.04
Received: December 15, 2025
Accepted: April 9, 2026
Published: April 24, 2026

Citation:
Siposné Kecskeméthy, Klára; Sipos, Alexandra (2026). Japan in the Asia-Pacific Region and its Strategic Partnership with NATO. *Polarities,* 7(SI), 61–72.

Acknowledgements:
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Abstract

This study analyzes Japan's geopolitical position in the Asia-Pacific region and evaluates its diversified partnerships. Japan has a strategically important geopolitical position in the Asia-Pacific region. It is a maritime power, a democratic state with a highly developed industry and economy, and, from a security perspective, part of the United States-led security framework. Japan is traditionally restricted by its pacifist constitution, it is currently adopting a more proactive security policy based on the concept of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), which emphasizes regional stability, interconnectedness, and the rule of law. Strengthening defense capabilities and security partnerships is part of this transformation. Europe and the Asia-Pacific region are increasingly interconnected, taking into account the systemic challenges posed by an increasingly powerful China, tensions on the Korean Peninsula, and exertions by the Russian Federation. Therefore, Japan is making considerable efforts to expand its strategic partnerships. Close cooperation and closer ties with NATO are also growing in importance.

Keywords: *Asia-Pacific region, Free and Open Indo-Pacific, Alliance commitments, NATO-Japan relationship*

Introduction

Japan occupies a key geopolitical position in the Asia-Pacific region. The country is a maritime power, a democratic state with a developed industrial economy, and due to its geopolitical importance part of the U.S. security framework, like other Asia-Pacific countries. Japan's geopolitical environment requires it to balance among major geopolitical players such as China, the Russian Federation, and North Korea.

Due to the geopolitical changes in the Asia-Pacific region in the last decade, Japan is redefining its security identity and emerging as a proactive security actor in the region. Although the alliance between the United States and Japan continues to form the basis of Japan's regional security strategy, the country is also strengthening its alliance and partnership relations, not only as a global partner of NATO (Szenes & Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2019: 125) but also at the regional level, in the Indo-Pacific region. Japan cooperates with Southeast Asian countries, invests in defense cooperation, capacity building, and soft power initiatives. The objective of building multi-level relationships, including the area of defense, economy, and diplomacy, is to strengthen Japan's regional position.

Traditionally, Japan is constrained by its pacifist constitution. The limits on the use of lethal force stem from its constitution and a traditionally restrained strategic culture. After World War II, the new Japanese constitution was drafted under the guidance of the United States. Its Article 9 reinforced Japan's pacifist approach by stating that *"the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes."* and that *"land, sea and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained"* (The Constitution of Japan, 1947). The necessity and practical extent of Article 9 have been debated in Japan since its enactment, particularly following the establishment of the Japan Self-Defense Forces in 1954 (Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2014: 39). Arguments for the amendment or repeal of said article revolve around the changing security environment in which Japan's current policy of self-defense may be inadequate. In addition, those in favor of enabling collective defense efforts and strengthening Japan's military capabilities, highlight how the current Constitution limits the extent of the country's military cooperation (Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2014: 39).

Multilateral security and regional connectivity: Free and Open Indo-Pacific

Although there have been no constitutional amendments to Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, the policy changes reflected Japan's adaptation to challenges both within domestic and international politics. In 2013, a new National Security Strategy was created where Japan's passive stance regarding peace and security changed towards "proactive pacifism" (Jain, 2025). Additional changes in Japan's approach to security policy relate to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who introduced the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) concept in 2016 as a strategic vision. This established approach continued under Prime Minister Fumio Kishida (Ozawa, 2022).

In Japan's strategic thinking, Russia's aggression against Ukraine was a turning point (O'Shea & Maslow, 2024). As a result, Japan is pursuing a proactively oriented security policy that emphasizes regional stability, connectivity, and the rule of law. This policy is implemented under a new vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific region (The Future of the Indo-Pacific, 2023). On 20 March 2023, Fumio Kishida visited India and delivered a speech launching Japan's new FOIP plan for the Indo-Pacific, which formalized Japan's strategic shift toward multilateral security and regional connectivity (Kishida, 2023). The FOIP is a framework concept for the regional strategies of countries in the Asia-Pacific region that share similar ideas and values (Nandy & Das, 2025).

The Free and Open Indo-Pacific concept has four pillars (see: Figure 1). The core principles of FOIP are as follows: on one hand it is defending freedom and the rule of law, on the other hand respecting diversity, inclusiveness and openness (New Plan, 2023). Among other things, it emphasizes respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, rejects unilateral changes to the status quo, and underlines the peaceful resolution of disputes.

The first pillar, which is the basis of the plan, addresses the fundamental principles of peace and the rules of prosperity. Japan seeks to promote a rules-based international order, strengthen deterrence, and build coalitions of partner states to counterbalance growing regional power asymmetries, particularly with regard to China (Lee, 2022). Japan condemned Russia's aggression against Ukraine, opposing any unilateral changes to the status quo by force anywhere in the world (Kishida, 2023; America Times News Service, 2023). The second pillar addresses challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. The cooperation focuses on responding to climate and environmental change, strengthening food and energy security, improving global health care, focusing on and improving disaster prevention and response capabilities, supporting the prevention of cybercrime, building cyber security capacities, and ensuring cyber security (New Plan, 2023: 3; The Future of the Indo-Pacific, 2023: 6, 8). The third pillar of FOIP focuses on multi-layered connectivity, enhancing human, knowledge and digital connectivity, the core elements of regional cooperation. The fourth pillar expands multi-domain security efforts, ranging from maritime to air domains, and supports the safe and secure use of maritime and airspace. Under this pillar, Japan plans to enhance cooperation with the United States, Australia, Republic of Korea, India, Philippines, Canada, and Europe. It aims to expand networks among countries that share a common vision in the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean (New Plan, 2023: 4).

As Prime Minister Kishida stated in New Delhi, "Japan will collaborate closely with India and contribute to the stability in the South Asian region" and also emphasized that "India is an indispensable partner" of Japan (The Future of the Indo-Pacific 2023: 6, 12).

Figure 1: The four pillars of "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)"

Pillar 1 Principles for Peace and Rules for Prosperity	Pillar 2 Addressing Challenges in an Indo-Pacific Way
Pillar 3 Multi-layered Connectivity	Pillar 4 Extending Efforts for Security and Safe Use of the "Sea" to the "Air"

Own editing, data source: New Plan, 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100484990.pdf, last accessed on 20.01.2026.

The FOIP emphasizes multilateralism, capacity building, and infrastructure development, areas where Japan's technological and financial strength can counterbalance China's growing influence in the region.

Broadening strategic partnership

The foundation of Japan's security strategy remains the alliance between the United States and Japan, but in this context, Japan is making major efforts to expand its strategic partnerships. Security challenges, risks and threats in Europe and Asia-Pacific are closely interlinked, which is why Japan's close cooperation and deepening ties with NATO are becoming increasingly important (Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2022: 181; Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2025: 253). Japan also faces serious security challenges and threats in the region, such as China's growing regional influence, increased military activity, its deepening strategic partnership with the Russian Federation, unresolved territorial and island disputes, natural gas and oil reserves in the South China Sea, tensions on the Korean Peninsula, and North Korea's nuclear ambitions. NATO's growing involvement could further destabilize the Asia-Pacific region (Yuichi, 2024; Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2022: 164, 166). NATO is signaling a more global approach, but its resource limitations, traditional responsibilities, and fundamental defense commitments under the Washington Treaty in the Euro-Atlantic area mean that it must be very careful when expanding its involvement in the region.

These partnerships are vital for supporting NATO's cooperative security as well as its 360-degree approach to emerging security challenges (Siposné Kecskeméthy & Sipos, 2024). As Japan faces challenges, the country has to consider how to guarantee its own security. However, Japan's pacifistic constitution and regional sensitivities limit military cooperation with NATO. In parallel, there is no established consensus on the approach to the partnership with Japan, as some European NATO member states prefer focusing on Euro-Atlantic defense rather than expanding too much into Asia. In this security environment, Japan must find the right and delicate balance in terms of the extent to which it cooperates with NATO and maintains stable relationship with its neighbors (especially China and South Korea).

NATO-Japan partnership

Among the global partners of NATO, Japan has a prominent and important role within the Asia-Pacific Four countries (in official NATO documents the region is referred to as Asia-Pacific, and the Alliance's four most important partners – Australia, New Zealand, Japan, South Korea – are termed the Asia-Pacific Four countries, APA4). Japan and NATO had little interaction during the Cold War, even though they shared fundamental democratic values and faced the Soviet Union as a common threat. During the Cold War NATO had no substantial relationship with non-members, as there was no reason to seek external help in achieving its core mission of defending the member states' territory, protecting its population, and safeguarding democratic values. At the end of the Cold War the diplomatic relations were limited between NATO and non-member states (Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2014: 33).

Japan is NATO's longest-standing global partner, previously referred to as one of the 'Partners Across the Globe' (PAG). Thus, the partnership reflects deepening political, operational, and strategic ties. The NATO–Japan partnership officially began on 2 July 1990 with the first NATO-Japan conference. Initial contacts in the early 1990s gradually evolved into regular high-level meetings and structured political dialogue on shared security interests. Japan's role was particularly significant after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which changed the global security environment and shed light on the international nature of emerging threats. Japan was one of the major supporters of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan and contributed to security and development initiatives, such as reconstruction and development projects (Ozawa, 2022; Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2014: 33–34; Joint Political Declaration, 2013; Siposné Kecskeméthy 2022: 180). Financial support has been provided for several human security projects. These were as follows: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR), Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) as well as support for the police force. The NATO-Japan relationship in Afghanistan was multifaceted, and included practical cooperation, political dialogue, operational support, defense equipment and industrial partnership, enhanced interoperability, and the development of multilateral approaches to emerging security challenges as well (Tsuruoka, 2013; Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2014: 34).

On 4 May 2006, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso addressed the North Atlantic Council for the first time in NATO's history (see: Table 1), signaling Japan's intention to strengthen and deepen strategic ties with the Alliance (Japan–NATO relations, 2022; Sipos Kecskeméthy 2022: 177).

In January 2007, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe addressed the Council, highlighted security challenges in the Asia-Pacific region, and expressed his country's interest in building a stronger partnership with NATO, including political and operational cooperation. Japan has also supported NATO beyond the Asia-Pacific region. It provided financial assistance for post-conflict recovery in the Balkans following NATO-led stabilization operations, demonstrating a commitment to global security and reconstruction efforts.

On June 25, 2010, NATO and Japan signed a Security Agreement that allowed the exchange of classified information. This was followed by a series of high-level meetings that further strengthened the partnership and promoted closer political and operational cooperation.

On April 13, 2013, Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe signed a Joint Political Declaration. A new phase in relations between NATO and Japan began (Siposné Kecskeméthy 2022: 177). The declaration provided a framework for further developing the relationship between NATO and Japan, the shared values such as individual freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. The document highlighted the principles of cooperation between NATO and Japan. It emphasized "the shared strategic interest in promoting global peace, stability and prosperity, and in fostering a rules-based international order that promotes peaceful resolution of disputes" (Joint Political Declaration, 2013, Siposné Kecskeméthy 2022: 180).

The document listed the following areas of possible cooperation, among others, emerging security challenges, cyber security and defense-related cooperation (joint training, information-sharing, crisis-response coordination), disaster relief, counter-terrorism, disarmament (small arms and light weapons), non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, and maritime security (counter piracy operations, joint naval exercises). The declaration also formalized Japan's commitment to NATO by designating its Ambassador to the Kingdom of Belgium as the Representative of the Government of Japan to NATO, establishing a permanent diplomatic channel for continued engagement. Although Japan's commitment was already stated in the 2013 declaration, the North Atlantic Council adopted the relevant decision on May 24, 2018 (Joint Declaration, 2013; Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2022: 177).

In May 2014, Japan's Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP) was finalized with the aim to strengthen high-level dialogue and promote defense cooperation and exchanges. The priority areas were as follows: cyber defense, maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, disarmament, arms control, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, defense science and technology, Women, peace and security, public diplomacy activities and other defense and security cooperation in the areas of mutual interest between Japan and NATO (Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme, 2014). This was followed by Japan participating in Interoperability Platform (IP) under the framework of the Partnership Interoperability Initiative (PII) established by NATO in 2014 (Siposné Kecskeméthy 2022: 180).

Table 1: NATO-Japan relationship (2006-2025)

Year	Event	Significance
May 4, 2006	Prime Minister of Japan speech at the NAC	Taro Aso Japanese Foreign Minister addressed the North Atlantic Council
January 2007	High-Level Visit	Abe Shinzo Japanese Prime Minister addressed the North Atlantic Council
March 7, 2007	Tailored Cooperation Package – Japan	Signature of Tailored Cooperation Package with Japan
June 25, 2010	Security Agreement	NATO-Japan Security Agreement
April 13, 2013	Joint Political Declaration	Signature of Joint Political Declaration (Abe Shinzo-Anders Fogh Rasmussen)
May 6, 2014	Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP)	Japan becomes the first Asian partner to sign a formal cooperation with NATO
July 2017	High-Level Visit	PM Abe Shinzo Visits NATO Headquarters
July 2018	Mission of Japan to NATO	Establishment of Mission of Japan to NATO based at the Japan embassy in Belgium
June 14, 2021	Enhancement of cooperation with Asia-Pacific partners (Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Korea)	Brussels Summit communiqué (enhancement of cooperation with Asia-Pacific Four-APA4 - countries)
April 6-7, 2022	Japan attends foreign ministers' meeting	Joshimasa Hayashi, Japanese foreign minister first time attends the NATO Foreign Ministers' meeting
June 29-30, 2022	Japan attends NATO Summit (Madrid)	PM Fumio Kishida participates in a NATO Summit for the first time
2023	Individually Tailored Partnership Programme (ITPP)	NATO and Japan adopt a new, more detailed framework for cooperation on cyber, emerging technology, space and resilience
July 11-12, 2023	APA4 countries attend NATO Vilnius Summit	Japan participates in a NATO Summit for the second time
2023-2024	Talks on NATO Liaison Office in Tokyo	Proposal to establish NATO's first office in Asia

July 9-11, 2024	APA4 countries attend NATO Washington Summit	Japan participates in a NATO Summit for the third time
January 15, 2025	Independent Mission of Japan to NATO	Japan's NATO mission was inaugurated
June 24-25, 2025	APA4 countries attend NATO Summit (The Hague)	Japan participates in a NATO Summit for the fourth time
2025 (current)	Ongoing strategic coordination	Japan continues to strengthen defence dialogue, technology exchange, and joint planning with NATO Allies

Own editing, data source: Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2022: 177.

Russia's attack on Ukraine on February 24, 2022 forged an unprecedented unity not only among allies but also among Asia-Pacific partners. In response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and authoritarian assertiveness, Japan supported NATO's approach to defending the "rule-based international order". The NATO 2030 report made it clear that NATO must adapt to a much more complex strategic environment characterized by geopolitical rivalry, confrontation with the Russian Federation, the rise of China, and numerous transnational threats and risks (NATO 2030 Report, 2020: 12; Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2021: 119). The Asia-Pacific region is strategically significant for a number of reasons, including military developments in the emerging China, the Taiwan issue, the presence of the Russian Federation, countries with nuclear weapons in the region (North Korea, India, China, Pakistan), natural gas and oil reserves in the South China Sea, territorial claims, island disputes, among others. These pose serious security challenges, risks, and threats in the region.

The 2022 Strategic Concept is marking NATO's shift toward global engagement. China's aspirations and coercive policies were also addressed, as they pose a systemic challenge to the interests, security, and values of the Alliance, undermining the international legal order in outer space, the oceans, and cyberspace (NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, Siposné Kecskeméthy & Sipos, 2022: 164).

At the 2022 Madrid Summit, for the first time in NATO's history, the APA4 countries were invited to attend the summit (Madrid Summit Declaration, 2022; Siposné Kecskeméthy & Sipos, 2022: 166). Following this turning point, the APA4 countries also attended the Vilnius, the Washington, and The Hague Summits. The Alliance's current relations with global partners in the Asia-Pacific region are the result of a long process and their strategic importance within the region is crucial.

Japan supported the opening of the first NATO Liaison Office (NLO Tokyo) in the Asia-Pacific region to help the dialogue with Asia-Pacific partners and serve as a center for information sharing and practical cooperation. China and Russia strongly opposed NATO's presence in the region. Emmanuel Macron, while referring to Article 6 of the Washington Treaty defining its geographical boundaries, stated that France did not support NATO's presence in the Pacific region. He further highlighted that the Alliance was founded to guarantee the security of the

North Atlantic area (Lau & Kayali, 2023; Siposné Kecskeméthy & Sipos, 2023: 400–401). While one of the most important topics of the Washington Summit was cooperation with the Asia-Pacific partners, the NLO Tokyo was not established (Siposné Kecskeméthy & Sipos, 2024: 306). On January 15, 2025, the Mission of Japan to NATO was inaugurated as an independent mission from the Embassy of Japan in Belgium. Emphasizing the importance of global partners, including Japan, the NATO Secretary General met with Asia-Pacific partners at the 2025 Hague Summit (Siposné Kecskeméthy & Sipos, 2025: 253).

The security environments of Europe and the Asia-Pacific region are becoming increasingly interconnected, particularly in light of China's, North Korea's, and Iran's support for Russia that have driven Japan to deepen ties with Western security partners. This interdependence is further reinforced through defense-industrial and technological cooperation. In this context, political coordination between NATO and Japan on global security issues is necessary and inevitable. Japan can play a key role in bridging security concerns between Europe and Asia.

Conclusion

Japan's geopolitical position presents opportunities and limitations in the Asia-Pacific region. On the one hand, it is actively shaping the Asia-Pacific area strategic environment, strengthening its defense capabilities, and diversifying its alliance system. On the other hand, it has proposed the vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's 2023 speech on the launching of Japan's new, Free and Open Indo-Pacific plan was the milestone that officially marked Japan's strategic shift toward multilateral security and regional connectivity (The Future of the Indo-Pacific, 2023). The country's security policy seeks to safeguard its national interests and contribute to regional stability, which requires a careful balance between internal politics, external threats, alliance commitments and strategic competition. The Free and Open Indo-Pacific plan has four pillars (see: Figure 1). The core principles are safeguarding freedom and the rule of law, respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity, and underlining the peaceful resolution of disputes (New Plan, 2023). The first pillar concerns the fundamental principles of peace and the rules of prosperity, while the second pillar addresses challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. The third pillar underlines multi-layered human, knowledge and digital connectivity, and the fourth pillar extends multi-domain security efforts, of the safe and secure usage of maritime and air space.

Despite the fact that the alliance between the United States and Japan is of utmost importance, Japan is widening its regional and international cooperation. Security challenges, risks and threats in Europe and Asia-Pacific are closely intertwined, and therefore Japan's close cooperation and deepening ties with NATO (see: Table 1) are becoming increasingly important (Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2022:

181; Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2025: 253). NATO had no significant ties with non-allied countries located on the other continents, focusing mostly on the Euro-Atlantic area and on the European continent. There was no intention to seek external support for its core mission, most importantly for deterrence. The key principle and task of the organization since its establishment has been defending the member states' territory, protecting its population, and safeguarding democratic values. At the end of the Cold War the diplomatic relations between NATO and other, non-member states were limited. This was also the case in NATO-Japan relations (Siposné Kecskeméthy, 2014: 33).

Japan is NATO's longest-standing partner in the Asia-Pacific region. The Alliance's partnership policy with partners across the globe resonates with Japan's strategic vision, and fundamental democratic values. Both are committed to the maintenance of peace and stability, freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. The relationship between NATO and Japan is multi-layered, reflecting the deepening of political, operational, and strategic ties. Its geostrategic position and active role in the Asia-Pacific region in addressing global security threats such as cyber-attacks, terrorism, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction can further reinforce the strategic importance of this partnership. This means that the relationship between NATO and Japan is becoming even more important in shaping international security during the following years.

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RIDE-OR-DIE SUPPORTERS?
ALBANIAN NARRATIVES ON EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION

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Doi: 10.15170/PSK.2026.SI.01.05
Received: December 15, 2025
Accepted: March 3, 2026
Published: April 24, 2026

Citation:
Németh, Ferenc (2026). Ride-or-die supporters? Albanian narratives on Euro-Atlantic integration. *Polarities*, 7(SI), 73–96.

Acknowledgements:
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Abstract

North Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration has faced and continues to face significant political challenges. Despite the difficult accession process to NATO and the seemingly never-ending efforts toward the EU, the country's Albanian minority and its political leadership have consistently demonstrated strong support. The paper first examines the foreign policy objectives and then classifies the narratives employed by Albanian political actors to reaffirm their steadfast commitment to Euro-Atlantic structures. Apart from strong justifications linked with (regional) security and inter-ethnic relations, the so-called 'West' is depicted as the only alternative for Albanians. Although the group remains more favorable toward Euro-Atlantic integration compared to ethnic Macedonians, the prolonged EU accession process – coupled with Albania's faster progress in integration – may negatively influence their attitudes, too.

Keywords: *North Macedonia, Albanians, Euro-Atlantic integration, foreign policy orientation, foreign policy objectives*

Introduction

Foreign policy – more specifically, Euro-Atlantic integration – is a domain in which the interests of North Macedonia's political elites are closely aligned. Membership in Western politico-military and economic organizations such as the UN, NATO and the European Union (EU) has been a foreign policy objective of successive governments since the country's independence in 1991 (Marolov, 2013, p. 9; Bechev & Marušić, 2020, p. 2). This priority is also shared by both Macedonians and Albanians (Leka, 2021, p. 56); the latter constituting 24 percent of North Macedonia's population of 1.8 million (State Statistical Office, 2022), making the Albanian community the most populous and politically significant minority group. Their political influence and importance, particularly after the 2001 Ohrid Framework Agreement (hereinafter OFA), as well as their role as so-called "king-makers" (Gjorgjioska, 2022, p. 3) in government formation, have been widely analyzed. Little attention, however, has been paid to examining their foreign policy priorities, and the (seemingly) unwavering support for Euro-Atlantic integration.

A common shortcoming in existing literature is that minority groups are typically analyzed through the lens of their non-dominant status, focusing on interethnic relations and struggles across various aspects of their everyday existence (Cowan, 2000; Brubaker, 2019; Bloodworth, 2020). Undoubtedly, "stable inter-ethnic relations [among Macedonians and Albanians] is a necessary precondition for stability and democracy" (Taleski & Pollozhani, 2016), but there are other, underexamined themes that may go beyond this paradigm. This paper thus brings North Macedonia's Albanians into the realm of foreign policy, a field in which their interests and engagement on issues of national importance have rarely been considered or examined. The paper thus maps the internal and external (political and social) influences that have shaped the Albanian political leadership's foreign policy objectives and the narratives used to voice their support towards Euro-Atlantic integration.

Research design

Joining Western politico-military alliances is one of the few unifying elements capable of symbolizing national cohesion in a divided, post-conflict, consociational democracy. Consociationalism, as defined by Lijphart (1969), is a form of governance that, through carefully designed, implemented, and monitored power-sharing mechanisms, ensures the participation of minority groups at various – including the highest – levels of the state (pp. 216–217). North Macedonia's case demonstrates that the shared objective of Euro-Atlantic integration remains, even more than twenty-five years after the signing of the OFA, a unique phenomenon. Ethnic Macedonians and Albanians have few cross-cutting issues that hold significance for both groups and that can simultaneously be perceived as national, rather than merely local or ethnic concerns. Since traditional building blocks of identity, such as language, religion, history, or even a common adversary (Babuna, 2000; Piacentini, 2019; Andeva et al., 2022), cannot serve as the nexus of self-identification for both ethnic groups, the existence of a consensus on joining Western alliances represents a positive development[1] and can function as "social covenants" (Taleski & Pollozhani, 2016) in North Macedonia.

After providing an overview of North Macedonia's challenging path toward Euro-Atlantic structures, the paper highlights the building blocks of Albanian foreign policy agenda and categorizes the most significant arguments put forward in favor of integration into Western alliances. For this purpose, the research employs discourse analysis, drawing on official and public statements made by Albanian politicians. Furthermore, to gain an in-depth understanding of the foreign policy priorities of the Albanian political bloc, Leka's (2021) concepts of voluntary and imposed retreat (p. 53) are utilized, thereby further strengthening the paper's theoretical framework.

In addition to comprehensive desk research on the evolution of the Albanians' foreign policy priorities since North Macedonia's independence, the paper draws on twenty-five semi-structured interviews[2], conducted by the author of this article in North Macedonia in 2024, to address the following research questions:

1) Why does the Albanian political bloc exhibit such a high level of support for Euro-Atlantic integration?

2) What narratives have Albanian political actors employed in support of the country's NATO and EU accession?

The paper argues that although there has long been a consensus among Albanian political parties and society regarding the importance of joining Euro-Atlantic structures, this kind of unwavering, "ride-or-die" support may soon reach its limits; particularly given the persistent obstacles in North Macedonia's EU accession process, the EU's regionwide credibility issues, and the fact that their kin-state, Albania, is advancing ahead of them.

Rocky road ahead: North Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration

North Macedonia has and continues to face a challenging path with its Euro-Atlantic integration. Although many of the country's difficulties, particularly regarding EU accession, stem from structural issues, as noted in annual European Commission reports (European Commission, 2024), bilateral disputes at the political level have repeatedly blocked its progress, too. The fact that its neighbors (Greece and Bulgaria, respectively) are already members of these organizations North Macedonia seeks to join, creates "asymmetry of power between EU and candidate countries" (Waters, 2021). In both NATO and EU, accession (i.e., admitting new members) requires unanimous approval. If even one member objects or withholds support, the process halts until the issue, usually of political nature, is resolved. Since declaring independence, North Macedonia has repeatedly encountered blockages caused by the vetoes of either its immediate neighbors or other member states, as discussed below.

NATO accession

Membership in NATO has long been a cornerstone of North Macedonia's foreign and security policy. Shortly after declaring independence, the Parliament voted to officially launch the country's bid to join the politico-military alliance (Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia, 1993). Although North Macedonia, like Croatia and

Albania, was left out of the so-called Vilnius Group – an informal platform of Central, Eastern and Southeastern European countries seeking NATO membership – and the first three post-Cold War enlargement rounds (1995, 1999 and 2004), it remained committed to achieving NATO's political objectives and technical standards. This included building closer ties with NATO through the Partnership for Peace (NATO, 1995) and the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NATO, 1996). In 2003, Albania, Croatia, and North Macedonia, under the auspices of the United States, created the Adriatic Charter to strengthen technical collaboration (U.S. Department of State, 2003). In this spirit, the country's National Defense Strategy had already been aligned with NATO standards by the new millennium.

Progress was disrupted by the quasi-civil war in 2001. The armed conflict between the National Liberation Army (in Albanian: *Ushtria Çlirimtare Kombëtare*; in Macedonian: *Ослободителна народна армија*, hereinafter UÇK) and Macedonian security forces lasted nearly seven months and ended with the OFA (Daskalovski, 2003). The conflict also prompted three NATO-led peace support operations until 2003: Operation Essential Harvest, responsible for the voluntary disarmament of UÇK members; Operation Amber Fox, tasked with protecting international monitors overseeing OFA implementation; and Operation Allied Harmony, which supported the handover of responsibilities from NATO to local authorities (NATO, 2022).

The Bucharest summit in 2008 had been expected to grant official invitations to all members of the Adriatic Charter. However, while Albania and Croatia had received and eventually joined the alliance the following year (NATO, 2009), North Macedonia – mired in the name dispute – had to wait another decade.

The greatest obstacle to NATO membership did not stem from internal interethnic relations nor the country's level of technical preparedness. At the 2008 NATO summit, Greece vetoed North Macedonia's membership over the unresolved name dispute (NATO, 2008), a long-standing bilateral issue concerning heritage, history, and national symbols, including the country's constitutional name (Heraclides, 2021). Greece's decision effectively blocked North Macedonia's invitation, even though the country had applied under its provisional name, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (hereinafter FYROM). By vetoing the invitation, Greece also violated its obligations under the 1995 Interim Accord, which, in Article 11, stipulated that the country would not obstruct North Macedonia's accession to international organizations as long as the provisional name of FYROM was used. The International Court of Justice later ruled (2011) that Greece had indeed breached this agreement, yet the country maintained its position until the name dispute was formally resolved.

The years 2018–2019 proved to be a watershed in unblocking North Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. After a decade of ethno-nationalist politics that stalled UN-led negotiations, the new government prioritized good neighborly relations and the resolution of bilateral disputes. The signing (2018) and ratification (2019) of the Prespa Agreement legally ended nearly thirty years of dispute over the name issue. Greece subsequently pledged not to block North Macedonia's accession to international organizations, including NATO and the EU (Prespa Agreement, 2018). As a result, more than a decade in the making, North Macedonia received an official invitation to join the alliance. Following ratification by all member states,[3] the country became NATO's 30th member (NATO, 2020), the last Southeast European state to do so to date.

Public support for NATO membership has traditionally been strong, even amid political turbulence. Approval peaked ahead of the Bucharest summit, when 92 percent of citizens supported accession (International Republican Institute, 2017, p. 55). However, attitudes shifted following Greece's veto: although 80 percent still favored joining the alliance in 2010, "approximately 65 per cent [...] were opposed to the country changing its name as the price for joining NATO" (Mulchinock, 2017, p. 241). Furthermore, data from 2015 showed that 70 percent of respondents would not support membership if it required a name change, while 68 percent would join under the FYROM designation (Capital.gr, 2011). By 2017, public opinion began to shift: polls by the International Republican Institute indicated that 77 percent supported NATO membership, and 57 percent were willing to accept a name change if it meant achieving Euro-Atlantic integration (2018, p. 21). These figures suggest that, while the majority consistently supported NATO membership, the bilateral dispute remained a major social and political divide, as also reflected in the 2018 referendum on the name change.[4]

EU accession

North Macedonia's EU accession remains ongoing and also exemplifies the asymmetric nature of the enlargement process. Like in NATO, all EU member states must unanimously approve key milestones (e.g., granting candidate status, opening and closing negotiations, signing the accession treaty); this requirement gives member states veto power over political aspects of enlargement. In practice, vetoes have delayed accession negotiations for several countries in the past; such blockages not only prolong the process but also undermine the EU's credibility and normative power, contributing to enlargement fatigue among candidate countries, too (Kelmendi, 2024). North Macedonia's experience illustrates all these dynamics: member states' vetoes over issues of political nature and declining public confidence in the EU's role in the region.

North Macedonia once had the potential to be among the first Western Balkan states to join the EU. It was the first to sign the Stabilization and Association Agreement[5] with the EU in 2001 (Council & Commission, 2004), even before the EU had formally/politically declared its openness to Western Balkan enlargement. Following the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit, where the EU extended the prospect of membership to the Western Balkans, North Macedonia again led the region by submitting its membership application the following year. The European Council granted candidate status in 2005, based on a positive recommendation from the European Commission, paving the way for the technical and legal stages of accession (European Commission, n.d.). Up to this point, North Macedonia's EU path was on track.

Political issues soon impeded the accession progress. Despite consistent European Commission recommendations to open accession negotiations, the European Council could not achieve unanimity; starting in 2009, Greece blocked the progress, citing the unresolved name dispute by mirroring its stance during the NATO accession process (Koneska, 2019, p.57).

After a decade-long impasse, the Prespa Agreement resolved the name dispute, and Greece withdrew its objections. Yet, new obstacles quickly emerged: in 2019, France, Denmark, and the Netherlands opposed opening accession negotiations, citing the need to reform the EU's enlargement methodology and expressing reservations particularly about Albania (Butnaru-Troncotă, 2025, pp. 9–10). Since North Macedonia's integration progress had been "coupled"[6] with Albania's, concerns about the latter's readiness delayed both countries. Although North Macedonia was effectively a "victim" of objections over Albania's integration, France opposed "decoupling" these candidate countries (Tcherneva & Varma, 2019). Once the revised enlargement methodology, proposed by France, was adopted in 2020, all member states endorsed the formal opening of accession negotiations.

Optimism was short-lived, however. In 2020, Bulgaria vetoed the start of accession talks over disputes concerning history, language, and minority rights. The country had long voiced such concerns; as early as 2012, alongside Greece, it reportedly blocked North Macedonia's bid to secure a negotiation start date (Volchevska, 2025, p. 186). In 2019, the Bulgarian parliament also adopted a so-called Framework Position (Министерски съвет на Република България, 2019) and warned of political consequences if the outlined demands were not met. These positions/demands are all related to the interpretation of historic figures and events, anti-Bulgarian rhetoric, and linguistic and minority recognition (Christidis, 2022).

Although Bulgaria lifted its formal veto in 2022 after North Macedonia accepted the so-called European (French) proposal and agreed to constitutional changes recognizing the Bulgarian minority, little tangible progress has followed (Vangelov, 2023, pp. 161–162). As a result, the country's EU accession remains stalled, while in 2024, Albania was officially "decoupled" from the country (Taylor-Braçe & Gotev, 2024). In practice, this means that the EU integration processes of these candidate countries are no longer linked; Albania could (and did) proceed with its accession, while North Macedonia has remained at a political dead-end.

Although support for EU membership remains high, pessimism prevails. A poll by the International Republican Institute (2023) found that 79 percent of citizens of North Macedonia favored joining the EU. In the past two years, public support has been volatile, signaling citizens' dissatisfaction, especially due to political unwillingness by North Macedonia and Bulgaria to unblock the country's accession process. Despite general support for EU membership, citizens realistically doubt North Macedonia's chances of ever securing membership: Eurobarometer (2025) found that only a quarter of respondents believed North Macedonia would become a member state within the next five years (MIA, 2025), while a combined 32 percent believed the country would either never join or would take more than fifteen years to achieve this foreign policy objective (WeBalkans, 2025).

Foreign policy priorities of North Macedonia's Albanians

The paper now turns to examining the foreign policy priorities of the Albanian political leadership. It argues that, based on earlier research and interviews, most foreign policy objectives – especially Euro-Atlantic integration – are shared with the Macedonian political bloc. The question of Kosovo and the advocacy for its independence, however, had created political divisions. Importantly, although the Albanian political corpus is not homogeneous – there are and have been numerous political parties representing the Albanian electorate since North Macedonia's independence[7] – their foreign policy objectives and general orientation toward the West remain a shared, uncontested feature. Therefore, out of simplification, the paper treats the political corpus representing the Albanian minority as a single entity.

According to Leka (2021), there are two approaches to explaining the lack of Albanian voices in foreign policy matters: voluntary and imposed retreat (p. 53). According to the *voluntary retreat*, the ethnic group's political leadership had been occupied with securing its constitutional rights; this "ethnocentric and nationalist aim to satisfy the interests of the ethnic collectivities" (Piacentini, 2019, p. 473) still remains their highest priority. Once their positions were secured and implemented by OFA after 2001, they were first expected – and later became self-interested – in state-level matters, including foreign policy.

Additionally, there is an understanding that North Macedonia's foreign policy has been shaped and controlled by the (ethnic) Macedonians, thus contributing to the voluntary retreat of Albanians. Undoubtedly, in the first decade after independence, the Macedonian leadership "controlled both the executive and the legislative branches of government" (Rossos, 2008, p. 278), including security and foreign policy. Besides, foreign affairs at this period were also a strong domain of the president; Kiro Gligorov, whose "advantages were his patriotism, his career in federal institutions, his political contacts and popularity, including among Albanians" (Todorova, 2020, p. 397), maintained strong partnership and coalition with the most prominent Albanian political party by offering them ministerial positions (Stefanova, 2008, p. 11). In the post-2001 period, "as a result of the evolution of the political system from semi-presidential to a more classical parliamentary system" (Leka, 2021, p. 51), the government assumed almost full control over conducting foreign policy. This shift, in theory, allowed Albanian foreign policy interests to be more pronounced, directly through the cabinet.

According to the *imposed retreat*, the lack of (political) opportunities given to Albanians is the reason for their absence from foreign policy making. Although this notion also dates to the 1990s, records show that the Albanian representatives, especially from the Party for Democratic Prosperity, had unconditionally agreed with Gligorov on foreign policy objectives (Pettifer, 2001, pp. 140–141), presumably because those objectives were in sync with their foreign policy priorities. Moreover, imposed retreat as an explanation further lost prominence by the 2010s; the appointments of Talat Xhaferi as Speaker of the Assembly (and in 2024 as Prime Minister for a hundred-day period) and Bujar Osmani as Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs and later Minister of Foreign Affairs paved the way for a more direct Albanian presence also in the executive branch, including foreign policy.

The Albanian political corpus has always given its approval to North Macedonia's foreign and security policy objectives, namely accession to NATO and the EU (International Crisis Group, 2009). Although the group was preoccupied with domestic (internal) issues, it nevertheless showed commitment to the necessity of Euro-Atlantic integration. One can argue that, in this sense, these two political blocs jointly constructed the newly independent country's foreign policy: while the Macedonian leadership set the red lines (especially regarding identity-related bilateral disputes), Albanians did not raise any concerns or reservations but remained supportive and pragmatic. In other words: instead of an imposed, a more voluntary retreat may characterize Albanian attitudes toward the country's foreign affairs.

It is rather inter-ethnic mistrust that may have motivated Macedonians to exclude Albanians from foreign policy issues. Many of North Macedonia's bilateral issues – especially those concerning its neighbors – revolve around the Macedonian identity: the name dispute with Greece and the identity-related issue with Bulgaria both touch upon sensitive themes of national identity. A widespread narrative, also brought up in some interviews, claims that the opinion of Albanians in foreign affairs is illegitimate and carry no emotional attachment as it undermines "Macedonian identity, and by extension, the Macedonian nation and the Macedonian state" (Buck, 1996). There is no evidence, however, to support this claim; the name dispute demonstrated that even under growing impatience, Albanian political elites did not challenge Macedonian reluctance, nor the red lines laid out by the Macedonian leadership. Even though it was in their interest to have the bilateral issue resolved quickly, their pragmatism led them to remain supportive of Macedonian positions and to constitute a unified stance against Greece.

The foreign policy priorities of Macedonians and Albanians are aligned (with the exemption of Kosovo), making it one of the few state-level domains in which there seems to be a harmony among political leaderships. This aspect is of high importance, as it creates a sense of national unity and social cohesion among ethnic groups that otherwise lack common building blocks of identity. The paper now deconstructs, in addition to Euro-Atlantic integration, the pillars that influence Albanian foreign policy priorities, namely Albania, Kosovo, and countering internal and external threats.

Kin-state and kinship: Albania and Kosovo

Albania holds a special position among Albanian foreign policy priorities. It is regarded not only as their kin-state[8] but also as a country that potentially leads by example in foreign affairs. For the Albanian political community in North Macedonia, Albania's integration into Western alliances serves both as an example and, in some cases, a cause for concern. Albania's NATO accession in 2009 demonstrated that once the country had surpassed North Macedonia on their joint integration path, frustration toward the Macedonian leadership and the sense of being left behind grew among Albanians in North Macedonia (Marusic, 2009). Albanian politicians were more inclined to raise concerns publicly and promise NATO and EU integration "with or without Macedonians" (A1 Televizija, 2009), yet they maintained respect for Macedonian positions vis-à-vis the name dispute even after Albania's NATO accession. The same tendency (frustration primarily) has been evident since Albania and North Macedonia's EU integration paths were decoupled in 2024.

Support for Kosovo and advocacy for its independence are also high on the Albanian foreign policy agenda. The Albanian community – comprising a unified bloc in the northwestern parts of North Macedonia near Kosovo's border – has lived in symbiosis with their Albanian compatriots in Kosovo since the Ottoman period. For Albanians in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, "Pristina and its university were historical, cultural, and intellectual centers of Albanian nationalism" (Serwer, 2018, p. 53), at the expense of Tirana.[9] As a result, Kosovo was the hub for future Albanian political actors in North Macedonia, too, and many of their defining politicians, especially from the Democratic Union for Integration (hereinafter DUI), were socialized in Kosovo.

The Kosovo War (1998–1999) and the subsequent declaration of independence (2008) have always resonated with the Albanian political corpus in North Macedonia. As Kosovo Albanians fled the armed conflict to North Macedonia, mainly to the Albanian-inhabited northwestern regions and to Skopje, "the country received

ISSN 2732-1851

344,500 refugees – 15 times more than expected" (Donev et al., 2002, p. 184). Moreover, many Albanian insurgents from the armed conflict in North Macedonia (2001) had also taken part in the Kosovo Liberation Army (*Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës*), including members of the leadership such as Fazli Veliu and the head of DUI, Ali Ahmeti (Naegele, 2002). Later on, Ahmeti himself also became the main advocate for Kosovo's statehood and normalization of relations with Serbia (Sloboden Pecat, 2022).

The Macedonian leadership initially showed reservations over recognizing Kosovo's independence. The country's "procrastination [...], despite the strong international pressure and the demands of the Albanian political forces in [North] Macedonia, primarily came from fears of possible worsening of economic ties with Serbia" (Karajkov, 2008) as well as concerns that an independent Kosovo might negatively impact regional security and the country's territorial integrity. In retrospect, recognition did not impact security, including North Macedonia's (trade) relations with any of its neighbors. Nevertheless, Kosovo's issue and the fear of rising Albanian nationalism – at the expense of North Macedonia's sovereignty or unitary composition – still detectable among Macedonians (Daskalovski, 2025, p. 343).

There has also been rivalry for the support of Albanian political parties in North Macedonia. Edi Rama and Albin Kurti, leaders of Albania and Kosovo respectively, both "struggle for supremacy [...] as these roles are not defined within the Albanian corpus" (Kosovo Online, 2024), and both aim to be the proverbial leaders of Albanians in Southeast Europe. In practice, this results in support for political parties with which they maintain closer relations: while Rama nurtures close ties with DUI, Kurti focuses more on newer Albanian political formations that aim to oust DUI from power (Beqa, 2023; Indeksonline, 2025). Although North Macedonia's Albanian political bloc is divided over which leader to cooperate with, their unwavering support for Albania and Kosovo remains intact.

Western orientation as a means of countering threats

Western orientation is an objective shared by Albanians in North Macedonia and elsewhere. In addition to supporting Euro-Atlantic integration, the EU and, more importantly, the United States are perceived as their strategic partners. There are at least two reasons behind the general pro-Western orientation among Albanians and their political representatives. First, the role of the United States (and NATO) in the Kosovo War and in brokering the OFA. Albanian politicians, in addition to the reasons discussed above, organized protests in North Macedonia in support of American intervention in Kosovo (International Crisis Group, 1998, p. 17) and also perceive the OFA "as a result of the pressure exerted by the USA, the EU, and NATO" (Marolov, 2013, p. 136).

Secondly, they also depict the U.S. as not only a guarantor of (their) local and regional security but also as an ally and protector against internal repression and malign influence.[10] Albanians perceive the West (especially the U.S.) as a counterbalance to nationalist tendencies among Slavs (Macedonians and Serbs) and to external influences, mainly from Russia and its local proxies. As Albanians have often been targeted by Russian disinformation campaigns aiming at "deepening the dividing lines between Macedonians and Albanians" (Metodieva, 2019, p. 18), they perceive U.S. actions countering these tendencies as beneficial to their well-being.

Albanian foreign policy objectives are built on three pillars: it is shaped by internal dynamics, relations with Albania and Kosovo, and great power rivalry in Southeast Europe. They perceive the West (the EU and the United States) as protectors of Albanian interests regionwide as well as of their own internal security. Therefore, integration into Euro-Atlantic structures can, in their understanding, serve as a useful shield for maintaining inter-ethnic balance in North Macedonia, too. These foreign policy priorities highlight consistency and pragmatism, and they have also stood the test of time: all were, formally or informally, declared soon after North Macedonia's independence and have served as guiding principles for Albanian political elites ever since.

Narratives on Euro-Atlantic integration

This chapter now lists the main narratives employed by Albanian politicians in the context of Euro-Atlantic integration. It examines how Albanian political leaders have framed and communicated support for joining NATO and the EU, both to their electorate and to the broader society of North Macedonia. Focusing on the Prespa Agreement, NATO accession, and the referendum on the country's name change, the chapter highlights the rhetoric used by Albanian politicians and explores how the recent decoupling of Albania and North Macedonia in the EU integration process may negatively influence Albanian support for further EU accession.

Euro-Atlantic integration as a strategic priority and symbol

During the 2000s, Albanian political leaders recognized that the name dispute between Greece and North Macedonia was the primary political obstacle to Euro-Atlantic integration. Although the issue dated back to North Macedonia's independence, it was after the Bucharest Summit and Albania's own NATO accession that Albanian politicians became more vocal about the necessity of resolving it.

Afrim Gashi from Besa Movement described NATO accession as "the country's strategic goal" (Georgievski, 2019) achievable only through settling the name dispute. Other politicians, such as Menduh Thaçi from the Democratic Party of Albanians and Xhevat Ademi from DUI, went further, arguing that Euro-Atlantic integration "is threatened by the delayed romantic nationalism of some leaders of the

Macedonian political elite" (Koleka, 2008). Thaçi also argued that although "their identity is very important for them but the road towards European and NATO is much more important for us [Albanians]," (Koleka, 2008), feeding into a widespread Macedonian perception that Albanians would 'give up' Macedonian identity for NATO membership. Some reports suggest that Albanian leaders even told their Macedonian counterparts that "getting into NATO was so important [for them] they could name the country after a soft drink" (Koleka, 2008). Rafiz Aliti from DUI went as far as to state that the lack of a compromise or solution to the name dispute would mean that "Albanians will integrate in EU and NATO with or without the Macedonians" (Eurasia, 2009). Albanian politicians also advocated for an "immediate compromise" (KOHA, 2018), stressing the urgent nature of resolving the issue and signaling openness to any proposal put to the table.

These statements, while provocative, primarily served to reassure Albanian voters of their leaders' commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration, rather than to threaten Macedonian leadership or identity. For Albanians in North Macedonia, integration into Euro-Atlantic structures is highly important. For example, only 18 percent of Albanians perceived the preservation of the country's name as more important than NATO and EU accession, while almost two-thirds of Albanian respondents favored integration (Marusic, 2010). Regarding EU integration, disparities in support between ethnic Macedonians and Albanians are also evident: polls by the Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" Skopje (2023) show that 78 percent of Albanian respondents support EU accession, almost 20 points higher than Macedonians' support (Damjanovski, 2023, p. 5). While Macedonians' support remained consistent two years later, the level of support among Albanians increased to 82 percent (Damjanovski, 2025, p. 5), signaling the importance of EU integration to this minority group. Given the high level of approval among Albanians for Euro-Atlantic integration, Albanian politicians – as confirmed by the interviews – could not refrain from openly pressuring their Macedonian counterparts to unblock bilateral disputes. Failure to do so would have risked alienating their own electorate.

Although the Albanian politicians' rhetoric is often amplified beyond its original intent, they only played a limited role in foreign policy decision-making and had little influence over negotiations with Greece. Although they might have favored a compromise, there is no evidence they sought to overstep their pragmatic role; on the other hand, they always were in favor of "respecting the specificities of the parties [Macedonians and Greeks]" (Koha.mk, 2017). Thus, their rhetoric should be understood as domestic signaling, rather than threats or some kind of announcement about unilateral and/or uncoordinated actions.

Europe has long been at the center of Albanian political thought. The "West" – embodied by the EU and NATO – symbolizes modernity, progress, and security, in contrast to the East or even Turkey, which often represent backwardness or threat. Even Albanian writer Ismail Kadare stressed that Europe is "Albania's natural state. The only one" (Tirana Times, 2012); this statement also applies to the Albanian community in North Macedonia, as Euro-Atlantic integration has been "the guiding principle of their political and social activity" (Koha.mk, 2018) for decades. For Albanians, Western orientation is embedded in political identity, rooted in ideology and in the pursuit of security and stability. On the other hand, as one interviewee framed it, given internal and external threats perceived by the community, "the group cannot support anything else but Euro-Atlantic integration".

The non-binding referendum in 2018 linking the Prespa Agreement to NATO and EU accession also reflected the overwhelming support of Albanians for Euro-Atlantic integration. Albanian politicians, including Ahmeti, framed the name referendum as a choice to be joining the West: "it will be decided whether we will align ourselves with the countries of Western democracy or once and for all, we will disappoint all our friends and trample on all those platforms, programs and determinations that we have had and align ourselves where we belong, near the Eastern bloc" (Indeksonline, 2018). Also, campaign speeches of Albanian politicians put the emphasis on the magnitude of the decision, stating not only that voting in favor is in the country's utmost interest but also claiming that "there is no plan 'B'" (Telegrafi, 2018) available. Ahmeti even delivered his very first public speech in Macedonian language to encourage support for the referendum in the broader electorate.

Following NATO accession, Albanian leaders celebrated the event as the fulfillment of a long-held dream. Artan Grubi from DUI (and First Deputy Prime Minister at that time) described it as "a dream coming true for Albanians," adding that "the sun rises in the West" (Reuters, 2018). Further, the politician compared the ratification of the Prespa Agreement to the best investment for the future by arguing that the country is "on the right side of history. Heroism is to provide a secure future" (King, 2018). Apart from symbolic and sentimental narratives, the Albanian leadership stressed more concrete benefits of Euro-Atlantic integration, too.

Security, stability and inter-ethnic relations

Security remains the cornerstone of Albanian support for Euro-Atlantic integration. Albanian leaders, including Ahmeti, have repeatedly argued that NATO provides the best guarantee of Albanians' internal security[11], claiming that NATO accession represents "the victory [which] is in security and stability" (KOHA, 2018), just as the OFA represents the same goals concerning inter-ethnic relations. He also expanded the resolution of the name dispute to the Western Balkans; from a security perspective, it is important "not only for [North] Macedonia, but also for the region" (Telegrafi, 2017). Ahmeti further claimed that "in this period of uncertainty and geopolitical tensions and geostrategic resurgence, NATO is a key factor for the country's stability" and that "membership in NATO is a guarantee of sovereignty, security and stability" (4NEWS.mk, 2022). More specifically, Grubi claimed that the OFA and Prespa Agreement are examples to follow "especially for the authorities in Pristina and Belgrade, to overcome the dispute and be rounded off with mutual recognition of independence between Serbia and Kosovo, which would contribute to the stability of the entire region" (Grubi, 2023).

Avoiding renewed inter-ethnic conflicts has also been a central narrative in Albanian support for NATO membership. Membership in the politico-military alliance was presented as both a security guarantee and a safeguard for inter-ethnic peace; Ademi pointed out, for example, that the lack of NATO and EU accession would worsen inter-ethnic relations, too (Koleka, 2008). The OFA, in this sense, is also perceived as a sort of "trade-off": the EU promised membership (more precisely, candidate status) to North Macedonia, in exchange for the end of hostilities and agreeing on the agreement (Marolov, 2013, p. 136). Thus, Euro-Atlantic integration and inter-ethnic relations have been closely intertwined and are actively linked together by Albanian politicians in the post-2001 period.

Since 2019, the Prespa Agreement has transcended foreign policy concerns. Much like the OFA, it has become part of Albanians' narrative about inter-ethnic stability and Western protection against destabilizing internal or external influences. Ahmeti warned that any attempt to renegotiate the agreement would violate Albanian vital interests, since the Prespa agreement "remains an essential document for peace and stability in the country and must be respected by all political parties" (IndeksOnline, 2025). Moreover, on the 24th anniversary of OFA, Ahmeti stressed that Albanian "contribution to the state resulted in good interethnic and neighborly relations, NATO membership, and the start of negotiations for joining the European Union" (KosovaPress, 2025), highlighting that both agreements have largely become part of the North Macedonia's political DNA. This echoes Grubi's statement that "if it wasn't for Ohrid, there wouldn't be Prespa or NATO membership" (Mihajlovska, 2024), clearly linking not only the two agreements but inter-ethnic relations and foreign policy together.

On a more tangible side of Euro-Atlantic integration, both organizations, but especially the EU are seen as both a security and economic provider. Ahmeti stated that Euro-Atlantic integration is important because "it guarantees peace, stability and security, but also opens up new and concrete economic perspectives" (KOHA, 2018). Membership promises cohesion funds and economic opportunities, and the Albanian diaspora in EU member states plays a key role in this narrative, promoting positive perceptions of the EU and transmitting European values back home.

In summary, Albanian narratives on Euro-Atlantic integration are deeply intertwined with security concerns, inter-ethnic relations, and the desire of joining the 'west'. Joining western politico-military alliances are viewed as a guarantee for inter-ethnic rights and stability as well as and ideological commitment. The persistence of blockages and the recent decoupling of the EU accession paths of Albania and North Macedonia, however, risk eroding Albanians' support for Western integration.

Decoupling: 2008 again?

The European Council's decision to separate the EU integration processes of Albania and North Macedonia sent shockwaves through the Albanian political bloc. According to press statements, it was perceived as the failure of the current government and Albanian parties within the coalition; a failure to advance Albanian foreign policy objectives (namely, EU accession) and claiming that the members of the cabinet "are robbing us [Albanians] of the European future" (CNA, 2024) and „is a grave injustice for every citizen of North Macedonia who has seen Europe not only as a political goal, but as a deep social and cultural aspiration" (Reporteri.net, 2024).

The situation bears similarities to NATO's Bucharest summit. Since 2008–09, the Albanian political sphere has been particularly sensitive and reactive to any developments suggesting that Albania, their kin-state, had achieved milestones in its Euro-Atlantic integration path. When Albania joined NATO, growing frustration emerged among Albanians and their representatives in North Macedonia, leading to a more proactive approach and vocal statements emphasizing the necessity of resolving the name dispute. Separating the EU integration progress of Albania and North Macedonia may foreshadow a similar pattern: Albanian parties campaigning on promises of bringing the country closer to the EU could lose support as public disappointment and frustration grow. This, in turn, may result in harsher rhetoric from Albanian politicians directed at both the Macedonian leadership and Albanian parties in power.

Decoupling these candidate countries also evokes negative experiences from 2019. At that time, North Macedonia – despite having resolved the name dispute – was blocked by (three) EU member states, mainly because of reservations over Albania's readiness for further integration.

Albanian political parties running on a pro-EU platform may become the greatest losers if EU accession ceases to be a feasible option, whether it is due to North Macedonia's (internal) situation or the stance of certain EU member states.

Conclusion

Examining the narratives on Euro-Atlantic integration among Albanians in North Macedonia provides a better understanding of how a minority group with significant political capital argues in favor of achieving its foreign policy priorities. Contrary to prevailing Macedonian narratives, foreign policy constitutes an important part of the narratives and campaigns of Albanian political parties, but for different reasons. While Albanians are driven by the desire not to be left behind by Albania and by promises to their electorate, perceiving Western alliances as guarantees for their socio-economic and political rights in the country, Macedonians proceed with more caution. Due to identity-related bilateral disputes with their neighbors, the conviction that sacrifices must be made for Euro-Atlantic integration at the expense of Macedonian identity prevails. Although Albanians have shown pragmatism in dealing with Macedonian questions of identity, their electorate's frustration may impact their stances on this issue in the future. Nonetheless, foreign policy objectives – specifically integration into Western politico-military organizations – are shared among ethnic groups, making it one of the rare domains in which there is alignment of interests between Macedonian and Albanian political leaderships, even though perceptions of the added value and/or sacrifices differ.

For Albanians, Euro-Atlantic integration is primarily perceived through a security prism regarding their political and socio-economic positions. They understand these supranational structures as bodies or tools that can effectively mitigate potential internal and external risks challenging their communities' legal rights and general well-being. Internal risks include the fear of rising anti-Albanian rhetoric and ethnonationalist tendencies among Macedonian politicians, while Serbian and Russian influences are identified as external threats. Additionally, Albania's example with its Euro-Atlantic integration serves both as a model and a source of concern; the fact that Albania has once again surpassed North Macedonia in the EU accession process (as it did with NATO membership) raises societal and political concerns that may negatively impact further Albanian support for EU integration in North Macedonia.

Endnotes

[1] Other cross-cutting issues may include environmental protection and climate change, the fight against corruption and state capture, as witnessed in 2016 (Gjinovci, 2016; Staletović, 2023) and 2025 (Telegrafi, 2024), and economic challenges such as unemployment and brain drain.

[2] The author aimed to include interviewees from wide-ranging backgrounds. Regarding professional background, former and current decision-makers, representatives of public institutions (e.g., ministries responsible for foreign affairs and EU integration), as well as members of academia, research institutions, civil society, and journalism were interviewed. In terms of location, interviews were conducted in Skopje and Tetovo, allowing for the inclusion of more diverse perspectives, particularly given that Tetovo serves as the political, cultural, and social center of the Albanian community. All interviews were conducted in accordance with the highest ethical standards, ensuring full anonymity.

[3] Symbolically, the Greek parliament was the first to ratify North Macedonia's accession protocol (RFE/RL, 2019).

[4] The so-called name change referendum, a legally non-binding plebiscite, linked public acceptance of the Prespa Agreement to North Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration. Although 94 percent of voters cast their ballots in favor, turnout was only 35 percent.

[5] The Stabilization and Association Agreement is a comprehensive legal framework governing EU–candidate relations, and is a key prerequisite for eventual membership.

[6] Coupling means that the accession processes of both countries–achieving the main milestones–are linked; if one lags, both are stuck.
[7] In North Macedonia, political parties are typically organized along ethnic lines, especially regarding mainstream parties representing Macedonians, Albanians, and other minorities. Based on the typology of Németh (2022), Albanian political parties, which emerged from the relatively homogeneous ethnic Albanian social strata, can be classified into three generations. The first generation emerged in the late 1980s and/or dominated the first decade of post-independence North Macedonia. It includes the National Democratic Party (in Albanian: *Partia Demokratike Popullore*; in Macedonian: *Национална демократска партија*), the Party for Democratic Prosperity (in Albanian: *Partia Për Prosperitet Demokratik*; in Macedonian: *Партија за демократски просперитет*), and the Democratic Party of Albanians (in Albanian: *Partia Demokratike e Shqiptarëve*; in Macedonian: *Демократска партија на Албанците*). The second generation, in the post-OFA period, is dominated by the Democratic Union for Integration (in Albanian: *Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim*; in Macedonian: *Демократска унија за интеграција*), while the third generation of parties emerged in the 2010s and includes the Alliance for Albanians (in Albanian: *Aleanca për Shqiptarët*; in Macedonian: *Алијанса за Албанците*), the Besa Movement (in Albanian: *Lëvizja Besa*; in Macedonian: *Движење Беса*), Alternativa (in Macedonian: *Алтернатива*), and the Democratic Movement (in Albanian: *Lëvizja Demokratike*; in Macedonian: *Демократско движење*). More on the political system and parties of North Macedonia, see: Abdula, 2025.
[8] According to Waterbury (2020, p. 799), a kin-state "represents the majority nation of a transborder ethnic group whose members reside in neighboring territories" and, apart from nurturing close social, cultural, political etc. ties with them, oftentimes sees itself as their protector.
[9] As Albania under Enver Hoxha broke off ties with Yugoslavia by the late 1940s and pursued international isolation by the 1970s, the country could not sustain its leading position among Albanians in Yugoslavia.
[10] The unwavering pro-Albanian stance of the United States, however, is debatable, especially in the case of the 2001 quasi-civil war in North Macedonia. While in Kosovo, the U.S. spearheaded NATO air strikes, it did not show the same level of military engagement or political willingness to support Albanian insurgents in North Macedonia (Perry, 2011). The U.S. was not interested in yet another unresolved conflict in Southeast Europe; security as a guiding principle outweighed the anticipated American support for North Macedonia's Albanians.
[11] As noted by many interviewees, security is or should be a sensitive topic for Albanian politicians, especially Ahmeti, given his role in the 2001 civil war in North Macedonia, and the fact that DUI as a political entity grew out of the insurgents. In a sense, they went from being security threats to one of the biggest supporters of security though NATO integration.

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GLOBAL AND LOCAL DYNAMICS IN THE URBAN CONTEXT: THE CASE OF ATHENS

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Doi: 10.15170/PSK.2026.SI.01.06
Received: February 19, 2026
Accepted: April 24, 2026
Published: May 8, 2026

Citation:
Tzoumaka, Eleni (2026). Global and Local Dynamics in the Urban Context: The Case of Athens. *Polarities*, 7(SI), 97–119.

Acknowledgements:
I want to thank the editors of this issue and the reviewers for providing feedback on the research and their valuable comments.

Abstract

Global cities and their strategic role in the world economy have been extensively discussed in recent decades. The globalization processes may also involve smaller peripheral cities, though not defined as global cities. After a brief overview of the functions and features of cities connected to global dynamics, this paper will concentrate on the case of Athens. The organization of the 2004 Olympic Games was a major strategic plan aiming to upgrade the Greek capital in the global hierarchy of metropolises. Considering the Olympic preparation and the urban restructuring projects involved as a starting point, this paper aims to examine Athens' trajectory through successive crises of global origin and scale (financial crisis, refugee crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, etc.), focusing on its ongoing transformations involving both national and international capital and agents, and on the interplay of global and local dynamics in the emerging urban space and identity, as well as in its international image and role.

Keywords: *Athens; globalization; entrepreneurialism; urban restructuring projects; rebranding; crises.*

Introduction

This paper aims to highlight the interplay between global and local dynamics in the urban environment of 21st-century Athens, a non-core capital of Southeastern Europe. The theoretical framework of our research is drawn from interdisciplinary literature in the broad field of urban studies, addressing issues of globalization and deglobalization, the global/world city model, the entrepreneurialism and commodification of cities, and the associated neoliberal strategies. We will examine the implementation of these strategies in the case of Athens, along with the impact of successive crises, taking into consideration geopolitical challenges as well. The analysis is based on related literature, including academic papers, institutional reports, and media articles; empirical data are also drawn from literature, not from primary research. The scope of this paper is to capture a synthetic overview of the city's transformations, rather than to highlight a specific aspect of these processes. We estimate that Athens' case is indicative of how a universal toolkit for urban regeneration and upgrading is translated into a local idiolect, and, therefore, consider this to be the main contribution of this paper. Though not a global city stricto sensu, Athens is studied here as a "city in globalization" (the term was introduced by Taylor et al., 2007), with a degree of world "cityness" (Beaverstock et al., 2019, p. 4), according to its positioning in global flows and networks.

The Lasting Effect of Globalization

The global city model

The notion of the "global city" (the term is used alternatively or distinctively to "world city") has been extensively discussed in recent decades as part of the broader debate on globalization and its consequences in every domain of human experience, including urban space. As Edward Soja (2000) summarized the ongoing process:

> Global flows of capital investment, labor migration, information, and technological innovation are reshaping city-space and local capital-labor relations, creating new industrial spaces, a reshuffling of class identities, different urban divisions of labor, and a repolarized and refragmented pattern of social and spatial stratification. (p.196)

Within the global/world city discourse, we could briefly mention the contributions of Peter Hall, John Friedmann, Nigel Thrift, Saskia Sassen, Manuel Castells, Paul Knox, Peter Taylor, Allen Scott, Doreen Massey, and many others. Sassen's model, in particular, has been most influential, though at the same time criticized, and remains a point of reference, despite the ongoing destabilization of the global system she had in mind. For Sassen (2001) the strategic role of major cities consists of the following functions:

> Beyond their long history as centers of international trade and banking, these cities now function in four new ways: first, as highly concentrated command points in the organization of the world economy; second, as key locations for finance and for specialized service firms, which have replaced manufacturing as the leading economic sectors; third, as sites of production, including the production of innovations, in these leading industries; and fourth, as markets for the products and innovations produced. (pp. 3-4)

These processes unfolded in the 1980s and 1990s. Common characteristics of global cities are the extremely high densities in the business districts, a greater incidence of jobs in the high- and low-paying ends of the scale, high-income gentrification in both residential and commercial settings, accompanied by an increasing number of expensive restaurants, luxury housing, luxury hotels, gourmet boutiques, expensive stores, etc. (Sassen, 2001, pp. 6, 9). High-income workers are likely to live in central areas rather than in the suburbs; as a consequence, the cost of living in these areas is constantly rising. This social transformation results in increased social and economic polarization, impoverishment of significant parts of the population (low-wage workforce, among them many undocumented immigrants), and a dramatic increase in homelessness (Sassen, pp. 12, 335, 340-342). It seems that cities on top of the global hierarchy are the most sharply divided, fractured into multiple, usually antagonistic enclaves.

Sassen placed New York, London and Tokyo at the top of the globalized urban network (Frankfurt and Paris followed), recognizing, at the same time, that similar trends were emerging in other major cities, "though on a lower order of magnitude" (Sassen, 2001, p. 332). These processes may also involve peripheral cities, given that smaller local urban centers are necessary for the completion and operational adequacy of this network; they host the headquarters of multinational organizations, important enterprises and large hotel chains (Marmaras, 2017). Cities that are strategic sites in the global economy tend, in part, to become disconnected from their region and even nation (Sassen, 1998, p. xxvi). In some cases, only certain areas of great cities can claim the status of global city; these "cities within cities" have more in common with other cities in the global networks of cities than with their surrounding suburbs (Stevenson, 2003, p. 97).

These facts make the global city "a highly specialized, institutionally differentiated", and not necessarily homogenized process, in which global dynamics interplay with local/national actors and institutional arrangements (Sassen, 2001, pp. 347-348). In fact, particular institutional components of the national state function as the institutional home for the operation of what we describe as "global capital" and "global capital market", so even what is constructed as "national" entails a negotiation, an articulation with global dynamics (Sassen, 2003, pp. 8-9).

Sassen (1998, pp. xx, xxxiii) also stresses the denationalization of urban space and the formation of new claims by transnational actors: On one side, global capital, which uses the city as an "organizational commodity". The new city users (foreign firms and international businesspeople) reconstitute strategic spaces of the cities in their image. Their claim to the city is not contested, despite its cost to the city. On the other side, disadvantaged (among them immigrant) populations, which claim their rights to the city, sometimes using urban violence to become visible.

Ascribing the status of a global city is a complex task, and depends on a range of "selection" criteria, different for each classification (Friedmann, 1986, pp. 304-305; Mantas et al., 2016, pp. 314-315; Stevenson, 2003, p. 95). The criteria may include global network connectivity, business activity, financial and other related services, human capital, information exchange, research and development, cultural interaction, livability, environment, accessibility, sustainability, and other relevant factors. It seems that some "hierarchy" has been established by scholars and institutions, and numerous lists and international indexes appear in the related literature. Most influential is the Globalization and World Cities Network (GaWC), which was founded in 1998 at Loughborough University by Peter Taylor and Jon Beaverstock, and provides numerous qualitative and quantitative studies on world city formation and inter-city relations, as well as classifications of world cities (Derudder & Taylor, 2021; Beaverstock et al., 2019). Other examples are the Global Power City Index (GPCI) by the Mori Memorial Foundation, the Global Cities Index (GCI) by Kearney, and the Global Financial Centres Index (GFCI).

As Castells (1996, p. 382) points out, "the hierarchy in the network is by no means assured or stable: it is subject to fierce inter-city competition, as well as to the venture of highly risky investments in both finance and real estate".

Jennifer Robinson, from a post-colonial perspective, questions such categorizations of cities featured in the global cities' literature, which disregard, and practically leave "off the map" a large part of the urban world (2006; 2002). She also criticizes the "imperialistic" idea, latent in all this theoretical framework, that ordinary cities should aspire to becoming global, entering into competition for a place in the hierarchy of global/world cities (Robinson, 2006); she considers the above transformation a highly contested process, with profound consequences for the built environment and for the wellbeing of their citizens (Robinson, 2002, p. 548).

Neoliberalism, entrepreneurialism and the commodification of cities

The globalization discourse involves a critique of neoliberalism, which developed as the "dominant glocal ideology" and brought to the fore a global class of economic and political entrepreneurs, who foster conditions that facilitate global capitalism not only transnationally but also at the national, regional, metropolitan, and local scales (Soja, 2000, p. 216). Neoliberalism has many variants, but its basic philosophy consists in open, competitive, unregulated markets, liberated from state intervention and the actions of social collectivities; the function of the liberal state is to safeguard profitable competition, and the welfare state is considered the arch-enemy of freedom (Hall, 2011, pp. 10-12).

During the 1980s, originating in the UK and the USA but gradually expanding into continental Europe, neoliberal strategies prevailed in urban politics and reoriented state intervention towards attracting private capital into large-scale infrastructure, as well as flagship projects, in an effort to trickle down benefits to broader regions and whole urban areas; the regeneration of London Docklands is an iconic paradigm (Chorianopoulos & Pagonis, 2020, pp. 151-153). Urban development projects tended to depend more and more on public-private partnerships, and entrepreneurialism gained ground, claiming that it was possible to combine goals that in the past were considered controversial: profit for the investors, and positive effect on society and environment (Chorianopoulos & Pagonis, p. 153). Business elites acquired a new role in urban governance (Souliotis et al., 2014, p. 732). This strategy involves the creation of entrepreneurial clusters to support the service sector and attract transnational corporations, the creation of new transport and communication infrastructure, the investment in cultural industries and urban tourism, the reuse of industrial spaces, the design of emblematic buildings by star architects, and other interventions (Chorianopoulos & Pagonis, pp. 154-158; Gospodini, 2006 pp. 29-31).

In the above framework, the competition between cities, increasingly, is being played out on the terrain of consumption and lifestyle, and on the cultural economy. Cities are promoted as "commodities", including both their tangible and intangible attributes; urban space, amenity and urban cultures have become valuable commodities for sale in the global marketplace (Stevenson, 2003, pp. 97-98; see also Zukin, 1995). Central to these efforts is the reimaging/rebranding of the city through urban regeneration plans and effective place-marketing (Stevenson, p. 98). Staging a high-profile event, such as the Olympic Games, can focus regional, national, and international media attention on a particular city for a period of time. Even the production of smaller-scale events is an effective way of raising the profile of urban centers in the tourism and city image marketplace (Stevenson, p. 99).

Central to the activities of place marketers is often a conscious and deliberate manipulation of culture in an effort to enhance the appeal and interest of places (Philo & Kearns, 1993, p. 3); most of the time they cultivate the image of "a certain sort of place" (Philo & Kearns, p. 21) to attract people "of the right sort" (Harvey, 1990, p. 295).

Redevelopment of waterfront areas and inner-city regeneration, as in the case of many American cities suffering from deindustrialization and erosion of the social fabric, has set the model of similar projects in European (including Southern European) cities as well. Two aspects of urban space morphology, i.e., built heritage and innovative design of urban space, appear as the competitive edge of cities; the emerging urban landscapes under the forces of economic globalization may be termed as "glocalized" (Beriatos & Gospodini, 2004, pp. 189, 191).

Although seeking to promote uniqueness and authenticity, they often result in the construction of "simulated urban landscapes that are devoid of both content and context" (Stevenson, 2003, p. 101). These identical spaces use the same architectural codes, and offer the same attractions, such as shopping spaces, convention centers, themed restaurants, aquariums, sports facilities, etc. (Stevenson, p. 102).

The deglobalization discourse

In the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, a certain backlash against globalization or even tendencies towards deglobalization were detected, offering fertile ground for a new debate among scholars. Prolonged shutdowns due to the Covid-

19 pandemic, as well as geopolitical tensions, conflicts, and wars in recent years, have also negatively impacted economic globalization (Suter & Ziltener, 2024, pp. 1-3). Although interconnectedness is still supported by cross-border flows of all kinds, digital advances, and global challenges (such as climate change, epidemics, etc.), there is obvious evidence of national protectionism and attempts to restrain global direct investment and trade (Kornprobst & Paul, 2021, pp. 1305-1306).

A crucial manifestation of this shift was Brexit, as a consequence of the 2016 EU membership referendum. Donald Trump's motto "America first" seems to best summarize the return of national priorities in international politics (a renationalization of politics in other words), if they were absent at all in the previous decades; it was the nation-state that led globalization (i.e., USA), that made the decisive turn. Other political leaders and parties worldwide share similar views and, as a consequence, the world seems to be experiencing a new phase of disequilibrium and uncertainty. Terms like "truncated globalization" (Paul, 2023, pp. 3, 8) or "disembedded unilateralism" (James, 2018, pp. 219, 235) have been used among others to describe the emerging condition, marked by the contestation of international institutions and commitments, as well as the prevalence of unilateral and/or more authoritarian policies.

The main causes of the weakening of the liberal order internationally should be detected in the multilayered "clash" in the nation-states of the once-called "First World", that are attributed to the intensified globalization processes in the aftermath of the Cold War: social complexity and unrest derived from immigration shocks, widening inequalities and social polarization, elevated risk of contagion in financial downturns, as well as in the case of new pandemics (Balsa-Barreiro et al., 2020; Kornprobst & Paul, 2021). It seems that the most distinct feature of the new era is the dismantling of the "West" as a geopolitical entity, ideological framework, and shared value system.

It would be interesting to discuss the possible impact of the resurgence of state-centric thinking on cities' hierarchies. The case of Brexit may provide valuable insights. The City of London remains a major and profitable center, but although London ranked first in the Global Financial Centres Index (GFCI) in 2017, ahead of New York and Singapore (Djankof, 2017, p. 5), in 2023 it had lost its sole lead; New York seems to benefit from Brexit, but EU financial hubs, especially Paris, are also growing, due to the relocations of financial firms from London (Ryan, 2023, pp. 183-184). In GFCI 38 (2025), New York leads the index with London second. In recent research, Marahrens and Alderson (2024) attempted to assess how the global urban hierarchy is changing in the context of globalization and deglobalization, using data on the headquarters and branch locations of the world's largest multinationals from 1993 to 2020. The results indicated that the world-city system is experiencing substantial restructuring (a fluid hierarchy), and high inequality, but not necessarily "new geographies of inequality". But fluidity is not something unprecedented within the space of flows. Further assertions of the effects of revived ethnocentrism on the world urban system would demand more focused research that exceeds the scope of this paper, and might, to an extent, prove premature.

Currently, globalization is still at work. By all means, it has never been a linear process. Cities continue to function within global, regional, and peripheral networks, subject to global dynamics, such as migrant and refugee flows, global tourism, global capital, international speculative agents, and homogenized lifestyles. Furthermore, neoliberal strategies are still implemented, as in the case of contemporary Athens.

Global and Local Dynamics in 21st Century Athens

The legacy of the 2004 Olympic Games

Greece's strategic position between East and West was crucial for its incorporation into European modernity. The so-called Greek Question has been a major geopolitical issue, part of the broader Eastern Question, which referred to the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire and the distribution of its territory, which preoccupied the leading European Powers for more than a century. The small state was involved in all major crises in the Southern Balkans and other peripheral crises, in the two World Wars of the 20th century, and the Cold War. In the 1980s, it was accepted into the European Community, although not fully adjusting (or not fully eager to comply) to the European standards. This decision was determined by its acknowledged geostrategic position, but mostly by its special significance for Europe's collective memory. Athens, in particular, is acknowledged as the birthplace of European civilization and the cradle of democracy. Although being part of the Western political structure (EU, NATO), Greece's dominant representation during the 1980s continued to be a combination of underdevelopment and exoticism.

For Athens, the 1990s constitute a turning point in many aspects. EU cohesion policies increased considerably the state's capacity to plan and to implement effectively new developmental goals for the city; additionally, the fall of communist regimes in the Balkan countries upgraded Greece as a regional center, while the integration in the Eurozone gave Athens the opportunity to improve its international competitiveness (Souliotis et al., 2014, p. 734). Following the example of another Mediterranean metropolis, Barcelona, Athens regarded the organization of the 2004 Olympic Games as an ideal opportunity to reclaim a focal role in Southern Europe, and to attract the international media attention, as well as a large number of international visitors (Athens was a candidate city for the 1996 Olympics too).

The availability of EU financial resources and the use of neoliberal tools ("exceptional" legal framework, public-private partnerships, etc.) led to a successful organization and boosted the city's economy for almost a decade (Souliotis et al., 2014, p. 733). New jobs were created for Greeks and immigrants who worked on the construction of the major sporting and transportation projects under harsh working conditions. An unprecedented urban regeneration and public investment program consisted in major infrastructure works (a new airport, new ring roads, expansion of the metro system, creation of suburban and tram lines, new buses, new telecommunications network, and others), as well as important flagship projects in the center of Athens, the most emblematic one being the Unification of Archaeological Sites (Chorianopoulos & Pagonis, 2020, pp. 159-163). The latter was part of a broader project of regeneration of the historical center and central districts through redesign of major streets, remodeling of squares, billboard removal, facade renovation, etc. At the same time, new spaces of consumption were intended to meet the needs of an emerging "creative class": shopping malls, new museums, new cafés, art-spaces and multi-purpose buildings, urban lofts, etc. (Hatzidakis, 2014, p. 33).

Almost 95% of the projects planned for the Olympics 2004 were permanent constructions to be remodeled and reused after the Olympics; Athens did not adopt the successful strategy of other cities (for example, Barcelona, Bilbao, Glasgow, Lisbon), which consisted of revitalizing large and central areas of the city (mostly brownfields), but promoted instead a "scattered model", i.e. a dispersion of projects all over the city plan (Beriatos & Gospodini, 2004, p. 192). An important parameter in this decision was the availability of low-cost space in the peri-urban areas and low-status suburbs and the intention to spread the benefits to the whole Attica region (Souliotis et al., 2014, p. 737). The business plans emphasized both innovative design and the enhancement of architectural heritage, following the global practice. Superstar Santiago Calatrava designed the reconstruction of Athens' Olympic Sports Complex (the central venue of the Olympic Games) with the emblematic dome, as well as public open spaces in the site as a whole (Beriatos & Gospodini, 2004, p. 195), reproducing a "standardized form" that he moves from place to place, a common practice of superstar architects (Zukin, 1993, p. 47).

The private sector, especially construction firms, participated as subcontractors, but not in the administration of the works; the central government had full control, and local authorities were excluded from decision-making processes (Souliotis et al., 2014, p. 739). The strategic goal of redeveloping the seafront of Athens following international practices was only partially accomplished and practically abandoned, because it demanded more time and more complex interventions in the broader area.

Though the organization per se was positively received by public opinion in general, there were social movements against the Olympics sharing features with the anti-global movement; they raised issues such as environmental and social consequences, working conditions, intensified policing and surveillance of citizens and public space, moral and other issues (Portaliou, 2008).

The organization of the Games proved successful. Athens' Olympic legacy consists mostly of a renewed infrastructure, vital to the city's functions, as well as the awakening and mobilization of local cultural bodies, both public and private. Athens was in many aspects a different city after the Games. Nevertheless, the ambitious project to reassess its position in the global hierarchy of cities remained unfinished, and – even worse – it was undermined by the outbreak of a multifaceted crisis only four years later. A state-owned company was assigned to the management of the Olympic venues. The stadiums and facilities for the 2004 Olympics quickly fell into ruin, due to the huge maintenance costs and the lack of a clear strategy for their future utilization.

Athens through the successive crises

From 2008 onward, the word "crisis" has been omnipresent in global geopolitics; particularly in the European context, it proliferated in public discourse (for a detailed presentation, see Boletsi et al., 2020; New Keywords Collective, 2016). Oversaturation of the word entailed the use of more inclusive terms such as permacrisis and polycrisis (UCD Humanities Institute, 2025). The global financial crisis struck Southern Europe more severely, and Greece was one of its epicenters; the refugee/migration crisis followed, and culminated in the years 2014-2016. Many issues were at stake in this sequence of crises; among others, the ability of global capitalism to absorb inherent crises at the expense of its national components, the stability and resilience of the European edifice, and the Eurozone in particular, the external and internal borders of Europe, and the solidarity between its members.

In Greece, crisis management turned into an extreme form of neoliberal governance. Since the agreement of 2010 with the IMF, the EU, and the ECB, the international creditors imposed the main lines in all major fields of public policy, and enforced strict cuts in welfare and social provisions, increased taxation, and privatization of public assets (infrastructure, state-owned enterprises, and privileged plots). An external administration (the so-called Troika) was assigned to supervise the implementation of austerity measures and other readjustments to avoid default. The austerity policies resulted in pauperization of a large part of the population, high unemployment rates (27% of the total population and over 50% among the youth), cut-offs of salaries and pensions, over-taxation, evictions, shrinking labor rights and welfare provisions. Austerity measures resulted in a prolonged recession. Between 2008 and 2016, for instance, the economy lost a cumulative 27 per cent of its GDP (see Chorianopoulos & Tselepi, 2019, pp. 86-87; Hadjimichalis, 2018, p. 26).

The manifestations of the recession in Athens' urban space were more than evident: shop closures, derelict spaces of consumerism that once thrived, reduced economic and professional activity, neglected public space, dramatic increase of homelessness, people looking for food or for metal in rubbish and recycling bins, and other signs of poverty. Indicatively for the wider metropolitan region of Athens, the proportion of the severely deprived population rose from 9.5% in 2010 to 20.0% in 2015; in 2015, the housing overburden concerned 29% of urban dwellers, and 40% of poor households (Arapoglou, 2019, pp. 214-215). During austerity years, overall funding from central government to the municipality shrank by approximately 60%, and left it with no resources to address social needs; the municipality responded by turning to civil society, underscoring the engagement of NGOs and the private sector in local policy-making (Chorianopoulos & Tselepi, 2019, pp. 87-88), while "urban solidarity spaces" originated from below (Arampatzi, 2017, p. 2156). Among other manifestations of crisis, there was an obvious crisis of the center of Athens caused not only by the recession, but also by the decentralization of important activities and functions due to the great infrastructure works of the Olympics' era (Chorianopoulos & Pagonis, 2020, pp. 173-174).

The austerity policies caused social mobilizations of various kinds. In 2011, repeated large demonstrations and battles with the police culminated in the occupation of Syntagma square (in front of the Parliament, the focal point for the anti-austerity movement) for several months by the Greek Indignant Citizens; this initiative was closely related to the Spanish Indignados and the "movement of the piazzas", which spread in many Mediterranean cities (for more details see Arampatzi, 2017; Cardoso et al., 2017; Leontidou, 2014; Dalakoglou, 2012). Anti-austerity protests and battles with the police severely damaged the historical center; burnt buildings, even historical landmarks, and the excessive use of tear gas created a hostile urban environment.

Moreover, at the height of the crisis (2015–2016) Greece became one of the two major entry points for more than a million refugees and migrants mainly from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, but also from other Asian and African countries, in one of the biggest population mass movements in recent European history; Athens was one of the main hub cities on the so-called Balkan corridor. After the EU-Turkey agreement in March 2016 and the closure of the Balkan route, Greece was transformed from a transit to a host country for entrapped refugees and migrants, among them many unaccompanied minors, who had no choice but to request asylum in Greece (Frangiskou et al. 2020, p. 16). It was "a crisis within the crisis", as reported by the media, because it exceeded the state's capacity to deal with it. The refugee emergency has had a direct impact on the city of Athens, which already had a significant immigrant population since the early 1990s (from Balkan and Eastern European countries), and the 2000s (from Africa and Central Asia).

To address the emergency, official (governmental) camps were set up on the outskirts of Athens, but informal and spontaneous shelters also appeared in many open spaces of the city; for example, Afghan refugees resided in tents in Pedion tou Areos, a public park near the city center. A large grassroots movement of solidarity – ordinary citizens alongside a wide spectrum of other agents – was mobilized to offer support (shelter, collective kitchens, etc.); refugee housing issues were managed by a system of international and local agencies and NGOs (Cappuccini, 2018).

A part of the refugees claimed their right to the center of the city through the production of collective common spaces or the occupation of abandoned buildings in the urban core, in collaboration with local solidarity groups. These practices contest city-branding policies and investors' schemes (conflicting rights). A paradigmatic case is Exarchia, a highly politicized, counter-culture central neighborhood, with a long tradition of social movements (Tsavdaroglou & Kaika, 2021). The regeneration of urban centers has as a consequence the expulsion of undesired social groups, such as squatters, homeless people, low-income residents, and migrants. In the case of Exarchia, the refugees rejected the isolation of police-controlled state-run camps, cut off from urban social life. Recent governmental plans to regenerate and sanitize the neighborhood resulted in the eviction of many squatters, while its touristification drives away even many of its native residents and shopkeepers, as Exarchia is one of the most popular areas on the Airbnb platform (Tsavdaroglou & Kaika). All these ethno-cultural groups rebrand the city through their own trajectories and everyday practices.

Another major challenge was the Covid-19 pandemic. The coronavirus spread globally very quickly, and it was affluent global travelers who brought the disease to every city (Martinez & Short, 2021). Athens had its share of the effects. The imposed lockdowns suspended major functions of the city and left its usually crowded center deserted (peripheral centers as well). The economy of the city was once more stricken, and the closure of urban public spaces alienated citizens from each other. Governmental measures have deepened systemic inequality, segregation, and social, spatial, and environmental injustice in the city; additionally, they have imposed unprecedented restrictions on people's democratic rights, consolidating a shift towards a more authoritarian version of neoliberal urbanism (Apostolopoulou & Liodaki, 2021).

The pandemic was also a challenge for authorities as well as for urban planners all over the world, urging them to create healthier and more socially sustainable cities. Suggestions were made towards more walkable cities and neighborhoods, with fewer cars, more spaces for pedestrians and cyclists, and new designs for public spaces; furthermore, it induced increased demand for green areas, stressing the importance of visual access to nature, and more attention to the quality of homes, as well as further development of smart city technologies (Eltarabily & Elgheznawy, 2020; Martinez & Short, 2021). The project named "The Great Walk of Athens" by the Municipality of Athens, initiated during the confinement (summer 2020), aimed at providing more public space, especially for pedestrians and bicycles, but was not implemented as originally planned and promoted.

Athens' visibility in the global public sphere

Retrospectively seen, Athens managed to gain only temporary visibility in the global media through the organization of the 2004 Olympic Games, while, on the contrary, it remained for a long period in the spotlight of the global public sphere, due to its bankruptcy and its final "rescue" from exiting the Eurozone (Grexit). It all began with the iconic scenes of repeated mass urban violence that followed the assassination of 15-year-old Alexis Grigoropoulos by the police, in 2008 (Panagiotopoulos, 2020, p. 54). Tziovas (2020, pp. 108, 111) speaks of another "rediscovery" of Greece; Greece was presented by outsiders as "both a utopia of resistance and a dystopian failed state". The massive demonstrations and battles with the police, the iconology of burning buildings placed Athens "on the global map of radical anti-globalization"; similarly, during the occupation of Syntagma square by the "Indignants", this most prominent Athenian square became a "global landmark of anti-systemism" (Panagiotopoulos, p. 61). On the other hand, the refugee crisis offered an ideal field for local and international NGOs and celebrities all over the world to practice "humanitarian activism", even "humanitarian tourism" (Rakkas, 2020, p. 69), mostly at the reception centers on the islands, but in Athens as well. Even the urban ruins and crisis-stricken locals were transformed into a tourist spectacle (Tziovas, p. 114), and Athens became the "focal point of the global alternative-touristic or experiencing participation" (Panagiotopoulos, p. 62), and the "Mecca of the graffiti global culture" (Vamvakas, 2020, pp. 154, 164).

An unprecedented effect of the multifaceted crisis of the city was its re-emergence as an updated cultural capital (an alleged New Berlin) with a refreshed identity, "part of the system of Europe's social and political structures", but at the same time "remote from Europe" (Tramboulis & Tzirtzilakis, 2018, p. 8), forever "not quite belonging to Europe" (Tziovas, 2020, p. 113). Many artists were challenged to experience the return of politics on the front stage, in the heart of a city of the South. Documenta 14, which took place in 2017 partly in Athens, confirmed Athens as "a platform of the creative globalized elites, operators of the new economy" (Panagiotopoulos, 2020, p. 62), or as a standpoint from which one could "learn"; "Learning from Athens" was the working title of the organization. For Tramboulis and Tzirtzilakis (2018, p. 9), it might mean "constructing an alterity but also being constructed by and as an alterity". The project received much criticism for colonization and cultural imperialism.

International media narratives played an influential role in redefining Athens from a city marked by austerity and crisis to one characterized by creative resilience and cultural vibrancy, and this rebranding was paired with the accompanying surge in tourism (Demertzi, 2025, p. 6).

Spatial transformations, neoliberal practices, and the role of international agents

Structural readjustments towards neoliberal practices were intensified during and in the post-crisis era. As a consequence of the IMF-ECB-EU bailout agreement, supranational authorities acquired more direct access to the management of urban assets, including Olympic venues. A new set of "exceptional" processes was introduced, which exempted strategic investment in infrastructures and networks in crucial sectors from established regulations and facilitated the privatization of major urban socioeconomic assets, including ports, airports, motorways, energy networks, and real estate (Chorianopoulos & Pagonis, 2020, pp. 116-117). For example, the Chinese giant Cosco Shipping signed a contract with the Greek state to manage part of the port of Piraeus, Greece's and Athens' main port (Chlomoudis, 2015). In 2016, under pressure from international creditors, it took full control of the Piraeus Port Authority as the majority stakeholder, while in 2021 it acquired an additional 16%, reaching 67% of the share capital (Bali, 2022). The privatization of the port elevated its strategic importance, increased transport activity and connectivity to global supply networks, but has also had adverse consequences for the environment and urban life (Apostolopoulou, 2024).

"Exemptionary planning" was also introduced, and special organizations were established to promote the privatization of the Greek State's real estate property (Chorianopoulos & Pagonis, 2020, pp. 116-117). Within this framework, large and privileged tracts of land along the Southern urban coasts were sold or leased to investors at very favorable terms (Leontidou, 2014); in parallel, major projects were scheduled and initiated, aiming to transform the whole coastal zone, the so-called Athens' Riviera (approximately seventy kilometers from Faliron to Sounion). The "Ellinikon" project, on the site of the former airport, is the most prominent example of privatization, subject to a special legislative framework. In the past, several plans to turn the site into a metropolitan park were developed, formally announced, and then abandoned for various reasons. In 2014, the site was bought by the consortium Lamda Development at a very low price. A new town within the city is being constructed, including a park, luxury homes, hotels, a casino, a marina, shops, offices, and Greece's tallest buildings reaching up to 200 meters in height. (For more details, see https://theellinikon.com.gr/; Spanogianni & Theodora, 2020; Chorianopoulos & Pagonis, 2020, pp. 186-189).

Highlighting the seafront of the city of Athens was once more revived, given its environmental, cultural and economic significance in supporting the city as a Mediterranean Capital. The presence of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre in the area was the catalyst for the resumption of the project. The Faliron Bay Metropolitan Park, now in progress, aims to restore the connection between the urban fabric and the seafront, and is supposed to provide generous public space, including cultural, educational, sporting and recreational facilities; the project is implemented by the Attica Region with the financial support and guidelines from the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (https://attica-euregions.gr/en/; Spanogianni & Theodora, 2020; Chorianopoulos & Pagonis, 2020, p. 186).

Such projects, although contributing to global competitiveness, raise issues about the appropriation of public space, depending on their ownership status and management, on the quality of the urban environment they create, and on the social groups they are addressing or excluding (Spanogianni & Theodora, 2020, p. 223).

Besides the luxury residences in Ellinikon, already purchased by affluent buyers, Greeks and foreigners, demand for homes on Athens's southern coast is constantly rising, and prices too are constantly increasing. This price increase has been driven to a large extent by foreign buyers seeking first and second homes that combine sea views with the benefits of living in the capital, but also by institutional buyers. The Athens Riviera is probably developing in a restricted zone of affluence and luxury lifestyle, following a homogenizing global model. It is doubtful whether this development will serve the city and its inhabitants or only international investors and a global elite at the least possible cost.

Many foreign buyers outside the EU benefited from the Golden Visa program, adopted by the Greek government in 2013 to attract international capital. The program functioned as a catalyst in the real estate market; in the beginning it was one of the cheapest in Europe, with a threshold of 250,000 euros, now rising to 800,000 euros for high-demand areas of the Attica region and other prestigious regions of the country. After a persistent downward trend from 2009 to 2017, residential real estate prices in Greece have returned to an upward trajectory since 2018 (Stratopoulou, 2025, p. 92); according to Bank of Greece figures, until 2025, prices in Attica have posted a total rise of 104.5% (Roussanoglou, 2026a). The increased investment thresholds, combined with the economic downturn in several key international markets, have led to a 22% decrease in foreign investment in the Greek real estate market (25% in the applications through the Golden Visa program) in 2025, according to data from the Bank of Greece; this decrease was anticipated, while an even greater decline in demand is expected for 2026 (Roussanoglou, 2026b). Investors are turning to other (non-residential) real estate sectors, but the "distortion" in the housing market does not seem to be correcting itself.

Local corporate capital has also been very active. The involvement of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation in the Faliron regeneration project mentioned above is an example of what in the bibliography is branded as "philanthrocapitalism", a special form of private-public partnership. The continuum of crises has provided ample opportunities for corporate actors and foundations to gain an increasingly decisive role in aspects of social and political life and governance in Athens, as in other crisis-afflicted cities, through both landmark and smaller-scale urban projects and other initiatives (Koutrolikou et al., 2025). Locally affiliated bodies such as the Onassis Foundation, the above-mentioned Stavros Niarchos Foundation, NEON, Latsis, and Laskarides Foundation extended and/or intensified their activities, but also global foundations incorporated Athens into their programs, for example the Rockefeller Foundation or Bloomberg Associates (Chorianopoulos & Tselepi, 2020; Koutrolikou et al., 2025). For the local bodies, prevalent was the development of flagship cultural centers, as in the case of Onassis Stegi in 2010 and Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre (SNFCC) in 2016. The Onassis Foundation also launched the project "Rethink Athens", which aimed to revitalize centrality through the pedestrianization of the central Athens boulevard, Panepistimiou, but was suspended because the EU denied financial support (Chorianopoulos & Pagonis, 2020, pp. 177-8; Leontidou, 2014).

In general, making Athens an attractive tourist destination for short- and long-term stays has been a core aim for many projects supported by private-public partnerships (the Municipality welcomed this kind of cooperation). For example, Athens Partnership was established in 2015, following the advice of Bloomberg Associates, to develop the Athens Resilience Strategy for 2030 in the context of the 100 Resilient Cities program initiated by the Rockefeller Foundation (Koutrolikou et al., 2025).

In the late 2010s, Athens actually turned into a year-round destination for tourists, instead of a quick break on their way to the islands, and, during the pandemic, into a preferable residence for digital nomads. The touristification of central Athenian districts has boosted the real estate sector and provided ample space for developing the short-term rental sector, mostly through online platforms, such as Airbnb. Initially, as a spontaneous and informal strategy, it operated as a survival strategy for many households and professionals of the broader construction sector, all suffering from the economic recession, and reactivated the local economy; gradually, large investors engaged in this process and shifted the short-term rental market to a large-scale, strategic management of real estate property (Balampanidis et al., 2019). Foreign investors and real estate funds bought the devalued housing stock of the city, even lower floor apartments or whole buildings (Maloutas et al., 2020, pp. 10-11).

The explosive growth of the short-term rental sector resulted in the commodification and financialization of housing, increased rents and prices (even in peripheral areas of the city), and caused gentrification and displacement of lower-income groups from the touristified areas of the city (Pettas et al., 2024; Maloutas et al., 2020). House prices in Greece have grown faster than disposable income since 2018, and the gap between them is constantly increasing (Stratopoulou, 2025, p. 95). Access to affordable housing is getting more and more difficult for tenants and potential buyers with limited budgets, especially for the younger generations. Moreover, the Airbnb practice introduces a new type of consumption of urban space as a whole, not only the historical center with its landmarks, museums, archaeological sites, restaurants, bars, etc., but any neighborhood of the city and the everyday life of its inhabitants; for example, the new application "Airbnb Experiences" enables the consumption of authentic everyday experiences, including thematic activities of all kinds (Balampanidis, 2025). Recently, the government imposed a ban on new registrations in central Athens and on the use of real estate purchased through the Golden Visa for short-term rental. Nevertheless, this practice, with all its positive and negative effects, is being moved to other neighborhoods, not far from the overburdened central districts, or to other types of real estate (for example, ground-floor shops and stores).

The unfolding of touristification is manifest in Athens' Historical Center and the surrounding – progressively even in more distant – neighborhoods. Old hotels are restored, office and commercial buildings (some of them abandoned for years) are being transformed into hotels or luxury residences, devitalized spaces return to urban life, and commercial uses connected to tourism (restaurants, cafés, bars, mini-markets) proliferate, often resulting in the displacement of professionals and uses, which contributed to the attractiveness of the city center. The unique character of traditional neighborhoods is being altered in favor of a homogenized lifestyle. The increasing number of foreigners (immigrants, tourists, proprietors, entrepreneurs, digital nomads, etc.) alienates a substantial part of the native inhabitants and gives the impression of an ongoing denationalization of urban space.

At present, touristification is the main vehicle for gentrification. Before the crisis, gentrification was promoted by private initiative and not by the state or by corporate capital, banks and investors, as presented in the Anglophone literature; but, though driven by free-market housing policies, accompanied by new entertainment and nightlife uses, alternative art, and cultural projects, it was definitely encouraged by state policies (Alexandri, 2018; Alexandri, 2013). During and in the aftermath of the crisis, the neoliberal agenda prevailed, emphasizing the need for economic growth and international positioning; tourism seems to be the only viable economic model proposed for the city, and state-driven gentrification aims at the return of resident groups of middle and higher income (Koutrolikou & Siatitsa, 2012). However, the monoculture of tourism endangers other development prospects and the overall sustainability of the urban environment and culture.

Global competitiveness and rankings

We have attempted to identify some data on Athens' global impact in research papers or Global City Indexes. In a research paper ranking European cities (Taylor et al., 2010), among 74 cities, Athens ranks 17th for general global network competitiveness, 15th for financial services, 16th for accountancy, 5th for advertising, 49th for legal services, and 30th for management consultancy. The selected data refer to Athens' status before the sequence of crises, showing a remarkable fluctuation of ranks in different domains of financial activity.

In the World Cities Map 2024 of the Globalization and World Cities Network (GaWC), which evaluates the importance of cities as nodes in the world city economy, Athens is classified as Beta+. Compared to past reports, the 2024 evaluation shows that Athens maintains the same position, except for 2020 (Beta), 2008 (Alpha-), 2004 (Beta), and 2000 (Beta); the upgrading in the aftermath of the Olympics is probably the result of the city's decisive "opening" to the world, just before the crisis. In the Globalization Index 2023 by the Swiss Institute of Technology in

Zurich, measuring overall globalization in 186 countries, Greece ranks 14th, a relatively good rank. On the other hand, Athens is absent from the Global Financial Centres Index 2025 (GFCI 38), the Global Power City Index 2025 (GPCI), and the 2025 Global Cities Index (GCI).

From this brief review, we acknowledge that Athens is not competitive in all sectors, but may achieve higher scores in the future. Rankings draw attention to deficiencies and can guide improvements, provided that they do not become goals per se. Evidently, the indicators and criteria on which most rankings are based are usually drawn from dominant paradigms, and reflect the profile of the institution conducting the research; therefore, rankings and indexes possess only relative value. Furthermore, in most cases, they focus on the city's economic performance, and tend to neglect human-centric factors, such as livability, community sustainability (Bove & Ghiraldelli, 2025), and other vital components of urban cultures.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined the interplay between global and local dynamics in 21st-century Athens. Athens attempted to upgrade itself in the global hierarchy of metropolises through the organization of the 2004 Olympic Games. International strategies, adjusted to the local conditions, were implemented by the Greek State, but the city gained only temporary visibility in the global public sphere. On the other hand, in the 2010s, through successive crises of global origin, which had a severe impact on urban space and society, Athens found itself repeatedly in the spotlight of global media. This period was marked by the intervention of international agents, both institutional and corporate, imposing their policies on the indebted state and administration. A combination of neoliberalism and austerity induced transformations of the urban environment, where private economic interests took precedence over public and community interests. The national authorities regained part of their regulatory power in the post-crisis era, but neoliberal strategies still prevail. The current image of Athens is more attractive to investors and visitors, though marked by sharp contrasts and inequalities. Athens is more connected to global networks of all sorts and hosts agents, projects, and activities of regional or even global impact. A multi-fractured urban space with global references is emerging, in which many of its citizens do not feel at home.

Apart from enhancing its global visibility and competitiveness, Athens also faces geopolitical challenges. Shifting geopolitical balances originating from deglobalization processes, major antagonisms, and regional conflicts have once more brought to the forefront Greece's strategic positioning in Southeastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean. Greece has reemerged as a key node in several energy networks, such as IMEC (aiming to connect India, the Middle East, and Europe) or the so-called Vertical Corridor (aiming to transmit American LNG to Eastern Europe), with

Athens having a strategic role in these plans (ELIAMEP, 2025; Newsroom, 2026a; Argiri & Liangou, 2026). The first project seems to be on hold due to the wars in the Middle East, but the second is proceeding. Additionally, there are processes underway to develop an alternative port as a counterweight to "Chinese" Piraeus, "the Head of the Dragon", considered a critical component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and a gateway for Chinese products to Europe (Apostolopoulou, 2024). Elefsina, west of Athens and Piraeus, seems eligible for this purpose, and an American corporation has already invested in ONEX Elefsis Shipyards & Industries in previous years (Newsroom, 2026b; Nedos, 2025). Athens seeks to find a balance between the conflicting interests of two major world powers, the USA and China, and may face more acute dilemmas in the future.

The scope of this paper was to give an overview of the city's transformations in the first quarter of the 21st century, focusing on the interplay of global and local dynamics from an interdisciplinary perspective. We acknowledge the limitations of the analysis; some issues may have been overlooked or not adequately documented. The original contribution of this study was to shed light on a capital city that, though not fully adapting to the dominant global/world city model, interacts within global networks, adopts global strategies, and negotiates global readjustments and challenges.

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THE QUESTIONS OF NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY IN JAPAN AND AUSTRALIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENERGY POLICIES, MILITARY CAPABILITIES AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS NUCLEAR POWER

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Doi: 10.15170/PSK.2026.SI.01.07
Received: December 15, 2025
Accepted: April 24, 2026
Published: May 8, 2026

Citation:
Csekity Szemesi, Bence and Györgyi, Dávid (2026). The Questions of Nuclear Technology in Japan and Australia: A Comparative Analysis of Energy Policies, Military Capabilities and Political Attitudes towards Nuclear Power. *Polarities,* 7(SI), 120–138.

Acknowledgements:
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Abstract

Australia and Japan share historically unique ties to nuclear technology. From the first British atomic bomb tests conducted on Australian soil to the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), large parts of Australian civil society have shown a hardline stance against nuclear weaponry. Echoing this, Japan, as the only country that was bombed twice directly with atomic weapons, shares a complex system of societal pushback, along with a highly politicised nuclear policy. The Japanese attitude regarding nuclear energy is economically pragmatic, though overshadowed by the 2011 Fukushima accident, while in Australia, plans to construct nuclear power plants remain only ideas. This paper aims to examine how Japan and Australia share their attitudes on the issues of pursuing nuclear energy solutions and military technologies while balancing national and economic interests, green policies, non-proliferation commitments and civil society pushback.

Keywords: *Australia, Japan, Nuclear technology, Policy, Geopolitics*

Introduction

Japan and Australia have starkly distinct historical and societal backgrounds, however both states share common experiences with nuclear energy and nuclear weapons. Japan, as the sole country to have suffered from nuclear bombing during wartime, has developed a so-called *Nuclear Allergy*: a stark commitment to nuclear disarmament. Australia, whose soil was utilized after the Second World War as a site for nuclear testing, has similarly developed a strong anti-nuclear stance, supported by its strong civil society growing sensitive to environmental and human consequences.

Australia and Japan are two of the closest and most prominent allies of the United States within the Indo-Pacific region, navigating the challenges of the increasingly assertive foreign policy of the People's Republic of China, and the Chinese-US competition emerging from this (Vörös & Tarrósy, 2024). The rising pressure is forcing Australia and Japan to reassess how they balance in the international arena, while keeping their moral commitments, security needs, and technological capabilities in check. While Japan constitutes the world's fourth largest economy, at the forefront of global technology development, coupled with a highly developed manufacturing industry, Australia's global economic importance is highlighted by its abundant natural resources and its strategic trade links with the leading economies of Asia, securing its strategic position within global supply chains.

In this paper, we will be comparing these countries due to their unique and complex stances regarding nuclear power use for both civilian and military uses. We will examine how the shifting world order influences the political and societal perceptions towards nuclear technologies within Japan and Australia. Both Japan and Australia are facing the effects of the global power shifts especially prevalent in the Indo-Pacific region. Amidst growing uncertainties regarding global energy supply chains, the strategic and economic feasibility of utilising nuclear power plants may be seen as a solution to fossil fuel dependency by politicians in both countries. Furthermore, growing security concerns due to an increasingly assertive Chinese foreign policy coupled with a reinvigoration of US interest in the Indo-Pacific, the military use of nuclear technologies has become a crucial political issue in both Japan and Australia. At the same time, however, the societies of Japan and Australia show a longstanding disdain for nuclear power use, making any nuclear technology development a divisive issue in both countries.

Starting out from the comparison of these perspectives, the research questions we pose in this paper are the following:

Q1. Can the uncertainty of the energy security environment of the Indo-Pacific incentivise the re-evaluation of civilian nuclear energy use within these countries?
Q2. How are the political attitudes to military nuclear technologies developing?
Q3. Can international security concerns shift societal attitudes towards nuclear technology?

To answer these questions, we will examine nuclear power use from three perspectives, comparing Australian and Japanese examples regarding each one. Firstly, we will examine the history and development of civilian nuclear energy use, considering the context of the Cold War and international tensions, Japan's development of nuclear power plants and British nuclear tests on Australian soil. Secondly, we will examine the re-evaluation of utilising nuclear technologies for military capabilities in Australia and Japan, including proposals of acquiring nuclear weapons for Japan, and the planned acquiring of nuclear submarine propulsion technology by Australia under the AUKUS deal. Thirdly, we will introduce how the 2011 Fukushima disaster continues to form public opinion regarding civilian nuclear energy use and what are some of the major groups forming public opinion against nuclear weapons, examining their global relevance. During these comparisons, we will examine and utilise relevant information from government sources, international organisations, qualified articles and relevant economic and societal reports while focusing on civilian issues as well, to provide a broad overview of all three research perspectives. Lastly, we will conclude by showcasing our findings regarding each of our research questions, comparing the results between Japan and Australia.

The Questions of Civilian Nuclear Energy Use

The historical background of nuclear power in Japan and Australia

When the Empire of Japan surrendered to the allied forces in 1945 after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan and the whole Indo-Pacific region was left devastated after years of warfare. After surrendering unconditionally, Japan came under a United States-led Allied occupation, lasting until the signing and ratification of the San Francisco Treaty in 1951, after which Japan regained its independence in 1952. The first and most prominent Japanese prime minister of the postwar era, Yoshida Shigeru, developed what would become known as the Yoshida Doctrine, in which he began paving the way for a new and democratic Japanese state, postwar economic reconstruction and eventually kickstarting the first phases of the so-called Japanese miracle. For postwar Japan, a resource-poor, import-dependent economy striving for rapid industrial growth, US President Eisenhower's endorsement of nuclear reactor construction became an opportunity that matched national priorities. At the same time however, the idea of constructing nuclear facilities faced an overwhelmingly negative opinion in Japanese society. In 1955 Japan adopted the Atomic Energy Basic Law, defining how the government may use nuclear energy, banning and denouncing the idea of acquiring nuclear weapons and only allowing the utilization of nuclear energy for peaceful and civilian purposes. Shortly after, the Japanese government began construction of its first two civilian nuclear reactors in the Tokai-Mura area. Within 5–6 years the first two Japanese nuclear reactors began their commercial operations. Nuclear power went on to play an outstanding role in the successful economic growth of postwar Japan, and the government decided to construct more reactors, even though this found widespread opposition in civil society (Aldrich, 2012).

After the end of the Cold War, nuclear reactor siting and constructions were slowed down drastically due to growing civil pressure, opposing such facilities due to health and environmental risk concerns, the lack of long-term storage facilities for nuclear waste and of potential proliferation concerns. The nuclear accident on the 11th of March 2011 at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear reactor effectively swept away any remaining pro-nuclear energy and weapon voices in Japanese politics, heavily affecting other developed countries as well. The questions of energy dependency and self-reliance, however, have recently regained momentum after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and with the changing geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific for Japan (Aldrich, 2012).

Australia became the testing site of the first British nuclear weapons during the first years of the Cold War. The United Kingdom restarted its independent research efforts into nuclear weapons shortly after the end of the Second World War. For testing these new weapons, remote locations in Australian territory were chosen, at which the British conducted several live nuclear weapon tests between 1952 and 1963. After the UK ratified the 1963 Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, testing stopped in Australia, amidst growing civil opposition to nuclear weapons development. Serious political will towards developing nuclear weapons for Australia has remained outside the scope of mainstream politics of the country ever since. At the same time, investigations into the feasibility of constructing civilian nuclear reactors became part of political discourse, at the time of the government of John Gorton during the 1960s. After Gorton's replacement as prime minister in 1971, however, efforts to develop a civilian nuclear program lost popularity and became sidelined from mainstream politics until the 2000s (Tynan, 2016).

Nuclear Energy and its Role within the Japanese Economy

The Atomic Energy Basic Law of 1955 was groundbreaking – even in international terms – since it not only laid out the direction of future government policies in connection with nuclear energy but also stated that the use of it must always be for peaceful purposes, within democratic governance and transparency, a principle that has proven to be difficult to uphold. Most importantly, the law enshrined Japan's commitment to pacifism even within its own nuclear policy. Also in 1955, the Japan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC) was created along with the Science and Technology Agency, institutions that were designed to guide the research and development of nuclear energy. The country's first research reactor, the JRR-1 was built in Tokai-Mura, and from 1957 it marked the beginning of operational nuclear capability for Japan. Japanese firms such as Toshiba, Hitachi, and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries quickly entered the field, initially relying on American technology but gradually adapting and innovating upon it (Aldrich, 2012).

The 1960s and 1970s marked the crystallization of nuclear power as a cornerstone of Japan's economic strategy. Japan's postwar economic miracle, characterized by annual GDP growth rates often exceeding ten percent, created massive demand for electricity. During this period, nuclear power plant construction accelerated at an unprecedented rate. Major facilities such as Fukushima Daiichi, which connected its first reactor to the grid in 1971, followed by the Ohi and Takahama plants in 1974 and in 1975, Hamaoka in 1976, and Fukushima Daiichi in 1982. These reactors, among others throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, became essential components of Japan's evolving energy infrastructure. The Kashiwazaki–Kariwa complex in Niigata Prefecture, whose reactors entered operation between 1985 and 1997, eventually became the world's largest nuclear electricity generating site. Due to the aftermath of the Fukushima Daiichi accident in 2011 however, it was shut down in 2012 (Aldrich, 2012). The reactor is planned to return into commercial operation by the 18th of March 2026, after a 14-year hiatus (Inoue, Tomatsu, Ogawa, & Morishita, 2026).

Japan's long-term nuclear strategy also emphasized the goal of achieving fuel-cycle independence. In pursuit of this objective, Japan developed uranium enrichment capabilities, reprocessing technologies, and fast-breeder reactor projects. The burst of the asset bubble in 1991 led to a period of economic stagnation, yet the electric utilities organised as powerful regional monopolies continued to advocate for nuclear expansion. In 2002, Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) admitted to decades of falsifying safety reports, triggering a major scandal that forced several reactors to shut down temporarily. Similar incidents involving Kansai Electric and Chubu Electric revealed systemic issues within what critics labelled Japan's Nuclear Village: a tightly interconnected network of utilities, bureaucrats, politicians, and researchers who collectively shaped nuclear policy with minimal transparency. Even in periods of rapid economic growth, civil society remained fearful of radiation leaks and stayed worried about possible environmental harm, and society at large was distrustful of the large complex technological systems (Satoko & Higashi, 2025).

The trajectory of Japan's civilian nuclear sector changed irreversibly on 11 March 2011. The Great East Japan Earthquake, followed by a devastating tsunami, crippled the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. The loss of power and cooling systems led to core meltdowns in Units 1, 2, and 3, hydrogen explosions, and the release of radioactive material. This event was the most serious nuclear accident since Chernobyl in 1986 that was already labelled as "7" (Major accident) on the International Nuclear Event Scale and revealed severe regulatory and institutional failures (Nuclear Energy Agency, 2025). In terms of the economy, the consequences were immediate and profound. Within two years of the accident, all of Japan's 54 nuclear reactors were taken offline and only 14 of them have been reactivated as of 2025. Nuclear power, which had provided around 30% of the country's electricity before the disaster, dropped close to zero by 2014 (Johnson & Russo, 2025). To compensate for lost capacity, Japan sharply increased imports of liquefied natural gas, oil, and coal mainly importing it again from Middle Eastern partners. The additional fuel costs reached several trillion yen annually, placing heavy burdens on households, industry, and the national trade balance. Electricity prices rose significantly, and energy-intensive industries faced declining competitiveness. The government, led first by Prime Minister Kan Naoto and later by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, sought to stabilize the situation through short-term fossil fuel reliance while debating the long-term role of nuclear power (Taghizadeh-Hesary, Naoyuki, & Rasoulinezhad, 2017).

In response to the regulatory failures exposed by Fukushima, Japan established the Nuclear Regulation Authority (NRA) in September 2012 as an independent body separate from the ministries and agencies that had previously overseen the sector. The NRA introduced some of the most stringent safety standards in the world, including comprehensive seismic and tsunami assessments, enhanced cooling requirements, filtered venting systems, and strict counterterrorism standards, however with the cost of defence the cost of operating became a heavier burden as well. The Sendai Nuclear Power Plant in Kagoshima Prefecture became the first to resume operation in 2015, followed by reactors at Takahama, Ikata, Ohi, and Genkai. Yet progress remained slow, hindered by court injunctions, local opposition, and the high cost of mandated retrofits (Aldrich, 2012).

The Nuclear Outlook of Australia's Energy Sector

Australia is home to immense quantities of uranium ore deposits, along with a highly developed mining and resource export economy. In 2001, Australia's known uranium stores accounted for approximately 40% of the world's known deposits (McKay & Miezitis, 2001). The next largest uranium-producing countries are Kazakhstan and Canada, both operating domestic nuclear reactors in their power grids. This places Australia in the unique position, despite being home to the largest known supplies of uranium worldwide, it is also the largest economy not making use of uranium domestically, exporting effectively all of it to nuclear reactor operating countries (World Nuclear Association, 2025). Australia is the world's third largest exporter of uranium after Kazakhstan and Canada, and the world's thirteenth largest economy as of 2025 by GDP. It is also only the third largest not using any nuclear power plants after Germany and Italy, and the only one never to have had a nuclear reactor. Only one functioning nuclear reactor exists in Australia, OPAL, the use of which is restrained to scientific research and nuclear medicine purposes (World Nuclear Association, 2025).

Mining uranium in Australia is thus necessarily a heavily regulated industry, on the one hand due to the country's strict adherence to international nuclear non-proliferation policies, and on the other due to stringent domestic regulations in place regarding mining operations. Australia has only three operational uranium mines as of 2025: Ranger, Olympic Dam and Beverley-Four Mile mines, with plans to resume production in the Honeymoon mine as well (World Nuclear Association, 2024). One of the largest recipients of Australia's uranium exports is Japan – coming in immediately after the US and the EU in terms of trade volume – with trade formerly

reaching 2500 tonnes of uranium per year, though the crash of the nuclear energy market in Japan post 2011 has reduced this. Nevertheless, as of 2015, Japan was cited as having one-third of its uranium imports supplied from Australia, valued at around $250 million (World Nuclear Association; 2021, Zavattiero, 2015)
Australian laws also heavily regulate possibilities for nuclear energy projects, with an outright ban in place regarding the construction of nuclear reactors since 1998, when Australia adopted the Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Act. This means any serious efforts to introduce nuclear reactors to the Australian power grid will have to overcome in-place regulations (as well as civil society resistance and economic burdens) (Owen, 2010; Falk, Green, & Mudd, 2006; Matysek & Fisher, 2008).

With the issue of the global climate crisis becoming a mainstream political issue, in 2006 John Howard's Coalition government suggested nuclear power as a possible alternative to fossil fuels for Australia's electricity production necessities. This has also been brought up during Tony Abbott's term in government, and most recently during the 2024 federal election when Peter Dutton's campaign embraced the idea again. Dutton's campaign outlined a plan to start construction on seven new nuclear reactors in Australia in order to meet the country's goals of carbon emission decreases set out in the Net-Zero plan (Readfearn, 2025). After the 2024 elections concluded, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has achieved a second term to lead the government of Australia, meaning the nuclear power project has again become sidelined for the foreseeable future.

The long-term financial viability of constructing nuclear reactors may be cited as one of the main reasons as to why Australia has never committed to building one. This is further hindered by how difficult it would be to introduce nuclear power into Australia's National Electricity Market logistically due to its inflexibility, the prevalence of inexpensive coal alternatives, a lack of suitable water-side locations, serious legal obstacles and negative public opinion (Owen, 2010). Anthony D. Owen's 2010 study outlining these barriers has been reinforced by the 2016 Royal Commission review and by a CSIRO review in 2024, both concluding that introducing nuclear power plants to Australia's power grid is not economically feasible (Nuclear Fuel Cycle Royal Commission, 2016; Graham, Hayward, & Foster, 2025).

Military Use of Nuclear Technologies

The Changing Narrative of Nuclear Means in Japan

Japan, as the only country ever bombed with nuclear weapons during warfare, developed a firm stance on the abolition of nuclear weapons early in the postwar period. This position later became institutionalized under the Eisaku Sato's administration, which established the Four Pillars of Nuclear Policy, defining the following ideas:

- Adherence to the Three Non-Nuclear Principles: Japan is committed to not possessing, not manufacturing, and not permitting the introduction of nuclear weapons into its territory.
- Global Nuclear Disarmament Efforts: Japan would actively work towards the long-term goal of bringing about a world free of nuclear weapons.
- Reliance on the U.S. Nuclear Deterrent: Japan's national security would be guaranteed by the United States' extended deterrence (the so-called Nuclear Umbrella), based on the US-Japan Security Treaty.
- Promotion of the Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy: Japan would develop nuclear technology strictly for peaceful and solely civilian purposes (Akiyama, 2024).

The Northeast Asian region, due to its complex and seemingly unmendable security environment – with the rise of an assertive Chinese foreign policy – shows that risks and dangers posed by the nuclear capabilities are real and even more concerning than they were during the Cold War. Concerns regarding China's military buildup, including its nuclear capabilities, have been perceived as a threat to Japan since the early 1960s, when China developed its nuclear weapons with aid and technology transfer from the Soviet nuclear weapons program, after which it successfully detonated its first nuclear device in 1964 (Gill, 2025).

Today, emphasizing the effects of the changing world order, concerns have been mounting in the region more than ever before (Vörös & Tarrósy, 2024). This may be attributed to China's further expansion of its military capabilities, the tense geopolitical competition between China and the United States, and also Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, concerning which Russia has repeatedly threatened to use nuclear weapons. Although the war is not taking place near Japan, they hold deep concerns and envision various scenarios with the actual use of nuclear weapons becoming reality (AFP, 2024). The possibility of an extensive and long-term blockade or an armed conflict over the Taiwan Strait has also become a subject of extensive discourse in recent years, with persistent apprehensions regarding the possibility of Japan becoming entangled in the situation (Kamikawa, 2024).

Further complicating the region's security environment, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has been vocal about expanding its missile program since the early 1990s, hand in hand with the internationally suspected development of nuclear weapons. The DPRK recently has overseen serious growth regarding its missile capabilities, especially concerning intercontinental ballistic missiles. The DPRK's missiles are now capable of reaching the main islands of Japan, even being able to fly over them. Furthermore, the DPRK has been making significant progress in miniaturizing its nuclear weapons, to the degree that the regime has developed the technological capability to launch them using ballistic missiles – posing an existential threat to Japan (U.S. Naval Institute, 2025).

Collaborations among Russia, China and the DPRK are causing an even greater security threat. Regarding the relations between Russia and China, Russia has consistently supported the One-China policy, stating that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China and that it could never become independent. The question of Taiwan and the PRC's intentions regarding it have consistently fuelled debates in Japanese politics, with even Abe Shinzo and Sanae Takaichi, former and current prime ministers of Japan declaring, that a security threat to Taiwan is seen as a security threat to Japan. Sanae Takaichi's remarks on a possible involvement of the Japanese Self Defense Forces in case of a blockade or armed conflict – commonly referred to as an emergency (Vörös & Györgyi, 2025) – occurring concerning Taiwan reignited the flame of anti-Japanese sentiments in China, sentiments which the PRC has been consciously making use of (Komurata, Nishimura, & Tajima, 2025). After the APEC summit in 2025, South Korea received the permission of the United States to build and to operate nuclear-powered submarines citing the reasons for South Korea to be able to better protect themselves and to shift the power balance of the region (The Korea Times, 2025). At the same time however, Japan does not have the option to acquire its own nuclear weapons or to operate any nuclear-powered military vessels, however much of a threat it perceives to its national security, due to Article 9 of its constitution, as well as the rules laid out in the Atomic Energy Basic Law. The response of the Japanese government to this was a statement by the Minister of Defense Shinjiro Koizumi concerning that Japan, considering the security situation of the region, may also need to acquire nuclear submarines of its own (Sato & Kiyomiya, 2025). This public declaration happened on the same day when Sanae Takaichi brought up the aforementioned Taiwan issue.

Japan admits that the US nuclear umbrella is an inevitable part of the country's security policy, holding that nuclear deterrence plays an unequivocal role in the region's stability from a Japanese perspective. Both at the first meeting between President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba in February 2025, at the first meeting between Japan's new Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi and Donald Trump in October 2025, the US President firmly upheld continuation of the US-Japan alliance, and the necessary security guarantees ensuring the defence of Japan and its territorial integrity (NHK World Japan, 2025; Johnson J., 2025).

The United States' position in the Indo-Pacific, including its nuclear umbrella and its relevance, were again reaffirmed in November 2025 by the country's new National Security strategy. The strategy defines the securitization of the First Island Chain as a term including the Japanese mainland, meaning Japan has retained its key position within US National Security (The White House, 2025).

From Maralinga to AUKUS

Military use of nuclear technology in Australia also shares a complicated history. At the start of the Cold War, the United Kingdom began to develop its own nuclear weapons program. Political differences with the United States, namely being left out of its nuclear program meant that the United Kingdom couldn't conduct live nuclear testing at one of the already extant US testing ranges, as it would have seemed logical. Instead, it looked to its former colonies for appropriate testing grounds, first surveying remote Canadian territories for 12 live bomb tests. When the Canadian government learnt of the plans, however, it swiftly declined to host the British tests. Thus, the choice fell on Australia, whose government under the Menzies administration was keen to make use of Australia's large uranium deposits, and to keep as close as possible to the UK government in terms of security assurances against the perceived threat of communism spreading throughout the Indo-Pacific (Tynan, 2016).

The first British atomic bombs were tested at the Monte Bello islands in Western Australia, in 1952. From 1953 testing briefly moved to Emu Field, then to Maralinga, South Australia, in 1956. A total of four large-scale testing projects, including the live explosion of the Blue Danube atomic bomb were conducted at Maralinga, as well as around hundreds of smaller scale tests. The effects of the latter have been more devastating long-term, including dire health consequences for the nearby, mostly native Aboriginal Australian populations, unknowingly exposed to radioactive waste from the testing. With the signing of the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) in 1963 by the UK, testing ceased within Australia, though further live explosions were conducted by Britain in its Pacific Island territories. After testing was over at Maralinga, a cleanup effort concerning radioactive waste left by tests at the site went underway in 1967, after which the issue was sidelined for more than a decade. In the mid-1980s, a royal commission investigation into the contamination of the site of Maralinga determined radiation hazards were still present near the sites. Another cleanup effort went underway in 2000, though radioactive contamination has still been detected at the site even as recently as 2021 (Tynan, 2016; Aeria & Leckie, 2021).

The idea for Australia to acquire its own nuclear weapons was considered by officials in the 1960s, during the Gorton administration. Plans to construct Jarvis Bay Nuclear Power Plant were also created at this time, but with public opinion opposing the project and later the fall of the Gorton government, the project was abandoned without advancing out of the planning phase. Under the next governments, Australia then signed and ratified the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in the 1970s. Though some politicians and media personalities have occasionally floated the idea, Australian officials have refrained from ever seriously trying to acquire nuclear weapons since then (Cawte, 1992).

The Australian Defence Force, most notably the Royal Australian Navy has also historically refrained from acquiring nuclear propulsion technology as well, Australia has never had any nuclear-powered naval craft, only traditionally powered ones. During the 2010s, when the Royal Australian Navy began to look for replacements to its aging Collins-class conventionally powered submarines. In 2016 Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull announced that the choice was made to acquire French-built Suffren-class submarines. These submarines were to be built as variants of the original French design, as the original Suffren-class was nuclear powered, meaning the new design was specifically tailored for Australian requirements and redesigned to accommodate for conventional diesel-electric power, creating the new Shortfin Barracuda variant (Panda, 2016). In 2021 however Australia announced its intention to acquire nuclear powered submarines through its newly shared AUKUS deal signed between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The already troubled, late-running contract with the French Naval Group was suddenly deemed cancelled because of this, causing diplomatic upheaval between France and members of AUKUS, with France even recalling its ambassadors to Australia and the US (Corbet, 2021). Against a background of NGOs and civil organizations arguing against this, Australia maintains its obtaining of nuclear propulsion submarine technology adheres to its obligations under non-proliferation treaties (Australian Submarine Agency, 2025). In 2024, Japan has been named as a potential partner to the technological, information sharing areas of the AUKUS treaty, as of 2025 however, no significant steps had been taken to advance this proposition (Capaccio, 2025).

Civil Society and Nuclear Power

The Societal Effects of the 2011 Fukushima Disaster

For many, the Fukushima disaster was not merely a breakdown of technology but a systemic institutional collapse, exposing the long-term effects of weak oversight, entrenched complacency, and enduring ties between regulators, utility companies, and political leadership (nippon.com, 2025). The civilian reaction was immediate and far-reaching. Mothers' groups became the leading figures organised demonstrations, demanding that children must be protected from radiation exposure (Kakuchi, 2011). By September 2011, six months after the disaster, roughly forty thousand people gathered in Tokyo's Meiji Park for the Sayonara Nuclear Power rally, in which many prominent Japanese artists like Kenzaburo Oe participated to highlight the possible dangers of such facilities (Gopalakrishnan, 2011).

Investigations soon validated public anger that claimed the disaster was mainly because of the lack of institutional checkups. The 2012 parliamentary report of the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission concluded that the disaster was manmade. The commission found systemic negligence, insufficient emergency planning, and a regulatory structure that prioritized industry promotion over safety. In response, nearly all of Japan's nuclear reactors were taken offline for comprehensive safety inspections or for permanent decommissioning. At the same time, the government announced institutional reforms aimed at separating the promotion of nuclear energy from its regulation to prevent future failures. Parallel to these developments, civil society movements became more structured and increasingly influential (Suzuki, 2015).

From 2015 onward, a small number of reactors resumed operations after meeting the NRA's new safety standards. The restart of reactors revealed profound societal divisions: on the one hand, restarting nuclear electricity production was accepted as a necessary measure to secure reliable electricity in the face of environmental and economic challenges, but on the other hand, for those affected directly by the disaster it felt like a betrayal of the transformative energy of the Fukushima protests and a stark reminder that influential bureaucratic and industrial interests continued to prioritize nuclear power (The Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission, 2012).

The most notable post-Fukushima controversy arose in August 2023, when Japan began releasing treated wastewater from the Fukushima Daiichi plant into the Pacific Ocean. Although the International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed that the discharge met international safety standards, public opposition within Japan was intense. Notably, the fishermen's unions in Fukushima voiced concerns that the release would further harm the reputation of their products, while activists organized demonstrations in Tokyo, condemning the decision as premature and disrespectful to affected communities (Bateman, Obayashi, & Mallard, 2023). International reactions were similarly strong: China, Hong Kong and South Korea imposed a complete ban on Japanese seafood, and protests occurred in neighboring states as well, demanding that Japan halt polluting the waters (Mao, 2023). For Fukushima residents, many of whom had already experienced displacement, social stigma, and economic hardship, the wastewater release represented a new chapter in a decade-long struggle for recognition and justice. Within the broader population, generational differences became increasingly evident, with the younger generation, influenced by global debates on climate and energy security, faced the challenge of reconciling skepticism toward nuclear institutions with concerns over sustainable energy and climate change (AP, 2023).

Non-Proliferation Efforts – ICAN and Nihon Hidankyo

After having signed and ratified the NPT in the 1970s, Australia became one of the most prominent international advocates of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996, under which any further test explosions of nuclear weapons would be banned internationally. Japan signed the NPT in February 1970 and ratified it in June 1976, formally committing to remain a non-nuclear-weapon state under international safeguards. Japan later strengthened its normative stance by signing CTBT when it opened for signature in 1996, completing its ratification in the late 1990s and reinforcing the global norm against nuclear testing. The treaty, however, could not enter into force despite an overwhelming majority of countries

ISSN 2732-1851

voting in favor of it, as key nuclear powers, such as the US, Russia and China have not ratified it (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2025; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2025).

In a large part due to the frustration caused by the failure of the CTBT entering into effect, members of the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize laureate organization, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War decided to launch a new campaign aimed at the prohibition of nuclear weapons in general. As a result, the International Campaign for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) was founded in Melbourne, Australia in 2007. During the first ten years of its existence, the organization became the most significant international civil effort to ban nuclear weapons, directing its work towards what would become known as the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), accepted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2017. For these efforts, mobilizing 95 signatory countries to the treaty – 74 of which have ratified it as of 2025 – ICAN was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 (ICAN, 2025; Nobel Prize Outreach, 2025).

Despite this strong pro-disarmament identity, Japan has consistently declined to join the TPNW. Tokyo justified its decision by arguing that the treaty's absolute prohibition is ineffective without the participation of nuclear-armed states and incompatible with Japan's security dependence on US extended deterrence, especially given its strategic environment. Japan has repeatedly emphasized that it remains fully aware of the risks posed by nuclear weapons, particularly because Northeast Asia constitutes one of the most complex and volatile nuclear regions in the world (Mukai, 2025). Similarly, Australia, sharing the idea of close cooperation with the US under its Nuclear Umbrella, refused to join the TPNW (ICAN, 2025).

The unprecedented mobilization following the Fukushima disaster produced and brought into the spotlight many civil organizations such as Gensuikyo, Gensuikin and most famously Nihon Hidankyo. These organizations stayed prominent in Japanese society well past the aftermath of Fukushima, advocating for abolishment of nuclear energy, and nuclear disarmament (Aldrich, 2012). Nihon Hidankyo, founded in 1956 in Nagasaki, became the most prominent of many grassroots organizations for the survivors of the 1945 nuclear bombings in Japan. After the effects of the Fukushima disaster became clear, Nihon Hidankyo rose to prominence in Japan as an organization with the goal of never letting anyone suffer the fate of their original founders ever again. For its efforts to achieve a world free from nuclear weapons it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2024 (Nobel Prize Outreach, 2025).

Conclusion

The conclusion seeks to address the research questions introduced at the outset. The first of these (Q1) asked whether uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific energy security environment can incentivize countries in the region to re-evaluate their use of civilian nuclear energy.

In Australia, political debate regarding the introduction of nuclear power to the civilian energy grid of the country became one of the main campaign promises of the Australian Liberal Party running up to the 2025 elections. After the Liberal Party's decisive defeat at the elections, the idea of constructing civilian nuclear reactors has been sidelined. At first sight, this could contrast with the abundance of uranium deposits in Australia, providing the country with its own potential fuel deposits as an invaluable strategic asset for its energy security. Further examined however, the main reasons as to why Australia hasn't constructed any reactors are twofold: on the one hand, Australian society has been historically opposed to the use of nuclear technology ever since the atomic energy boom of the 1960s concluded without any reactors being built – and the negative health effects of British nuclear testing became widely known – and on the other hand Australia has an abundance of naturally available fossil fuels supplying a historically consistent low-cost energy source. This meant that nuclear energy would remain politically sidelined throughout Australian history, until environmental concerns related to traditional fossil fuel power plants became a mainstream political issue in by the 21st century, creating the modern political idea of nuclear energy as zero carbon emission alternative to fossil fuels. Due to its consistently low popularity among voters in Australia and its extremely high entry costs, we may conclude that complete paradigm shift is needed for Australian society to adopt the idea of investing in civilian nuclear power plants.

In contrast to Australia, Japan has never fully backed away from the future use of nuclear energy; possible supply-chain disruptions, such as the Israel-US intervention in Iran, can be seen as an example of why. The election of Sanae Takaichi as the first female prime minister of Japan, changed the LDP's stance on nuclear energy facilities and their re-introduction into the civilian sphere. After the Komeito, the LDP's coalition partner until 2025, had been the main force that halted the nuclear buildup after Fukushima; however, after the election win of Sanae Takaichi and with the Komeito leaving the coalition, the political power and coalition partner was found to re-open other power plants in accordance with the "Japan is Back" agenda, a promise of Takaichi's to make Japan stand up for itself. Nuclear energy thus for a civilian use can be considered a tool to reduce dependence on other sources such as on the Middle Eastern countries in terms of gaining a "strategic autonomy" over such fields, and the Takaichi Cabinet's decision to re-introduce the world's biggest power plant in Niigata is an example of that.

The second research question (Q2) examined how political attitudes toward military nuclear technologies are evolving. The political attitude of Australia towards the military use of nuclear energy has seen a decisive shift from decisively refusing to acquire nuclear powered naval technology before 2021, to – with the signing of the AUKUS Treaty in 2021 – officially committing to jointly developing and operating a completely new class of nuclear propulsion fitted submarines. As the AUKUS deal continues to be endorsed by successive Australian, British and US governments, Australia stands to gain access to nuclear submarine propulsion technology, contrasting with its longstanding denial to acquire such technologies before the 2020s. This paradigm shift may be considered a part of the larger context of Australia's geostrategic environment being reevaluated as the Indo-Pacific region, reacting to the increasing foreign policy activity by China, and the perceived need by the government of Australia to reaffirm its deep commitment to alliance with the United States.

This parallels Japanese defense policy and possible constitutional re-evaluations, which are also developing dynamically in the light of ever-increasing Chinese foreign policy activity throughout the Indo-Pacific. However, the military usage of such capabilities is not only a Taboo in Japan but cannot be done without rewriting or rethinking of the Japanese Constitution's 9th Article that prevents war as a tool and prohibits the state to keep an army and such potential attacking capabilities. Nevertheless, discussions are underway of re-defining the constitution in a way it would fit the modern, and changing world's needs, and on nuclear capabilities such as nuclear-powered submarines or having the capacity of constructing nuclear warheads and bombs if needed. In February the 8th 2025 Sanae Takaichi won the snap elections securing record mandates and gaining the super majority in the lower house of the Japanese diet, with the election win the Takaichi Cabinet has the upper hand when it comes to legislations and if the international disruptions of supply chains in terms of goods and energy chains wise the government has the stepping-stone capabilities and the legitimacy to make steps in order to possess nuclear capabilities to an extent, however considering the stiff relations between China and Japan and the United States occupied with its own interventions and foreign policy goals it is highly unlikely that the Japanese government would make such decisions.

Lastly, the third research question (Q3) explored whether international security concerns can shift societal attitudes toward nuclear technology. With the decisive defeat of the Australian Liberal Party in 2025 after running a campaign in favor of constructing nuclear reactors, it may be concluded that the civilian use of nuclear power will likely remain unpopular within the Australian electorate for the coming years. Due to Australia's naturally occurring fossil fuel deposits and its developed extraction industry, it is significantly less dependent on the international energy grid compared to Japan, making the high-cost, long-term investment into nuclear energy inefficient, and ensuring the idea meets significant societal pushback. Environmental concerns further warrant that Australian civil society will remain opposed to civilian nuclear power unless a significant paradigm shift occurs. At the same time, due to the endorsement of the AUKUS treaty by successive Australian governments, societal opposition to the adoption of nuclear submarine propulsion technology has not received any political credit. To conclude, Australian society and in turn the

Australian electorate has retained a decisively negative stance towards nuclear technology use, save for the special case of AUKUS, which calls for further analysis as Australia faces the long-term treaty stipulations.

The Japanese civil society is active and participating when it comes to nuclear policy and decisions that might be interpreted as forced upon the population, however we have to take it into consideration the current international environment and how the Japanese economy can suffer from disruptions in supply chains and disruption within the energetic sector can cause more damage in comparison to imported goods. Nuclear policy was always a difficult question within the Japanese population, and the Fukushima daiichi accident worsened public opinion, which is still against the fast-tracked reopening of nuclear power plants and the economic stagnation, the financial difficulties, the question of foreign nationals and migration bothers society at large more than nuclear power plants and the government is aware of the issues surrounding the question of nuclear energy, however, as part of the incumbent government's promise to achieve less dependence on global markets, society, as the February 8th election described it, supports the change and with that the careful and well-thought steps towards the aim can be tolerated, one example is the planned reoperation of the Kashiwazaki–Kariwa complex.

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A VENEZUELAI MIGRÁCIÓ SPANYOLORSZÁGBAN ÉS CHILÉBEN: ÁLLAMPOLGÁRSÁG ÉS INTEGRÁCIÓ AZ ÁTALAKULÓ GLOBÁLIS ÉSZAKON ÉS DÉLEN

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Doi: 10.15170/PSK.2026.SI.01.08
Beküldve: 2025. december 30.
Elfogadva: 2026. április 16.
Publikálva: 2026. május 13.

Hivatkozás:
Thomázy, G. – Guevara Parra, A. C. (2026): A venezuelai migráció Spanyolországban és Chilében: állampolgárság és integráció az átalakuló globális Északon és Délen. *Pólusok,* 7(SI), 139–158.

Egyéb információk:
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Absztrakt

Venezuela politikai, társadalmi és gazdasági válsága a közelmúlt egyik legnagyobb kivándorlási hullámát indította el. Chile és Spanyolország gazdasági fejlettségük révén régóta célországa a Latin-Amerikából érkezőknek, ám a 2015-ben kezdődő úgynevezett „venezuelai exodus"-szal" jelentős számú venezuelai bevándorló érkezett mindkét országba. A tanulmány célja a venezuelai migráció Chilébe és Spanyolországba érkezésének a vizsgálata, különös tekintettel a két ország migrációs szakpolitikájára, az integráció és az állampolgársághoz kapcsolódó legújabb tendenciák tanulmányozására. Az európai és a dél-amerikai ország összehasonlítása lehetőséget nyújt az átalakuló globális Észak és Dél vizsgálatára. A hasonló kulturális hagyományok, a közös nyelv ellenére a két ország eltérő megoldást nyújt a migránsok integrációjára. A szakirodalom, az adatbázisok, valamint a szakpolitikák elemzése alapján a tanulmány rámutat a jó gyakorlatokra, a főbb kihívásokra és a legfontosabb változásokra.

Kulcsszavak: *Chile, Spanyolország, venezuelai migráció, integráció, állampolgárság*

Bevezetés

Venezuela gazdasági, politikai és társadalmi válsága Latin-Amerika legnagyobb kivándorlási hullámát indította el a 21 században. A venezuelaiak az Amerikai Egyesült Államok szigorodó bevándorlási politikája miatt elsősorban a régióban kerestek új hazát. A közös nyelv, az országok viszonylagos közelsége a legfőbb vonzerő, így 2025-ben Latin-Amerikában már 6,87 millió venezuelai tartózkodott, míg az összes kivándorlók száma megközelítette a 8 milliót (R4V, 2025, 2024).

Spanyolország alapvetően kibocsátó ország volt, majd 1990-es évektől egyre több bevándorlót fogadott. A latin-amerikaiak egyik fő célországává vált, majd a 2008-as gazdasági válság során csökkent az érdeklődés a mediterrán ország iránt, viszont egy rövidebb megtorpanás után ismét emelkedett a bevándorlók száma (Pólyi, 2016; Sánchez Alonso, 2011). Chile hasonló utat járt be, mint Spanyolország szintén kibocsátó országból vált befogadó országgá. Az andoki országba hagyományosan az európai országokból érkeztek bevándorlók, majd kibocsátó országgá vált a katonai diktatúra alatt. A demokráciába való visszatérést követően, a politikai-gazdasági változások hatására a migráció összetétele jelentősen megváltozott, Chile az intraregionális migráció egyik célországává vált, elsősorban a kedvező fizetések és az egyszerű letelepedési engedélyek miatt (Bravo Acevedo, 2018: 13-15; Thomázy, 2020). Chile lakossága 2025-ben elérte a 20,2 milliót főt, Spanyolország pedig megközelítette az 50 milliót, amelyből 8% illetve 18% a migráns. Mindkét országban domináns a latin-amerikaiak aránya, viszont Spanyolország a nyugat-mediterrán migrációs útvonal része, így jelentős az Afrikából érkező migráció is, különösen a marokkóiak. A migrációs folyamatok 2015-től intenzívebbé váltak, Chilébe megközelítőleg 1,5 millió körüli bevándorló érkezett, míg Spanyolországba közel 3 millió (INE Chile, 2025; SERMIG, 2025; González Enríquez & Martínez, 2025; INE-ECP, 2025; Farkas, 2019; Vecsey, 2019).

A migráció ellenére mindkét ország társadalma elöregedő, a születéskor várható átlagos élettartam Chilében 81,8, míg Spanyolországban 83,7 év volt, ugyanakkor a születések száma egyre csökken. A chilei teljes termékenységi arányszám (1,17) a 2023-as adatok alapján kedvezőtlenebb volt, mint a spanyolországi (1,21) (HDI, 2025: 288; Our World in Data, 2023; INE Chile, 2025). Chile magánnyugdíj rendszere (AFP) kevésbé kitett a migrációnak, a Mercer nyugdíj index alapján 76,6-os értéket (B+) kapott. Spanyolországot még mindig elsősorban felosztó-kirovó (állami) nyugdíjrendszer határozza meg, amelynek fenntartásához elengedhetetlen, az aktív munkaképeskorú lakosság foglalkoztatása, így a bevándorlók fogadása. A mediterrán ország a Mercer index alapján C kategóriába került, 63,8-as értékkel, a nyugdíjrendszer fenntarthatósága alapján viszont rendkívül alacsony pontszámot (34,2) ért el (Mercer, 2025). A munkanélküliségi rátát mindkét országban (Chile: 9%, Spanyolország:12%) az úgynevezett szezonális és strukturális munkanélküliség jelentősen befolyásolja (WPR, 2025b). A szegénység aránya az andoki országban, rendkívül kedvező, az elérhető adatok alapján 6,5 %, míg Spanyolországban esetében meghaladja a 20%-ot (WPR, 2025a). A GDP növekedés 2024-ben Chilében 2,6 % volt, míg a spanyol GDP 3,2 % -on zárt ugyanabban az évben (World Bank, 2024).

A tanulmány egy kevésbé kutatott területre az állampolgárságra és az integrációra fókuszál, ezen belül a venezuelai migrációra. A venezuelaiak esetében az útlevél és a személyi azonosító igazolványok megújítása rendkívül nehézkes, olyan bevándorló csoport, amely számára a tartózkodási ország állampolgárságának a megszerzése nem csak előnyös, hanem gyakran elengedhetetlen is. A venezuelai migránsok számára mindkét vizsgált ország célország, a Covid-19-et megelőzően közel azonos arányban tartózkodtak a venezuelai bevándorlók Chilében és Spanyolországban is (Our World in Data, 2024).

A téma szempontjából a következő kutatási kérdések fogalmazhatók meg: Melyek az állampolgárság megszerzésének főbb különbségei és hasonlóságai a két vizsgált országban? A közös kulturális gyökerek, a spanyol nyelvtudás elősegíti-e a venezuelaiak integrációját? Hogyan alakítja a venezuelai migrációra adott chilei és a spanyol szakpolitikai válaszok a globális Észak és Dél átalakulását? A kutatás továbbá két hipotézisre fókuszál: H1: A globális Dél és Észak között közeledés figyelhető meg, Chile a migrációs nyomás hatására biztonságiasít. H2: A közös kulturális gyökerek, azonos nyelv nem elég a sikeres integrációhoz.

A kutatás nem kíván történelmi áttekintést nyújtani az állampolgársághoz való hozzáférés változásairól a vizsgált országokban. A tanulmány kifejezetten az elmúlt időszak aktualitásaira koncentrál, továbbá nem tér ki a tartózkodási és letelepedési engedélyek részletes ismertetésére sem. A tanulmány először az állampolgárság és az integrációval kapcsolatos legfontosabb fogalmakat és kutatásokat tekinti át. A rövid módszertani ismertető után a kutatás a venezuelai migráció Chilébe és Spanyolországba érkezését vizsgálja, elsősorban az állampolgárság és az integráció lehetőségeit veszi górcső alá.

Állampolgárság és az integráció kapcsolata

A történelem során az állampolgárságra vonatkozó törvények két egymással ellentétes elvből alakultak ki az *ius sanguinis* (leszármazás elve), amely az adott ország állampolgárától való származáson, valamint az *ius soli* (területi elv), amely az ország területén való születésen alapul. Napjainkban a kettő együttes alkalmazása gyakori, az országtól függ, hogy melyik dominánsabb, de számos további variáció lehetséges, mint a *double* vagy *tripe ius soli*[1]. Az állampolgársághoz való jog egyre inkább az országban való hosszú távú tartózkodásból az *ius domiciliből* fakad (de Haas et al., 2020: 316-317). Számos új, vitát kiváltó kezdeményezés is megjelenik. Olaszországban az oktatáson keresztül a társadalmi integrációra fókuszáló *ius scholae* (oktatáshoz való jog) amely kifejezetten a második generációnak kedvezne, az országba érkezett vagy ott született külföldi kiskorúaknak tenné lehetővé az állampolgársághoz való hozzáférést egy olyan országban, amely a leszármazás elvéhez ragaszkodik. Ellenpéldaként gyakran az olasz állampolgársággal rendelkező argentinok esete jelenik meg, akik sosem jártak nagyszüleik országában és a nyelvet sem beszélik (Mouaid, 2025). Az *ius domicili*, ugyanakkor egyre több új kutatási irányt jelöl ki, amely a tartózkodási hely szerinti állampolgárság történeti elemzésére, az egyes országok állampolgársági politikájára, továbbá ebből adódóan az emberi jogokra fókuszál (Bauböck, 2006: 79).

Az állampolgárság megszerzésének szabályai összetettek, és az elmúlt évtizedekben jelentős változásokon mentek keresztül. A világ legtöbb országában az állampolgárság általában 5-7 év legális tartózkodással szerezhető meg, amelyhez általában büntetlen előélet, alapfokú nyelvismeret szükséges. Kevésbé gyakori a kulturális integráció speciális nyelvi teszttel és/vagy állampolgársági ismeretekkel való mérése, továbbá jövedelem/megélhetés igazolása, illetve a korábbi állampolgárságról való lemondás. A szigorúbb szabályozás jelentősen korlátozza azt, hogy a bevándorlók a befogadó ország állampolgáraivá váljanak. Az úgynevezett restriktív politikák mellett az elmúlt években számos ország módosított az állampolgárság megszerzésének szabályain, alkalmazkodva a migráció új trendjeihez (Vink et al., 2025; de Haas et al., 2020: 316-318). A módosítások gyakran az enyhítés irányába mozdulnak el, bár a szigorításra is van példa. 2024 júniusa előtt a német állampolgárságot igénylő külföldieknek legalább nyolc évet kellett várniuk, ez lecsökkent öt évre, valamint lehetővé tették az úgynevezett „turbóhonosítás"-t három év tartózkodás után azoknak, akik bizonyíthatóan integrálódtak a német társadalomba.[2] Az új kormány hosszú vitát követően 2025 őszén megszüntette a gyorsított eljárást, bár a 15 hónapig érvényben lévő gyorsított honosítást rendkívül kevesen kérelmezték (Fürstenau, 2025).

Sok bevándorló, bár jogosult lenne mégsem tart igényt az állampolgárságra, annak előnyei ellenére sem. Az adminisztrációs terhek, az információ hiánya vagy a kettős állampolgárság tilalma is eredményezhet ilyen döntést (OECD, 2011: 4). Erre példa a Németországban élő török bevándorlók esete, akik a közelmúltig nem is igényelhették a német állampolgárságot a török állampolgárságról való lemondás nélkül. A 2024-es reform óta, ugyanakkor 110%-kal emelkedett a Németországban élő törökök állampolgársági kérelme (Ünveren, 2025).

Számos tanulmány a migráció gazdasági hatásaira fókuszál, az állampolgárság és az azt befolyásoló integrációra, elsősorban annak pozitívumaira kevés kutatás tér ki, annak ellenére, hogy egyre több adat elérhető a témával kapcsolatban (Schain, 2010). Az OECD 2011-ben kiadott a *„Naturalisation: A Passport for the Better Integration of Immigrants?"* című tanulmánya többek között arra kérdésre kereste a választ, hogy az EU és OECD országok milyen gyakorlatot folytatnak az állampolgárság megszerzésével kapcsolatban, valamint maga az állampolgárság hogyan járul hozzá az integrációs folyamatokhoz és milyen társadalmi-gazdasági következménnyel járnak. A fogadó ország állampolgárságához való hozzáférés megkönnyítése egyrészt elősegítheti a bevándorlók integrációját, másrészt rendkívül költséghatékony megoldás a várható eredményekhez képest (Frattini & Bertino 2023: 53).

Az állampolgársággal rendelkezőkkel kapcsolatban számos pozitívumot tártak fel az ehhez kapcsolódó tanulmányok. Ide sorolható többek között, hogy az állampolgársággal rendelkező bevándorlók jobb munkaerő-piaci eredményeket érnek el, továbbá a társadalmi integrációjuk is eredményesebb, mint azoké, akik nem rendelkeznek a fogadó ország állampolgárságával (OECD, 2008; OECD, 2007). A honosítás, a bevándorlók integrációjának más területeire is kiterjed, mint a nyelvismeret, a lakhatáshoz való hozzáférés, további pozitívuma politikai integrációt is eredményezhet, amely hosszú távon is hatással lehet a népszavazásokon való részvételre, valamint a politikai ismeretek és a politikai hatékonyság növelésére is (Hainmueller et al., 2015; OECD, 2011).

Az állampolgárság megszerzése egyértelműen olyan eszközként értelmezhető, amelynek segítségével az érintettek jobban integrálódnak, kialakul a befogadó országhoz való tartozás érzése, egyfajta bizalom és erkölcsi felelősség is (Finotelli et al., 2025: 2936). A külföldiek honosítása, ugyanakkor kiválthatja az ország állampolgárainak az elutasítását is, hiszen az állampolgárság „leértékelődésének" tekinthetik a folyamatot (OECD, 2011: 4). A téma szempontjából fontos megemlíteni, a jogosulatlanul megszerzett állampolgárságot, illetve az állampolgárság visszavonását. Alapvetően, a nemzetközi jog tiltja a diszkriminatív állampolgársági politikákat úgy, mint politikai vélemény, vallás, származás alapján történő állampolgárság visszavonását. Azonban, bizonyos esetekben az ország biztonságát veszélyeztető állampolgárok esetén, az állampolgárság ideiglenes felfüggesztésére vagy akár végleges visszavonására is sor kerülhet úgy, mint terrorizmus, kémkedés vagy hazaárulás esetén (Hailbronner, 2018: 198, Paskalev, 2018: 47–49; Vink et al., 2025).

Számos példa van az állampolgárságot befektetési program keretében hirdető országokra, amely gyors állampolgársághoz jutást jelent az azt megfizetni képes külföldieknek, ide tartozik néhány karibi ország, mint például Grenada, Dominika, Saint Kitts és Nevis vagy Törökország is (Saraiva, 2025). Az Európai Unióban többek között Málta tette lehetővé az úgynevezett *„golden passport"*-ot, amely az Európa Unió Bíróságának a döntése értelmében 2025-ben szűnt meg, mivel egy ilyen program aláássa az EU-állampolgárság természetét és az unió integritását. A befektetési célú állampolgárságot egyre inkább felváltja az úgynevezett *„golden visa"*, amely kedvező tartózkodási engedélyt nyújt és csak később kérvényezhető az állampolgárság (Bauböck, 2018: 37; Casaburi, 2025; Saraiva, 2025).

Módszertan

A kutatás során két ország került kiválasztásra: Chile és Spanyolország. Egyrészt a hasonló kulturális környezet (történelmi múlt, nyelv, kultúra stb.), másrészt a bevezetőben említett gazdasági és társadalmi mutatóik alapján is számos közös tendencia azonosítható (GDP, születéskor várható átlagos élettartam, munkanélküliség stb.). Chile a globális Dél egy speciális példája, hiszen a gazdasági növekedés és a társadalmi-politikai átalakulása következtében kiemelkedik a régió többi országaitól. Chile és Spanyolország is a venezuelai migránsok célországai, ugyanakkor jelentős számú latin-amerikai migráns érkezik, mind a két országba, viszont a kutatás csak a venezuelaiakra fókuszál. A két vizsgált országban legálisan tartózkodó venezuelai migránsok száma hasonló, így jobban elemezhetők a hasonlóságok és az eltérő tendenciák, továbbá a venezuelaiak esetében gyakori az állampolgárság kérvényezése, hiszen rendkívül nehéz az útlevelek, személyi azonosítók megújítása. A kutatás 2015 és 2024 közötti időszakot vizsgálja, a kezdő időpont a venezuelai exodus, a záró időpont az állampolgársággal kapcsolatos rendelkezésre álló adatok elérhetősége. A kutatás az United Nations, International Migrant Stock adatbázisát, illetve a helyi bevándorlási és statisztikai hivatalok adatait használta fel. Az adatok elemzése során a kutatás kifejezetten az országban való hosszú távú tartózkodás alapján kérvényezhető állampolgárságra fókuszál, nem tekinti át a leszármazási elvet, vagy a területen való születéssel igényelhető egyéb kategóriákat.

A kutatás a két vizsgált ország migrációs folyamatait tekinti át, valamint az úgynevezett MIPEX (Migráns integrációs szakpolitikai index) közelmúltban frissült adatait, amely a migránsok integrációját méri 8 dimenzió alapján (munkaerőpiaci mobilitás, politikai részvétel, családegyesítés, állampolgársághoz, oktatáshoz és egészségügyi ellátáshoz való hozzáférés, letelepedési engedély, diszkrimináció ellenes szakpolitikák). Az állampolgárság megszerzésének feltételeinek vizsgálatához a törvényi szabályozások, a statisztikai adatok, a szakpolitikák, valamint Global Citizenship Observatory elemzései nyújtottak alapot. A kutatás kiegészül venezuelai menekültkérdéssel, amely az UNCHR Refugee Data Finder adatbázis használatával készült.

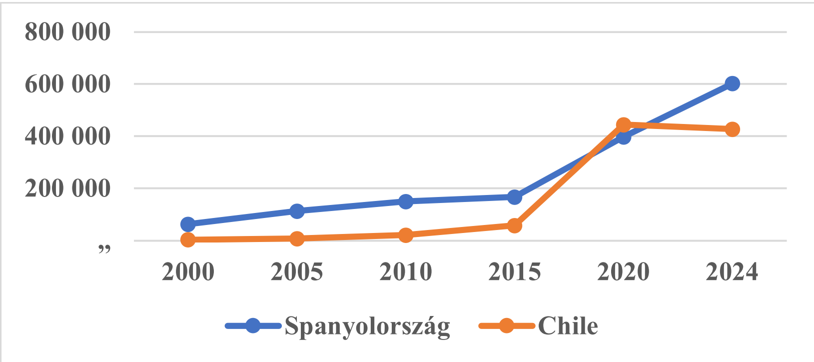
A venezuelai migráció Chilében és Spanyolországban

Mindhárom országot a közös nyelv mellett összeköti a történelmi múlt. A 20. század során Venezuela a Franco diktatúra idején a spanyolok, a Pinochet diktatúra alatt a chilei menekültek egyik fontos befogadó országává vált. A venezuelai migrációhoz hasonlóan a spanyol és a chilei menekültek egy része, nem politikai menekült volt, hanem gazdasági okok miatt hagyta el a hazáját. Venezuela az 1970-80-as években az olajipar fellendülésével vonzó országgá vált és viszonylag stabil demokráciával rendelkezett (Alonzo Herrera, 2022, Banko, 2019; Rojas Mira, 2019). A venezuelaiak 21. századi kivándorlása párhuzamba állítható a korábbi spanyol és chilei migrációs folyamatokkal, a kivándorlók elsősorban politikai és gazdasági okok miatt kerestek új hazát, ám a kivándorlás volumene jóval kisebb volt Chile és Spanyolország esetében.

Chilébe és Spanyolországba, a két vizsgált befogadó országba Hugo Chávez (1999) hatalomra jutásával párhuzamosan vált jelentősebbé a venezuelaiak érkezése. Az államosítások, a szocialista hatalomátvétellel bizonytalanná váló ország elsősorban a felső-közép osztályt, a gazdagabb és/vagy a tanultabb réteget érintette, továbbá a már kettős állampolgársággal rendelkezőket (Dekocker, 2018; Stefoni & Silva, 2018). A venezuelaiak kivándorlása a 1999-től folyamatos, több nagyobb hullámot lehet meghatározni úgy, mint a 2002. évi „Petróleos de Venezuela" olajtársaság szakszervezeteinek a sztrájkja, 2007-ben a korlátlan újraválasztásról szóló referendum elfogadása, 2013-ban Chávez halála és Maduro hatalomra jutása. 2015-ben, a társadalmi és politikai válság a súlyos élelmiszerhiánnyal is társult, a venezuelai migráció tömegessé vált, megkezdődött az úgynevezett „venezuelai exodus". (Acosta et al, 2019; Aliga Sáez, 2021; Herrera & Gómez, 2022). Mindkét országban a 2015-ös év volt a mérföldkő, hirtelen emelkedni kezdett a Venezuelából érkezők száma (lásd. 1 ábra). A korábban a magasan képzett, kedvező munkavállalási vagy tanulási célú migrációt felváltotta a tömegesen, alacsonyabb társadalmi státuszhoz tartozó migráció. A menedékkérelmek száma rendkívüli módon megnőtt és folyamatos nehézséget jelentett a legális státusz megszerzése, a munkaerőpiachoz való hozzáférés vagy akár végzettségek elismertetése (Dekocker, 2018; Thomázy, 2020).

A nemzetközi adatok alapján 2018-2020 közötti időszakban szinte azonos számú megközelítőleg 400-450 ezer venezuelai tartózkodott Chilében és Spanyolországban, (lásd 1. ábra) (Our World in Data, 2024; UN, 2024).

1. ábra: Venezuelai bevándorlók: Chile, Spanyolország (2000-2024)



Forrás: saját szerkesztés az United Nation, International Migrant Stock, 2024 online adatbázisa alapján.

A Covid-19 pandémia határlezárásai ellenére mindkét országba folyamatosan érkeztek a venezuelaiak. Az ENSZ adati alapján 2024-ben Spanyolországban 602 539 venezuelai tartózkodott, míg Chilében 427 821. A chilei bevándorlási hivatal legutóbbi, 2025-ben közzétett adatai alapján 728 586 venezuelai tartózkodott az országban, így a legnagyobb migráns csoporttá vált megelőzve a peruiakat (260 ezer), valamint a kolumbiaiakat (209 ezer) (SERMIG, 2023). Az ENSZ és a chilei hivatal adatbázisai közötti különbséget az irreguláris venezuelai migránsok becsült száma adja, amely meghaladja a 250 ezret az összes venezuelai bevándorló közel 35%-a (SERMIG, 2023).[3]

A spanyol statisztikai hivatal 2025. január 1-én kelt adatai alapján a venezuelai bevándorlók (692 ezer) már a harmadik legnagyobb migráns csoport a marokkói (1,1 millió) és a kolumbiai (978 ezer) után (INE, 2025). Az adatok eltérő időpontban történő aktualizálása miatt figyelhető meg eltérés az 1. ábra és a spanyol statisztikai hivatal adatai között. Az irregulárisan tartózkodó venezuelai bevándorlókról pontos adat nem állnak rendelkezésre, az összes harmadik országból érkező migráns 17%-a tekinthető irregulárisnak, ebből a marokkóiak aránya magasabb, a venezuelaiaké jóval kevesebb lehet, hiszen menekültstátusz, illetve kiegészítő (humanitárius) védelmi státuszt kaphatnak (lásd. következő fejezet, Funcas, 2024; SJM, 2024; España Gonzalez, 2023).

A venezuelai migráció: állampolgárság és integráció a két vizsgált országban

A tartózkodás alapján kérvényezhető állampolgárság mindkét vizsgált országban viszonylag rövid tartózkodás után kérhető. A legáltalánosabb esetben Chilében 5 év tartózkodással és letelepedési engedéllyel, vagy a letelepedési engedély megléte mellett legalább 2 év tartózkodás után kérvényezhető, amennyiben chilei házastárssal legalább 2 éve házas vagy chilei gyermeke van (SERMIG, 2025b). Spanyolországban 10 év tartózkodást ír elő a törvény, viszont kedvező feltételeket nyújt a volt gyarmatokról érkezőknek. Ennek alapján a venezuelai állampolgár számára 2 év tartózkodás után kérvényezhető a spanyol állampolgárság, valamint 1 év után, amennyiben spanyol állampolgárral legalább egy éve házas (Real Decreto 1004/2015). Chile esetében a külföldi állampolgár Chilében született gyermeke chilei állampolgárrá válik az *ius soli* alapján, függetlenül a szülő migrációs státuszától (SERMIG, 2025b). A kulturális hasonlóság alapján megszerezhető „gyorsított" spanyol állampolgárság, az elméleti részben említett *ius scholae* speciális változatának tekinthető, míg Chile a területen való születéssel implicit módon feltételezi a jövőbeli integrációt.

A chilei adatok alapján 2015 és 2024 között: 17 450 bevándorló kapott állampolgárságot tartózkodás alapján, ebből 4 605 venezuelai volt, míg a második, illetve a harmadik helyen a kolumbiai (2 986 fő) és a perui bevándorlók álltak (2 806) (SERMIG, 2024; 2025). Spanyolországban ugyanakkor csak a 2024 évet tekintve 252 476 fő kapott állampolgárságot tartózkodás alapján, ebből 35 403 fő volt venezuelai, így a marokkóiak után (42 910) a második legnépesebb bevándorló csoport, akik spanyol állampolgárságot kaptak (INE, 2024). A rendelkezésre álló adatok alapján 2020 és 2024 között több, mint 85 ezer venezuelai kapott állampolgárságot tartózkodás alapján (INE, 2020-2024). A chilei állampolgársággal rendelkező venezuelaiak száma jóval alulmaradt a spanyolországihoz képest, viszont az adatok alapján 2023-ban 42 ezren és 2024-ben közel 50 ezren kérvényeztek chilei állampolgárságot. Valószínűsíthető, hogy jelentős részük venezuelai, ám a hosszadalmas, legalább 2 éves ügyintézés miatt az eljárások még folyamatban vannak (SERMIG, 2025).

Figyelemre méltó, hogy mindkét ország kedvezményes állampolgárságot nyújt házasság révén. Egyrészt ezzel elősegítik a bevándorlók integrálását, mind kulturális és szociális téren, valamint a munkaerőpiacra való bekerülést is meggyorsítja. A házasság útján nyújtható kedvezményes állampolgárság esetén mindig felmerül az érdekházasság kérdésköre, amelyet a szabályozó ellenőrzéssel próbál kivédeni.

Chile és Spanyolország is többféle típusú tartózkodási engedélyt kínál a bevándorlóknak. Az egyik legfontosabb probléma a venezuelaiak esetében az érvényes személyi azonosító és/vagy útlevél megléte, ahogy a bevezetőben is megjelent, a hivatalos dokumentumok megújítása, vagy igénylése nehéz. Chile a Covid-19 pandémia idején a lejárt útlevelek érvényességét egy évvel meghosszabbította, míg Spanyolország 2019-ben hozott és öt évig érvényben lévő rendelete lehetővé tette, hogy a lejárt venezuelai útlevelek hivatalos dokumentumként szolgáljanak, bár az országba való beutazást nem tette lehetővé, a tartózkodási engedély vagy állampolgársági kérelem benyújtását igen (Administración General del Estado, 2024; Thomázy, 2022).

Az állampolgárság megszerzése, tehát a venezuelaiaknak viszonylag egyszerű mindkét országban. Valójában a fő kérdés, hogy a Chilébe vagy Spanyolországba érkező venezuelaiak hogyan tudnak az országban maradni és legális tartózkodási engedélyhez jutni és/vagy az irreguláris státuszukat rendezni? A bevándorlási politika milyen formában teszi lehetővé a legális tartózkodást, amely az első lépés az az új állampolgárság megszerzéséhez? A két ország közt fontos különbség azonosítható. Míg Chilében jelentős azoknak az aránya, akik jogellenes határátlépéssel érkeztek az országba, dokumentumok nélkül, addig Spanyolországban a venezuelaiak „túltartózkodással" váltak irregulárissá, vagyis a turista vízum lejárta után nem kérvényezték a tartózkodási engedélyt (Dekocker, 2018; SERMIG, 2025; SJM, 2024). A továbbiakban néhány fontosabb kezdeményezés összehasonlítására kerül sor, a fejezet a MIPEX adatbázisa alapján az integráció lehetőségeinek az elemzésével zárul.

Menedékkérelmek a venezuelaiak speciális esete

Spanyolország 2019. március 5-én elfogadta az úgynevezett humanitárius nemzetközi védelem céljából történő tartózkodási engedélyt, amely többek között a menedékjogról és a kiegészítő védelemről szóló 12/2009. sz. törvény alapján lépett hatályba. (España Gonzalez, 2023, Ley 12/2009; Ministerio de Interior, n.d). Az új törvény a növekvő venezuelai migrációra adott válasz, hiszen az ENSZ 1951. évi Egyezménye értelmében a venezuelaiak jelentős része nem tekinthető menekültnek, hiszen nem fegyvereskonfliktus vagy „üldözéstől való megalapozott félelme miatt" hagyta el a hazáját (UNCHR, 2012: 2-6). A humanitárius nemzetközi védelmet a venezuelaiak a menedékkérelem elutasítása esetén automatikusan megkapják, így lehetővé téve a legális tartózkodásukat (Ministerio de Interior, n.d; España Gonzalez, 2023).

ISSN 2732-1851

2. ábra: Venezuelaiak Chilében és Spanyolországban. Menedékkérők, menekültstátusszal rendelkezők és Humanitárius védelemben részesülők

Ország	**Menedékkérők (2015–2024)**	**Menekültstátusszal rendelkezők (2015–2024)**	**Humanitárius védelemben részesülők (menedékes státusz) (2015–2024)**
Chile	10 049	90	0
Spanyolország	293 111	187	182 424

Forrás: saját szerkesztés az UNCHR. 2015-2024. Refugee Data Finder adatbázisa alapján.

A 3. ábra alapján azonosítható, hogy Spanyolországban a menedékkérők száma közel 300 ezer volt, amelyből 2024 végére közel 200 ezer kapott humanitárius védelmet. Chilében alig haladta meg a 10 ezer főt a menedékkérők száma és mindössze 90 fő kapott menekültstátuszt. Spanyolországban 2019 előtt sorra utasították el a menedékérőket, ahogy Chilében is viszont a 2019 törvény elfogadásával a Spanyolország a humanitárius védelemmel hasonló jogokat nyújt a venezuelaiaknak, mintha a „hagyományos" menekültstátusszal rendelkeznének. A humanitárius védelem egy évre szól, viszont meghosszabbítható. Egy év tartózkodás után számos egyéb tartózkodási engedély kérvényezhető, illetve 1 vagy 2 év után az állampolgárság is (Dekocker, 2018; Stefoni & Silva, 2018; Ministerio de Interior, n.d).

Chilének, ahogy a többi latin-amerikai országnak rendelkezésre áll az 1984-ben aláírt Cartagenai Megállapodás, amely a menekültstátuszt szélesebb értelemben fogalmazza meg, így alkalmazható lenne a venezuelai migrációra is (Soltész, 2024; ACNUR. 2024). Az ENSZ adatbázisa alapján a dél-amerikai országok közül Paraguay közel 5 ezer, Brazília több, mint 141 ezer venezuelait fogadott be a Cartagenai Megállapodás alapján a Covid-19 pandémia alatt, többségüket épp a jobboldali Jair Bolsonaro kormányzása idejeén (UNCHR, 2015-2024).

Chile, 2018 áprilisában egy új típusú vízumot vezetett be a venezuelaiak számára a „demokratikus felelősség" jegyében (Visa de Responsabilidad Democrática), viszont magas volt az elutasítások aránya, a bevezetés után két évvel a kérvényeknek mindössze 27%-át fogadták el (Soltész, 2024; SJM, 2021).

Irreguáláris venezuelaiak – A növekvő migránsellenesség

Chile és Spanyolország is számos alkalommal hirdetett meg rendkívüli legalizálási programot a bevándorlóknak, amely az irreguláris migránsoknak tette lehetővé státuszuk rendezését. Chile a Covid-19 pandémia során már korlátozta a részvételt és a jogellenes határátlépéssel érkezetteket kizárta a legalizálási folyamatból (Fernández Páez & Celedon Arrieta, 2024, Thomázy, 2022).

Pedro Sánchez, Spanyolország baloldali szocialista államfője (PSOE: Partido Socialista Obrero Español) 2021-ben megjelent „Spanyolország 2050" című stratégiában évi 190 ezer migráns befogadását hirdette meg, amely a gazdaság fellendüléséhez és a nyugdíjrendszer fenntartásához lenne elengedhetetlen. 2024-ben viszont a kormány által meghirdetett új program még ambiciózusabbá vált, az úgynevezett „arraigo" letelepedési programokkal" évi 300 ezer irreguláris bevándorló státuszát kívánják rendezni. Az „arraigo" öt féle formában (családi együttélés, munkavállalás stb.) nyújt lehetőséget a legális státusz megszerzéséhez (Real Decreto 1155/2024; Consejo de Ministros, 2024; España 2050, 2021). A Sánchez-kormány álláspontja alapvetően megengedőbb a korábbi államfő Mariano Rajoy (PP jobboldali Néppárt, Partido Popular) vezette kormánytól (2011-2018), aki a határellenőrzésre és az irreguláris bevándorlás csökkentésére törekedett és ellenezte a tömeges legalizálást, szakítva a baloldali szocialista (PSOE) José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (2004-2011) elfogadóbb politikájával (Munárriz, 2018).

Chilében a migráció a baloldali Michelle Bachelet (2014-2018) kormányzása alatt jelentősen megnőtt. Sebastián Piñera (2018-2022) jobboldali elnök a növekvő migrációra és a lakosság elégedetlenségére reagálva új migrációs törvénnyel válaszolt, valamit számos új rendelettel, amelynek egy része már a Piñerát követő baloldali Gabriel Boric elnök kormánya alatt lépett hatályba. Az új migrációs törvény egyértelműen szigorít, valamint nem teszi lehetővé, a turista vízummal érkezőknek, hogy Chilében kérvényezzenek tartózkodási engedélyt (SERMIG n.d; Dekocker, 2018). A Covid-19 idején meghirdetett rendkívüli legalizáció során a korábbi programokkal ellentétben csak a legálisan érkezettek rendezhették a státuszukat (Thomázy, 2022). A migránsellenesség az elmúlt években tovább fokozódott Chilében, a lakosság biztonságpercepciója csökkent. A Boric-kormánnyal való elégedetlenség a jobboldali pártok erősödését okozta az országban. 2025. december 14-én José Antonio Kast jobboldali politikus nyerte meg a chilei elnökválasztás, aki választási kampányában több ízben kijelentette, hogy radikális fellépést tervez az irreguláris migráció és a külföldi szervezett bűnözői csoportok ellen, sőt a „papírok nélkül" tartózkodókra kitoloncolás vár, illetve határkerítés megépítése is megjelent a választási kampány során (Castro, 2025; CADEM, 2025).

Spanyolországban a parlamenti választás még várat magára, amennyiben Sánchez és kormánya kitart 2027-ig. A migránsellenesség egyre növekszik a lakosság körében, ahogy a kormánnyal való elégedetlenség is egyre nő, mindezek a jobb oldali pártokat erősítik (Bermejo Casado & González Enríquez, 2024). 2023-as önkormányzati választásokon a jobboldali Néppárt (PP) aratott komoly győzelmet, továbbá a VOX szélsőjobboldali párt is erősödik. A migrációval kapcsolatban a VOX fogalmaz meg radikális álláspontot, mind a legalizálás, mind a kitoloncolással kapcsolatban, míg a PP szükségesnek látja a dolgozó, integrálódó migránsok legalizálását. VOX és a José Antonio Kast vezette chilei Republikánus Párt erősödése között, ugyanakkor számos hasonlóság azonosítható (Garcia, 2025; Piña, 2025; Aranda Bustamante, & Bórquez Paredes, 2021).

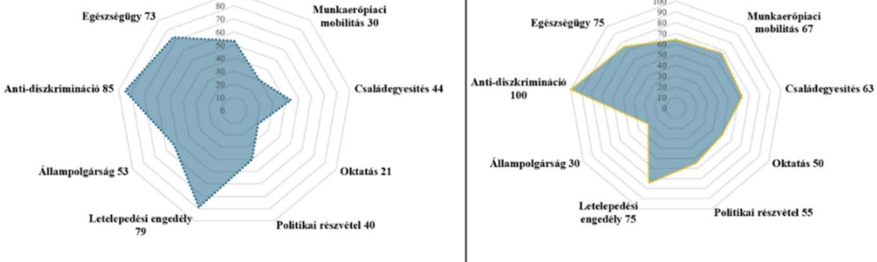
A két ország hasonló utat járt be a legalizálással kapcsolatban a közelmúltig. Chile viszont biztonságiasít,[4] egyre inkább szűkíti a lehetőségeket és megnehezíti a bevándorlást, valamint a legális tartózkodáshoz való hozzájutást, amely inkább a globális Észak országaira jellemző. Ezzel szemben Spanyolország további kedvezményeket nyújt az országban tartózkodó migránsoknak. A venezuelai migrációra Chile nem tudott hatékony megoldást találni és a korlátozott rendkívüli legalizációval próbálta meg orvosolni a tömeges bevándorlást. Chilének elsősorban a szomszédos országokkal, Bolíviával és Peruval, lenne elengedhetetlen az együttműködés, hiszen a jogellenes határátlépők is elsősorban Peruból a bolíviai határszakaszon érkeznek Chilébe. A közös történelmi múlt, a ma is élő konfliktusok, valamint a határviták megnehezítik a kooperációt mindkét országgal (Thomázy, 2022; Deák, 2021; Deák, 2019).

Integráció nehézségei, szakpolitikai fejlemények

A MIPEX adatbázisa 2025 őszén került aktualizálásra, így Spanyolországgal kapcsolatos index már a 2024-es évet tükrözi, míg a chilei adatok frissítése várat magára. A MIPEX oldala 2014-től teszi elérhetővé az információk nyomon követeset, amely alapján a tendenciák azonosítása lehetséges mind a két országgal kapcsolatban (MIPEX, 2024; 2019). A két ország összehasonlítása a migráció szempontjából a legfontosabb dimenziókra fókuszál. A 8 dimenzió összértéke alapján egyik ország sem kiemelkedő az integrációt illetően. A maximum 100-as értékből Spanyolország 64, míg Chile 54-es pontszámot kapott, amely közepes kategóriát jelent (lásd. 3. ábra).

Chile és Spanyolország hasonló értékkel szerepel számos dimenzióban, ezek közül érdemes kiemelni az állampolgárságot, amely javuló tendenciát mutat az elmúlt években, különösen a latin amerikaiak esetében. Mindkét ország javított az egészségügyi ellátáshoz, valamint az oktatáshoz való hozzáférésen, különösen Chile, bár még a 2019-es adatok alapján alacsony értékkel szerepel a MIPEX adatbázisában (SERMIG, 2025).

3. *ábra:* MIPEX (Migráns integrációs szakpolitikai index) Chile (2019), Spanyolország (2024).



Forrás: saját szerkesztés MIPEX online adatbázisa alapján.

A diszkrimináció ellenes szakpolitikák kiemelkedő értéket mutatnak minkét országnál (Chile: 85, Spanyolország: 100), jelentős javulás történt az elmúlt évekhez képest. A munkaerőpiachoz való hozzáférést ennek ellenére Chilében kedvezőtlen, mindössze 30-as értéket kapott, számos szakpolitika nehezíti a külföldiek munkavállalását, míg Spanyolország javuló tendenciát mutat a 67-es értékkel. Spanyolország kis- és közepes vállalkozások alapításának egyszerűsítése vonzóvá vált a bevándorlóknak, továbbá kifejezetten az innovatív vállalkozásoknak kedvez számos új szabályozás (Legalitas, 2025). A vállalkozás alapításához tartózkodási engedély kérvényezhető, amely megkönnyíti az országban tartózkodást mind az egyén, mind a családtagok részére.

Azonban, ha az OECD adatait is elemezzük, akkor ennek alapján megállapítható, hogy a munkaképes korú migráns lakosság foglalkoztatása feülreprezentált. Chilében a migránsok foglalkoztatási aránya 76,5%, amely 20%-kal magasabb, mint a Chilében születetteké, Spanyolországban 65% a migránsok foglalkoztatottsága, míg a spanyoloké mindössze 52% (OECD, 2023, 2024). Az ide vonatkozó tanulmányok alapján is azonosítható, hogy a helyi lakosság diszkriminatív a migránsokkal szemben, a munkaerőpiac felfelé zárt. Mind Chilében, mind Spanyolországban a venezuelaiak elsősorban a szolgáltatási szektorban dolgoznak, a végzettséget nem igénylő munkaerőpiac nyitott számukra. A jól fizető és magasan kvalifikált állásokhoz való hozzáférés korlátozott, egyrészt a végzettségek elismerésének nehézsége, másrészt a munkaerőpiac zártsága miatt, annak ellenére, hogy a venezuelaiak jelentős része felsőfokú végzettséggel rendelkezik (Eguren, & Estrada, 2018; González Enríquez & Martínez, 2025, SJM, 2021; Thomázy, 2020).

Bár a MIPEX munkaerőpiacra vonatkozó értéke Chile esetében jóval alacsonyabb, mint Spanyolországé, ennek ellenére úgy tűnik, hogy mindkét országban korlátozottak a migránsok lehetőségei. A nemzetközi migráció elméletei közül egyértelműen azonosítható minkét országban a globális északra jellemző duális munkaerőpiac jelentléte (de Haas et al., 2020: 53). Az elsődleges munkaerőpiacon a bérek magasabbak, a munkakörülmények kedvezőbbek, viszont ez a munkaerőpiac elsősorban a helyiek számára nyitott, megnehezítve a képzett venezuelaiak munkavállalását. A kettős munkaerőpiac kialakulása során a munkaerőpiac a strukturális szükségletekhez igazodik (Sik, 2012, 14-18). Chilében és Spanyolországban is a felsőfokú végzettséggel rendelkező fiatalok aránya az OECD átlagot (47.42%) megközelíti, illetve meg is haladja.[5] A venezuelaiak számára elsősorban a másodlagos munkaerőpiac kínál lehetőséget, olyan pozíciókat kínálva, amely a helyi lakosság körében kevésbé népszerű, ezzel enyhítve a strukturális munkanélküliséget. Az elsődleges munkaerőpiac a végzettséggel rendelkező helyieket részesíti előnyben. A szakirodalom a duális munkaerőpiac felfelé zártságát, a migránsok nem megfelelő nyelvtudásával is indokolja, a végzettségek elismerésének nehézsége mellett (de Haas et al., 2020: 53). A venezuelaiakat ugyanakkor, épp a spanyol nyelv segíthetné a munkaerőpiaci integráció során.

Összegzés

A tanulmány a venezuelaiak Chilébe és Spanyolországba érkezését, az állampolgárság és az integráció lehetőségeit vizsgálta. A két ország hasonló utat járt be a migrációt tekintve. Minkét országba jelentős számú venezuelai érkezett, sőt Chilében ma már a legnagyobb bevándorlócsoport, míg Spanyolországban a harmadik legnépesebb. A kutatás két hipotézis fogalmazott meg, az első a globális Dél és Észak közötti közeledésre vonatkozott és a chilei migráció biztonságiasítására. A globális Dél és Észak közötti közeledést támasztja alá, hogy Chile és Spanyolország hasonló gazdasági és társadalmi mutatókkal rendelkezik, minkét ország elöregedő társadalom, a születések száma alacsony, amelyet alapvetően a migrációval lehetne ellensúlyozni. Minkét országban, továbbá kialakult az úgynevezett duális munkaerőpiac, amely a fejlett országokra jellemző. Az elemzés alapján igazolható, hogy Chilében egyre inkább a bevándorlást korlátozó politikák kerülnek előtérbe (új, szigorúbb bevándorlási törvény, korlátozó rendkívüli legalizálási programokból stb.). A lakosság körében, továbbá a migránsellenesség növekedése a jobboldali José Antonio Kast győzelméhez vezetett a 2025. év végi elnökválasztáson, aki radikális álláspontot fogalmazott meg a migrációval kapcsolatban. Spanyolország ezzel szemben kedvez a venezuelai migrációnak, mind a humanitárius védelemmel, a legalizációs folyamatokkal, mind pedig az állampolgárság megszerzésével kapcsolatban. A spanyol szélsőjobboldali, migrációellenes VOX párt és a chilei Republikánus Párt migrációval kapcsolatos álláspontja között közeledés figyelhető meg.

A második hipotézis a közös kulturális gyökerekre, az azonos nyelvre vonatkozott, amely nem elegendő a sikeres integrációhoz. Az elemzés alapján megállapítható, hogy az integráció sikerességéhez szükségesek a legális tartózkodást lehetővé tevő bevándorlási politikák, amely nélkül a venezuelai migráció nem tud állampolgársághoz jutni. Chilében, ahol a latin-amerikai migráció domináns, a venezuelaiaknak korlátozottak a lehetőségei. Spanyolországban viszont a venezuelai migrációt előnyben részesítik a migrációs politikák, hiszen számos intézkedéssel segítik a keresztény, spanyolul beszélő kisebbséget, szemben például a marokkóiakkal. A második hipotézis szintén verifikálódott, hiszen a munkaerőpiaci elhelyezkedés mindkét országban felfelé zárt, lefelé nyitott és diszkriminációval terhelt. A bevándorlóknak az alacsonyabb státuszú munkalehetőségek elérhetők. A venezuelai migráció elhelyezkedését nem feltétlenül javítja a spanyol nyelv, a hasonló kultúrkör, viszont a hiányosságok részletes feltárásához a szakpolitikák további vizsgálata szükséges. Spanyolország, ugyanakkor számos jó gyakorlattal ösztönzi a latin-amerikaiak, elsősorban a venezuelaiak bevándorlását. A kutatás azonosította többek között, az úgynevezett „arraigo" letelepedési programokat, amely az irreguláris bevándorlók státuszát rendezi, a venezuelaiak esetében a hivatalos okmányok lejárat utáni elfogadását, a kedvezményes honosítását, továbbá humanitárius nemzetközi védelem biztosítja a legális tartózkodásukat az országban, valamint a munkaerőpiacra lépést segíti a vállalkozóvá válás egyszerűsödése.

Chile és Spanyolország is változás előtt áll. A 2025. decemberi chilei elnökválasztás megnyerő José Antonio Kast kormánya számos migránsellenes intézkedéssel további korlátozásokat fog bevezetni. Azonban Spanyolországban is erősödik a migránsellenesség, elsősorban a bevándorlást ösztönző politikák hatására, úgy tűnik a következő választások változást hozhatnak az ország politikájában.

Jegyzetek

[1] Legalább az egyik szülő, vagy akár a nagyszülő országban való születésére is kiterjed (Tunézia) (Vink et al., 2025: 13.).

[2] Többek között, felsőfokú német nyelvtudás, németországi tanulmányok /munkavállalás, önkéntes munka.

[3] Irreguláris venezuelaiak Chilében: A SERMIG (bevándorlási hivatal) becslése alapján készül. Főbb adatok, amelyet a hivatal figyelembe vesz: rendőrségi nyilvántartás, oktatási intézménybe beiratkozott külföldi gyerekek száma, turista vízum lejárta, a chilei PDI (nyomozó rendőrség) és a SERMIG közös biometrikus azonosítása a jogellenes határátlépőknek.

[4] „(…) valamilyen ügy az államra nézve létfenyegetés ként jelenik meg, s ennek okán az állam, vagy annak képviselői rendkívüli intézkedésekhez folyamodnak" (Gazdag, & Remek, 2018: 24).

[5] OECD felmérés a felsőfokú végzettségre vonatkozóan a 25-34 éves lakosság körében. Chile: 40,51% a felsőfokú végzettséggel rendelkező fiatalok aránya, míg Spanyolországban 50,51% (OECD, 2022).

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Venezuelan Migration in Spain and Chile: Citizenship and Integration in a Changing Global South and North

Abstract

The political, social, and economic crisis in Venezuela has caused one of the largest emigrations waves in recent years. Chile and Spain have long been attractive destinations for Latin American migrants, due to their economic development. However, since the start of the "Venezuelan exodus" in 2015, both countries have experienced a substantial influx of Venezuelan migrants. This study examines Venezuelan migration to Chile and Spain. It focuses on their migration policies; particularly recent trends related to integration and citizenship access. Comparing a European country with a South American offers an opportunity to examine the changing dynamics between the Global North and the Global South. Despite having similar cultural traditions and a common language, the two countries implemented different solutions for migrant integration. This study will highlight good practices and major challenges based on an analysis of databases, public policies, and academic literature.

Keywords: Venezuelan Migration in Spain and Chile: Citizenship and Integration in a Changing Global South and North

ÁLLAMI TÉRKÉPZETEK ÉS KLÍMAPOLITIKAI ÜTKÖZÉSEK: JAIR BOLSONARO AMAZÓNIA-STRATÉGIÁJA TÖRTÉNETI ÖSSZEFÜGGÉSBEN

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Doi: 10.15170/PSK.2026.SI.01.09
Beküldve: 2025. december 16.
Elfogadva: 2026. április 16.
Publikálva: 2026. május 13.

Hivatkozás:
Kara-Szabó, Z. S. (2026): Állami térképzetek és klímapolitikai ütközések: Jair Bolsonaro Amazónia-stratégiája történeti összefüggésben. *Pólusok*, 7(SI), 159–175.

Egyéb információk:
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Absztrakt

A tanulmány azt vizsgálja, miként éledtek újjá a brazil katonai geopolitikai hagyomány amazóniai elemei Jair Bolsonaro kormányzása alatt. Az elemzés amellett érvel, hogy Bolsonaro szuverenista és klímatagadó politikája nem pusztán populista eltérés, hanem a „grandeza” gondolatköréből és a fejlesztő–expanzív államlogikából fakadó strukturális kontinuitás. A klímaváltozás elismerése a brazil állami ellenőrzés korlátozását jelentette volna Amazóniában, ezért a klímapolitika szükségszerűen „külső diktátumként” jelent meg a kormányzati diskurzusban. A tanulmány bemutatja, hogy a szuverenitás Bolsonaro alatt szelektíven alkalmazott politikai erőforrássá vált, amely egyszerre utasította el a környezeti normákat és ösztönözte a külföldi gazdasági jelenlétet. Amazónia a klímaváltozás korszakának egyik legélesebb geopolitikai ellentmondását testesítette meg.

Kulcsszavak: *Amazónia, Bolsonaro, geopolitika, hadsereg, szuverenitás*

Bevezetés

A Jair Bolsonaro vezette brazil kormányzat amazóniai politikája a 2019 és 2022 közötti időszakban óriási figyelmet váltott ki a nemzetközi kapcsolatokban, elsősorban az erdőirtás mértékének jelentős növekedése és hozzá kapcsolódó erőteljes konfrontatív politikai retorika miatt (Mongabay, 2022; Pierik, 2024). Az adminisztráció a környezetvédelmi kritikákat a nemzeti szuverenitást fenyegető külső beavatkozásként értelmezte, miközben az amazóniai térség kezelése egyre inkább militarizált keretek között zajlott (Rodrigues & Kalil, 2021). Az időszakot meghatározó politika azonban nem értelmezhető pusztán Bolsonaro személyes stílusának vagy populista stratégiájának következményeként.

A tanulmány kiindulópontja, hogy Bolsonaro amazóniai narratívája és kormányzati gyakorlata egy hosszabb történeti és intézményi kontinuitás részeként érthető meg. A brazil Fegyveres Erők esőerdei régióra vonatkozó geopolitikai gondolkodása már a 20. század közepétől meghatározta a térség szuverenitásról, fejlődésről és biztonságról alkotott állami értelmezéseket, ami a katonai diktatúra időszakában doktrinális formát öltött (Martins Filho, 2007). Ez a katonai geopolitikai hagyomány a demokratikus átmenetet követően sem szűnt meg, hanem a Bolsonaro-adminisztráció alatt újratermelődött (Rodrigues & Kalil, 2021; Amorim & Peyerl, 2024). Bolsonaro amazóniai politikája a brazil katonai geopolitikai hagyomány visszatérő dilemmáinak megnyilvánulásaként értelmezhető egy olyan korszakban, amelyet immáron olyan újabb szempontok is strukturálnak, mint a klímaválság és a globális környezetpolitika. A tanulmány célja, hogy feltárja ezt a kontinuitást, valamint bemutassa, miként válik az Amazónia egyszerre a nemzeti szuverenitás, a fejlődés és a globális környezeti felelősség vitatott terévé.

Elméleti keretek

Mindenekelőtt két fogalmi lépést szükséges megtenni: (1) tisztázni kell, hogy mit értünk geopolitika alatt, és (2) meg kell indokolni, hogyan ragadható meg a „geopolitikai hagyomány" nem pusztán eszmetörténeti örökségként, hanem strukturálisan, intézményesen rögzült gondolkodásmódként, amely időről időre megújul (Ó Tuathail, 1996; Agnew, 1998; Martins Filho, 2007). A geopolitika fogalma a kortárs társadalomtudományban nem rendelkezik egységes, lezárt definícióval: jelentése történetileg változik, és eltérő tudományos, politikai és ideológiai kontextusokban más hangsúlyokkal telítődik meg (Ó Tuathail, 1996; Agnew, 1998; Dodds & Atkinson, 2000). A geopolitika egyszerre jelenik meg földrajzi adottságokra építő hatalmi érvelésként, stratégiai gondolkodásként, biztonságpolitikai nyelvként vagy civilizációs narratívakészletként is (Cohen, 2003; Dodds, Kuus, & Sharp, 2013). A definíciós nyitottság adja a geopolitikai elemzések sajátosságát, sőt, ahogyan Dodds és Atkinson (2000) hangsúlyozzák, a geopolitika esetében szükségszerűen több definícióval kell dolgoznunk, mert a fogalom nemcsak leírja, hanem alakítja is a politikai valóságot. A kritikai geopolitika kiindulópontja, hogy a geopolitika nem semleges térleírás, hanem diskurzív és intézményi gyakorlat: politikai szereplők a világpolitikát térbeliesítik, fenyegetéseket neveznek meg, és ezen keresztül legitimálják saját érdekeiket és cselekvéseiket (Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992; Ó Tuathail, 1996). A geopolitikai narratívák barát–ellenség megkülönböztetéseket stabilizálnak; meghatározzák, mi tekinthető „szuverén ügynek", és mi minősül „külső beavatkozásnak" (Ó Tuathail, 1996; Dodds, 2007). Az esőerdő esetében ugyanaz a tér több politikai jelentéssel telítődik meg: egyszerre a „nemzeti integrációt" igénylő periféria, stratégiai erőforrásraktár, illetve a globális környezeti felelősség kiemelt terepe – az értelmezések között állandó konfliktus zajlik (Rodrigues & Kalil, 2021; Amorim & Peyerl, 2024).

A kritikai geopolitika fontos eszköz a geopolitikai diskurzusok elemzéséhez, ugyanakkor nem ad kielégítő választ arra, hogy miért térnek vissza ugyanazok a geopolitikai kérdések egy ország vagy terület életében – mint például a szuverenitás, a külső beavatkozás vagy a területi kontroll problémái – különböző történelmi korszakokban, eltérő politikai nyelvezetben. A tanulmány azzal a céllal, hogy ezt a problémát feloldja, a „geopolitikai hagyomány" fogalmát használja, amely olyan visszatérő értelmezési minták és reflexek együttesét jelöli, amelyek az állami gondolkodás bizonyos intézményeiben rögzülnek és válsághelyzetekben újra aktiválódnak (Martins Filho, 2007; Rodrigues & Kalil, 2021). Ebben a geopolitikai kontinuitásban a dilemmák szerkezetei (szuverenitás – beavatkozás; fejlődés – védelem; „külföldi mohóság" – „nemzeti integráció") felismerhető módon újratermelődnek. A strukturális ismétlődés megragadásához Fernand Braudel strukturális időfelfogása sokat segíthet: az általa leírt *longue durée* annak a felismerése, hogy bizonyos kulturális jelek és politikai problémák lassabb történeti ritmusokban térnek vissza, miközben a szereplők, intézmények és retorikai készletek gyorsabban változnak (Braudel, 1980). Az Amazónia esetében a „területi integráció", a „külső fenyegetés" és a „szuverenitás" jelszavai a brazil geopolitikai képzelet olyan tartós koordinátáit jelentik, amelyek különböző korszakokban új fogalmakkal és új ellenfelekkel jöttek és jönnek létre (Martins Filho, 2007; Amorim & Peyerl, 2024). Morgenthau klasszikus felismerése – miszerint a szuverenitást érintő külső elvárások rendszerint hatalmi konfliktusként jelennek meg – megerősíti ezt a keretet: a szuverenitás korlátozásaként megélt külső nyomás különösen akkor politizálódik élesen, ha a terület, az erőforrások és a biztonság fogalmai egyazon vitában kapcsolódnak össze – ahogy az Amazóniában történik (Morgenthau, 1948; Rodrigues & Kalil, 2021).

A brazil geopolitika központi gondolata: a „Grandeza"

Ha Brazília strukturálisan visszatérő történelmi külpolitikai-geopolitikai dilemmáit vizsgáljuk, akkor a *Grandeza*-projekt, avagy a „Nagyság elérése" a legfontosabb. Az O Brasil Grande (a nagy Brazília) jelszó az 1960-1970-es években vált az állami diskurzus központi szimbólumává, de utólag a szakirodalom a Grandeza kifejezést az ország általános nagyhatalmi aspirációira is kiterjeszti (Mares & Trinkunas, 2016). A „Nagyság" eszménye Brazília önállóságának kezdete óta megragadta az ember fantáziáját: gondolhatunk akár az ország óriási területére (Brazília a dél-amerikai kontinens közel felét, 48%-át teszi ki), vagy a benne rejlő természeti kincsek és kiaknázatlan lehetőségek sokaságára Az új, 19. századi Latin Amerika széttöredezett és kaotikus államai mellett egyedül Brazília maradt egységes Dél-Amerikában, ami szinte természetesen meghatározta az ország kiemelt pozícióját a szubkontinensen.[1] A portugál korona már az 1822-es függetlenség idején tartott attól, hogy Brazília ereje túlmutathat az új állam határain, és a jövőben az afrikai gyarmati területek számára is alternatív központtá válhat, aminek következtében Portugália kizuhan a hatalmi pozíciójából, és Brazília lesz a portugál gyarmati világ hatalmi-kulturális örököse (Fausto & Fausto, 2014). Jóval később, még a 20. század derekán is, a Nobel-díjas Stefan Zweig 1941-ben írt *Brazília, a jövő országa* című könyvében, a második világháború katasztrofális traumájának közepette, Európán kívül kereste a „Jövő" civilizációját, amit Brazíliában vélt felfedezni (Zweig, 1941).

A 19. század második felére az Amerikai Egyesült Államok fejlődési modellje vált a brazil értelmiségi elit legfontosabb referenciapontjává (Bas, 2011). A gyorsan növekvő, kontinentális méretű állam számára az amerikai példa egy olyan jövőképet vázolt fel, amiben Brazília saját útján, de hasonló módon a nyugati félteke meghatározó hatalmává fog válni – „a Dél USA-jává" (Brands, 2010). A Grandeza eszméje Brazíliában a köztársaság kikiáltása óta egy olyan történelmi küldetést fejez ki, amely az ország kontinentális méreteiből, erőforrásaiból, regionális dominanciájából és kivételességtudatából fakadóan Brazíliát „sorsánál fogva" a nagyhatalmak közé rendeli, és amely a 20. század során a katonai gondolkodástól a diplomáciáig a nemzeti önértelmezés alappillérévé vált.

A brazil hadsereg geopolitikai hagyománya

A Grandeza tartóssága azonban nem magától értetődő. Egy ilyen hosszú időn át fennmaradó geopolitikai önkép intézményi hordozókat igényel: olyan szereplőket, amelyek képesek a nagyságra vonatkozó elképzeléseket nemzedékről nemzedékre továbbadni, doktrinálisan rögzíteni és azt a mindenkori politikai környezethez igazítani. Brazília esetében ezt a szerepet a hadsereg töltötte be. A brazil hadsereg a 19. század végétől kezdve nem csupán a területi egység őreként, hanem a nemzeti tér, a fejlődés és a szuverenitás geopolitikai értelmezőjeként is fellépett, és ebben a minőségében játszott szerepet a *Grandeza* geopolitikai jelentésének kialakításában és fennmaradásában. Másként fogalmazva: a *Grandeza* egy intézményesített gondolkodásmódot is jelent, amelynek elsődleges hordozójává a történetileg a hadsereg vált. A következőkben ezért a brazil katonai geopolitikai hagyomány történeti és intézményi kialakulását vizsgáljuk meg.

A paraguayi háború (1864–1870) fordulópontot jelentett a brazil fegyveres erők történetében: a konfliktus kezdetén mindössze 17 ezer fős hadsereg hat év alatt több mint 100 ezer főre duzzadt (Johnson, 1964). A gyors expanzió ugyan önmagában nem tette automatikusan meghatározóvá az intézményt, ám a háborús mozgósítás mellett a hadsereg olyan infrastrukturális, szervezeti és adminisztratív hálózatot épített ki, amely páratlan volt a kor Brazíliájában. Ennek eredményeként a 19. század végére a hadsereg vált az ország legnagyobb és legkoherensebben működő állami apparátusává. A háború először tette lehetővé, hogy a hadsereg az államiság egészét átfogó szervezeti és kognitív szerepébe lépjen. Ezzel szemben a brazil társadalom mélyen megőrizte elmaradottságát és gyarmati örökségét: a rabszolgaság intézménye az amerikai kontinensen utolsóként, egészen 1888-ig fennállt, a lakosság írás-olvasástudatlanság aránya pedig csaknem 80% volt, ami messze elmaradt a szomszédos Argentínától vagy Chilétől (Fausto & Fausto, 2014). A társadalom modernizációja késve érkezett, és ebben a kontextusban nem léteztek civil intézmények, amelyek képesek lettek volna egy modern állam számára jól képzett szakembereket vagy politikai gondolkodókat előállítani.[2] Ez a kontraszt – egy szervezetileg modernizálódó hadsereg és egy strukturálisan elmaradott civil társadalom – hosszú távon megteremtette annak feltételeit, hogy a hadsereg váljon az értelmező és irányadó szereplővé az állami gondolkodásban.

A katonai akadémiák hamarosan az ország legfontosabb tudásteremtő és elitképző központjaivá emelkedtek. A hadsereg belső modernizációját döntően Auguste Comte pozitivizmusának recepciója határozta meg (Johnson, 1964). A pozitivizmus, a mérnöki tudás, az államelméletek és a politikai filozófia oktatásának együttese különösen a Rio de Janeiró-i Katonai Akadémián vált meghatározóvá, ahol Benjamin Constant tanításai nyomán az eszme politikai küldetéstudattá formálódott (Delson, 1995). Az új tisztikar számára a rend, a haladás és a tudományos racionalitás égisze jelentette a birodalom archaikus politikai rendszerének alternatíváját (Johnson, 1964). A kadétok közül sokan úgy tekintettek magukra, mint akik erkölcsi felelősséggel tartoznak a nemzet jövőjéért és a modern állam szellemi irányvonalának kijelöléséért.

A hadsereg vezetése 1889-ben megdöntötte a Brazil Császárságot és kikiáltotta az első Brazil Köztársaságot (1889-1930). A politikai rendszerváltás mellett ez egy olyan modernizációs projekt kezdete is volt, amelynek a hadsereg biztosította a legitimitását, és ami a Brazília teljes politikai fejlődésére tartós hatást gyakorolt (Fausto & Fausto, 2014). A brazil hadsereg szerepe messze túlmutatott a hagyományos védelempolitikai feladatokon: az intézmény a modern állam irányítására hivatott politikai–technokrata elit képzőhelyévé vált, olyan tisztekkel, akik nemcsak értelmezték, hanem aktívan formálták is Brazília hosszú távú geopolitikai vízióit.

A hadsereg elitértelmisége csak az 1930-as években kezdte el az amazóniai régiót geopolitikai értelemben értékelni. Everardo Backheuser, akit a brazil geopolitika „mesterének" is neveznek, 1926-ban vetette fel annak lehetőségét, hogy Brazília területe elméletileg akár 1,2 milliárd ember eltartására is alkalmas lenne, ugyanakkor az Amazónia hasznosítása terén még nem rendelkezik ehhez szükséges technológiai feltételekkel (Backheuser, 1926: 96). Mário Travassos hadseregtiszt és geopolitikai gondolkodó az 1930-as években írt „Projeção Continental do Brasil" című munkájában az Amazónia már a dél-amerikai kontinens egyik legfontosabb földrajzi antagonizmusaként jelenik meg, ami a régiós nemzetközi feszültségek egyik forrásává válik (Travassos, 1935). Travassos azt is felvetette a könyvében, hogy meg kell kezdeni az „üres területek" módszeres elfoglalását.

A második világháború után az 1949-ben alapított Legfelső Hadi Akadémia (Escola Superior de Guerra, ESG) vált a brazil geopolitikai iskola legfőbb intézményévé (Szilágyi, 2022). Az Akadémia gondolkodásmódjára erősen hatott a modernizmus és a hidegháborús klíma, amelyben az „első" és „második világ" közötti globális és kataklizmaszerű összecsapása elkerülhetetlenné válik. A hadsereg kialakította a saját Nemzetbiztonsági Doktrínáját, és berendezkedett a hidegháborús szerkezetre, elsősorban a régiós rivális Argentínával szemben: megkezdődött a nukleáris versengés a két ország között (Martins Filho, 2007). Az 1950-es évek brazil geopolitikájának első számú teoretikusa Golbery do Couto e Silva tábornok volt, akinek hatása nemzetközi szinten is meghatározóvá vált. Golbery volt az, aki meghirdette a „külső és belső expanzió" szükségességét, azaz megkezdeni az Amazónia tényleges elfoglalását és a nemzet érdekei mentén kihasználni (Szilágyi, 2022) Golbery mellett nem lenne teljes a felsorolás Therezinha de Castro és Meira-Mattos tábornok nélkül, akik Golberyvel együtt alkották a brazil geopolitikai gondolkodás „nagy hármasát" (Szilágyi, 2022).

A hadsereg 1964. március 31-én a hadsereg puccsot hajtott végre a baloldali elnök João Goulart-tal ellen, amivel megkezdődött a brazil katonai diktatúra időszaka 1964 és 1985 között. A 21 éves diktatúra alatt a hadsereg felső vezetése monopolizálta az ország geopolitikai térképezését és az alapvető földrajzi-stratégiai gondolkodását (Shiguenoli, 2002; Szilágyi, 2022). A katonai diktatúra idején használt jellegzetes kifejezések – mint a „külső és belső terjeszkedés szükségessége", a „menetelés Nyugat felé" (marcha para o Oeste) vagy a már említett *Grandeza* – részben vagy egészben az Amazónia tényleges meghódítására, gazdasági alárendelésére és kizsákmányolására irányultak (Shiguenoli, 2002). Ebben az összefüggésben a *Grandeza* eszméje koherensen foglalta össze az adott korszak politikai vezetőinek geopolitikai ambícióját: Brazíliát nagyhatalommá kívánták tenni (Fausto, 2014).

A politikai vezetés az Amazóniát demográfiai értelemben „üres térként" kezelte, ami jogi és ideológiai alapot szolgáltatott annak kompromisszumokat nem ismerő kizsákmányolásához – egy olyan gondolatkörhöz, amely súlyosan érintette az esőerdő őslakos népességét (de Paula, 2022). Az 1970-es évektől kezdődően nagyszabású infrastrukturális beruházások, gazdaságfejlesztési és kényszerű áttelepítési programok indultak e terv megvalósítása érdekében. Ezekben az években kezdődött meg az ambiciózus BR–230-as Transzamazóniai Autópálya építése (Walker, 2011), felépült a Tocantins folyón a Tucuruí gát és vízerőmű, amely alapvetően meghatározta az ország teljes amazóniai energiapolitikáját (Fearnside, 2001), valamint elindult a Grande Carajás Projekt, amely az ország történetének legkiterjedtebb bányászati programjává vált, és mindmáig meghatározza Brazília bányászati exportstruktúráját (Coelho, 2015).

Az 1980-as években tovább fokozódott a hadsereg érdeklődése a térség iránt. Andrew Hurrell (1991) kiváló tanulmánya összegyűjtötte a kulcsfontosságú mozzanatokat: 1983 és 1985 között új légi hadműveleti központokat, légibázisokat és helikopteres egységeket hoztak létre Rondônia és Roraima államokban. Az időszak legnagyobb amazóniai katonai projektje a Calha Norte Program volt, amely a jogi értelemben vett amazóniai területének mintegy egynegyedét fedte le, és az amazóniai határvidékek militarizálását tűzte ki célul. Ez a program súlyos társadalmi feszültségeket és jelentős környezeti károkat okozott (Hurrell, 1991). Az 1985-ös politikai fordulat nem hozott azonnali és érdemi változást a brazil politikai elit Amazóniához való viszonyában. José Sarney kormánya – az első civil elnökség a katonai diktatúra után – nem jelentett radikális törést a hadsereg és az államigazgatás kapcsolatában.

A demokratikus átmenetet követően is fennmaradt a hadsereg meghatározó szerepe az állami élet legfontosabb előjogainak területén (Stepan, 1988). Sarney ráadásul teljes mértékben a katonaminisztereire bízta az amazóniai ügyeket, akik jelentős befolyást gyakoroltak magára az elnökre is. 1989-re több esetben maga Sarney is ellenségessé hangot ütött a „nemzetközi ökológusokkal" és a nemzetközi közösség beavatkozásaival szemben (Zirker and Henberg, 1994). A demokratikus Brazília így egy olyan Amazónia-stratégiát örökölt, sőt, mentett át, amely a térséget az ország fejlődési potenciáljának forrásaként, az erőforrások kitermelésén keresztül gondolta el. A katonai elit által kialakított geopolitikai gondolkodás hagyománya a diktatúra után is fennmaradt.

A katonai geopolitikai hagyomány kritikája – a szűk elit szerepe

A katonai geopolitikai hagyomány esetében érdemes figyelembe venni Alfred Stepan kritikáját, miszerint hajlamosak vagyunk túlértékelni a hadsereg egységes természetét és úgymond „egy akaratnak" tekinteni az elemzésekor (Stepan, 1988). A hadsereg valójában nem ennyire egységes. Stepan véleménye szerint nem hangsúlyozzuk ki elegendően, hogy a külső társadalmi és politikai nyomások milyen mélyen hatnak a hadsereg szervezetére. A fejlődő országok esetében a hadsereg belső szervezete sokszor leképezi az ország társadalmi törésvonalait, és ahelyett, hogy a nemzeti identitás és egységes akarat instrumentuma lenne, magával hordozza az államot is meghatározó törzsi, faji, vallási, vagyoni különbségeket. A brazil hadsereg külső megjelenésében megfelel egy nemzeti, integráló intézmény képének, amelyben a társadalmi osztályok keverednek, a különbségek pedig eltűnnek. Stepan szerint ez a kép azonban súlyosan leegyszerűsítő: a toborzási gyakorlat valójában nem bontja le a regionális és társadalmi kötődéseket. A sorozás decentralizált: a katonákat jellemzően lakóhelyük közvetlen közeléből hívják be, és szolgálati idejük rövid; a kadétok hétvégéken hazatérnek saját otthonaikba. A hadsereg nem szakítja ki őket meglévő lojalitásaikból, hanem inkább fenntartja azokat. A hadsereg ráadásul – a jelentős emberanyag-túlkínálat miatt – tudatosan a városi, írástudó és technikailag képzettebb fiatalokat választja ki, és nem törekszik a vidéki, analfabéta rétegek integrálására, ami tovább gyengíti az intézmény „olvasztótégely" jellegét.

Ezért amikor a brazil hadsereg geopolitikai hagyományáról beszélünk, nem egy homogén intézményt állítunk szembe a civil társadalommal, és nem is feltételezzük azt, hogy a hadsereg egésze egységes geopolitikai szereplőként működne. Éppen ellenkezőleg: a kiindulópont az, hogy egy töredezett, eltérő regionális, társadalmi és intézményi lojalitások mentén tagolt hadseregen belül létezik egy szűk, részben intézményesült elit, amely viszonylag konzisztens geopolitikai gondolkodásmódot hordoz. Ez az elit által artikulált geopolitikai hagyomány külpolitikai krízishelyzetekben – szuverenitási viták, nemzetközi nyomás vagy belpolitikai legitimációs válságok idején – újra a mindenkori történeti és politikai kontextus nyelvén aktiválódik, gyakran civil csatornákon, médián és értelmiségi fórumokon keresztül is.

Az Amazónia „nemzetközi kisajátítása"

A brazil demokratikus átmenet (1985) és a hidegháború lezárulta alapvetően átformálták a hadsereg geopolitikai gondolkodásának egészét. Ahogy a kontinens többi országában, úgy Brazíliában is felszámolták a Nemzetbiztonsági Doktrínát. Egyúttal az Amazónia körüli geopolitikai veszélyek értelmezései is megváltoztak. Immár nem a szomszédos államok jelentettek elsődleges fenyegetést Brazília amazóniai hegemóniájára, hanem a fejlett országok kormányai és nemzetközi civil szervezetek, amelyek a környezetvédelem és az őslakos jogok védelmének hangoztatásával kívánják „nemzetközi érdekeltségű területté" nyilvánítani az esőerdőt (Martins Filho & Zirker, 2000). A tét ekkor már nem az volt, hogy Amazóniát katonailag ki tudja megszállni, hanem az, hogy ki tudja normatívan és intézményesen újradefiniálni, hogy mit értünk szuverenitás alatt Amazóniában. A külső kritika szuverenitási ostromként jelent meg. A környezetvédelem globális diskurzusának a kezdőpontját általában az ENSZ 1972-es stockholmi emberi környezetről szóló konferenciájához kötjük, amely korábban példátlan nemzetközi figyelmet irányított a környezeti degradáció problémájára (Paes, 2022). Az amazóniai államok számára általában – és Brazília esetében különösen – ezek a tárgyalások fenyegetést jelentettek az ország fejlesztési stratégiájára.

Az Amazónia „nemzetközi kisajátításáról" már a brazil történész Arthur Cezar Ferreira Reis 1960-ban írt könyvében, az *Amazônia: a cobiça internacional*-ban. A könyv témája, hogy miként ébredtek rá a nagyhatalmak Amazónia erőforrásaira, és miként próbálják azt nemzetközi ellenőrzés alá vonni (Reis, 1960). A fogalom egyszerre volt figyelmeztetés és fegyver: nem csupán egy lehetséges, rémisztő jövőt rajzolt fel a politikai döntéshozatal számára, hanem előre ellehetetlenítette azokat a nemzetközi normákat, szabályozókat és szereplőket, amelyek a területet globális felelősségű térként igyekeztek keretezni. A katonai hírszerzés és az értelmiség hangja a 90-es években a civil médiában is megjelent. A katonai geopolitikai nyelvezet, miután fokozatosan elvesztette a politikai döntéshozásban való képviseletét, folyóiratok hasábjain élt tovább. A hadsereg, illetve a hadsereggel szimpatizáló értelmiségi csoport kivételesen nagy teret kapott a *Tribuna da Imprensa* című napilap hasábjain. Cícero Sandroni a brazil szuverenitás szimbólumaként tekintett Amazóniára, élesen bírálva a környezetvédelem és az őslakos jogok hangsúlyozását – amelyeket pusztán idegen érdekeket szolgáló eszközöknek állított be (Sandroni, 1991). A cikkek populista túlzásai a neoliberális, nyitáspárti politikusokat és a külföldi beavatkozást támadták: a „zöld" és „humanitárius" nyelv álcázott területpolitikai nyomásként jelent meg. Tasso Villar de Aquino tábornok 1993-ban publikált cikkében az USA-t nevezte meg Brazília fő geopolitikai ellenfelének: Washington nemzetközi befolyása és az amazóniai erőforrások iránti étvágya aláássa Brazília szuverenitását (Aquino, 1993). Szintén Aquino volt, aki 1997-es esszéjében arról írt, hogy Brazília idegen hatalmak befolyása alatt, megalázott helyzetben áll, miközben az amazóniai kincseit kisajátítják – „Kissinger és Fernando Henrique Cardoso (a brazil elnök

1995–2002 között) partnerei irányítják Brazíliát az új világrendben" (Aquino, 1997). Sebastião Nery újságíró 1998-ban odáig ment, hogy az Egyesült Államok globalizációs politikáját Adolf Hitler gazdasági imperializmusához hasonlította Brazíliában (Nery, 1998). A szuverenitás-féltés retorikájának érdekes példája a modernkori újságírás egyik korai „fake news"-a is: 1995-ben széles körben terjedt egy állítólagos 1817-es „geopolitikai térkép", amely szerint az esőerdő brit fennhatóság alá tartozott volna (Hernandes, 1995). Később kiderült, hogy a térkép hamisítvány, mégis jelentős hatást gyakorolt a közvéleményre, erősítve azt a vélekedést, hogy külső erők fenyegetik az ország területi integritását (Casarões & Farias, 2022). A történet valószerűvé tette az elbirtoklás lehetőségét és az Amazónia „elvesztésének" rémképe – a demokratikus érában is tovább élt a köztudatban.

Jair Bolsonaro és a régi-új amazóniai geopolitika

A 2000-es évek elejére a brazil fegyveres erők politikai befolyása látványosan visszaszorult. A demokratikus konszolidáció, valamint az új civil–katonai normák elfogadása következtében a hadsereg vezetői lassanként háttérbe szorultak a nyílt politikai döntéshozatalban és alkalmazkodtak a demokratikus keretekhez. A hadsereg intézményes politikai súlya kimutathatóan csökkent (Bruneau & Tollefson, 2014). A katonai geopolitikai diskurzus klasszikus témái – így a szuverenitás folyamatos fenyegetettsége vagy Amazónia „elvesztésének" narratívája – elsősorban a már említett értelmiségi és médiatérben maradtak életben.

Jair Messias Bolsonaro 1955-ben született, a katonai diktatúra idején végezte el az Agulhas Negras Katonai Akadémiát (1977), majd tizenhét éves katonai pályafutása során a hadsereg kapitányi rangjáig jutott (Wallenfeldt, 2023). Személyes katonai háttere, valamint a Fegyveres Erőkhöz fűződő nyílt lojalitása lehetővé tette, hogy a látens katonai–szuverenista geopolitikai hagyomány visszakerüljön az állami végrehajtó hatalom központjába. A kormányzó baloldali Munkáspárt (PT) korrupciós botrányai és a 2014-től erősödő brazil gazdasági válság mellett a szélsőjobboldali katonai-politikai szereplők 2016 és 2020 között visszatértek a politikai porondra. A jelenséget Karabekir Akkoyunlu és José Antonio Lima láthatatlan beavatkozásként írták le: a katonai elit civil pozíciók, szakértői szerepek és kormányzati kinevezések révén szerezte vissza a befolyását a demokratikus rendszer formális keretein belül (Akkoyunlu & Lima, 2021). Bolsonaro 2018-as választási győzelme ennek a folyamatnak a csúcsát jelentette, aki a kormányát nagyrészt katonatisztekkel töltötte fel, így teljessé téve a hadsereg politikai rehabilitációját.

Körülbelül húsz év elteltével a szuverenitás kérdése ismét a brazil geopolitikai diskurzus központi elemévé vált. Bolsonaro elnöksége alatt az állami vezetés kifejezetten védekező, konfliktusos külpolitikai és környezetpolitikai álláspontra helyezkedett, amely sok tekintetben a katonai diktatúra időszakának retorikáját idézte. Bolsonaro következetesen hangsúlyozta, hogy „az Amazónia a brazioké", és minden nemzetközi bírálatot vagy beavatkozási kísérletet a nemzeti szuverenitás megsértéseként értelmezett (BBC News, 2019). A nemzetközi közösség – különösen az európai államok és környezetvédelmi szervezetek – kritikáját Bolsonaro rendszeresen politikai támadásként, illetve idegen érdekek által vezérelt nyomásgyakorlásként utasította el, még akkor is, amikor a tudományos és empirikus adatok egyértelműen az amazóniai pusztítás fokozódását jelezték (Phillips, 2019).

Bolsonaro klímapolitikája ebben az értelemben nem egyszerű tagadás vagy tudatlanság eredménye, hanem strukturális következménye egy szuverenista geopolitikai racionalitásnak. Bruno Latour „új klimatikus rezsimről" szóló megközelítése szerint a 21. században a geopolitikai hagyományok nem „üres térben" élednek újra, hanem egy megváltozott globális környezetben (Latour, 2018). A klímaváltozás és a globális környezeti kormányzás felerősödése olyan helyzetet teremtett, amelyben az ökológiai korlátok és a nemzetközi klímanormák közvetlenül érintik azt, hogy hogyan és meddig alkalmazhatók az erőforrás-alapú fejlődési modellek egy állam szuverén döntései keretében (Latour, 2018). Latournál a természet a politikai konfliktusok egyik fő terepévé és feltételévé válik, amely kézzelfoghatóan szűkíti vagy átalakítja a szuverén cselekvés mozgásterét. Az Amazóniában a klímaváltozás elfogadása és tagadása strukturálja a geopolitikai teret is. Ha a geopolitikai tér továbbra is a terület feletti kizárólagos állami kontroll, a fejlődés és az erőforrás-hasznosítás nyelvén kerül megfogalmazásra, akkor a klímapolitika szükségszerűen szuverenitáskorlátozásként jelenik meg.

A 21. századi brazil szuverenista geopolitikai diskurzus fenntartása strukturálisan együtt jár a klímapolitika elutasításával vagy külső beavatkozásként való keretezésével. Ez nem pusztán kommunikációs vagy retorikai stratégia, hanem annak a geopolitikai racionalitásnak a következménye, amely a teret, az erőforrásokat és a természetet a nemzeti autonómia alapjaként értelmezi, és minden külső normát a szuverén döntéshozatal korlátozásaként érzékel (Latour, 2018; Rodrigues & Kalil, 2021). Ez a keret teszi lehetővé annak megértését, hogyan válhat Amazónia egyszerre a nemzeti szuverenitás belpolitikai nyelvének terepévé és a globális környezeti legitimitás vitaterévé, miközben a brazil katonai geopolitikai hagyomány alappillérei újra felismerhetően aktiválódnak (Amorim & Peyerl, 2024; Rodrigues & Kalil, 2021). Bolsonaro esetében a klímaváltozás a geopolitikai autonómia feladását jelentette volna.

A klímatagadás kényszerű stratégiává vált: a klímaváltozás politikai realitásként való elismerése korlátozta volna az állam területi és gazdasági szuverenitását. Az amazóniai szuverenitásdiskurzus ebben az összefüggésben egy strukturálisan ellentmondásos politikai gyakorlat részeként működött. Stephen D. Krasner fogalmával élve, a szuverenitás Bolsonaro alatt „megszervezett képmutatásként" jelent meg: nem következetes normaként, hanem szelektíven alkalmazott politikai erőforrásként, amelyet az adott nemzetközi interakciók függvényében mozgósítottak (Krasner, 1999). A „szervezett képmutatás" logikája három szinten mutatható ki: az intézményi dereguláció (1), az amazóniai erőforrás-kitermelés (2) és a gazdasági nyitás terén (3).

Intézményi dereguláció

Megkezdődött a belső, Amazóniát felügyelő intézmények szisztematikus gyengítése és lebontása: 2019-ben a Környezetvédelmi Minisztérium költségvetése 240 millió reálra (kb. 45,7 millió USD) csökkent, miközben az IBAMA további 3,6 millió USD forrást veszített, jelentősen korlátozva mindkét szerv ellenőrzési és szankcionálási kapacitásait (Ioris, 2022).[3] A szerv számos ellenőrzési normáját módosították, a bírságolási tevékenység drasztikusan visszaesett – az elkobzások és ingatlan-lefoglalások 2019-ben és 2020-ban 59, illetve 55%-kal estek vissza, a ténylegesen kifizetett bírságok aránya pedig 17%-ról 5%-ra zuhant –, (Nunes et al., 2024; Poder360, 2020). Az IBAMA legyengítésén túl Bolsonaro visszavonta a katonai rendőrséget a terepi ellenőrzésekből, illetve leváltotta a brazil Nemzeti Űrkutatási Intézet (INPE) igazgatóját azután, hogy az intézet 278%-os növekedést jelzett az erdőirtásban: ezek mind tudatos politikai döntéseknek bizonyultak a helyi végrehajtás gyengítése érdekében (Baker, 2019; Ioris, 2022).

Ricardo Salles környezetvédelmi miniszter a 2020. április 22-i minisztertanácsi ülésen – amelyet a Legfelsőbb Bíróság (STF) később nyilvánosságra hozott – nyíltan javasolta, hogy a kormány használja ki a COVID-19 világjárvány miatt elterelt médiafigyelmet a környezetvédelmi szabályozás szisztematikus lebontására. Salles szavaival élve, a cél az volt, hogy „hajtsák át a csordát" (ir passando a boiada), azaz a lehető legtöbb deregulatív intézkedést fogadtassák el, amíg a közvélemény a járvánnyal van elfoglalva (Poder360, 2020). A gyenge intézményi jelenlét és az állami retorika találkozása hallgatólagos felhatalmazást teremtett az illegális földhasználatra (Baker, 2019; Cardil et al., 2020). Ennek emblematikus példájává vált a 2019. augusztus 10-ei „Dia do Fogo" (A Tűz Napja) nevű, az amazóniai Pará államban szervezett összehangolt erdőégetési akció, amelyet gazdálkodók és földfoglalók WhatsApp-csoportokon keresztül koordináltak: az INPE adatai szerint a régióban a tűzgócok száma egy nap alatt több mint 700%-kal ugrott meg (Cardil et al., 2020; IPAM Amazônia, 2019).

Egy ilyen nyíltan szervezett, kollektív akció csak olyan politikai-gazdasági környezetben jöhetett létre, amelyben az állam lemondott a szabályozás és az ellenőrzés szerepéről. A nemzetközi reakciók élesek voltak: a norvég és német kormányok felfüggesztették hozzájárulásaikat az Amazónia Alapból a vállalt környezetvédelmi feltételek megsértésére hivatkozva; az EU–Mercosur szabadkereskedelmi megállapodás ratifikálása megakadt; Emmanuel Macron és Jair Bolsonaro botrányos üzengetései folytán pedig az amazóniai kérdés a 2019-es biarritz-i G7-csúcs napirendjére került (France24, 2019; Norwegian Ministry, 2019; The Guardian, 2019). A Bolsonaro-kormány úgy tálalta az eseményeket, hogy a globális környezetvédelmi normák a politikai nyomásgyakorlás eszközeivé váltak, amelyek közvetlenül korlátozzák az állami döntéshozatal mozgásterét, végső soron a brazil szuverenitást.

Amazóniai erőforrás-kitermelés

Bolsonaro politikája súlyos hatással volt a környezetre és az esőerdőre. 2019 és 2022 között az amazóniai erdőirtás mértéke drámai fordulatot vett. Az éves átlagos erdőirtás elérte a 11 456 km²-t, ami kb. 60%-kal haladta meg az azt megelőző 6 év (2013–2018) 7 184 km²-es átlagát. A 2004 óta tartó csökkenő trend megfordult (INPE, 2023). Az erdőégetések mellett fontos, környezeti és társadalmi károkat okozó jelenség a *garimpo* – az illegális kézműves aranybányászat.

Miközben a kormányzati retorika az amazóniai területek felett gyakorolt szuverenitást minden külső beavatkozással szemben védelmezte, a Bolsonaro-adminisztráció aktívan akadályozta a hazai ellenőrzési mechanizmusok érvényesítését az illegális esőerdei aranybányászattal szemben. A Yanomami Őslakos Terület – Brazília legnagyobb demarkált indián rezervátuma mintegy 9,6 millió hektáron – a Bolsonaro-korszakban az illegális bányászat példátlan mértékű inváziójával szembesült: a Hutukara Associação Yanomami műholdas monitoringja szerint az illegális bányászat által érintett terület 2018 és 2022 között több mint 300%-kal nőtt a Yanomami földeken. Mintegy húszezer illegális bányász tevékenykedett a területen, higannyal szennyezve a folyókat és humanitárius katasztrófát idézve elő: az alultápláltságból eredő halálesetek száma 330%-kal emelkedett, a maláriaesetek száma pedig 2022-ben meghaladta a 20 ezret (Hutukara Associação Yanomami, 2022; de Angeli Dutra et al., 2024; Mongabay, 2025).

Bolsonaro volt az első brazil elnök, aki személyesen felkeresett egy illegális aranybányász-telepet – a Raposa Serra do Sol őslakos területen, Roraima államban, 2021 októberében –, ahol nyilvánosan támogatta a PL 191/2020 törvényjavaslatot, amely egyszerűsített feltételeket kívánt teremteni az őslakos területeken végzett bányászathoz. A szuverenitás itt az állami terület védelme helyett az erőforrás-kitermelés belső akadályainak felszámolását jelentette.

Gazdasági nyitás

A kettős mérce gazdaságpolitikai szinten is strukturálisan jelen volt. Bolsonaro retorikájának központi eleme volt az Amazónia nemzetköziesítésének elutasítása, miközben éppen az ő kormányzata alatt mélyült tovább az esőerdő globális gazdasági integrációja. Kína részesedése a brazil marhahús-exportból 2019 és 2022 között 23%-ról 61%-ra ugrott, a szójaexport közel háromnegyede Kínába irányult, a kínai állami COFCO International pedig Brazília ötödik legnagyobb szójaexportőrévé vált (Zu Ermgassen et al., 2020; Trase, 2025). A kínai közvetlen külföldi befektetések kumulatív összege Brazíliában 2020-ra meghaladta a 66 milliárd dollárt, és ezeknek mintegy 70%-a meglévő brazil vállalatok felvásárlásán – nem új infrastrukturális beruházásokon – keresztül valósult meg (Barbosa et al. 2021; CEBC, 2022).

A Bolsonaro-kormány által támogatott Ferrogrão vasútvonal (EF-170) – egy 933 km-es, mintegy 4 milliárd dolláros projekt, amely Mato Grosso szójatermelését amazóniai folyami kikötőkön keresztül kínai piacokra szállította volna — szintén a kínai stratégiai jelenlét mélyülését tükrözte: a CCCC, a China Railway Engineering és a Shanghai Pengxin Group egyaránt jelezte ajánlattételi szándékát a koncesszióra (Abdenur, 2021). Bolsonaro a francia és európai klímafinanszírozási - tulajdonképpen befektetési – ajánlatokat szuverenitási alapon utasította el, miközben a kínai és amerikai befektetéseket a fejlődés zálogaként fogadta el (Lucey, 2021).

A szuverenitás normatív-környezetvédelmi alapon történő elutasítása olyan gazdasági struktúrával párhuzamosan működött, amely az amazóniai erőforrások kitermelését a külföldi kereslet és tőke mentén szervezte meg. A Krasner-i gondolat itt érhető tetten a legmarkánsabban: Bolsonaro a westfáliai szuverenitást védte a környezeti normák ellen, miközben az államhatárokon átívelő gazdasági folyamatok feletti ellenőrzést ténylegesen feladta. Bolsonaro pragmatikus gazdasági kapcsolatot ápolt a BRICS-országokkal – különösen Kínával –, miközben ideológiailag szoros szövetséget alakított ki Donald Trump adminisztrációjával. Tanulságos példa az Alcântara űrközpontról 2019-ben kötött Technológiai Garanciális Megállapodás (Technology Safeguards Agreement), amelyben Brazília korlátozott hozzáférésű övezeteket létesített a saját területén az amerikai személyzet kizárólagos használatára, lemondott arról, hogy a bázis bevételeit rakétatechnológiai fejlesztésre fordítsa, és elfogadta, hogy az Egyesült Államok vétójoggal rendelkezzen arról, mely országok használhatják a brazil indítóbázist (Berringer, 2024).

Miközben a környezetvédelmi kritikák szuverenitássértésként jelentek meg a hivatalos retorikában, az egyezmény a szuverenitás tényleges és jogilag rögzített korlátozását jelentette. A szuverenitás egyszerre szolgált védelmi pajzsként a környezeti normák és nemzetközi kötelezettségek ellen, valamint rugalmasan értelmezett fogalomként, amikor a globális tőke, a geopolitikai szövetségek vagy a stratégiai együttműködések ezt indokolták (Lucey, 2020, 2021; Berringer, 2024). Ebben az értelemben az Amazónia a szuverenitás performatív meghatározásának kulcsfontosságú elemévé vált.

Konklúzió

A tanulmány amellett érvelt, hogy Jair Bolsonaro amazóniai politikája a brazil katonai geopolitikai hagyomány megjelenéseként értelmezendő. Az Amazónia stratégiai térként való értelmezése, a szuverenitás hangsúlyozása és a külső beavatkozástól való félelem olyan diskurzív elemek, amelyek a katonai geopolitikai gondolkodásból öröklődtek tovább a demokratikus korszakba, és Bolsonaro kormányzása alatt modern populista nyelvezettel és klímapolitikai konfliktusokkal telítődve ismét meghatározóvá váltak. A klímaváltozás elutasítása ebben az összefüggésben strukturális kényszerként jelent meg: az éghajlati és ökológiai valóság politikai elismerése szükségszerűen korlátozta volna az állami szuverenitás amazóniai érvényesítését. A Bolsonaro-kormány élesen példázza azokat a geopolitikai ellentmondásokat, amelyek a klímaváltozás korszakában a nemzetállami gondolkodás határait jelölik ki. Számunkra pedig fontos tanulság lehet, hogy hogyan próbáljuk meghatározni a 21. században egy ország szuverenitását egy elkerülhetetlenül egymástól kölcsönösen függő globális környezetben.

Jegyzetek

[1] Brazília egysége azonban nem volt a korszakban magától értetődő. Az új Császárságnak több forradalmi hullámmal és szeparatista mozgalommal is szembe kellett, hogy nézzen A különválás igénye különösen erős volt az északkeleti Pernambuco régióban, ahol rendszeresek voltak a lázadások (Brandão Teixeira, 2024). A 19. század első felének regionális lázadásaiban külön érdekesség, hogy az 1835–1845 közötti dél-brazíliai Farroupilha-felkelés során – amelynek keretében a lázadók ideiglenesen kikiáltották a Rio-Grandense Köztársaságot (központja Piratini városa volt) – Giuseppe Garibaldi is harcolt a császári erőkkel szemben (Fausto, 2014).

[2] A 19. században az egyetem is hiányzott Brazíliában. Bár 1808 óta léteztek külön felsőoktatási „fakultás intézmények" az első brazil egyetem csak 1912-ben alakul meg Paranában, amit az Universidade Rio de Janeiro követett 1920-ban, 1934-ben pedig az Universidade de São Paulo – USP. Sguissardi, (2021)

[3] Az IBAMA a Brazil Környezetvédelmi és Megújuló Természeti Erőforrások Intézete (portugálul: Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis), brazil kormányzati ügynökség, amely a kormány környezetvédelmi felügyeletét és természeti erőforrások fenntartható használatának ellenőrzését végzi, 1989 óta (Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources – IBAMA, n.d.).

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TERRITORIAL VISIONS AND CLIMATE POLICY CLASHES: JAIR BOLSONARO'S AMAZON STRATEGY IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Abstract

The study examines how elements of Brazil's military geopolitical tradition related to the Amazon have been revived under Jair Bolsonaro's government. The analysis argues that Bolsonaro's sovereignist and climate-denying policies are not merely populist deviations but rather a structural continuity that comes from the idea of "grandeza" and the logic of a developmental-expansionist state. Recognizing climate change would have meant limiting Brazilian state control in the Amazon; therefore, climate policy necessarily appeared as an "external dictate" in government discourse. The study shows that under Bolsonaro, sovereignty became a selectively applied political resource that simultaneously rejected environmental norms and encouraged foreign economic presence. The Amazon embodied one of the sharpest geopolitical contradictions of the climate change era.

Keywords: Amazonia, Bolsonaro, Geopolitics, Military, Sovereignty

A HUNYADI-SOROZAT POPULÁRIS GEOPOLITIKAI OLVASATBAN

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Doi: 10.15170/PSK.2026.SI.01.10
Beküldve: 2025. december 30.
Elfogadva: 2026. május 13.
Publikálva: 2026. május 31.

Hivatkozás:
Murányi, K. – Egeresi, Z. – Tarrósy, I. – Maksa, Gy. (2026): A Hunyadi-sorozat populáris geopolitikai olvasatban. *Pólusok,* 7(SI), 176–194.

Egyéb információk:
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Absztrakt

A tanulmány a Hunyadi-sorozatot a populáris geopolitika elméleti keretében vizsgálja, arra keresve a választ, miként járul hozzá egy nagyszabású történelmi televíziós produkció a geopolitikai imaginárius és a nemzeti identitás kortárs újratermeléséhez. A tanulmány első része áttekinti a populáris geopolitika fogalmának kialakulását és főbb irányzatait, különös tekintettel arra, hogyan értelmezi a populáris kultúrát – filmeket, sorozatokat, irodalmi műveket – a geopolitikai gondolkodás formálásának terepeként. Ezt követően a Hunyadi-sorozat részletes elemzése következik, amely feltárja a „mi” és a „másik”, a keresztény Európa és az Oszmán Birodalom, valamint a magyar politikai közösség és a nyugati hatalmi centrumok reprezentációját. Az elemzés rámutat arra, hogy a sorozat egyszerre épít a „védőbástya” toposzára és a lentről felemelkedő hős alakjára, miközben árnyalt ellenfélképet és kritikus Nyugat-reprezentációt kínál. A történelmi narratíva így nem pusztán múltértelmezésként működik, hanem a jelenből visszavetített geopolitikai önpozicionálásként is értelmezhető.

Kulcsszavak: *Hunyadi János, média, populáris geopolitika, reprezentáció, televíziós sorozat*

Bevezetés

A Hunyadi (Rise of the Raven) egy nagyszabású, tíz részből álló, nemzetközi koprodukcióban megvalósult történelmi televíziós sorozat, amelyet 2024. októberében mutattak be Cannes-ban. A sorozat alapjául Bán Mór regényfolyama szolgált, amely Hunyadi János életét és a 15. századi oszmán-magyar konfliktus drámai eseményeit dolgozza fel. A sorozat nemzetközi forgalmazásra szánt, államilag támogatott produkció, minden idők legnagyobb költségvetésű magyar mozgóképes alkotása (Papp, 2025), amely a magyar és az európai történelem sorsfordító időszakát dolgozza fel és újszerű perspektívából mutatja be a politikai harcok, hatalmi blokkok alakulását. Jellegéből adódóan nem csupán széles közönséghez jut el és könnyen befogadható narratívát kínál, hanem olyan, a nemzeti identitáselbeszélés újraértelmezésére vonatkozó vállalkozásnak is tekinthető, amely Magyarország védőbástya szerepét hangsúlyozza.

A sorozat aktívan formálja a nemzeti identitás, a „mi" és a „másik", a „saját" és az „idegen" jelentését, ugyanakkor hozzájárul a geopolitikai, külpolitikai hangsúlyok közvetítéséhez, a különböző kultúrák és civilizációk találkozásának bemutatása által. A Hunyadi alapnarratívája a bátor, igazságos, emberi történelmi hős és a hősies kis nemzet elbeszélése, amellyel morális felsőbbrendűséget és civilizációs védőszerepet hangsúlyoz a külső (és belső) fenyegetéssel szemben. Legfőképp a „mi" és az „ők", az identitások konstruálásában tűnik újszerűnek, és ehhez kapcsolódóan az Oszmán Birodalom, a Nyugat és a keresztény Európa megjelenítésében, értékelésében. A sorozat kulturális kódjai olyan ellentétpárokon keresztül jelennek meg, mint a civilizáció és barbárság, agresszor és áldozat, centrum és periféria.

Tanulmányunk célja kettős: egyrészt szeretnénk rövid magyar nyelvű áttekintést nyújtani a populáris geopolitika viszonylag új tudományos megközelítéséről, másrészt a geopolitika és populáris kultúra szempontjából vizsgálni a sorozatot. A főbb kutatói kérdéseink a következők: Miért aktuális a Hunyadi-sorozat vizsgálata populáris geopolitikai szempontból? A különböző tematikus elemek (szereplők, események, helyszínek) és reprezentációk által hogyan konstruálja meg a „mi" és a „másik", a „saját" és „idegen" kettősségét (pl. török-magyar konfliktus) a sorozat? Ehhez kapcsolódóan magyar nézőpontból milyen sztereotípiákat erősít meg vagy bizonytalanít el az elbeszélés? Magyarországnak milyen geopolitikai szerepet tulajdonít? Hogyan járulhat hozzá a magyar nemzeti identitáselbeszélés újragondolásához a sorozat (hősies nemzet)?

A populáris geopolitikai vizsgálódás történeti áttekintése

Amíg a tradicionális, államközpontú geopolitika vizsgálódási körébe olyan témák tartoznak, mint a nemzeti szuverenitás, az államhatalom, geopolitikai blokkok és erőviszonyok, addig a kritikai geopolitika a globalizáció, a szimbolikus határok,

ISSN 2732-1851

hálózatok és virtuális környezet (Ó Tuathail & Dalby, 1996) problematikáját tárgyalja, egyúttal diszkurzív térben vizsgálja a kapcsolódó narratívákat. Ó Tuathail (Toal) szerint érdemes bevezetni a geopolitikai kultúra fogalmát, amely azért tekinthető adekvátnak, mert érzékenyen kezeli a jelenségek összetettségét, és abból indul ki, hogy az államokon belüli hatalmi viszonyok és intézményi struktúrák érdemben befolyásolják azokat a narratívákat, amelyekkel az adott állam a külvilág felé önmagát és érdekeit megjeleníti (Toal, 2024: 91).

A populáris geopolitika diszciplínája a kritikai geopolitikai megközelítésnek Ó Tuathail (1996) szerinti hármas felosztásába illeszkedik. Amíg a formális geopolitika az akadémia vagy a politikai think-tankek (tanulmányok, jelentések, politikai doktrínák stb.), a gyakorlati geopolitika pedig a politikai döntéshozók által generált geopolitikai diskurzust jelölik (politikai beszédek, állami intézkedések, diplomáciai és jogi gyakorlatok stb.), addig a kommunikáció, a média és az identitás politikájának egybefonódásával foglalkozó populáris geopolitikai megközelítés a diskurzus azon rétegét vizsgálja, amelyben az állampolgárok nap mint nap elmerülnek (tömegkommunikáció, állami rituálék, közvélemény stb. eszközeivel), tehát – tehetjük hozzá – a populáris médiakultúrát. A népszerű média elbeszéléseinek segítségével megalkotott populáris geopolitikát, azaz a médiaszövegek reprezentációiban, valamint a médiaközönségek és -használók mindennapi gyakorlataiban megképződő geopolitikai tudást. A populáris geopolitika kutatása a média kulturális tanulmányozását találkoztatja a geopolitikai elemzések korábbi hagyományaival, figyelmet szentelve a keretezésnek (framing), amely éppen a narratívák (how the story is told), reprezentációk dimenzióira irányítja a figyelmet.

Saunders és Strukov (2018) kiemeli, hogy a populáris geopolitika interdiszciplináris jelleggel felöleli a tömegkultúra, a nemzetközi kapcsolatok és a geopolitika által tárgyalt problémákat. A média különféle típusait, formátumait, műfajait vizsgálja, legyen szó hírmédiáról (újságok, TV stb.), könyvekről, vagy a populáris kultúra egyéb termékeiről (pl. képregények, filmek, zene, internet stb.). Dittmer és Bos (2019) a Popular Culture, Geopolitics, and Identity című kötetben a nemzettudat reprezentálására példaként hozzák a labdarúgó világbajnokságok által transzmittált nemzeti szimbólumok szerepét (Dittmer és Bos, 2019: 17-18) vagy a Brit Birodalom esetében például a James Bond-filmeket (Dittmer és Bos, 2019: 69-94).

A tömegfogyasztás könnyen elérhető értékeire épülő tömegkultúra – vagy másképpen: populáris médiakultúra – kialakulása akár a mozgatható betűelemekkel való könyvnyomtatás technológiájának 15. századi megjelenéséig is visszavezethető, hiszen az első tömegterméknek tekinthető könyv révén a kulturális termelés már nem csupán egy szűkebb réteg kiváltsága volt (Dittmer és Bos, 2019). Közös nyelvi-kulturális jellemzőkkel bíró „elképzelt közösségek" (Anderson, 2006) jöttek létre, melyek formálódását a nyomtatás, mint technológiai újítás alapvetően határozta meg. Széles tömegek számára is hozzáférhetővé váltak a vallási és politikai szempontból érzékeny szövegek, így a kultúrafogyasztók rálátást kaptak a közösség, a nemzet kérdéseit érintő ügyekre. A korábbi előzmények ellenére a korai médiakultúra korát a piaci alapon szervezett média 19. századi kiépülésével szokás összefüggésbe hozni.

A populáris kultúra számtalan kommunikációs csatornán, platformon és hagyományon keresztül elérhető számunkra, és széles társadalmi csoportokhoz kapcsolódik. A populáris geopolitika kérdései alapvetően a populáris kultúra politikai jelentéstartalmaira vonatkoznak a geopolitikai kereten belül. Saunders és Strukov (2018) értelmezése szerint a geopolitika térkép a világ megértéséhez, amely segít eligazodni a nemzetközi kapcsolatok világában, feltárva a földrajzi tér és az ott élők viszonyát, különös figyelemmel a hatalmi viszonyokra és az egyes szereplők hatalomhoz kapcsolódó viszonyára. A nemzetközi kapcsolatok klasszikus megközelítésének területén a populáris kultúra tanulmányozása legjobb esetben is marginális szerephez jut. Noha számos folyóirat – a Politics, a Geopolitics, vagy a Millennium – egyre nagyobb teret szentel a populáris kultúra empirikus és elméleti elemzésének a nemzetközi kapcsolatokon belül, valamint a populáris kultúra politikai kultúrában betöltött szerepének fontosságáról szóló tanulmányoknak, a nemzetközi kapcsolatok diszciplínájának legfontosabb folyóiratai továbbra is szinte áthatolhatatlan erődítményeknek tűnnek. Ugyanakkor a populáris kultúra nemzetközi politikai kontextusainak kutatása gyakran talált termékeny talajt más tudományágakban, a földtudománytól a kultúrakutatáson át a szociológiáig. Ugyancsak Saunders és Strukov (2018) szerint a nemzetközi kapcsolatok tudományának nem sikerült elérnie azt az alapvető célját, amely azon kortárs politikai entitások közötti kapcsolatok tanulmányozására és megértésére vonatkozik, amelyek nemcsak az állami intézményeket, hanem a populáris kultúra intézményeit is magukban foglalják.

Az 1990-es években kezdődött digitális forradalom átalakította és kihívások elé állította a globális politikai színteret, megkérdőjelezve a politika működéséről régóta fennálló elképzeléseket. Az új médiák, a tévésorozatok, a filmek vagy a videojátékok relevanciája a világ megítélésében és működésében megköveteli, hogy az ilyen kutatások bekerüljenek a nemzetközi kapcsolatok tudományának fősodrába, hiszen nyilvánvalóvá vált, hogy a politika és a nemzetközi kapcsolatok szorosan kapcsolódnak a populáris kultúrához, amely elbeszéléseket és értelmezéseket kínál a laikusok számára is. A populáris médiakultúrában a hírességek és a politika közötti határ egyre elmosódottabbá válik, láthatjuk ezt például Berlusconi, Schwarzenegger, Trump vagy Cicciolina esetében (Saunders és Strukov, 2018).

A geopolitika kritikai vizsgálata az 1970-es évekhez, a francia geográfus Yves Lacoste személyéhez és a radikális francia földtudomány folyóirata, az Hérodote megalapításához köthető. Francia nyelven az utóbbi évtizedekben a médiageopolitika (géopolitique des médias) tudományterülete látszik önállósulni, ennek átfogó képét, tematikájának részletgazdag bemutatását kínálja Philippe Boulanger monográfiája (2014, a korábbi könyv fogalmi hálójával dolgozó újabb változat 2021). Az 1990-es évektől a meghatározó angol nyelvű nemzetközi szakirodalomban is új geopolitikai megközelítések jelentek meg (Ó Tuathail és Dalby, 1998). Joanne P. Sharp úttörő munkáiban (1993, 1996, 2000) azt vizsgálja, hogy a széles körben terjesztett Reader's Digest amerikai magazin miként befolyásolta a közvélemény geopolitikai percepcióját a hidegháború idején. Sharp azzal érvel, hogy a magazin jelentős szerepet játszott egy bizonyos amerikai identitás és világnézet kialakításában azáltal, hogy egyszerűsített narratívákat mutatott be a globális eseményekről. A Reader's Digest gyakran ábrázolta az Egyesült Államokat erkölcsi vezetőként, a Szovjetuniót pedig állandó fenyegetésként, ezzel megerősítve a kétpólusú és ideológiai ellentéteket is. Sharp tanulmánya (1993) rávilágít a populáris kultúra fontosságára a nemzetközi kapcsolatok alakításában és a nemzeti identitás közvélemény általi megértésének alakításában. Klaus Dodds (2003, 2005; Funnell és Dodds, 2017) a James Bond-filmek elemzésén keresztül mutatja be a posztimperiális Nagy-Britannia narratíváját. A szintén geográfus Jason Dittmer (2005, 2007, 2013) pedig egyebek mellett az Amerika Kapitány figuráján keresztül vizsgálja, hogy egy képregény szuperhős miként alakítja az Egyesült Államok pozícióját, megítélését, értelmezését a világban. Ahogy Dittmer és Dodds (2008) rámutat, a hidegháború idején a populáris kultúra és a politikai világ közötti határok elmosódása különösen jelentőssé vált, főleg, amikor Reagan elnök Hollywoodot saját személyes eszközkészleteként kezdte használni külpolitikai céljainak eléréséhez, például a Csillagok háborúja, a Rambo vagy a Rocky című filmek kapcsán. Az említett geográfusokhoz hamarosan más tudományterületek képviselői is csatlakoztak (nemzetközi kapcsolatok, kommunikáció- és médiatudomány, politikatudomány stb.), akik kutatásaikban filmsorozatok, könyvek, képregények, dalszövegek, videójátékok médiumain keresztül vizsgálják a politikai hatalmi viszonyokat és narratívákat (például Weldes, 1999; Weber, 2005; Nexon és Neumann, 2006; Boulton, 2008; Dunnett, 2009; Salter, 2011). A populáris geopolitika területén tevékenykedő kutatók különös érdeklődést tanúsítanak azirant, hogy a populáris kultúra miként képes beszivárogni (Dodds, 2005) a politikai döntéshozók, diplomaták és polgárok valós cselekedeteibe, kezdve a külpolitikai kezdeményezések támogatásától a fegyverkezésen át a nemzeti ellentétekig. Mégis fontos kiemelni, hogy ezen kutatások középpontjában alapvetően a globálisan orientált angol nyelvű országok állnak (Saunders és Strukov, 2018). Tanulmányunkkal az angolszász kereteken kívüli, közép- és kelet-európai populáris geopolitikai diskurzus hangsúlyozásához kívánunk hozzájárulni.

Az írás ezáltal a magyar nyelven elérhető, eleddig meglehetősen szerény vonatkozó szakirodalom és tudáskorpusz bővítését is szolgálni akarja. Valójában a Szilágyi István által jegyzett Geopolitika és A geopolitika elmélete című kötetek (Szilágyi, 2013 és Szilágyi, 2018) foglalkoznak néhány oldal erejéig a kritikai geopolitika és geoökonómia lényegi elemeivel és megközelítéseivel, Ó Tuathail munkásságán túl kiemelve további fontos szerzők hozzájárulását „a modernitásra jellemző sokszínű geopolitikai diskurzusok és gyakorlatok változatos kritikáinak gyűjtőhelyeként”

(Szilágyi, 2013: 144) felfogható kritikai geopolitika valóságának feltárásához. Így Laura Jones, Daniel Sage, John Agnew, valamint Saul Bernard Cohen, Edwin Luttwak és Neil Smith szerzők fontosabb munkáira is történik hivatkozás magyarul. A kritikai geopolitikával is részletesen foglalkozott Mendly Dorottya (2016). Értékes novum geostratégiai elemzést publikált többek között Kacziba Péter (2023), újfent Szilágyi István (2022), Türke András István (2015), Vörös Zoltán (2014), és magával a geostratégiai gondolkodással Bárdos-Féltoronyi Miklós (2006) is hosszasan foglalkozik a Bevezetés a geopolitikába című művében.

Az utóbbi években további új megközelítések is megjelentek a geopolitikai elemzésekben, így például a kibertér (Krasznay et al., 2025). Horváth Levente (2022) A kínai geopolitikai gondolkodás. „Egy övezet, egy út" kínai szemszögből című könyvében a kínai geopolitikai gondolkodásmód gyökereit alaposan kibontja és ezzel ráirányítja a figyelmet számos „puha tételre" (nem csupán a katonai keményerő meghatározó súlyára), amelyek számunkra alapot kínálnak ahhoz, hogy jobban megértsük: hogyan is szól a kínai sztori, amely a mára mérvadó „Övezet és Út Kezdeményezés" (Belt and Road Initiative, BRI) geostratégiai rendszerét keretezi. A változó világrend kérdéseit és magát a világrendi átalakulást vizsgáló monografikus kötetek közül a Grünhut és Vörös (2013) és a Vörös és Tarrósy (2024) munkák alkalmaznak kritikai geopolitikai megfontolásokat. Míg Tarrósy (2022) a válságok jobb megértéséhez kínál kritikai geopolitikai megközelítés-kísérleteket, addig Benyhe István (2025) Magyarország helyzetével és lehetőségeivel foglalkozik behatóbban geokulturális alapokról indítva eszmefuttatását. Kifejezetten friss megközelítéseket adott közre a populáris geopolitikák értéséhez a Kálai–Maksa páros, akik a Bevezetés a médiakultúra tanulmányozásába (2022) című munkájukban foglalkoztak a kérdéskörrel. Maksa Gyula a képregények geopolitikai vonatkozásait vizsgálja (2017; 2025), az Egri–Maksa szerzőpáros (2025) a divatkutatás terén alkalmazott populáris geopolitikai megközelítést. Murányi Kata doktori disszertációjában (2020) a kritikai városkutatás, szimbolikus terek, médiavárosok, luzofón identitás kapcsolatával foglalkozik. A Maksa-Murányi szerzőpáros (2023, 2025) a képregény, migráció, szimbolikus terek, street art vizsgálatában alkalmazza a populáris geopolitikai megközelítéseket. Továbbá 2026-ban a Pécsi Tudományegyetem Bölcsészet- és Társadalomtudományi Karán megalakult a Populáris Geopolitika és Média Kutatócsoport. Jelen tanulmány is jelentős részben e kutatócsoport kezdeményezésére született.

A Hunyadi-sorozat mint magyar Game of Thrones?

Köszönhetően annak, hogy a Hunyadi egy játékfilmes sorozatként készült, Bán János (írói álnevén: Bán Mór) fantasy-regényíró kötetei alapján (érdemes megnézni a szerző korábbi, 2000-es évek folyamán megjelent Kárpáthia-sorozatát, amely szintén a Kárpát-medence és tágabban vett környezetében játszódik egy jövőbeli posztapokaliptikus világban, amelyben az emberek középkori civilizációs szinten élnek), emiatt a művet akár egy magyar Game of Thrones-ként is megközelíthetjük. Stenberg és Switek (2023) tanulmányukban éppen a Game of Thrones-t hozzák példaként a nemzetközi kapcsolatok oktatásához kifejezetten kultúraközi-geopolitikai megközelítésben, mint ahogyan az érzelmek geopolitikáját kutató Dominique Moïsi is, a sorozatok geopolitikájával foglalkozó könyvében (2017) önálló fejezetet szentel ennek az alkotásnak. A magyar történész szakma kritikusan fogadta a Hunyadi-sorozatot (mi több, a kritikát magát is górcső alá vették lásd Illik, 2025), nemcsak a technikai következetlenségei vagy kevésbé korhű megoldásai, de a valós történelmi események és személyek „könnyed" kezelése miatt is, s inkább játékfilmként való értelmezését javasolta (Balogh és Németh, 2025; Tóth, 2025; Kovács, 2025). Ez azonban nem von le a film szórakoztató jellegéből, épp ellenkezőleg; lehetőséget ad arra, hogy ne egy történelmi vagy dokumentumfilmként közelítsük meg, hanem a jelenből a 15. századra vetített, szélesebb közönségnek szánt világképet ismerjünk meg, amely egyszerre építi és továbbfejleszti a magyar lakosság által már ismert, a korszakra vagy történelmi helyzetekre építő tudást és hoz be új megközelítéseket. Így számos közismert, általános és középiskolai könyvekben tárgyalt nemzeti toposz megjelenik a sorozatban. Így például a kereszténység védőbástyájának szerepe, aminek nincsenek megbízható szövetségesei, hiszen végső soron egyedül kellett felvenni a harcot a törökkel szemben. További példa a valójában kitalált Dugovics Titusz alakja, akit a hazafi példájaként konstruáltak meg a 19. században, noha a korabeli források szerint valaki valóban magával ragadott a halálba egy zászlót kitűző janicsárt (Szőcs, 2012). Vagy ide tartozik a déli harangszó, amelyről minden magyar közoktatásból kikerülőnek a nándorfehérvári diadal jut eszébe.

A feldolgozott korszak – 1420-as évektől 1456-ig – valóban a magyar történelem egyik legizgalmasabb, intrikákban, polgárháborúkban és hősies mozzanatokban bővelkedő időszaka volt, amely ráadásul az oszmán terjeszkedés hetven évre történő megállításával valóban világtörténelmi jelentőségre tett szert. Ez a korszak ráadásul nemcsak a magyar történelem szempontjából izgalmas: számos balkáni nép ezekben az években vívja utolsó nagy harcait az Oszmán Birodalommal szemben. Ide tartoznak a havasalföldi és moldvai románok, a szerbek, akik végül 1459-ben elveszítették államukat, a bosnyákok (1463) vagy az albánok, akik Szkanderbég (Kasztrióta György) vezetésével nagyon komoly gondokat okoztak az oszmánoknak, egészen vezetőjük 1468-as haláláig. Másik oldalon ez az időszak, amikor az oszmánok több vereség ellenére úrrá tudnak lenni a balkáni ellenálláson, s Konstantinápoly megszerzésével (1453) végképp birodalommá válnak. II. (Hódító) Mehmed a jelenlegi török kultúrpolitikában is meghatározó szerepet játszik (2012-ben kurzusfilm is készült róla). Tehát a korszak és a fordulatos események valóban kiváló alapot szolgáltattak egy Game of Thrones-féle megközelítésnek; ezt pedig a sorozat messzemenően igyekezett kihasználni. A sorozatban megjelenő testiség, a véres jelenetek brutalitása és a fordulatokban gazdag cselekmény szintén a nagysikerű sorozat képviselte trendbe illeszti a Hunyadit.

Ebből a megközelítésből kifolyólag valós, a közönség jelentős része által felületesen ismert történelmi személyek és események felhasználásával egy nemzeti mozgóképi hőseposz készült, magyar szemszögből, magyar hősökkel, ahogyan az intencióval kapcsolatban az író egy interjúban megjegyzi: „mert ez a mi igazságunk" (Exterde, 2025). A sorozat központjába Hunyadi János alakja került. A 15. század meghatározó magyar hadvezére valóban súlyos harcokat folytatott a terjeszkedő Oszmán Birodalommal szemben és számos csatában legyőzve jelentős vereségeket is mért rá. Egy tízrészes, meglehetősen nagy időkeretet felölelő sorozatban ennek a harcnak a részletes bemutatására nem is vállalkozhattak a készítők (az 1443-1444-es téli hadjárat például kimaradt); Hunyadi életének pusztán néhány állomását villantották fel, amelyek személyiségformáló hatásúak voltak, illetve hozzájárultak ahhoz, hogy olyan hadvezérré váljon, aki képes volt vereséget mérni az akkori világ egyik leghatalmasabb uralkodója, az oszmán szultán által vezetett hadra.

A sorozat erőssége, hogy a történetiséget képviselendő a külföldi karaktereket a készítők általában igyekeztek külföldiekkel eljátszatni (törököket törökökkel, szerbeket többnyire szerb színészekkel stb., azonban román színészek nem szerepeltek a produkcióban), s az anyanyelvükön szólalhattak meg a nem magyar szereplők. A megfelelő kommunikációs helyzetekben magyar színészek is megszólalnak idegen nyelveken: Hunyadit alakító Kádár L. Gellért olykor olaszul beszélt, a szerb despota lányát, Brankovics Marát játszó Törőcsik Franciska a magyar mellett szerbül és főleg törökül szólalt meg. Innen nézve feltűnő hiányosság viszont, hogy a román szereplőket nem román színészek játsszák, illetve, hogy csak elvétve szólalnak meg románul. A magyar színészek a Kárpát-medence egészéből, tehát a kisebbségi magyar közösségekből is érkeztek. Ahogyan egy helyen Bán Mór fogalmazott: „egy kicsit így is sikerült meghaladni Trianont" (Kolek, 2025). A következőkben a karakterek és a hozzájuk kapcsolódó szerepek részletes bemutatása helyett inkább arra koncentrálunk, hogy a sorozat hogyan konstruálja a különböző geopolitikai szereplőket és az általuk képviselt politikai entitásokat.

A félelmetes, de nemes hódítók

A végső soron a középkori magyar állam bukását (1526) és a Kárpát-medence etnikai viszonyainak máig tartó megváltoztatását okozó Oszmán Birodalom sorozatban megjelenő vezetői (II. Murád, II. Mehmed) a végzetes konfliktus ellenére alapvetően pozitív színben tűnnek fel. Jelentős játékidőt kap az ő életük, fejlődéstől nem mentes karakterük bemutatása, ami a magyar történelemben oly sokszor ellenségként megjelenő törökök eddigi ábrázolásához képest mindenképp kivételes. Ebből kifolyólag a nagyközönség által kevésbé ismert mozzanatok (pl. testvérgyilkosság intézménye) és toposzok (szultáni hárem bemutatása) is megjelentek a filmvásznon.

Ami a fő török karaktereket illeti, a sorozat ugyan nem indokolja különösebben, hogy miért kell lerohanniuk a Balkánt és Közép-Európát, de ravasz és bölcs, ugyanakkor rendkívül kemény vezetőként mutatja be őket. Az Murathan Muslu által megformált II. Murád a karizmatikus uralkodó karakterét hozza, aki hatalmát nemcsak erővel, de furfanggal tartja meg. Egy olyan vezető, aki az uralkodás nehézségei ellenére vágyik a szerelemre és gyönyörre, de a felsőbb érdekek miatt ezeket akár fel is áldozza, ha kell. A sorozatban elrabolt erdélyi magyar anyától születő II. Mehmed már gyerekkorában éles észjárásról, a „vaskapui csatában" pedig hűségről apja iránt, bátorságáról, a hatalom megszerzésével (megöleti testvérét) pedig keménységéről és eltökéltségéről, makacsságáról tesz tanúbizonyságot. Ugyan a felépített szultáni karakter képében vannak „gyarlónak" mondható mozzanatok, mint az amúgy az oszmán udvarban bevett gyakorlatnak számító testvérgyilkosság vagy nevelőanyjának megerőszakoltatása, azonban ezek is végeredményben egy olyan ellenfélkép építés részei, amely a végső soron őt legyőző Hunyadi alakját is emeli. A sorozat által megalkotott kép, miszerint a keleti hódítók nem egyszerű karakterek, akik pusztán csak ölni, zsákmányolni jönnek, hanem egy expanzív politika rendkívül tehetséges, tanult és belső vívódásoktól sem mentes letéteményesei, akik a háború és gyarlóságaik ellenére megérdemlik a tiszteletet, s akiket egyáltalán nem lehet félvállról venni.

A keleti zsoldba persze – magyar szempontól – árulók is szegődtek. Ugyan a hazai gondolkodásból teljesen hiányzik, viszont a török történelmi köztudatban – s nemrég „Rise of Empires: Ottoman" netflixes sorozatban – megjelenik Urban/Orbán mester személye, aki a török hagyomány szerint azzal tűnt ki, hogy felajánlotta szolgálatait II. Mehmednek Konstantinápoly 1453-as ostromához. A hagyomány szerint a mester az akkori világ legnagyobb ágyúját öntötte, amivel komoly károkat sikerült okozni a városfalban – ugyan ő nem láthatta annak elestét, mivel ágyúja felrobbant széttépve őt is (a korszakban ez egyáltalán nem volt ritka). A sorozatban azonban Nándorfehérvár ostrománál is feltűnt, mint az olasz pattantyúsok vezetője, aki képes hidegvérrel a saját keresztény népébe lövetni, nem véletlen lesz bűnei zsoldja ezüst helyett magyar kardél.

Önző Nyugat

Ezzel szemben az osztrák vagy olasz szereplők szinte egytől-egyig negatív megvilágításba kerülnek. Az egyik fő probléma velük szemben, hogy miközben Magyarország, mint Európa védőbástyája próbálja megakadályozni az oszmán terjeszkedést, addig a jelentős pénzügyi, politikai és katonai képességek fölött diszponáló európai vezetők nemhogy nem ismerik fel a fenyegetést, hanem épp ellenkezőleg, Magyarország – vagy a mindenkori magyar uralkodók – kiszolgáltatott helyzetén próbálnak kíméletlenül nyerészkedni. A magára hagyatottságot érzékletesen szemlélteti az utolsó epizódban az ostromra készülve Hunyadi János és Szilágyi Mihály párbeszéde, melynek konklúziója, hogy már megint egyedül maradt az ország. A nyugati nyerészkedés egyik eklatáns példája volt a genovai flotta oszmánok általi lefizetése, melynek révén a csapataikat áthajózhatták a Boszporuszon, hogy aztán tönkreverjék a keresztény hadat Várnánál 1444-ben.

Az önérdekkövető, gazdag, pöffeszkedő, ravasz nyugati uralkodó toposzát Habsburg Frigyes képviseli a leginkább, akivel történelmileg valóban meggyűlt a baja Hunyadi Jánosnak is, s még inkább Hunyadi Mátyásnak. A sorozatban bemutatott sztereotip képben egy elhízott, öregedő, élvhajhász nagyúrként tűnik fel, aki akár a saját rokonai boldogságát is sutba dobva képes erkölcstelen politikai alkukat kötni – lásd Habsburg Albert kiházasítása vagy özvegyével, Luxemburgi Erzsébettel való bánásmódja.

Az olasz kegyúr, Visconti milánói herceg, akinek zsoldjába Hunyadi Luxemburgi Zsigmond parancsára kénytelen elszegődni, szintén a saját hasznát nézi. Nagyon helyesen felismeri, hogy Hunyadit érdemes minden erejével megtartania, emiatt még attól sem riad vissza, hogy unokahúga bájait is bevesse – aminek köszönhetően a főhős három évig családját feledve olasz földön marad.

A film főgonosza szintén a nyugati „szövetségesek" közül kerül ki. Székhelye a magyar határ mellett lévő Cillei vár. A magyar történelemben elhíresült Cillei Ulrik valóban sok gondot okozott a hatalomért való küzdelemben Hunyadinak, azonban a sorozatban egy végtelenül erkölcstelen, furfangos és hatalomhajhász, ördögi figuraként jelenik meg, aki még saját unokahúgát is képes meghágni (mi több, megöletni a saját gyerekével várandós királynét). Persze az isteni gondviselés nem marad adósa: minden gyermekét elveszíti a film végéig. Cillei alapvetően a ravasz, megbízhatatlan, s valójában az ország érdekei ellen tevékenykedő nyugati tanácsadó szerepét testesíti meg, akinek ármánykodásaival a főhősnek rendszeresen meg kell küzdenie.

Árulók és szövetségesek között a Balkánon

Miközben a jelentősebb nyugati hatalmak vajmi keveset segítenek a magyaroknak, az oszmán terjeszkedés útjában lévő balkáni népek is eltérően viszonyulnak a fenyegetéshez: ezt főleg a románok és szerbek esetében láthatjuk.

A külföldi uralkodók közül a leghálátlanabb szerep a román, köztük is II. Vlad Dracul havasalföldi fejedelemnek jutott (fia helyett ő kapta meg a karóbahúzó címet). Nagypál Gábor zseniális alakításában egy morális megfontolásokkal nem nagyon vádolható, szadista vezetőt ismerhetnek meg a nézők, aki képes bármit és bárkit, még saját fiait is feláldozni a hatalomért. Havasalföldi vajdaként nemzetközi ereje sem az oszmán szultánéval, sem a magyar királyéval nem mérhető össze, emiatt elvtelen egyensúlyozást folytat a két nagyhatalom között, az erőviszonyok változása pedig gyors pálfordulásra készteti. Magyar szempontból gyávának és megbízhatatlannak mutatják be.

Az összkép két fiát illetően se sokkal jobb: miután mindkettő a szultáni udvarba került, egyikből az edirnei trón várományosával kerül szodómiába, míg a másik, a későbbi (valóban Karóbahúzó) Vlad Tepes éveken át rabláncon kénytelen sínylődni. A börtönből a fiatal Mehmed szabadítja ki azzal a feltétellel, hogy végez féltestvérével, a szultán elsőszülött fiával – ennek örve alatt a mindenre képes Vlad a fél udvartartást meggyilkolja. A fiatal havasalföldi herceg a későbbiekben, mint Mehmed vérszomjas és bármire képes embereként tűnik ki. Az ő karaktere kapja a szerepet, hogy megerőszakolja Mehmed nevelőanyját, Marát, később pedig a Nándorfehérvárat ostromló török katonákat ostorral hajtva a városfalnak kergesse, s ő ígér jutalmat a végül a vártoronyra az oszmán zászlót egy rövid időre kitevő Abdullahnak nevezett katonának – akivel együtt a filmben Dugovics Titusz magát is a mélységbe veti. Kegyetlensége végül az oszmán seregben is ellenérzést szült, ami végül Mehmedet az ostrom közben arra készteti, hogy Havasalföld fejedelmévé téve inkább hazaengedje, azonban ezt megalázó módon teszi, emlékeztetve az ifjú vezetőt az erőviszonyokra: meg kell csókolnia a szultán csizmáját.

A románok viszont nem egyértelműen negatív képben vannak feltűntetve: a vaskapui összecsapás előtt erdélyi románok is megjelennek, akiket Hunyadi hű embereiként köszöntött. Ugyanígy pozitív szerepet kapnak a (huszita) csehek, akik harci szekereikkel valóban jelentős szerepet játszottak a korabeli csatákban - bár az kimaradt a filmből, hogy Zsigmond rendkívül sokat harcolt ellenük, s ezekben a háborúkban Hunyadi is megismerkedett az akkor forradalmi újdonságnak számító huszita harcmodorral.

Az oszmánellenes harcokban megjelenő másik jelentős balkáni a nép, a szerbek alapvetően pozitív szerepet játszanak. A román testvérpárral szemben éles ellentétet képez a két szerb herceg története, akik kitartanak a magyarok mellett, s nem lázkodnak meg II. Murád előtt. Még akkor sem, amikor emiatt megvakíttatják őket, s a szultáni udvarba kerülnek: ott inkább nővérük, Mara segítségével önkezükkel vetnek véget az életüknek, mintsem megalkudjanak.

Hunyadi egyik szerelme, Mara az okos és furfangos nő szerepét testesíti meg, aki képes még az oszmán szultán szívét is meglágyítani, elméjét pedig lenyűgözni. A szerb hercegnő pedig még az ellenség udvarában sem felejti el, honnan érkezett – lásd testvérei vagy a magyarok alkalmanként megsegítése –, amely a megalkuvásoktól nem mentes hűséges kitartást mutatja be, bár II. Mehmed parancsára, Vlad Tepes általi megerőszakoltatása révén elveszik tőle a lehetőséget, hogy Muráddal tartson, miután az (valóban) visszavonult a hatalomtól. [1]

Egyház – hollywoodi toposzok

Mint láttuk, a Balkánon ugyan akadnak szövetségesek, de ők túl gyengék. A film ábrázolásában a legtöbb nyugati vezető – kezdve a Habsburgokkal vagy az olaszokkal – alapvetően önérdekkövető, s nem nagyon akar a magyarok segítségére sietni. Érdekes módon azonban ebbe a táborba kerül a pápa is, akit az egész korszakra vonatkozóan egy személy játszik (valójában a vonatkozó három évtizedben négy pápa is váltotta egymást Rómában). A pápa ezen esetben sem igyekszik a magyarok segítségére, amikor viszont igen, azzal is inkább többet árt, mint használ. Így például Cesarini pápai nuncius Magyarországra küldése, aki valóban jelentős szerepet játszott abban, hogy 1444-ben Magyarország felmondta az Oszmán Birodalommal kötött szerződését és megindította – a sorozatban helyesen bemutatva – a várnai katasztrófával végződő hadjáratát. A sorozatban az ő vakbuzgóságnak köszönhetően a vonuló seregek kegyetlenkednek a bolgár, ortodox papokkal, akik érthető módon inkább ellenséget, mint felszabadítót látnak a keresztesekben.

A film számos helyen a fentebb említettekhez hasonlóan hollywoodi toposzokat szerepeltetve egyházellenes kritikákat vagy mozzanatokat fogalmaz meg. Így például a magyar egyház feje, az esztergomi érsek is rendkívüli rugalmasságot mutat a királyválasztásokat illetően, s végül csak az utolsó pillanatban, Nándorfehérvár ostroma előtt áll Hunyadi mellé. Ugyanígy negatív megvilágításban ábrázolják a felesége halála után hitbuzgalomba és a keresztes hadjáratba „menekülő" I. Ulászlót is. Egyedüli pozitívabb szerepet Kapisztrán János kapott, aki már idejekorán felismeri Hunyadi képességeit, majd pedig a szükség órájában népes kereszteshadat szervezve megtámadja az ostromló török sereget. Az utolsó két epizódban ez a hitbuzgalomból indított fegyvertelen támadás, s mint ilyen, egyértelmű öngyilkosság, a valóságban a kaszákkal, cséplőkkel felfegyverkezett keresztesek hősies, de nem esztelen beavatkozását jelentette, amelyet Hunyadi tényleg sikeresen tudott kihasználni.

A magyar hős karaktere a rossz vezetővel szemben

A Toldi Miklósba oltott János vitéz, a rendkívül sportos, kiváló hadvezéri képességekkel rendelkező, szívós, uralkodójához hűséges, katonáival emberséges, szeretőivel szemben állhatatos, a lehetőségekhez képest jó férj, apa és hazafi szerepét megtestesítő Hunyadi esetében a film vajmi kevés esendőséget mutat be. A karaktere alapvetően megfelel a Bán Mór által elképzelt képnek „mindig úgy éreztem, hogy a klasszikus hős az, aki pallossal a kezében, talpig páncélban az ellenség sorai közé tör, és megvédi a hazáját" (Exterde, 2025).

Noha Hunyadi sem fedhetetlen – főleg az első epizódokban, amikor még fiatal és éretlenebb, az italt és a nőket se veti meg –, az árnyaltabb jellemábrázolás hiánya nem a véletlen műve. Ugyanígy makulátlanul és férje biztos támaszaként jelenik meg a felesége, a sorozatban Rujder Vivien által megelevenített Szilágyi Erzsébet, aki bár kénytelen erkölcstelen dolgokat tenni, ezeket a férje és családja érdekében – így mindenképp megkapja a felmentést. Ugyanígy az utolsó pillanatban megtérő tékozló fiú szerepét kapja Újlaki Miklós magyar főúr is, aki az epizódok többségében a saját érdekeit nézve a hős elárulásától sem riad vissza.

Noha Hunyadit a valósághoz hasonlóan, a sorozatban is nemesi család sarjaként ábrázolták, s ebből a szempontból egyértelműen az uralkodó osztály része, a lentről felkapaszkodó hős sztereotípiáját testesíti meg. A királyhoz képest jóval szerényebb, oszmán és havasalföldi támadásoknak kitett vajdahunyadi vára Erdélyben, az uralkodók által folyamatosan szolgálatra, igaz, egyre jelentősebb szolgálatra kötelezett fiatal nemes a film végére – a történelemhez hasonlóan – jelentős magasságokba emelkedik, hiszen akkor már erdélyi vajdaként, nándorfehérvári kapitányként, az ország volt kormányzójaként adja életét a török elleni harcban.

Ezzel szemben a királyi trónon ülő uralkodók Hunyadi ellenpólusaiként jelennek meg: Luxemburgi Zsigmondot egy idősödő, állandó pénztelenséggel küszködő, csak a német-római császári címre törő, s ezért bármit feláldozni hajlandó, nyelveket nem beszélő vezetőként ismerjük meg. Ugyan történelmileg valóban sokat küzdött a német-római császári címért vagy az állandó pénzhiány ellen, s hadi vállalkozásait, főleg a török ellen, kevés siker koronázta, azonban a sorozat készítői a Zsigmondhoz kapcsolódó történelmi tényanyag alapján egy sokoldalúbb, esetlegesen pozitívabb képet alakíthattak volna ki, amennyiben ez cél lett volna. Elvégre ötven évnyi országlása alatt ő volt az egyedüli magyarországi uralkodó, aki képes volt európai méretű keresztes hadjáratot szervezni (amely ugyan az 1396-os nikápolyi vereségbe torkollott); Zsigmond nevéhez köthető a több mint egy évszázadig kitartó végvárrendszer kiépítése és Nándorfehérvár megszerzése; vagy az, hogy császársága idején budai udvara számított a Német-Római Birodalom központjának. Ugyan megemlítik a sorozatban, hogy a nyugati egyházszakadást lezáró tárgyalásokat ő zavarta le, azonban ez a korban valóban hatalmas diplomáciai teljesítménynek számított. Zsigmond személye és külpolitikája a konnektivitás stratégiájának sikeres, korabeli megtestesítője lehetett volna.

Hunyadi személyiségével még élesebb kontrasztban áll Habsburg Albert, akit egy egyértelműen gyenge, a nagybátyja és felesége által könnyen befolyásolható, alkalmatlan uralkodóként mutat be a film, aki ráadásul nem volt képes teherbe ejteni feleségét – a valóságban persze több gyerekük is született. Történelmileg valóban Nándorfehérvár 1439-es oszmán ostroma idején, a magyar táborban kitört járványban veszítette életét, de vélhetően nem olyan dicstelenül, ahogy a film bemutatta.

IV. Ulászló lengyel királyt pedig egy naiv, jó szándékú királyként mutatja be a film, aki viszont a személyes tragédia – szeretett, várandós felesége váratlan halála – miatt megroppan és vallási fanatizmusba, s rossz külső tanácsadók (Cillei Ulrik és Cesarini bíboros) befolyása alá kerül, ami aztán elvezet a saját, s felelőtlensége miatt az ország tragédiájához a várnai csatában. A sorozatban szereplő, háború elkerülésére tett oszmán felajánlások valósak voltak – így annak történelmi visszautasítása, különösen a később történtek fényében valóban befogadhatóbb a kor mai embere számára egyszerű őrültségként, mint a mindenkori magyar furfang (akár stratégiai gondolkodás?) példájaként. Hiszen ne feledjük: annak a szerződésnek a felmondásával a magyar fél megszegte a szavát, csak a történelem véresen megtorolta ezt a pálfordulást.

A következő uralkodó, Luxemburgi Erzsébet fia, V. László már a Habsburg udvarban, Frigyes keze alatt nevelkedik, így őt már nem a magyar érdekek képviselőjeként ábrázolja a film. Azoknak egy igazi képviselője van: Hunyadi és családja, illetve az őt követők.

Geopolitikai tér

Már a Hunyadi első részének, egyúttal magának a sorozatnak az indítása is geopolitikai értelmezésre hív. Sötét háttér előtt egy rövid szöveget olvashatunk a Magyar Királyság „geopolitikai" jelentőségéről, a „kapu" és az „ütközőállam" metaforáit hangsúlyozva. Ezt követően egy olyan, nagyrészt Európát mutató térképet látunk, amelyen szürke háttérből kiemelkedik piros színével az Oszmán Birodalom, sárgával Szerbia, kékkel pedig a Magyar Királyság, amelyre ráközelítünk. A mozgóképes alakítottságú térkép a sorozatindító néhány mondat infografikus kiegészítése.

A sorozatban a magyar geopolitikai gondolkodást – nem számítva a Zsigmond öncélúnak beállított birodalomépítési törekvéseit – a napjainkban hangoztatott konnektivitás helyett a törökellenes harc jelentette. A film helyszíneit alapvetően különböző udvarok – ma úgy mondanánk: erőcentrumok –, illetve a balkáni csataterek teszik ki. A sokszor nemzet(köz)i intrikák helyszínéül szolgáló budai királyi udvar romlottsága és fényűzése mellett ellenpéldaként szolgál a vidéki Magyarországot szimbolizáló Vajdahunyad vára, a Hunyadi-család törökök és havasalföldiek által állandóan támadott birtoka.

A sorozat alapvetően egy keleti – Edirne – és több nyugati központot (Bécs, Róma, Milánó) mutat be, ezek utóbbiak közül főleg a pápai udvar és Bécs (Habsburgok székhelye) játszik nagyobb szerepet. Milánó inkább csak epizódszerepet kap, ahogy a havasalföldi fejedelmi udvar is (a sorozat elején Nándorfehérvár szerb székhely, később magyar kézbe kerül). Ezen központok közül a legtöbb szerepet az orientalista sztereotip háremábrázolással megtestesített, örök tavasz hazájaként ábrázolt Edirne kapja: ez az ellenségépítés miatt nélkülözhetetlen.

A Edirne–Róma–Bécs hármas erőközpont között Magyarország a Kárpát-medencénél jóval nagyobb geopolitikai térbe kerül, amelynek központjaként egyaránt számolnak vele a korszak meghatározó hatalmai: az Oszmán Birodalom, a pápa, a Habsburgok. Azonban a velük szemben a kesztyűt eredményesen nem a megvezetett, gyarló budai udvar, hanem az erdélyi köznemesből hőssé avanzsáló, magyar néplelket megtestesítő Hunyadi veheti fel.

További kutatási irányok

Az egyik lehetséges további kutatási irány a történeti távlatba helyezés. Feltehetjük a kérdést, hogy a populáris médiakultúra, korábbi népszerű regények, képregények, mozifilmek és televíziós produkciók geopolitikájához, Hunyadi-képéhez és oszmán-magyar konfliktusábrázolásokhoz képest mennyiben és miben hoz újat a sorozat.

Ezek az alkotások hogyan viszonyulnak például az egzotizáló, orientalizáló európai médiakulturális hagyományhoz?

A másik lehetséges és nehezen megkerülhetőnek látszó kutatási irány az összehasonlító távlatba helyezés. Hunyadi János a magyaron kívül a román és a szerb történetírás fontos szereplője is. Mit tapasztalhatunk ezzel kapcsolatban a román és a szerb populáris médiakultúrára tekintve? Ezen a ponton egy összehasonlító médiatörténeti távlat érvényesítése kínálkozik lehetőségként, amelynek viszont szálai időben és nyelvi-kulturális tereket tekintve is messzire vezethetnek (lásd ehhez Nagy, 2021).

Ez utóbbihoz kapcsolódóan, és mivel nemzetközi forgalmazásba került, nagyszabású mozgóképes alkotásról van szó, felvetődik a Hunyadi (Rise of the Raven) Magyarországon kívüli és magyar nyelven túli recepciójának kérdésköre is. Populáris geopolitikai szempontból különösen érdekes volna az osztrák, szerb és török fogadtatás mellett a román nyelvű recepció vizsgálata is. Talán nem véletlen, hogy nagyon hamar, még a hivatalos bemutató előtt megjelent egy populáris geopolitikai nézőpontú, előzetes értelmezés a román sajtóban, éppen egy soft power-kutató véleménycikke révén (Blănaru, 2024), amely olykor vitatható megállapításai mellett a reprezentáció kapcsán releváns kérdéseket is felvet, noha a reprezentációkritikát a „kulturális kisajátítás" ernyőfogalma felől érvényesíti. Pedig a Hunyadi (Rise of the Raven) esetében talán inkább érvényes és a további összehasonlító populáris geopolitikai vizsgálatok szempontjából hasznosabb is volna a történeti, mediális és populáris geopolitikai „narratívaversenyről" beszélni.

Konklúzió

Tanulmányunkban arra tettünk kísérletet, hogy a Hunyadi (Rise of the Raven) című sorozatot a populáris geopolitika elméleti keretében értelmezzük, és megvizsgáljuk, miként konstruálja újra a „mi" és a „másik", a „saját" és az „idegen" kategóriáit egy sajátosan mediatizált történelmi narratíván keresztül. Kiindulópontunk az volt, hogy a sorozat nem pusztán nagyszabású szórakoztató történelmi televíziós produkció, hanem olyan, kulturális és politikai jelentéshordozó mediális tér, amelyben identitáspolitikai és geopolitikai jelentések termelődnek újra.

A populáris geopolitika történeti és elméleti áttekintése rámutatott arra, hogy a geopolitikai gondolkodás nem kizárólag az állami döntéshozatal vagy az akadémiai diskurzus szintjén formálódik, hanem a populáris médiakultúra tereiben is. A kritikai geopolitika és az arra épülő populáris geopolitikai megközelítés arra hívja fel a figyelmet, hogy filmek, sorozatok, képregények vagy akár televíziós narratívák is hozzájárulnak a világról alkotott geopolitikai tudás és identitásmintázatok kialakításához. Joanne P. Sharp, Klaus Dodds vagy Jason Dittmer munkái nyomán láthatóvá vált, hogy a populáris kultúra szereplői és történetei nem pusztán szórakoztatnak, hanem politikai és kulturális jelentéseket közvetítenek, miközben részt vesznek a nemzeti önkép és a globális erőviszonyok értelmezésében. Tanulmányunk ezt a megközelítést kívánta a magyar és közép-kelet-európai kontextusban alkalmazni.

A sorozat összetett képet nyújt a 15. századi geopolitikai erőviszonyokról: miközben az Oszmán Birodalom vezetőit árnyalt, sőt bizonyos értelemben tiszteletet parancsoló ellenfélként ábrázolja, addig a nyugati hatalmi centrumokat gyakran önérdekkövető, morálisan problematikus szereplőkként jeleníti meg. Magyarország a „védőbástya", a hősies kis nemzet pozíciójában tűnik fel, amelynek autentikus képviselője nem a hivatalos udvari hatalom, hanem a lentről felemelkedő hadvezér, Hunyadi alakja. A sorozat így egy olyan geopolitikai imagináriust erősít meg, amelyben a magyar politikai közösség erkölcsi legitimációja a külső fenyegetéssel szembeni ellenállásból és önfeláldozásból fakad.

A populáris geopolitikai megközelítés alkalmazása lehetővé teszi annak feltárását, hogy a sorozat miként illeszkedik a kortárs médiakultúra narratívaversenyébe, és hogyan kapcsolódik a jelenlegi geopolitikai önpozicionálás kérdéseihez. A Bán Mór regényein alapuló adaptáció nem csupán múltértelmezés, hanem a jelenből visszavetített világkép, amely a történelmi toposzok (védőbástya, magányos harc, áruló Nyugat) újrakeretezésével járul hozzá a nemzeti identitás kortárs újragondolásához. Ebben az értelemben a sorozat a populáris médiakultúra azon termékei közé sorolható, amelyek a geopolitikai gondolkodás mindennapi szintjein is hatást gyakorolnak a közönség világértelmezésére.

Mindezek fényében a Hunyadi-sorozat vizsgálata túlmutat önmagán: ráirányítja a figyelmet arra, hogy a populáris médiakultúra miként válik a geopolitikai gondolkodás egyik meghatározó színterévé Közép- és Kelet-Európában is. A jövőbeni kutatások számára különösen termékeny irány lehet a nemzetközi recepció összehasonlító elemzése, illetve annak feltárása, hogy a sorozat által közvetített narratívák miként léptethetők párbeszédbe más – szintén mediatizált – nemzeti történelmi elbeszélésekkel.

Jegyzetek

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Popular geopolitical analysis of the series Rise of the Raven

Abstract
The study examines the series Rise of the Raven within the theoretical framework of popular geopolitics, seeking to answer the question of how a large-scale historical television production contributes to the contemporary reproduction of the geopolitical imaginary and national identity. The first part of the analysis reviews the development and main trends of the concept of popular geopolitics, with a particular focus on how it interprets popular culture - films, series, literary works - as a field for the formation of geopolitical thinking. This is followed by a detailed analysis of the series, which explores the representation of "us" and "them," Christian Europe and the Ottoman Empire, as well as the Hungarian political community and Western power centers. The paper points out that the series builds on both the topos of the "defensive bastion" and the figure of the hero rising from below, while offering a nuanced image of the enemy and a critical representation of the West. The historical narrative thus functions not only as an interpretation of the past, but can also be understood as a geopolitical self-positioning projected from the present.

Keywords: *János Hunyadi, media, popular geopolitics, representation, television series*

CRITICAL GEOPOLITICS OF DECOLONIZATION:
THE INDONESIAN QUESTION AT THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL, 1947

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Doi: 10.15170/PSK.2026.SI.01.11
Received: March 16, 2026
Accepted: May 28, 2026
Published: June 4, 2026

Citation:
Stempler, Á. (2026). Critical Geopolitics of Decolonization: The Indonesian Question at the United Nations Security Council, 1947. *Polarities,* 7(SI), 195–212.

Acknowledgements:
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Abstract

Between 31 July and 25 August 1947, the United Nations Security Council debated the Dutch “police action” in Indonesia – the first major armed confrontation between the Netherlands and the Republic of Indonesia since its 1945 declaration of independence. The outbreak of hostilities prompted Australia and India to bring the issue to the UNSC, framing it as both a threat to international peace and a matter of decolonization and self-determination. Drawing primarily on Ó Tuathail’s framework of critical geopolitics, this paper analyzes the debate as a set of discursive performances and geopolitical scripts that produced and contested geopolitical meaning in the early postwar order. This framework is complemented by constructivist understandings of sovereignty and legitimacy and scholarship on anticolonial internationalism. Through the interpretive discourse analysis of the official meeting records and adopted resolutions, the study focuses on how the representatives of the Netherlands, Australia, and India articulated competing visions of world order and claims to legitimacy, revealing the 1947 debates as a founding contest over the architecture of the postwar international order and an early instance of anticolonial worldmaking. By situating these historical debates within broader patterns of North–South relations and the construction of state authority, the study highlights how early postwar discourses continue to inform contemporary understandings of global power, legitimacy, and the role of critical geopolitical narratives in shaping international relations.

Keywords: *United Nations Security Council, Indonesian Question (1947), Critical Geopolitics, Decolonization, State Sovereignty, Anti-Colonial Internationalism, Postwar International Order*

Introduction

The representative of the Netherlands notified the Secretary-General of the United Nations in a letter dated July 22, 1947, that his government, "with the utmost reluctance been compelled [sic] to authorize the Lieut. Governor General to resort to police measures of a strictly limited character" (Document S/426, 1947). The letter justified the so-called first "police action" against the Republic of Indonesia on the grounds that the Netherlands, with which the sovereignty of the territory rested, was ultimately responsible for maintaining law and order (Document S/426, 1947). However, the Dutch narrative was called into question on July 30 when the representatives of Australia and India brought the issue before the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The discussion of the Indonesian Question commenced the next day.

Although the UNSC played an integral role in the recognition of Indonesia's independence during the years leading up to the eventual transfer of sovereignty in 1949, the scope of this study is limited to the period between July 31 and August 25, 1947: the period from the placing of the Indonesian Question on the agenda until the resolution deciding on the establishment of the Committee of Good Offices, representing the formal institutionalization of mediation and international oversight (S/RES/30., 1947; S/RES/31., 1947). Employing interpretive discourse analysis, the aforementioned period will be examined through the Security Council meeting records (171st–195th meetings) and Resolutions 27, 30, and 31 (1947). The main argument of this paper is that the raising and subsequent discussion of the Indonesian Question not only challenged the Dutch military action attempting to restore colonial authority but also exposed and contested key assumptions of the post-Second World War geopolitical order.

For the purposes of this study, geopolitics will be understood as re-conceptualized by Gearóid Ó Tuathail in his approach of critical geopolitics. Accordingly, geopolitics will be interpreted as a highly ideological and political "discursive practice by which intellectuals of statecraft 'spatialize' international politics in such a way as to represent it as a 'world' characterized by particular types of places, peoples and dramas" (Ó Tuathail & Agnew, 1992, p. 192). As discourses are constantly being modified by human practice (p. 193), the UNSC will be conceptualized as a stage where competing geopolitical scripts were performed over the right to speak sovereignly about geography, space, and territory. Geography, as articulated by Ó Tuathail, "was an active writing of the earth by an expanding, centralizing imperial state" (Ó Tuathail, 1996, p. 1), in this case the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Consequently, an understanding of space based on the principles of empire and state sovereignty was imposed onto the Indonesian archipelago. Complementing this framework, the constructivist understanding of sovereignty and legitimacy – as social and political constructs produced through recognition and practice – highlights how these debates reflected a genuine ambiguity surrounding the Council's early authority (Hurd, 2007; Biersteker & Weber, 1996). As a colonial dispute was framed as a threat to international peace and security – without clear precedent or established Charter applicability – the Indonesian Question became open to discursive contestation.

Based on the premise that the UNSC debates became a contest between different ways of envisioning the world, the principal objective of this paper is to analyze the discursive strategies "performed" by the respective states as part of their contestation over spatial legitimacy. The analysis identifies "discursive strategies" as recurring patterns of framing through which representatives categorize spaces, actors, and events to advance claims to legitimacy, and "geopolitical scripts" as the broader, integrated narratives that organize these strategies into a coherent vision of world order. The study will attempt to contrast the Dutch narrative with the Australian and Indian counter-narratives over the spatial nature of the conflict: was Indonesia an internal Dutch domain, a matter of international concern, or a nascent sovereign state? By treating these debates as discursive performances rather than institutional procedures, the paper challenges conventional – political, diplomatic, and legal – accounts of the Indonesian Question (Foray, 2021; Taylor, 1960), while also contributing to broader scholarly debates on anticolonial internationalism and the normative contestation of the postwar order (Getachew, 2019; Mazower, 2009). It will be further argued that the UNSC meetings not only revolved around Indonesia, but also around the structural tension within postwar geopolitics itself.

Historical Context

After the unconditional surrender of the Japanese Empire on August 15, 1945, a political vacuum emerged in the Indonesian archipelago, or in the Netherlands East Indies, as the territory was known as a Dutch colony at the time. Taking advantage of the opportunity, nationalist leaders Sukarno and Mohammad Hatta proclaimed the independence of the Republic of Indonesia two days later (Ricklefs, 2001). The proclamation simultaneously marked the beginning of the Indonesian National Revolution (1945–1949). However, the Netherlands was not in a position to militarily challenge the nascent Republic after the Second World War, hence the Lord Louis Mountbatten-led South East Asia Command (SEAC) assumed responsibility for accepting the Japanese surrender, releasing the prisoners of war, and maintaining law and order until the arrival of the Dutch administration (McMillan, 2005). The transfer of authority began in November, and by July 15, 1946, the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration re-established the Dutch government's authority over the archipelago with the exception of the Republican-controlled islands of Java, Sumatra, and Madura (Steiner, 1947).

After months of sporadic armed conflicts and failed negotiations, an agreement seemed to take shape in the fall of 1946. The Linggadjati Agreement was accepted by the Netherlands Commission-General and the Delegation of the Republic of Indonesia on November 15, 1946; and it was subsequently ratified on March 25, 1947 (Linggadjati Agreement, 1947). The Agreement recognized the Republic's de facto authority over the islands of Java, Sumatra, and Madura (Article I). Furthermore, it called for the "rapid formation of a sovereign democratic State on a federal basis" (Article II), comprised of three territories, covering the "entire territory of the Netherlands East Indies": the Republic of Indonesia, Borneo, and the Great East (Article III–IV). The federal state, referred to as the United States of Indonesia, was envisaged as being part of the Netherlands Indonesian Union headed by the Dutch monarch (Article VI). Finally, it was decided that any dispute that could not be resolved through joint consultation should be settled by arbitration (Article XVII). Despite the successful ratification of the agreement, different interpretations of the text and accusations of violating the conditions by both parties eventually led to the escalation of the conflict, culminating in a coordinated military offensive on July 20, 1947, known as the first "police action".

The outbreak of the hostilities transformed the conflict from a localized colonial struggle into an international crisis, at least as characterized by Australia and India when referring the question to the UNSC. It is important to note that when the Indonesian Question was brought before the Council, its non-permanent members only included Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Colombia, Poland, and Syria. One of the first decisions taken by the member states was to invite – although without voting rights – the Netherlands and India in line with Articles 31 and 32 of the Charter, which allowed UN member and even non-member states to participate in the discussions if they were "specially affected" or a "party to a dispute" under consideration (UN Charter, 1945). As can be seen, the Republic of Indonesia was not among the invited parties when the 171st session commenced on July 31. This reflects the initial uncertainty concerning the Republic's status in international law, in addition to the Security Council's hesitancy to become involved with colonial matters. The Dutch representative, Eelco van Kleffens, consistently maintained throughout the meetings – as will be examined in the next section – that the UN Charter was not applicable in the case of the Indonesian Question, and even if it was, the Council had no jurisdiction.

The Colonial Geopolitical Script: The Netherlands

Following the decision that the Netherlands and India could participate in the UNSC meetings, the Australian representative promptly suggested sending an invitation to the "Government of Indonesia" as well (S/PV.171., 1947). After taking his seat at the Council, Eelco van Kleffens sought to speak immediately, since he regarded the possible invitation of the Indonesian representative to "prejudge the whole question" (p. 1619), immediately shedding light on the primary objective of the Dutch narrative: maintaining the geopolitical status quo of colonial authority by denying the Republic's sovereignty and even its subjectivity as an international political actor. In the following paragraphs, the Netherlands' reasoning during the UNSC meetings – termed here the Colonial Geopolitical Script – will be examined not in a chronological order of the speeches given by van Kleffens, but according to – highly interrelated and at times overlapping – thematic discursive strategies aiming at delegitimizing the Republic's case on multiple fronts and levels.

Throughout the proceedings, one of the most foundational Dutch discursive strategies was the ontological denial of Indonesian sovereignty. Van Kleffens argued that the Republic of Indonesia was not and never had been a sovereign and independent state (pp. 1619–1620). In accordance with the Linggadjati Agreement, the Republican Government was only granted de facto authority, while de jure sovereignty still rested with the Kingdom of the Netherlands (S/PV.181., 1947). As part of the discursive strategy, the claim of Indonesian statehood was denied as well. Referring to the Linggadjati Agreement once again, van Kleffens stated that the only sovereign state would be the future United States of Indonesia, thus the Republic was only a "political entity", a "state-to-be", a "constituent element" destined to be ultimately affiliated with East Indonesia and Borneo, becoming part of said federation (S/PV.171., 1947; S/PV.192., 1947). Its status and nature "as a state" was compared to that of New York or Utah, making it a sub-national or sub-state unit (S/PV.171., 1947). This spatial analogy functioned to strip Indonesia of its territorial subjectivity, one of the principal criteria – cited by van Kleffens – for recognition as a sovereign state in international law. Besides a well-defined territory in which authority was exercised, the other requirement included real governmental authority, a population not subject to another state, and de jure recognition (S/PV.181., 1947, pp. 1921–1922). According to the Dutch narrative, the Republic did not meet any of the requirements mentioned. The Indonesian Government was characterized as remnants of Japanese ideology, Japanese methods, and Japanese indoctrination (S/PV.185., 1947, p. 2009). Portraying the Republic as a Japanese creation questioned its legitimacy and the claim that it was the manifestation of the population's right and will to self-determination. Additionally, in certain areas of Java and Sumatra – i.e. the well-defined territory only acknowledged in the Linggadjati Agreement – the population did not recognize the authority of the government and did not consider themselves as "wholly and exclusively" citizens of the Republic as they were aware of their ties with the Kingdom of the Netherlands (S/PV.181., 1947). Furthermore, the Government also lacked recognition by the international community necessary to constitute a sovereign and independent state (S/PV.181., 1947). As shown, the Dutch attempted to deny the geopolitical subjectivity of the Republic of Indonesia by excluding it from the community of sovereign states. In constructivist terms, sovereignty here was not being treated as a legal fact but as a social construct to be withheld (Biersteker & Weber, 1996; Hurd, 2007).

By excluding the Republic from the international system, van Kleffens could claim that the Security Council had no jurisdiction over the Indonesian Question. The first step of the legal-procedural discursive strategy was to deny the applicability of the Charter to "what is now happening in Java and Sumatra" (S/PV.171., 1947, p. 1645). Building directly upon the ontological denial of sovereignty, the Dutch argued that the UN Charter and its principle of "sovereign equality" (Article 2(1)) were intended to "operate between sovereign States" (p. 1645). On similar grounds, the invitation of the Indonesian delegation was objected as only sovereign and independent states could participate in accordance with Article 32. When a vote was taken in favor of inviting the Republic's representative on August 12, van Kleffens similarly objected to the acceptance of Sutan Sjahrir – the head of the Republican delegation – as an ambassador since only states recognized in international law had ambassadors (S/PV.181., 1947).

The second step was to characterize the conflict as an internal matter, claiming that it was "essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of the Netherlands" under Article 2, paragraph 7 of the Charter (S/PV.171., 1947, p. 1645). Finally, framing the military offensive as a domestic matter was meant to restrict the geographical impact of the violence. By asking the rhetorical question "In what countries outside the Netherlands' territory are there any signs of danger to peace caused by this action?" (p. 1645), van Kleffens directly challenged the Australian assertion that the conflict constituted a breach of the peace under Article 39. As will be shown, Australia and India placed great emphasis on the international implications of the conflict. Additionally, even the mere fact that the question was discussed at the United Nations Security Council lent it the appearance of an international issue. Consequently, by insisting that the Council was operating outside its "limitations" (p. 1646), the Netherlands not only tried to delegitimize the entire proceeding but also intended to spatially re-map its "police action" from an international matter to a strictly domestic conflict located within the Netherlands' sovereign space.

Strongly connected to the mapping of the conflict, the third discursive strategy was the spatial fragmentation of the Indonesian archipelago's political geography. As both the Netherlands and the Republic of Indonesia formed claims to the entire territory of the Netherlands East Indies, this strategy primarily served to undermine the unitary notion of Indonesian state- and nationhood. While the Dutch intended to restore their former authority, it is interesting to note that they referred to the territory as Indonesia, and not as Netherlands East Indies. This was most likely due to the realization that a full-scale colonial war was contradictory to the new postwar realities, particularly to the spirit of the UN Charter. Nevertheless, the Dutch definition of Indonesia still extended to the whole archipelago, "reaching from Sumatra in the west to New Guinea in the east" (S/PV.171., 1947, p. 1619). In light of this, van Kleffens referred to the Republic of Indonesia as an expansionist "programme" (S/PV.181., 1947, p. 1922), emphasizing the misleading nature of its name, since geographically it only comprised the islands of Java and Sumatra and was never intended to comprise more than that (S/PV.171., 1947).

As part of the discursive strategy, the Netherlands elevated the status of the two other Dutch-created non-sovereign entities making up Indonesia – the States of East Indonesia and Borneo – claiming that these were "on exactly the same level as the Republic of Indonesia" (S/PV.181., 1947, p. 1942). Further strengthening their justification, the Netherlands claimed that these "sister States" approved the military action and had "asked us more than once to take such action earlier" (S/PV.171., 1947, p. 1640). This rhetoric move prompted the Indonesian delegation to characterize East Indonesia and Borneo as "puppet states" (S/PV.184., 1947, p. 2000) and thereby to object to granting them invitation to the Council meetings as was requested by van Kleffens claiming that the matter affected them very deeply (S/PV.181., 1947). Consequently, the police action was framed as a defensive endeavor aiming at protecting the freedom and democratic system of the two other states against the expansionist tendencies of the Republic of Indonesia, which was portrayed as harboring ambitions to rule over the entire archipelago (S/PV.181., 1947). By fragmenting the territory's political geography, the Netherlands attempted to weaken the Republican claim of political and national unity based on self-determination and limited its – only de facto – authority to Java, Madura, and Sumatra.

The signing of the Linggadjati Agreement was a double-edged sword. Although Article I restricted the territory of the Republic of Indonesia, it also recognized its de facto authority over the three aforementioned islands, thus inherently weakening the Dutch claims of domestic jurisdiction and absolute sovereignty. This fact was referenced on multiple occasions by the delegations questioning the true motives behind the Dutch "police action". Furthermore, the official registration of the Agreement with the Security Council was interpreted by certain delegations as meaning that it was – in effect – an "international agreement" between two states. Consequently, some countries, such as Egypt and Syria, even concluded treaties of friendship with the Republic of Indonesia. Reflecting upon these matters, the Dutch representative stated that the Security Council was merely informed about the agreement, and that there was no request at all to officially register it (S/PV.171., 1947). Moreover, to justify the ongoing military efforts, the van Kleffens-led delegation claimed that the Republican Government was "either not prepared or not able to implement that Agreement", citing specific violations such as failing to observe the truce, engaging in the "loathsome practice" of keeping hostages, blockading territories held by the Dutch troops, and acting like a sovereign state by entering into "direct agreements with other States" (p. 1640). Although Article XVII contained an arbitration clause, van Kleffens asserted that it was not applicable since most of these questions were not regulated in the Linggadjati Agreement, thus leaving no other option but to resort to force in order to restore order and legality (p. 1642).

Another strategy aimed at legitimizing the use of force was the reframing of the conflict as "police measures of a strictly limited character". Even though it was admittedly a military conflict, it did not fall within the authority of the Security Council. As van Kleffens phrased it: "This is clearly not war… we are compelled to do so by circumstances and much against our will. This is not war. The best words we have been able to find for it…were 'police action'" (p. 1644). The assertion not only meant to position the Netherlands as a reluctant actor in the matter – preempting accusations of imperial aggression – but it also aimed at avoiding the implications of Article 39 (breaches of the peace) invoked by Australia. Trying to minimize its scale and scope, the operations were portrayed as a strictly internal matter under Dutch domestic jurisdiction, where the sovereign power "responsible for the maintenance of law and order" was forced to intervene in order to restore the peace disturbed by the Republican forces. In addition, van Kleffens emphasized that his government enjoyed the full backing of all the parties and trade unions of the Netherlands, not to mention the governments and population of East Indonesian and Borneo (S/PV.171., 1947).

By portraying themselves as "the guardians of their security and true liberty" (p. 1644), the Dutch delegation also relied on a humanitarian and civilizational narrative, drawing a very sharp contrast with the disorder and lawlessness of the Republic. The Republic was characterized as fundamentally unstable, lacking authority ("it was not obeyed"), and run by an "oppressive government" of "totalitarian character" that rested on the "support of armed people whom it cannot control" (S/PV.171., 1947; S/PV.185., 1947). This narrative claimed that the "honest, common agricultural folk" who were constantly terrorized by "undisciplined troops and lawless elements", actually welcomed the Dutch troops restoring order and repairing infrastructure (S/PV.171., 1947; S/PV.192., 1947). By claiming that it was actually the Republic who hindered the realization of freedom, van Kleffens positioned the Netherlands as liberators, rejecting accusations of attempting to re-establish colonialism. The military action was thus framed as a necessity, a consequence of the chaos and anarchy under the dictatorial Republican Government intent on subjugating the entire archipelago. The narrative also challenged the effective governance condition of functional statehood advanced by both India and Australia. The Dutch representative insisted that they wanted to act with the Indonesians as "partners", since the time was "past for servants" (S/PV.171., 1947, pp. 1644–1645); and what they truly advocated for was freedom, self-government, and the establishment of the democratic and sovereign United States of Indonesia (S/PV.192., 1947).

Instrumentalizing the Linggadjati Agreement once again, van Kleffens asserted that the Netherlands complied in every respect with Chapter XI,[1] particularly Article 73 of the UN Charter by promoting the well-being of the inhabitants and helping them progress toward self-government (S/PV.185., 1947). On the other hand, the Security Council was acting well beyond the bounds of the Charter. As part of the discursive strategy of shifting responsibility, the UNSC was warned that intervention was counterproductive: if the Council "embarrasses our honest constructive efforts," the responsibility for the failure would be the "Council's, not ours" (S/PV.171., 1947, p. 1647). Furthermore, if the Dutch troops were withdrawn, "terrible acts of retaliation" would follow (S/PV.173., 1947, p. 1705). This framing attempted to shift moral responsibility onto the Security Council for any prolonged instability if they chose to interfere with the Dutch domestic jurisdiction. Moreover, van Kleffens called attention to the possible ramifications of the Council's interference: a precedence could be established where "a faction in any country claims to be a Government and opposes the sovereign or paramount Power" (S/PV.192., 1947, p. 2144). Based on the discursive strategies outlined above, it can be stated that the Netherlands sought to stabilize a spatial and legal imaginary that could preserve its colonial authority without appearing to violate the principles of international peace, self-determination, and collective security. Van Kleffens was not merely defending Dutch interests but articulating a vision of world order that reflected the continued centrality of empire – and its hierarchical spatial logic – within the emerging United Nations system (Mazower, 2009). However, as will be shown, Australia and India attempted to perform a re-territorialization of Indonesia as an international subject, challenging the Dutch colonial geopolitical script and the hierarchical international system with it.

The Regional Security Counter-Script: Australia

Australian discursive strategies during the UN Security Council meetings were designed to counter Dutch attempts at "internalizing" the conflict. While the Netherlands sought to frame the situation as a domestic policing matter, Australia's strategy was aimed at internationalizing the conflict and recognizing the statehood of the Republic of Indonesia. This approach was clearly detectable from the beginning of the proceedings. Colonel William R. Hodgson claimed in a letter sent to the Secretary-General on July 30 that the "hostilities in Java and Sumatra" constituted a breach of the peace under Article 39 of Chapter VII,[2] and urged the Security Council to restore international peace and security (Document S/449, 1947). Article 39 grants the authority to take certain measures if the "existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression" was determined (UN Charter, 1945). By explicitly invoking Chapter VII of the Charter and emphasizing that this was the first case brought under Article 39, Australia framed the Indonesian conflict as a foundational test of the UN's authority in the postwar international order (S/PV.171., 1947). Besides its precedent-value, the application of Chapter VII was also fundamental due to the fact that Article 2(7), which grants absolute domestic

ISSN 2732-1851

jurisdiction to states, also contains the clause that “this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII” (UN Charter, 1945). Consequently, Hodgson argued that once a matter was brought under Chapter VII, it “follows automatically” that the issue was outside the sphere of domestic jurisdiction (S/PV.195., 1947, pp. 2216–2217). The Australian delegation thereby attempted to position the Security Council not as a passive observer but as an institution with both the competence and the obligation to act, even if it meant extending international oversight over spaces previously shielded by the principle of classical Westphalian sovereignty. Both the question of the Council's competence and the scope of its obligations were thus reframed: what the Dutch characterized as illegitimate interference, the Australians regarded as an institutional obligation.

Nonetheless, the Australian appeal could only achieve its aim if the Dutch police action was considered an actual threat to international peace and security. Accordingly, instead of a localized domestic conflict, the intervention was characterized as “large-scale military operations” and even as “warfare”, which “in international law, is armed conflict between two States” (S/PV.171., 1947, p. 1623). As Article 39 was invoked for the first time, there was no clear precedent as to what constituted a breach of the peace. In order to substantiate the scale and scope of the conflict, Hodgson referenced the coordinated use of naval units, aircraft and tanks, the issuance of regular military communiqués, the wide extent of the fighting between organized forces, and the substantial number of casualties (S/PV.171., 1947). In addition, for the term “warfare” – as understood in international law – to apply, the Australian representative outlined a more flexible, functional understanding of statehood. Hodgson did not question van Kleffens’ remark that UN membership was based on the equality of sovereign states; he argued instead that there was no clause in the Charter prohibiting the Council from acting in a dispute between two states (S/PV.171., 1947). Therefore, although the Republic of Indonesia did not possess de jure sovereignty, it still constituted a state under international law. The functional redefinition of statehood – resting on effective governance, international recognition, and organized armed capacity – was a direct counter to the Dutch ontological denial examined above. This recognition was essential to Australia’s Chapter VII strategy: only by treating Indonesia as a state could the conflict be framed as interstate warfare and thus as a breach of international peace.

By characterizing the conflict as hostilities between the armed forces of the Netherlands and the Republic, Australia elevated the latter to an equal footing in the matter. On the other hand, the equal status of the States of East Indonesia and Borneo was refuted on the grounds that neither had received any form of recognition (S/PV.181., 1947). As one of the most important pillars of statehood in the Australian discursive strategy, it was contended that the Republic of Indonesia had received “very wide international recognition” (S/PV.171., 1947, p. 1627). Hodgson even drew a parallel with Australia and New Zealand. Although both countries were parts of the British Commonwealth, their independence had received sufficient recognition to be founding members of the United Nations (S/PV.181., 1947). To further strengthen his argument, Colonel Hodgson referenced the Netherlands-Indonesian Draft Agreement and the Linggadjati Agreement as both were negotiated and signed by the Republican Government, the latter even recognizing the government's de facto authority (S/PV.171., 1947). The invocation of the Linggadjati Agreement was significant for another reason as well: by highlighting Article XVII's arbitration clause – requiring the involvement of the President of the International Court of Justice – Australia underscored that only states could be parties to such procedures (S/PV.171., 1947). Lastly, in order to accentuate the Indonesian Republic's international recognition, Hodgson noted that the Republic had received de facto recognition from – besides the Netherlands – the United Kingdom, the United States, India, Australia, and the members of the Arab League, and diplomatic recognition from Iraq, Egypt, and Syria. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the latter two even conducted treaties of friendship with the Republican Government (S/PV.171., 1947). By listing each instance of de facto recognition, Hodgson was constructing sovereignty not as a binary legal status to be granted or withheld by the Netherlands, but as a social reality already produced through international practice (Biersteker & Weber, 1996).

Finally, to highlight the international implications of the armed conflict between the two states, the Australian delegation constructed a regional, geographical imaginary in which Indonesia was reframed from a distant overseas territory of the Netherlands to a proximate and consequential geopolitical space. As Colonel Hodgson put it: "Not only is Indonesia adjacent to our territory, but we are bound by the closest possible economic and commercial ties with this important area" (p. 1622). Furthermore, according to the Australian narrative, the Indonesian Question affected the well-being and stability of "the whole of the South-west Pacific and South-east Asia" (pp. 1622–1623). By framing the hostilities as a threat to the entire region, Australia moved the geographical scale of the conflict from a domestic Dutch matter to a regional security crisis that "especially affected" Australian national interests (p. 1622), thus legitimizing its intervention in the matter. Since the Dutch operations became situated within a shared regional space, the stability of which was a collective concern, Australia regarded the issue as falling within the authority of the Security Council. Accordingly, Australia submitted a resolution to the UNSC calling for an immediate cease-fire and the settlement of the dispute by arbitration in accordance with Article XVII of the Linggadjati Agreement (S/RES/27, 1947). As the discussion of the resolution was drawn out by procedural battles, Hodgson also called attention to the fact that the matter on the agenda was not a purely legal question, and that it had "grave political implications", even affecting world security (S/PV.195., 1947). Through these discursive strategies, Australia positioned itself as an intermediary actor and a regional middle power, speaking from a position that was neither imperial (Netherlands) nor postcolonial (India), calling for a collective security system and a cautious reconfiguration of geopolitical space. In this sense, the Australian counter-script did not merely respond to Dutch framing but actively produced an alternative spatial order in which Indonesia was a regional security matter, UNSC jurisdiction was legitimate, and international oversight was a collective responsibility (Ó Tuathail, 1996).

The Anti-Colonial Counter-Script: India

As seen in the case of Australia, India's intervention also began with a letter dated July 30, referring the Indonesian Question to the UN Secretary-General. More specifically, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru wished to call the Security Council's attention to the situation in Indonesia, which, in his opinion, endangered "the maintenance of international peace and security" (Document S/447, 1947). Unlike Article 39 invoked by the Australian delegation, Articles 34 and 35(1) of Chapter VI, referenced by Nehru, only authorized the Council to investigate a dispute and to determine whether a threat to international peace and security existed (UN Charter, 1945). Nevertheless, the Indian representative clarified the difference at the first possible occasion: not being a Security Council member, India did not feel entitled to invoke more urgent provisions; however, the delegation fully supported the application of Chapter VII (S/PV.171., 1947). As can be seen from the letter, India also intended to re-spatialize the conflict from a strictly domestic to a regional, international matter. Samar Sen and Padmanabha Pillai, the Indian representatives, consistently rejected the Dutch attempt to frame the conflict as an internal, localized question. Yet, where the Australian counter-script was grounded in regional security and institutional-legal argument, the Indian delegation posed a direct challenge to the premises of the colonial international order itself.

Through the discursive strategy of geopolitical rescaling, Indonesia was portrayed as the "heart of Southeast Asia" (S/PV.192., 1947, p. 2157), reframing the conflict as a threat to the entire region, affecting the "peace and security of the whole of South-east Asia" (S/PV.171., 1947, p. 1628). Moreover, Southeast Asia was characterized as "one of the danger spots" of the world, calling attention to the fact that the Dutch operations could and should not be viewed as an isolated incident (S/PV.192., 1947, p. 2157). In this regard, Pillai found it rather regrettable that France, a nation contributing so much to the concept of liberty, would help to "retard that human liberty in Southeast Asia" (S/PV.195., 1947, p. 2221). Besides alluding to the Indochinese War, the Indian representative specifically referred to France's veto on a resolution amendment calling for the establishment of a commission made up of Security Council member states to oversee the implementation of the August 1 cease-fire order (S/PV.195., 1947).

By openly criticizing the French veto, Pillai attempted to expose the geopolitical alignment of the "group of colonial exploiters" (S/PV.192., 1947, p. 2154), arguing that colonial powers felt it was their "duty to support each other" (S/PV.195., 1947, p. 2020). India repeatedly accused colonial powers of using procedural maneuvers – calls for advisory opinions, jurisdictional debates, and consular inquiries – in order to ensure that "policies of imperialism" would not be raised before the Council, and to delay action while preparing for renewed military offensives (S/PV.192., 1947, p. 2153). Furthermore, Pillai explicitly attacked the Dutch discursive techniques, labelling them as "stock arguments in the repertoire of the colonial apologist" (p. 2154). The Indian representative identified and deconstructed familiar colonial tropes: natives were unfit or unable to govern themselves and to enforce law and order; they possessed undemocratic, imperialistic and expansionist tendencies; and hostility towards all foreigners as evidenced by testimonies of foreign missionaries (S/PV.192., 1947). With this counter-hegemonic act, India not only critiqued specific Dutch claims but also the entire repertoire of discursive structures through which colonial geopolitical scripts operated. By revealing the inherently imperialistic nature of the postwar geopolitical order itself, Pillai demonstrated that the prevalent assumptions of the era were not neutral, but highly strategic, political, and ideological.

Directly challenging colonial spatial hierarchies, India repeatedly highlighted the racial, continental, and civilizational dimensions of the debate. Pillai declared that "no European country… had any business to use its army in Asia" and the presence of foreign troops on "Asian soil" was framed as an "outrage against Asian sentiment" (pp. 2153–2154). Closely connected, India's discursive strategy of constructing Asia as a unified geopolitical subject contested the imperial geopolitical imagination, or as phrased by Ó Tuathail (1996), the "understanding of space based on the principles of empire and state sovereignty" (p. 5). The Indian representatives frequently spoke for the East and for Asia, remarking that events in Indonesia were being watched "with anxious eyes by the rest of Asia" (S/PV.192., 1947, p. 2157). At the 192nd meeting Pillai distinguished the West and the East as separate geopolitical subjects. The West was characterized as sophisticated and democratic, while at the same time hypocritical. Two world wars were fought – in which Asian nations had also participated – against "aggression and lust for domination", and in the name of democracy and self-determination; yet colonialism and colonial wars were still "permitted" (p. 2153). As can be seen, Pillai drew parallels, on the one hand, between colonialism and fascism, and on the other, between democracy, self-determination and the Asian states' struggle for autonomy and independence. In this framework, the Netherlands was identified as the "aggressor Government" (S/PV.195., 1947, p. 2219) and the Republic of Indonesia was the one fighting – maybe "naively" – for "European values" just as the Allies had done in the two world wars.

This Indian discursive strategy was further strengthened by historical analogies, linking Indonesia to earlier failures of collective security. References to Japan's aggression in China and Italy's invasion of Ethiopia served to warn the Council of the dangers of tolerating colonial violence under legal pretexts and thereby undermining the credibility of the postwar order (p. 2221). The Indian delegation remarked that the "people of Asia are looking to the United Nations to help them in the onward path of independence and democracy, to reconcile race with race, continent with continent, and to pave the way for the one world for which we are all longing" (S/PV.192., 1947, p. 2157). In the Indian narrative, the Security Council was the only body in the world competent to deal with the Indonesian Question. Samar Sen went as far as referring to the Council as the "last hope of humanity for peace and security" (S/PV.171., 1947, p. 1621). Like Hodgson before him, the Indian representative highlighted that the international organ's authority was conditional upon its willingness to act. However, beyond the institutional obligations stressed by Australia, Sen also advanced a moral argument, putting pressure on the Council members to uphold the UN's founding principles. Furthermore, in order to meet its "high moral and political responsibilities", the UNSC – Pillai argued – should not be a strictly procedural forum because the issues involved – "racial, national, and colonial conflicts" – affected the very foundations of modern society (S/PV.195., 1947, p. 2219-2221). Here, proceduralism itself was framed as a strategic geopolitical practice.

One such "hair-splitting legalism" (p. 2220) was the Netherlands' reliance on legal definitions of sovereignty and statehood. In this regard, India invoked arguments quite similar to those of the Australian delegation. Both Sen and Pillai stressed that the Netherlands itself recognized the Republic's de facto authority over Java, Sumatra, and Madura under the Linggadjati Agreement, and that this authority had been internationally acknowledged. De facto governance and practiced functional sovereignty were presented as evidence of real statehood. Furthermore, unlike Australia, India even referenced internationally recognized law authorities (Birkenhead and Hall) to argue that "full sovereignty" was not a prerequisite for statehood (S/PV.171., 1947, p. 1628), grounding the functional sovereignty argument in recognized legal doctrine. It is important to note that the Indian representatives did not reject international law itself, but its selective application by the Netherlands to serve their geopolitical interests. The Indian narrative thus positioned the Republican Government as a legitimate international actor, constituting a state for the "purposes of Chapter VII" (S/PV.181., 1947, p. 1924) – a state in transition from colonial rule to independence, and a state entitled to international protection. Repudiating the euphemistic epithet of "police action", the conflict was referred to as a "senseless" colonial war multiple times by both Sen and Pillai, and as an asymmetric war no less: one side using modern arms and weapons, while the other fought with "bamboo poles" and their hands (S/PV.178., 1947, p. 1846). According to the Indian representative, the Dutch operations were not aimed at restoring peace and order, but at occupying further strategic areas in Java and Sumatra, just as they had done in East Indonesia and Borneo. As for the Dutch claim concerning the support of the two states, Sen – presumably sarcastically – added that "wherever Dutch forces penetrate, the population comes over" to their side (S/PV.173., 1947, p. 1707).

For the reasons outlined above, the Indian delegation urged the Security Council – in an age in which there was no "moral basis for the ownership of colonies" anymore – not to tolerate a full-scale colonial war (S/PV.192., 1947, p. 2154). Instead of debating the competence of the UNSC, Pillai posed the rhetorical question "whether it is morally defensible to use force for the continued enslavement and political subjection of human beings" (S/PV.195., 1947, p. 2220). The Indian delegation warned the Security Council that inactivity would defeat the objectives of the UN; it would diminish its prestige and authority, and ultimately lead to the end of the Organization (S/PV.192., 1947). Similarly to the "last hope of humanity" argument, the warning was meant to call attention to the fact that the UN's authority rested on the collective belief that it would act in accordance with its founding purposes – and inaction would erode that belief (Hurd, 2007). Taken together, the Indian discursive strategies formed a powerful postcolonial counter-geopolitical script, challenging imperial authority and calling for the reconstitution of global political space in the age of decolonization. The Indian performance at the UNSC represented an early instance of what Getachew (2019) termed anticolonial worldmaking: the use of international institutional language to contest the normative foundations of the existing order and to produce, through discursive practice, an alternative vision of sovereign equality.

Conclusion

Drawing primarily on Ó Tuathail's framework of critical geopolitics, this paper analyzed the UNSC debates on the Indonesian Question as a set of discursive performances and geopolitical scripts that produced and contested geopolitical meaning in the early postwar order. Through interpretive discourse analysis of the official meeting records and adopted resolutions, the study focused on how the representatives of the Netherlands, Australia, and India articulated competing visions of world order and claims to legitimacy. The Netherlands, by fragmenting the political geography of the archipelago, denying Indonesian sovereignty, excluding the applicability of the UN Charter, instrumentalizing the Linggadjati Agreement, and reframing military violence as internal "police action", sought to stabilize a spatial and legal imaginary through which colonial authority could be preserved in a hierarchical international system without appearing to violate the principles of international peace, self-determination, and collective security. The Dutch discursive strategies ultimately revealed the structural logic of colonial geopolitics itself: the attempt to maintain a hierarchical world order grounded in the principles of Westphalian sovereignty. As part of the performance, van Kleffens instrumentalized international law to shield imperial authority – a vision that was, as Mazower (2009) has shown, embedded in the very architecture of the UN's founding.

On the other hand, Australia and India – through distinct but complementary counter-scripts – attempted to perform a re-territorialization of Indonesia as an international subject, challenging the Dutch colonial geopolitical script. Australia's performance was geopolitically situated and strategic, positioning itself as a regional middle power seeking to shape the emerging postwar order in Southeast Asia by emphasizing its proximity and security concerns. While Australia's discursive strategies were primarily based on considerations of regional security and institutional-legal internationalism, India advanced an Asian postcolonial and moral counter-geopolitical script challenging imperial authority and calling for the reconstitution of global political space and international order in the age of decolonization. The distinction between the two counter-scripts is analytically significant: Australia sought to expand the UNSC's jurisdictional reach within the existing framework of international law, while India sought to contest the normative foundations of that framework itself.

The three scripts were not simply competing diplomatic positions, but competing visions of what sovereignty meant. In constructivist terms, the UNSC debates were a site of sovereignty construction: the international subjectivity of the Republic of Indonesia was not a given that the Council recognized or denied, but an object actively produced and contested through the discursive performances of all three delegations (Biersteker & Weber, 1996). The 1947 UNSC debates on the Indonesian Question were, in this sense, a founding contest over the architecture of the postwar order: a moment in which the imperial assumptions built into the United Nations system were openly challenged by actors who used the institution's own language against it, performing an alternative vision of sovereign equality – a project of worldmaking.

Notes

[1] Declaration Regarding Non-Self-Governing Territories.

[2] Chapter VI of the UN Charter invoked by India concerns the pacific settlement of disputes and authorizes investigation and recommendation, whereas Chapter VII allows the Security Council to determine threats to peace and adopt binding enforcement measures, thereby limiting claims of domestic jurisdiction under Article 2(7).

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